The Archive, Time and the Body in Refugee Writing in Arabic and English

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the 'new field in literary studies' (Potter and Stonebridge 2014:1) denominated 'Refugee Writing.' Inter alia, this burgeoning field critiques the typology of suffering which has often marred writings about refugees (Farrier 2011), whilst also acknowledging the challenges of perceiving such literatures as a means of eliciting a 'literary humanitarian' impulse amongst its readers (Rickel 2018:97). Through centralising the agency of refugees, as responders to their own lives and those of others, and through exploring complex configurations of 'refugee-refugee relationality' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015), I argue that the selected texts push against the assumption that the main form of tension (and thus of *resolution*) is framed around refugee-citizen relations. By centralising refugees' own archival practices, their roles as time-makers, and refugees' potential to engender 'a different writing of embodiment' (Ahmed 1998:64), I posit that the texts under study – Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams (Men in the Sun)* (1962), Salim Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* (*Rampaging Geese*) (2010), Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* ([2001] 2002) and Claire Bayley's *The Container* (2007) – destabilise traditional frames of reference which position the citizen as the quintessential observer of and responder to displacement. In particular, by identifying and examining the processes of writing and reading that emerge *within* the selected texts, I seek to advance a shift in contemporary literary studies by positing the significance of complementing an analysis of 'refugee writing' with the concomitant process of 'refugee reading.' In addition to intervening in discourses concerning refugees, refugee literature and refugee studies, my thesis equally offers a wider contribution to key debates concerning the politics of knowledge production; intimate archiving processes contra traditional historiographies and archives; and the agency of minoritized individuals and communities in contexts of structural inequality and violence.

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Introduction

Refugee Writing: Writing By, About or For Refugees?

Refugee literature or literature produced by, about, or for refugees has started to receive increased recognition and attention, being incorporated not only into scholars' research agendas and university curricula, but also into human rights organisations' international campaigns, and popular discourses and activism alike. For instance, an online campaign organised for World Refugee Day 2020 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sought 'to introduce you to books written by refugee authors or books about refugees,' maintaining both that 'no one can describe the life of refugees better than the refugees themselves' and that books about refugees enable the reader to 'catch moments from the lives of refugees, which we did not notice because of their brevity. Thanks to these books, we can now see those fragments of life in detail and feel them together with the books' heroes' (UNHCR 2020). In turn, in response to 'the ongoing crisis and the prevalence of refugees as part of an ongoing national conversation – and the need for more compassion and empathy than ever,' the publisher, Penguin Random House (n.d.:n.p.) 'pulled together novels and memoirs touching on the refugee experience,' including texts of a wide range of genres by people who have variously experienced, witnessed or imagined displacement. Some organisations, such as PEN International, have specifically asked the 'international community to "make space" for displaced writers,' seeking to 'creat[e] opportunities to promote the writing of displaced and refugee writers; strengthening voices of displaced writers in global migration debates; broadening the impact and reach of our protection work with writers at risk and countering xenophobia and hate' (2018:n.p.). Other initiatives have created writing groups for asylum-seekers and refugees to write about their experiences in refugee camps in the Middle East (ie. Ahmad et al 2018) and in Europe (ie. Godin et al 2017), with Tom Cheesman arguing that the works published in *Refugees Writing in Wales* (of which he was one of the editors) '[a]ll attest to the double value of refugee writing: to work through personal traumas, and to communicate with the world as individuals, instead of as the faceless, bogus bugbear of much UK media and ignorant public opinion' (2003:7).

While noting that it is common for references to refugee literature to include, and at times conflate, 'books by refugee authors' and 'books about refugees' (a distinction I return to below), such campaigns and initiatives often explicitly identify 'refugee literature' as a means of advocating 'for' refugees: 'refugee writing' is thus conceptualized as being related to but also 'distinguished from other forms of advocacy' precisely through this literature's 'foregrounding' of the demand 'that the reader share responsibility for the story' (Bernard 2020:77), concluding that such literature seeks to 'generate a shared sense of responsibility *among non-refugees'* (ibid., emphasis added), by 'demand[ing] attentive reading from us, not only in our *responsibilities as citizens* but also and most particularly as literary readers or scholars' (Olubas 2019:1, emphasis added). In this sense, 'humanising' the refugee through literature – including through the prioritisation of (auto)biographical testimonial narratives (see Szörényi 2009:173; Rickel 2018:97) – has been perceived as a means of eliciting compassion and welcome amongst citizens to redress the rejection, discrimination and violence that refugees have often faced. While this has indeed potentially stimulated what Jennifer Rickel denominates a 'literary humanitarian'[1] impulse amongst readers of refugee writing (2018:97), such approaches to 'refugee literature' are nonetheless also now receiving critical scrutiny.

It is only recently that 'a new field in literary studies' has emerged (Potter and Stonebridge 2014:1) variously denominated 'Refugee Writing,' 'Refugee Literature' or 'Refugee Literatures' (i.e. see Ganapathy-Dore and Ramsey-Kurz 2012; Nyman 2009:245, 2017; Stonebridge 2015, 2018, 2021; Nguyen 2018; Gallien 2018; Cox et al 2019; Bakara 2020). Noting the urgency and pertinence of the topics discussed in and about refugee writing across diverse fora and genres, studies within this burgeoning literary field have often developed a particular focus on the (auto)biographical and (auto)ethnographic forms and nature of such writing (i.e. Shemak 2011). Some studies have reiterated that refugees' own (auto)biographical narratives 'offer insights into the problems encountered in their countries of origin but they also tell of processes of dislocation, exile and

[1] Rickel has borrowed and elaborated this term from Slaughter (2007).

cultural adaptation' (Nyman 2009:265). In contrast, other scholars have critiqued the extent to which '[t]raumatic testimony has long been the life-writing genre of choice for those wanting to give voice to the dispossessed' (Stonebridge 2015:1331), challenging the typology of suffering which has often marred writings by, and about, refugees (see Stonebridge 2018). Indeed, while Corina Stan seeks to 'mak[e] a case for including in the emerging corpus of "refugee literature "not only accounts inspired by first-hand experiences, but also *texts by western writers who see migration as a shared concern*' (2019:796, emphasis added), both the narrative imperative and the mode of enacting this 'shared concern' have been subject to critical analysis. For instance, an increasing number of studies have sought to disrupt what Henri Lefebvre refers to more broadly as the 'not present in the presentation' (Lefebvre 2013:48) in accounts 'by' and 'about' refugees, maintaining the centrality of listening carefully to and 'projecting' the multiple voices of refugees (i.e. Farrier 2011, 2012; Farrier and Tuitt 2013; Jeffers 2012; Cox 2014), including voices that challenge rather than reinscribe suffering and compassion as central tropes and aims (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2022). In this regard, literary scholars such as Carrie Dawson stress not only the 'recalcitrance' but also 'anti-confessional impulse' in selected writings by refugees (2017:14), as embodied, for instance, by the Iranian-American writer Dina Nayeri (2017) whose insistence on carving out and maintaining a space for 'the ungrateful refugee' is identified as one way of explicitly resisting 'readerly expectations' (Dawson 2017:14).

Although refugee writing has often been posited as taking place for or on behalf of refugees, to propagate understanding and solidarity, in this thesis I argue that although the selected texts can arguably do this, they do so in complex manners. Through centralising the agency of refugees, as responders to their own lives and those of others, and through exploring complex configurations of what Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh conceptualises as 'refugee-refugee relationality' (2015, 2016), I argue that the texts push against the assumption that the main form of tension (and thus of *resolution*) is framed around refugee-citizen relations. Challenging the notion that it is citizens who are the bearers of actual or potential solidarity towards refugees, the selected texts highlight both the solidarity and support that exist within and across refugee communities, and also processes of contestation between

refugees themselves/ourselves. By pivoting around refugee-refugee relationalities without homogenising or reifying refugee identities, and by dwelling on refugee protagonists' tensions and animosity towards other refugees, I posit that the selected texts simultaneously insist on retaining the focus on people who have been displaced without requiring the protagonists to be either the (absolute) hero or the (total) victim (following Arendt 1958, 1978), whilst also destabilising the traditional frame of reference which positions the citizen as the quintessential observer of and responder to displacement. Hence, the refugee protagonists in these texts do not only engage in processes of heroic *self*-representation (as asserted by UNHCR in their rhetorical question 'who better to represent refugees than refugees themselves'), but also of representing and responding to the self-other refugee and/or the refugee other. Through a critical multilingual examination of four literary texts which explore the journeys of refugees from different perspectives – two written and first published in Arabic: Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams (Men in the Sun)* (1962) and Salim Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* (*Rampaging Geese*) (2010); and two written and published in English: Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* ([2001] 2002) and Claire Bayley's *The Container* (2007) – I thus seek to make a series of intersecting contributions to this field: inter alia, to interrogate the meaning of 'refugee writing', including by arguing that a focus on refugee-refugee relationality dismantles the vantage point of the citizen-qua-reader, which, in turn, enables us to acknowledge the refugee not only as writer but also as reader, thereby opening up the possibilities of reading as a refugee.

I develop my analysis through my dual and complex positionality as a scholar of literature and as a writer who was born and raised in a refugee camp in Lebanon before seeking and being granted asylum in the UK, and who has been labelled a 'refugee writer' whilst resisting this framing in diverse ways (Qasmiyeh 2009, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; Qasmiyeh and O'Donoghue 2009). For instance, in my co-authored reflection with Bernard O'Donoghue, with whom I was partnered for the 2008 'Oxford Poets and Refugees Project', we wrote of my concerns 'that the term "asylum-seeker/refugee" was featuring so prominently as an overarching heading for this poetry initiative. Being a refugee should not require foregrounding one's legal condition above all else, overshadowing, for instance, one's personal, professional and writing history beyond and before

asylum' (Qasmiyeh and O'Donoghue 2009:45). My contribution to the project's main output, the book *See How I Land*, as Lyndsey Stonebridge discusses in her chapter on W.H. Auden's and my writings 'on the borderline', resisted the very label 'refugee writer' itself and the 'explicit invitation for the writers to produce a kind of testimony, to authenticate themselves, and their experiences through an image: "You can be witness writers," Carole Angier, the workshop leader urged the participants, "like the great Italian author Primo Levi"' (2018:180-181). I thus approach this field from a position of ambivalence, having resisted this label for over a decade, whilst also being heartened that my interjections have been acknowledged within the context of this field (i.e. ibid.; Naffis-Sahely 2023; Sakti and Taek 2023:39). My position could simultaneously suggest that this thesis may itself be identified by some readers as an instance of 'refugee writing', whilst drawing attention to the apparent paradox of my writing about 'refugee writing' at the same time as raising the intellectual challenge of doing so in a way that does not reduce authors or texts to only one of multiple identities, positions and positionalities.

Recalling that the authors included in this corpus often have an ambivalent relationship with the label 'refugee writer', one of the contributions of this thesis is to interrogate the meaning of 'refugee writing', exploring both how the author's identifications matter to the writing of the text, and to how their text is received. Relatedly, I seek to analyse the processes of writing, reading and criticism that emerge *within* the selected texts. Indeed, in reading these works together, it is notable that the refugee protagonists in all four of the selected texts emerge as active producers of knowledge, including, most pertinently in the context of this study, as writers in their own right. In identifying and examining such instances and practices as they emerge *within* these narratives, I read the authors' inscription of refugees as writers and of refugee writings within the texts as more than instances of intertextuality: instead, I argue that these writings that engender other writings by refugees offer an opportunity to reconceptualize the significance of refugee writing itself. The writings that are written *into* these texts, and that are *addressed to* and (potentially) *read by* refugees, demonstrate the need for multiple readings from different positionalities, beyond and against the optics of enhancing understanding, solidarity and empathy. The latter not only undermines the literary integrity of such

writings but assumes it is only the citizen who reads them. Thus, just as Edward Ademolu 'problematises the tendency within development literature to uncritically generalise British audiences of NGO representations as seemingly white' (2021:203), I seek to disrupt the 'tendency' to 'uncritically generalise' the readers of refugee writing as citizens, whose 'literary humanitarian' impulse, to quote Rickel, is to be activated by refugee writing. Dismantling this assumption leads us to engage with these writings as texts worthy of critical attention in their own right.

In turn, although some of these writings can be perceived as falling into the corpus of refugee writing in the sense invoked by the subtitle of Viet Thanh Nguyen's edited collection, *The Displaced*: *Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (2018), I argue that the protagonists' writings, like the texts in which they are inscribed, do not always revolve around or dwell on refugeedom. Indeed, it is when seen from the vantage point of the 'citizen' that 'refugee' becomes an all-consuming label, and yet shifting the gaze means that more complex understandings can emerge, including the recognition that writers who happen to be refugees are not necessarily consumed by refugeedom, and that their writings are not necessarily framed around displacement. In viewing the selected texts as a kind of refugee writing I thus do not seek to either reify the identity of the author or to argue that these texts and writings should only be read through the lens of displacement or of imminent solidarity: instead, refugeedom is only one part of a set of broader spatio-temporal junctures throughout people's lives.

Recognising and exploring the multi-positionality of the refugee as writer and producer of knowledge, thus also leads to acknowledging the refugee as the reader and critic of their own lives and those of others. As such, rather than asking under what conditions, in what ways and with what effects the 'refugee can write', to paraphrase Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak' (1995), my analysis thus asks if the refugee can be acknowledged as a reader, and as critic. In response to this question, and in line with interjections to postcolonial studies which seek to centralise the diverse positionalities and potentialities of *reading* (Boehmer 2018), in this thesis I propose a new direction in literary studies of refugee writing: it is not only 'the refugee writer' and 'refugee writing' that is of significance in these texts, but also the process of 'refugee reading' as

exemplified simultaneously by the selected authors and the protagonists in their respective texts, and also through my own critical engagement, as a refugee/refugee-writer, with this body of literature. While remaining acutely aware of the problematic of reinscribing 'the refugee' label in this configuration, it is precisely by complementing an analysis of 'refugee writing' with the concomitant process of 'refugee reading,' that I seek to advance a shift in contemporary literary studies.

Refugee reading, in this sense, advocates for an inclusive critical approach to writings produced by and about refugees, where the refugee is acknowledged not merely as a topic of such writings or as the object to be understood or saved by the reader, but as one of its actual or potential readers from the outset. What refugee reading offers is thus a complementary and active involvement of the refugee as a reader, not in lieu of the citizen, but alongside them. Rather than displacing the citizen as reader, it offers an invitation for the reader who is not a refugee to rethink their assumptions and expectations, and to instead engage with the text from a vantage point other than that of the citizen who is fixated on compassion and empathy. Furthermore, in rendering visible refugee readings of texts which are not necessarily framed around displacement (as discussed throughout the thesis), refugee reading is posited as a form of analysing diverse kinds of text, beyond the scope of 'refugee writings' per se. As such, while my thesis seeks to make an intervention in discourses concerning refugees, refugee literature and refugee studies, my analysis of these texts equally offers a wider contribution to key debates concerning the politics of knowledge production; intimate archiving processes and practices contra traditional historiographies and archives; and the agency of minoritized individuals and communities in contexts of structural inequality and violence.

Histories and Geographies of 'Writing Refugees' and 'Refugees Writing'

Before delving into the texts selected for this study, I start by noting that critical studies of the positionality of refugees in relation to writing – of the refugee being 'written' on the one hand, and of the 'refugee as writer' on the other – have in the past been dispersed across disciplines, including

law, history, literature, and philosophy. In this section I thus briefly delineate the long history of literary texts vis-à-vis refugees and displacement, placing refugee writing in a wider literary, historical and geographical context by situating the analysis in relation to Holocaust literature (Aarons and Berger 2017), literatures of exile (Said 1983, 1999; Saloul 2007; Siddiq 1995), and the long-standing Arabic *adab al-riḥla* ('literature of journeying') (see Ḥalīfī 2006). Inter alia, I highlight the continual historical dialogue between Holocaust literature and refugee writing by stressing their common (if at times conflictual) attempts to write the refugee into literature, whilst also highlighting the multiple genealogies of such writings across both Europe and European languages on the one hand, and the Middle East and Arabic on the other.

Within the context of European history, one can trace the emergence of the term 'refugee' back to 1685 (derived from the French *réfugié,* it was originally used to refer specifically to the Protestant Huguenots who fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes), yet the roots and contours of modern forms of 'refugee writing' return us to the historical context that led to the drafting of the *1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. This period and process is characterised by its history-defining specifics, and the resulting emergence of the term 'refugee' as a socio-legal construction which is both temporally and spatially bound: the Convention set out the parameters for refugee status to be granted to people at risk of persecution for five grounds delineated in Article 1(a), and whose well-founded fear of persecution related to events taking place before 1951, and within the geographical confines of Europe.[2] In this way, the meaning of 'the refugee' was inherent in the parameters and literatures drawn by the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations.

Beyond the 'refugee' being 'written' into, by and through the law, states and international organisations, one might argue that the beginnings of a conversation, explicit or otherwise, between disciplines, including literature and socio-legal studies, started to take shape in the post-Second

[2] It was only with the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees that states could extend the temporal and spatial limits established by the Convention.

World War period, and in particular in the shadow of the Holocaust. Indeed, as a precursor to ongoing debates relating to the tension between the representation of refugees as ahistorical and apolitical victims worthy of universal compassion and humanitarian support (Malkki 1996) and the acknowledgement of refugees' agency and their position as producers of knowledge (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et a.l 2022), it has been noted that the worldly presentation of the victim changed during and after the Holocaust: from a mere victim whose suffering was at the forefront of his testimonial speech/writing, into a writer of victimhood with different degrees of engagement with time and place.[3] Rooted in the act of writing as archiving, remembering and narrating, Holocaust writing looks critically at languages, at their capacity to signify, at the impossibility of bearing witness completely (Agamben 2002). In this context, the writer is also the survivor '[whose] vocation is to remember; he cannot *not* remember' (ibid.:26).

While the authenticity of 'diaries' has at times been questioned (i.e. Heide and Dwventer 1941), leading to important questions about the relationship between individual lived experiences, accounts grounded in historical facts, and diverse forms of fictional recounting of such experiences (questions to which I return below), diaries and memoirs were a way of imposing systematicity on a life which was otherwise orderless and devoid of any sense of time (Orsten 1998). This technique of periodicisation was superimposed on those texts to relate the content to what used to be 'there' in the shape of traces of memory but also to refashion a personal identification with time, past and post-past, as deracinated as the refugee himself. As invoked in the framing of the abovementioned 'Oxford Poets and Refugees Project', Primo Levi's writings have taken on great significance, with *Survival in Auschwitz and The Reawakening: Two Memoirs* (1986) and *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989) standing as more-than-memoirs. In a lucid, yet assertive narratorial voice, Levi writes his life in stages in the Monowitz concentration camp as he lived it with extraordinary enunciation and in so doing he 'refers not to the *text* of what is stated, but to its *taking place*' (Agamben 2012:116,

[3] On evolving representations of refugee experiences during WWII in memoirs, fiction and film, see Kraft and Wallach (2012), and on the development of Holocaust literary representation through the lens of 'post-Holocaust writers', see Aarons and Berger (2017).

emphasis added). It is on condition of living what was narrated that Levi was able to bear witness on his own bearing witness, on the transmutation of the body of the *Muselmann*. The *Muselmann*, in Giorgio Agamben's words, 'marked the moving threshold in which man passed into non-man and in which clinical diagnosis passed into anthropological analysis' (ibid.:47). This is to say that even though Levi was aware of the impact of his words on the reader and on those who perceive his work as testimonial in nature, he never assigned himself the role of the definite witness (in writing) but instead asserted his right as a speaking being who could not avoid communication (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, self-professed writings of and by refugees have, historically, been associated, firstly, with autobiographical enunciations of suffering, exile and testimony (including resulting from/through the Holocaust, as above, but also elsewhere[4]), and, relatedly, with historical depictions of writing as psychoanalytic models to 'process' trauma (for a critique of the latter, see Stonebridge 2015, 2018).[5] Beyond these particular modes of life-writing and trauma-processing, Anna Bernard notes that 'the full range of writing by and about refugees spans poetry, short fiction, novels, drama, graphic narrative, children's literature, letters, theory, journalism, legislation and human rights reporting' (2020:66). Across these genres, Bernard argues that scholars have often itemised and examined themes and information which they identify as being common to refugee writing (ibid.:66-67). In spite of this tendency to identify common themes, far from being the preserve of refugee writing, the themes of migration and movement are generically attributed to postcolonial studies due to the centrality of notions such as resistance (be it existential, spatial and/or anticolonial), transgression and power. In focusing primarily on textuality, however, postcolonial studies has arguably tended to demote the material and the palpable as vehicles behind displacement. Indeed, in

[4] Such autobiographical, biographical and fictionalised autobiographical accounts of exile and refugeedom from around the world include Aguirre (2010), Al-Ali (2007), Davies et al (2001), Eggers (2007); Filipovic et al (1994); Khosravi (2010); Ly qui (1970); Maryam (1968); Noble (1976); Suleiman (2016) and Szymusiak (1999); and diverse 'real-life accounts' of refugees' 'journeys' and experiences of 'living as a refugee' in the UK (i.e. Armstrong, 2005; Glynne and Hammond, 2014; Glynne and Salvador, 2015; Glynne et al 2014; Glynne and Senior 2014; Glynne and Topf, 2015; Robinson and Allan 2008, Robinson et al, 2009a and 2009b; Salvador and Glynne, 2014).

[5] The Cold War and its proxy wars led to further legal and political writings and legal frameworks interpellating, and responding to, a particular figure of 'the refugee': these conflict and international interventions simultaneously produced 'refugees' and a generation of 'refugees who write' across diverse geographies.

Secular Criticism, Edward Said aptly reminds us that 'textuality has […] become the exact antithesis and displacement of what might be called history' and 'can be read and interpreted, although reading and interpreting routinely occur in the form of misreading and misinterpreting' (2000:221-2). Even though literary theory has always been subjected to such a critique, Said's point lies in the rupture that has been widening between the representation(s) of the text and lived experiences. The privileging of textuality is evident, for instance, in postcolonial authors' emphasis on thematising and containing 'the liberatory aspects of displacement' and the authors' reading of 'diaspora as a new kind of cosmopolitanism' (Farrier 2011:2). Unlike diasporas, however, David Farrier argues that seeking refuge refers to '[the refugee's] induction into a condition of waiting, uncertainty and dependency that frustrates any chance for self-creation' (ibid.:6). The barriers to 'self-creation' are a consequence of the bureaucratisation of 'self-recognition' (on the refugee's behalf) imposed by the state: the refugee is neither (completely) inside nor outside of the host nation's law (see Smith 2004; Gikandi 2009).

On a par with Levi's memoirs, Edward Said's autobiographical writings, especially his *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Reflections* (2002), eloquently highlight the rupture between exilic literature, as a modernist trope, on the one hand, and the contemporary processes of forced migration which have directly contributed to the rewriting of the notions of humanism, on the other (Said 2002; Farrier 2011). Since, in Said's words, '[h]umanism […] engenders its own opposite' (2012:373), it is worth stressing that 'the asylum seeker [and not the exile] is [now] a trope of the infrahuman […] a counterpoint to the postcolonial emphasis on diaspoetics' (Farrier 2011:24). Said's invitation to look beyond exilic discontents, and instead focus through a representational framework on the bigger picture of forced migration, can be interpreted as a bridge between 'exilic and diasporic literature,'[6] in the context of postcolonial literature, and the literature of and from the

[6] There are numerous entry points to analyse literatures pertaining to movement, migrancy and displacement, with an extensive body of studies having already explored, individually and in relation/comparison, the diverse literatures on 'refugees, exiles and migrants' (i.e. see Nyman 2009). Here, I cover only a selection of these bodies of literature due to limitations of time and space, and due to the specific focus of my thesis.

Palestinian *Nakba*.[7] This provides a transition from the Eurocentric roots of (European) conceptualisations of memoir writing and exile through Holocaust literature, to literature written by and about people whose lives have been affected by displacement and dispossession in the modern era and whose writings could be considered to be part of what I refer to here as refugee writing.

Such a focus is important in order to trace the multiple histories, geographies and languages of refugee writing and the writing of refugees both outside and in relation to Europe. As such, while 'the refugee' and 'refugee writing' may have been 'produced' by the events and processes leading up to and following the drafting of the 1951 Geneva Convention, beyond the question of contemporaneous models of suffering, the Palestinian *Nakba* in 1948 is also a pivotal historical setting with regards to 'refugee writing.' Through their exclusion from the 1951 Geneva Convention (by virtue of being under the purview of another UN agency, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, known by its acronym UNRWA), Palestinian refugees were granted a different defining script to that awarded by UNHCR to non-Palestinian refugees. In contrast with the 1951 Geneva Convention refugee definition, which sets out a linkage between the granting of refugee status and five specified grounds for persecution, UNRWA's operational definition pertains to those 'persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.' They and their descendants are eligible to register for UNRWA services, but not for refugee status and its associated rights, as provided for in the 1951 Geneva Convention. While distinct in nature, both UNHCR and UNRWA definitions institutionalise temporal and spatial limits to who can be recognised as a refugee, with UNRWA's definition adding material dimensions: the loss of home and livelihoods due to the 1948 conflict. These spatial, temporal and material dimensions of refugeedom are of particular relevance to this study, which explores conceptualisations of the archive, temporality and the body in containment in selected texts written in English and Arabic.

[7] This Arabic term is used to denote the Palestinian catastrophe arising from the mass exodus from Palestine in 1948.

When tracing the historical evolution of Arabic terminology pertaining to the protection of displaced people, Arafat Madi Shoukri notes that 'in the Islamic tradition there are three terms [*mustajīr*, *muhājīr* and *mustaʾmin*] that *come close* to the meaning of the modern term "refugee"' (2011:93, parenthetic clause and emphasis added); while not explored by Shoukri, these have in turn been supplemented with 'the modern terms used in Arabic which directly equate to contemporary conceptualisations of 'seeking refuge' (*lujūʾ*), 'refugee' (*lājiʾ*), 'seeking asylum' (*ṭalab lujūʾ*), and 'asylum-seeker' (*ṭālib lujūʾ*)' (Qasmiyeh 2011:631). In Arabic, the word *lājiʾ* stems from the verb *lajaʾa* which is governed by movement, as its verbal noun *lujūʾ* (seeking refuge) corroborates. The noun *lujūʾ* follows the same pattern as the generic Arabic verbal noun pattern *fuʿūl* (in which a long vowel sound is added before the last of the three root letters); the root letters [*l – j –ʾ*] thus become *lujūʾ,* with this being the same pattern of other key terms pertaining to movement, including, in particular, *dukhūl* (entering), *khurūj* (exiting) and *nuzūḥ* (displacement) which have long been a staple in the refugee corpus. Following the 1948 Nakba*,* the referent 'refugee' has become a fixity when referring to displaced Palestinians.

Examining the roots and contours of 'refugee writing' thus requires us to complement attention to historical and contemporary European approaches to (primarily Anglophone) literatures by, about and for refugees, with historical and contemporary writings in the context of the Middle East (see Kanafani n.d.; Saloul 2007; Siddiq 1995). Notably, it is only recently, triggered by and in response to writings produced *outside* the Arab region following the Arab Spring, that the term *adab al-lujūʾ* (literally 'literature of refuge') itself came to existence, being used specifically to refer to 'the writings of those who fled their countries due to war or detention and are now in their countries of refuge' (Ḥamza 2019:np[8]; also see Jarmakani, 2017). Although other Arabic taxonomies pertaining to movement have been used to designate certain writings[9] – spanning the canonical *adab al-riḥla* (literature of journeying) discussed below, *adab al-mahjar* (migrant literature), *adab al-manfā*

[8] Here and elsewhere, translations from original Arabic sources are by Qasmiyeh, unless stated otherwise.
[9] On genres in Arabic literature, including the very question of locating a text's genre, see Ouyang (2003, 2004).

(exilic literature) and *adab al-shatāt* (diasporic literature) – *adab al-lujūʾ* is still in its embryonic state. Furthermore, it continues to be viewed, at least in the Arabic literary scene as discussed by ʿĀrif Ḥamza in his 2019 article '*Adab al-lujūʾ amm al-manfā?.. Mawjat al-kitāba al-jadīda baʿda al-rabīʿ al-ʿarabī'* ('Literature of refuge or exilic literature? A wave of new writing after the Arab Spring'), as situational, and lacking in '*khuṣūṣiyya'* (distinctiveness) (ibid.), as it directly stems from '*this* experience' of 'big waves of Arab refugees *in the aftermath of the Arab Spring*' (ibid., emphasis added). This specific '*tajriba*' (experience) seems to prioritise the works of Syrian refugees, excluding, in the process, other Arab refugees, such as Iraqis, whose literary productiveness has been seen outside of the remit of the Arab Spring (ibid.).

While *adab al-lujūʾ* is primarily a new wave of writing, 'Palestinian journey narratives are ubiquitous in literary, visual, and performing art texts,' as noted by Nadia Yaqub, with such narratives, from the 1960s onwards, including 'journeys of exodus', 'journeys of return' and 'journeys within Palestine or a Palestinian community, usually circular in nature and lacking a defined beginning and end' (2012:306).[10] Contra the centrality of the *forced* nature of journeys resulting from the Palestinian Nakba in the 21st Century, the canonical *adab al-riḥla* (literature of journeying)[11] corresponds to (purportedly non-fictional) autobiographical accounts of expeditions, pilgrimage, and encounters (i.e. see al-Sīrāfī and Ibn Faḍlān 2014; Ibn Battutah and Mackintosh-Smith 2003).[12] It is worth noting that the Arabic root of the term *riḥla* highlights the intention(al) in travelling and the way in which the term *riḥla* (flight) constitutes the very notion of wandering and diasporisation. Unlike refugee journeys, however, it can be argued that earlier forms of journeying chronicled in *adab al-riḥla* were, in essence, embodiments of hierarchy and privilege, insofar as it was rare for a traveller to embark on journeying without the endorsement of a Sultan or the intention of reaching

[10] For an analysis 'placing the refugees at the heart of the story of Palestinian literature' see Abu-Remaileh (2021).
[11] While often translated as 'travel literature', I refer to *adab al-riḥla* as 'literature of journeying' in order to centralise the term '*riḥla'* and its resonance with the *flight* of refugees and migrants and the challenges faced throughout the process in transit. Equally, the notion of 'journeying' also captures shifting subjectivities and both the personal and interpersonal dynamics that arise.
[12] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with broader literatures falling under the umbrella of travel writing (ie. see Pratt 2008).

one for financial and moral support (Kilito 2017:46-55). Importantly, with regards to the writing of the traveller(s) within *adab al-riḥla*, in most cases, these journeys produced chronicles which sought to describe, engage with and above all validate some of the details lived by the traveller himself by matching them with *real* names, places and languages. This approximation of the truthfulness of the lived, on one hand, and that of the narrator on the other, is beautifully expressed in Abdelfattah Kilito's *Between Movement and Stillness* as he comments on Ibn Battuta's journey in the 14th Century: '[i]n one respect, Ibn Juzayy summarised Ibn Battuta's text, and in another respect, he gave it a literary hue. In other words, he *translated* it' (2017:54, emphasis added). Kilito continues by complicating even further the nature of the agreements which were signed between the traveller, the scribe and finally Ibn Juzayy, the de facto writer: '[a]pparently Ibn Battuta did not dictate the narrative of his travels to Ibn Juzayy directly, but to a scribe, and this dictation is what Ibn Juzayy edited, corrected, and gave a final form' (ibid.). This fascinating account of several people and a multiplicity of voices collaborating to produce a text based on the experiences of Ibn Battuta is a deconstructionist experiment par excellence (following Jacques Derrida) in the sense that deconstruction 'endures the limits of translatability – in other words, its various border-crossings are always marked by an untranslatable remainder – and yet it is always "in" translation, calling for translation, without "pure" origin' (Wortham 2010:33; also see Reynolds 2016). The intertwinement of experiencing travelling and archiving it (in the future) proves to the reader that within the journey there always appears more than one traveller, and also potentially more than one author. This returns us to the question of how we can conceptualise the relationship between 'refugee' and 'writing,' including with regards to the texts under study in the following chapters.

Conceptualising 'Refugee + Writing' and Beyond

As suggested above, 'refugee writing' offers a dialectical relationship inherent in the syntactic construction (refugee + writing). Since these writings are produced by, about and/or for refugees, the connection between the two constitutive parts (refugee and writing) can be interpreted as either/or and both. Firstly, 'refugee writing' could be viewed as a genitive construction whereby refugee and writing are both nouns and that this writing is by, about or for refugees. Alternatively, 'refugee'

could be interpreted as an adjectival which describes rather than asserts a relationship between refugee and writing, potentially suggesting that the writing is itself 'refugee-like'. By interrogating the ways in which these two constituents behave to/with one another, it becomes apparent that what is being produced is a form of writing which revolves around the figure of the refugee as both a subject/agent and an object. As such, both the author (citizen or refugee) and the authored (text about refugees) become part of one entity in their ability to maintain the movement of the refugee protagonists under study.

However, while it may be the case that a citizen who does not write about refugees would be unlikely to be labelled an author of 'refugee literature', it is equally the case that 'refugees who write' may be labelled as 'refugee writers' and as authors of 'refugee writing' irrespective either of their chosen thematic (as noted above, 'refugees who write' may not actually write *about* displacement) or of their own identification. While this thesis explores refugee *writing* as opposed to refugee *writers,* by means of introduction to the selected texts here I briefly reflect on the authors of these four texts, because the authors-and-their-texts embody different configurations of refugee writing.

The first two authors are members of protracted Middle Eastern refugee communities: Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian author displaced from Palestine, first to Lebanon and then Syria, and who worked in Kuwait; and Salim Barakat, a Syrian-born Kurdish author who sought and was granted asylum in Sweden, subsequently becoming a Swedish citizen. The third author, Abdulrazak Gurnah, fled Zanzibar for the UK, where he became a canonical figure in postcolonial literature as an academic, literary critic and novelist, most recently being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2021. These three authors thus have personal experiences of displacement (and of asylum-seeking in Europe in the case of Gurnah and Barakat), and in the selected texts write about the displacement and refugeedom of members of their communities of origin:[13] Kanafani about Palestinian refugees

[13] In contrast, for instance, Khaled Hosseini, whose family fled Afghanistan to Iran and who is well-known for his novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003), set in Afghanistan, has recently published a novel, *Sea Prayer* (2018), which takes the form of a letter from a Syrian refugee father to his son. This is therefore not an instance of a refugee writing about his own place of origin or his own displacement, raising questions as to whether

en route to Kuwait; Barakat about Kurdish refugees in Sweden; and Gurnah about Zanzibari asylum-seekers and refugees in the UK. In contrast, the author of the fourth selected text, the playwright Claire Bayley, does not have a personal displacement background, although her mother was displaced by World War Two, which raises questions of the boundaries between citizen-refugee, a thematic that is explored throughout the thesis. In spite of not identifying as a refugee, Bayley consciously wrote *The Container* as a 'reconstruction' of a real event in which migrants and refugees were discovered in a container and subsequently deported (Farrier 2011:183), drawing on interviews with asylum-seekers and refugees to this end. While based on this research, Bayley does not offer a verbatim account of her interviewees' experiences, instead 'disguising' her interlocutors' stories through dramaturgical freedom, leading her to declare *The Container* to be 'a fiction, based on careful research' (2016:n.p.). While she is a citizen writing refugees into literature, it can be argued that elements and dimensions of (auto)biography and fiction are interwoven either explicitly or implicitly in all four texts, For instance, alongside Barakat's earlier autobiographical writings, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* is a novel that intentionally conflates fact and fiction, with the author assigning himself the role of the 'documentarian' of the Kurdish protagonists' lives in Sweden, as I discuss in Chapter 1. This explicit and implicit interweaving leads us to critically interrogate the extent to which the author's legal and political status may be relevant not only to the writing, but also the reading and critical analysis of these texts.

Where the first three authors' refugee backgrounds and the research methodology underpinning Bayley's writing process mean that the selected texts blur, or perhaps place into relief, the relationship between 'fact and fiction' or 'life and text',[14] I push against reading these books through the lens of (auto)biography. As argued by Spivak, it is through the 'notion of authenticity' that

UNHCR's assertion (op cit) that 'no one can describe the life of refugees better than the refugees themselves' means that writers with refugee backgrounds, by virtue of being refugees, are uniquely positioned to write about *any* refugees from *any* displacement situation.

[14] In acknowledging this dynamic, I do not suggest that this is unique to refugee writing, since many writings blur the distinction between fact and fiction, as is prominent in the contemporary genre of autofiction (such as the case of David Shield's (2010) *Reality Hunger*), as well as autobiographical novels more broadly. Notably, where V. S. Naipaul's (1987) *Enigma of Arrival,* for instance, is formally classified as an 'autobiographical novel,' in the selected texts, autobiographical traces are implied and yet not articulated directly by the authors.

'benevolent imperialism' allows and expects the migrant experience to be written, granting space to the Other only if they articulate themselves 'purely' and 'authentically' (Spivak and Harasym 1990:61). In line with this expectation, Trinh Minh-ha notes that 'it is often said that writers of colour,' including 'Third World [sic] writers of the diaspora, are condemned to write only autobiographical works' (2005:10). Against this backdrop, I maintain that acknowledging that elements and dimensions of (auto)biography and fiction are implicitly interwoven in the work of authors with refugee backgrounds does not mean that their writings should be condemned to be read and critically engaged with through the lens of (auto)biography, as noted by Gurnah himself in his critical reflections on this problematic, to which I now turn.

In addition to being a scholar and critic of English and postcolonial literature, Gurnah is an accomplished novelist whose writing, grounded in the multiple histories of the East African postcolonies, has received international recognition.[15] Born in Zanzibar in 1948, Gurnah's writing is informed by and engages with questions of history, more accurately the layered histories of East Africa, ranging from Islam, the trade routes from and to the Persian Gulf, the plural Africa, race and gender, colonialism, migration and asylum and the postcolony more broadly. Gurnah's application of the historical lens – pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial – to his writing ties history and its various representations to multiple forms of exclusion and inclusion, dispossession and emplacement, hospitality and hostility that characterise the movement of people today and in the past.

Gurnah's works have often been read through an auto/biographical lens, with Folisade Hunsu (2014:78) for instance submitting that in Gurnah's eighth novel *Desertion*, the author applies the 'auto/biographical mode' to narrate African experiences mediated by 'new challenges' such as migration and biracialism. However, Gurnah's novels, critical work as a literary scholar, Op Eds and interviews, resist such labels and readings. Indeed, Erik Falk argues 'that Gurnah's "self-

[15] Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) and *By the Sea* (2001) were shortlisted and longlisted for the Booker Prize respectively; *Desertion* (2005) was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize.

authorization" proceeds by resistance to simplifying labels used both in the publishing world and in the academic arenas and displays a wish to complicate matters pertaining to his background and identity' (2020:162).

In a post-Nobel interview in which 'Gurnah told UNHCR his own story of displacement and dislocation, starting with how and why he left his native Zanzibar in 1968', UNHCR asserts that 'despite the circumstances in which he left Zanzibar, he does not consider himself a refugee' (Thompson 2022, np). While this assertion is both relevant and notable to the present discussion, this does not necessarily point to Gurnah's rejection of the label *per se*, but instead directs us simultaneously to his ambivalence towards the *labelling process* and to his understanding of the disjuncture between the nature of his journey to the UK in the 1960s and what a 'real refugee' endures (as delineated in the same article). As such, when he wrote over a decade earlier in his 2001 Op Ed in *The Guardian* that 'I would never have described myself as an asylum seeker or a refugee', it was not to dismiss the persecution he faced: even though '[t]hey didn't call it asylum then. The phrase was illegal immigrant', he recalls how 'a vindictive terror ruled our lives' in Zanzibar and, with reference to the urgency of his departure, he asserts: 'I escaped.' Instead, it is to emphasise the conditions of his arrival, and to differentiate these from the desperate conditions of other refugees, including those who are held in indefinite immigration detention upon arrival, with whom Gurnah has long expressed his solidarity and support through platforms such as *Refugee Tales* (for which he is patron). As he recounts in his Op Ed:

> I did not cling to the side of a ferry or wedge myself under a train to enter Britain. My brother and I arrived on a Sabena flight and were courteously interrogated by an immigration official. We had £400 between us and we were admitted on tourist visas. The £400 was to pay for our education, or so we stupidly thought; when that ran out we would work and study. We had no idea we had arrived in the middle of an exodus. I don't think we gave much thought to what we would find when we arrived. Yes, we should have done, but that is what I mean by terror. I thought about what I was escaping from and a lot less about what I was escaping to.

In response to the discrimination he faced after arriving in the UK – 'What a shock it was to discover the loathing in which I was held… If there had been anywhere to go to, I would have gone' (2001) –, in Gurnah's 'biographical-literary essay' (as Falk (2020:156) describes Gurnah's 2004 essay, 'Writing and Place'), and in his critical reflections 'Imagining the postcolonial writer' (1999), the author delineates the genealogy of his own approach to writing. He notes that '[i]t was in the first few years of living in England, when I was about twenty-one or so, that I began to write' with his approach to writing changing over time as he confronted 'the overwhelming feeling of strangeness and difference' in England (Gurnah 2004:58). As such, as he articulated in his Nobel Prize acceptance lecture in 2021, it was specifically after a 'prolonged period of poverty and alienation' in Britain that 'it became clearer to me that there was something I needed to say' (in Flood 2021). While Gurnah acknowledges in 'Writing and Place' that 'it is this condition of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years,' the author identifies this 'not as a unique experience that I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times' (2004: 27). It is in this sense that I view *By the Sea*, and the other texts under study, as contributing to our understanding of displacement as 'one of the stories of our times,' but also of seeing displacement as only one part of refugees' stories, rather than as (auto)biographical treatises.

Most pertinently, of the relationship between writing and reading (which I return to in Chapter 1), Gurnah reflects (2004:60) on his self-awareness that

> I had to write with the knowledge that for some of my potential readers there was a way of looking at me that I had to take account of. I was aware that I would be representing myself to readers who perhaps saw themselves as the normative, free from culture or ethnicity, free from difference. I wondered how much to tell, how much knowledge to assume, how comprehensible my narrative would be if I did not. I wondered how to do all this and write fiction.

I read this reflection as implicitly pointing to Gurnah's recognition of the likelihood that 'some of his potential readers' would likely be white, but also explicitly noting that his fiction would be read through the lens of self-representation: 'I would be representing myself.' In the context of this acute degree of self-awareness, Falk argues that Gurnah's 'biographical-literary' article clearly sheds light

on the author's own conceptualisations of 'how his novels should be approached, how his identity should be described, and how he should be related to other writers' (2020:152); Falk interprets this as part of Gurnah's insistence that 'generalized descriptions of the postcolonial author reflect the colonial homogenization of culture [that postcolonial literary studies] are meant to challenge' (ibid.:159). With Falk himself never using the term refugee or asylum-seeker to describe Gurnah – instead invoking Gurnah's own terms to describe 'Gurnah's story, as he acknowledges, is a familiar one: the *migrant turning writer* partly to come to terms with his divided life' (ibid.:151, emphasis added) – and while Gurnah himself resists the label 'refugee' as part of his broader quest to critically reassert the complicated nature of both the author's and the work's identity, it is nonetheless notable that Gurnah and his work have often been *refugee-ised*.

For instance, in her article 'Locating Abdulrazak Gurnah', Sally-Ann Murray (2013) analyses representations of Gurnah's identity in the reprinting of his piece, *Margate*, in the *New Statesman*, noting that in the magazine, 'Gurnah's remains a "migrant identity", vulnerable to the very refugee discourses he seeks to reconceptualize', with the 'dek beneath the header summaris[ing] Gurnah as "a refugee from Zanzibar", projecting into the present a condition describing his adolescent time of arrival' (2013:148). In the process of insisting on his 'refugeeness,' '[o]verall, there is nothing, in the *New Statesman*'s attribution, of "Abdulrazak Gurnah" as more than refugee, no larger life history referenced in the body of the piece, as *does* happen in "Margate"' (2013:148, emphasis in the original). Two intersecting key points arise herein: firstly, by 'excluding exactly the difficult interrelated processes of memory, fiction and narrative mediation upon which Gurnah's writing tends to turn,' the article's labelling and decontextualizing of Gurnah and his work 'has the effect of displacing imaginative agency with a putatively unproblematic category of documentary truth' (ibid.). In this sense, Gurnah has been 'condemned' (to return to Minh-ha's words, 2005:10) to be read as only 'writing autobiographical works.' Secondly, the author's biography and identity are reduced to that of the 'refugee' alone (Murray 2013:148):

> Any Gurnah personae which threaten the preferred 'refugee' identifier – the academic head of school and discipline, the chair of major literary committees, the university

> teacher of Victorian and postcolonial literatures, the prize-winning international author ... – are conveniently effaced, and Gurnah becomes an author only in absentia.

Through this positioning, which 'works to legitimate ideological categories' that Gurnah's writings have historically interrogated, 'Gurnah is unable to escape the categorical designation "refugee"' (ibid.:149). Indeed, it is only the 'refugee' identity that grants him 'the experiential permission which secures his authority to articulate an opinion.' As such, Murray stresses, 'he writes *embodied as a refugee* from an enslaving specialist knowledge ghetto premised firmly on bodily experience rather than conceptual thought' (ibid., emphasis in the original).

Similarly, the Kurdish-Iranian journalist Behrooz Boochani has resisted readings of his work being forcibly *refugee-ised*: while he does not deny his positionality as a refugee and former-detainee, like Gurnah he has repeatedly resisted his book *No Friend But the Mountains* being read 'primarily *as a work written by a refugee'* (Birns and Allahyari 2023:3, emphasis added), prompting him to write that: 'I must *restate* that this book is an attempt to depict life in [a remote detention centre on] Manus [Island] *in literary language*' and that despite its depiction of 'the naked suffering of humans' following 'five years of life in exile', '[t]his work is a *literary product*' (Boochani 2019:n.p., emphasis added). As Nicholas Birns and Keyvan Allahyari assert, notwithstanding Boochani 'writ[ing] from the centre of his own experience,' his book should be read '*as literature*' (2023:3, emphasis in the original).

Invariably, some authors accept, embrace and even, as in the case of Viet Thanh Nguyen, '*insist* on being called a refugee' (2018:11, emphasis added), including as a means of publicly resisting xenophobia and also potentially to not only authenticate but also validate their contributions to contemporary debates. It is equally the case that Nguyen and his partner, Prof. Lan Duoung, are described as 'refugee writers' in the media (ie see Bergman 2017) and the sub-title of his abovementioned collection points to his intentional framing and pivoting of his own and others' work around this construct. Nonetheless, across numerous media platforms he is introduced as

'writer, refugee'[16] and in his public-facing Twitter profile the first two words he uses to introduce himself are: 'Writer. Refugee.' This configuration not only places his identity as a writer at the forefront ('writer' precedes 'refugee' rather than vice versa), but the usage of a comma by the media and a full stop in his own Twitter profile also potentially raises questions about the relationship between these two facets of his identity. While these are clearly not mutually exclusive in this articulation, it is equally the case that 'refugee writer' is not necessarily a straightforward compound noun: rather than being a compound identity marker, it can arguably be read as a marker of processes and relationships, relationality and change. Unlike Nguyen's *insistence* on being called a refugee, Gurnah's dual *resistance* to and being *condemned* to this label, highlights the epistemic violence that may be embedded in the reduction of identity to that of 'refugee', whether in relation to the author or to the protagonists in the texts examined. This is not to deny the 'refugeeness' of people who have experienced persecution and displacement, but to resist processes that *forcibly refugee-ise* people's lives, narratives and identities and in so doing deny their multifaceted experiences, forms of expertise and contributions to different forms of knowledge production.

It is also in this sense that I return to my own intersecting positions as the reader and analyst of these texts. In a recent interview with the *New York Times*, Gurnah asserted that he does not wish to *represent* or act as a *spokesperson* for others, instead noting that 'When I speak, I'm speaking as a voice among many, and if you hear an echo in your own experience, that's great' (Marshall 2022:np). Indeed, in Gurnah's works I do 'hear an echo' that reverberates not only in relation to my own complex relationship with being interpellated as a 'refugee writer', but also through my own encounters with immigration officers in Heathrow airport when I first sought asylum and with the asylum-system in the UK. While my analysis of the selected texts is by no means driven by my 'refugeedom', this is nonetheless important to acknowledge, especially as several other echoes

[16] For instance, he is introduced by ABC Radio as: 'Viet Thanh Nguyen is a writer, refugee and Pulitzer Prize winner' (see https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/the-book-show/viet-thanh-nguyen-jane-harper-sulari-gentill-chloe-wilson/13237196) and a Twitter post by The International Relief Committee (IRC) reads: 'A beautiful reminder from writer, refugee, and IRC board member Viet Thanh Nguyen: An American can be a refugee. A human being can be both.' (https://twitter.com/rescueorg/status/1531342689731477504).

reverberate throughout and from the other three texts selected (texts which I briefly introduce and justify in the final section of this Introduction). In essence, whilst I resist the imposition of the label 'refugee,' my critical vantage point, as a person who has experienced displacement, containment, the asylum-journey and the 'evolution' into a citizen who has interpreted for and conducted research with other refugees is pertinent to, even if it does not govern, my reading of these texts.[17]

Echoing Gurnah's rejection of being positioned as a spokesperson for differed causes, as I have posited in my own writings, I would argue that the refugee as author or narrator cannot be assumed to speak for the other: 'For clarity's sake, I talk on behalf of no one, let alone myself, my brothers-in-asylum, and my only mother' (Qasmiyeh 2016a:248). This does not mean that either the author or the protagonist is a mere observer of events and therefore does not (either intentionally or unintentionally) have an influence on people's lives. Instead, it is to posit that for the refugee (as author or protagonist, and even as reader and critic) to escape from the binary of truth/non-truth is also to preserve the right to narrate or not to narrate. Adapting Peggy Kamuf's words on Derrida's 'terms/notions/practices of composition and displacement' (2016:132), we can in this sense maintain that refugee writing insists on 'the possibility of telling the truth [as] at once the possibility of not telling it' (ibid.:177), that the refugee preserves the right to tell or not to tell, in their own terms, without giving in to the authoritative voice of the immigration officer or citizen qua external observer.

In this light, and building on Irving Goh's conceptualisations (2016a) of the reject as epitomising three figurations or turns – passive, active and auto-reject –, I have elsewhere argued that the refugee

[17] For instance, my analysis of Barakat's representation of the Kurdish interpreters' responses to newly arrived asylum-seekers is informed by my own experience of translating for asylum-seekers as they met with lawyers and NGO representatives while my own asylum claim was pending, after being granted refugee status, and as a naturalised citizen. Before being granted refugee status, I conducted interviews with Kurds and Palestinians as part of a study subsequently published in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010). Between 2016-2021, I was also writer-in-residence for an AHRC-ESRC funded project examining local community responses to Syrian, Palestinian and Kurdish refugees in the Middle East and in Europe. These personal and professional engagements provide important foundations for my analysis, given my familiarity with the processes of interpreting and of navigating the asylum system, and of the specific displacement contexts from which the protagonists in the selected texts have fled.

is the reject par excellence (see Qasmiyeh 2018 and 2021). In Goh's theorisation, 'the reject is never always passive. It can project a force of rejection in turn, to counter the forces that are targeting or oppressing it' (2016b:137). In tracing the representation of the refugee figure in these works, I follow in Goh's footsteps with one main variation: the reject *is* the subject. In other words, by using 's/he' instead of 'it', with reference to the notion itself, we are engaging directly with the lived experience and its practices first-hand, and, in particular the encounters that emerge throughout the process of displacement. It is after all '[w]hat will happen in an encounter or meeting *between two rejects*, when each of them, in their heterogeneous ways, rejects any move that will actively determine the outcome of the encounter' (Goh 2016b:141, emphasis added). Expanding Goh's 'theory of the reject', which as he posits does not seek to *hierarchise* or totalise such *rejections,* enables us to further explore the multidirectional interactions at play amongst and between the refugee protagonists in the selected texts, to shed light on power and rhetorical dynamics therein. In this way, it is the reject who can extrapolate on their terms and not the observer. It is indeed encounters between refugees which are at the core of all four texts, with citizens (if and when they emerge) primarily only being described and inferred through the refugee-refugee dialogues that characterise all of these writings, which I now introduce.

A Brief Introduction to the Selected Texts

Ghassan Kanafani's oeuvres – along with those of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Emil Habibi – have been identified as 'constitut[ing] the core of the Palestinian novel in Arabic' (Abu-Manneh 2016:3; see also Said 2000:320-321). From his extensive opus*,* his first novel, *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (*Men in the Sun*) (1962), is acknowledged as the first contemporary Palestinian novel on Palestinian refugees' journeys from their camps and host places in search of other futures. I use Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams* – set in 1958, 10 years after the Palestinian *Nakba* – as the point of departure for the other selected texts. *Rijāl fī al-Shams* – written in Arabic and translated into English by Hilary Kilpatrick in 1999 – deals primarily with three Palestinian refugees' journey in containment, as they travel on and later *in* a water tanker through Iraq to Kuwait, resulting in their death at the border. One might

deduce that for Kanafani to write such a work on containment while he himself was living in hiding in Beirut as a Palestinian refugee with no 'legal' documents, is one way of *letting* literature be part of resistance without inundating the former with the directness of the latter.

In turn, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* by Salim Barakat (whose writings and political involvement with the Palestinian cause intersect with Kanafani's) focuses on female Kurdish former-refugees' dialogues within contained spaces in their host country (Sweden), primarily within the women's apartments. Written in Barakat's colonial language (Arabic), with intermittent references to the women's native Kurmanji-Kurdish and Swedish (languages which are inferred but not physically inscribed in the text), *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* (which has only partially been translated into English), documents the everyday interactions of women who recollect their Kurdish homeland while reminiscing on their experiences of interpreting for newly arrived refugees in Sweden, with whom they enter into competition over their new national space. Also written in the author's colonial language (English), Gurnah's *By the Sea*, intersperses the text with Kiswahili as the protagonists – 'new' and 'old' male refugees from Zanzibar who have intertwined pasts – navigate encounters in spaces of containment including in immigration offices in airports, in detention centres and hostels. In turn, I view Bayley's *The Container* as a rewriting of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* in a European contemporary setting, through its focus on containment, and male and females' refugees' journeys inside of a lorry. Where *Rijāl fī al-Shams* traces Palestinian men's journey through Iraq to Kuwait and culminates in their suffocation within the water tank at the border, *The Container* explores the fraught journeys of five refugees (two Somali women, a Turkish Kurdish man and an Afghan man who are joined by an Afghan woman in Scene One), and their Turkish 'Agent', as they travel across the Former Yugoslavia through France and onwards to the UK. This three-scene play revolves around the speech which is articulated by the protagonists within (and, off-stage, from outside of) the eponymous container, interspersing the English (the lingua franca, and the language of intended-arrival in the UK), with 'lines in Turkish, Somali and Pashto' (2007:4), in contrast with Kanafani's novel, where the men's speech is suppressed or silenced within the container and only enunciated and heard outside.

Together, the texts thus discuss people who are born into refugeeness in the Middle East (Palestinians and Kurds), in addition to would-be refugees, and those who are en route to becoming refugees (ie. Zanzibari, Somali, Afghan and Kurdish-Turkish). With *Rijāl fī al-Shams* as my point of departure, I view all three novels as being in an ongoing conversation with *The Container*. On the one hand, this is due to thematic confluences: from Kanafani's focus on Palestinian refugees in containment en route, to the multiple origins of the refugees travelling within Bayley's container, and Barakat's and Gurnah's old and new refugees meeting at different temporal junctures of their journeys, all four texts highlight the specificity of language and speech both in the production and content of the texts, in addition to the centrality of themes of containment and journeys. On the other hand, I read *The Container* as representing the ongoing movement, displacement and containment of people, as stressed by Bayley herself (2016:n.p.). In the middle of writing her play, 58 people 'were found suffocated inside a locked container at Dover' (ibid.), highlighting the ongoing process of displacement and containment. Such processes persist, as does the writing of such experiences into literature. As such, the arc of my thesis – through texts published between 1962 and 2010[18] – does not propose 2010 as either the end point of displacement or of so-called refugee writing; instead, this date marks a pause given the ensuing and unfolding events (and writings) from 2010 onwards in what has been labelled the Arab Spring, which has itself been identified by many as a turning point in literary production (as noted above, and as reflected in Rakha's notion of the 'Arab Spring industry,' cited in al-Mousawi 2016; Jaquette and Youssef 2016).

Two points are worth noting at this stage before I conclude this Introduction by delineating the structure of the following chapters. Firstly, recalling Bernard's approach to the inherently plural 'genres of refugee writing' (2020:66), and in line with analyses of 'refugee writing' which in turn bring together (for instance) a memoir, a novel and a collection of short stories (i.e. Rose 2020) or poetry, verbatim theatre and graphic narrative (i.e. Bernard 2018), in this analysis I bring together four texts which can be identified as belonging to different 'genres': three novels and one play. On

[18] Technically, the texts span 1948 to 2010, since Kanafani's protagonists become refugees due to the 1948 *Nakba*, even if the text was first published in Arabic in 1962.

a practical level, whilst acknowledging that its genre is of course distinct from that of the novels analysed, I clarify at this stage that I do not engage with the *performance* of *The Container* but instead with the *text written* by Bayley, which is readily available to purchase and *read*. Bayley notes that her play, as a collaborative work dramaturgically developed from her research with refugees, and performed by actors with refugee backgrounds, is designed to draw empathy and solidarity amongst the members of the audience (Bayley 2016:n.p): she views the play as offering the ordinary citizen a glimpse into the complexities of asylum, allowing them to view, through their own eyes, what life is like for those who are forced to seek asylum and yet are often rendered invisible (ibid.). Directly confronting the question '[h]ow can playwrights tell refugees stories without exploiting or appropriating them?', Bayley expresses her acute awareness that critics would 'ask, what are my qualifications as a white, middle-class Englishwoman to write about the experiences of Afghans, Somalis, Kurds and Turks fleeing persecution and war' and articulates that one of her guiding principles 'when writing plays' is to take 'lesser-known or unheard stories and [help] them reach a wider audience.' The latter emphasis has led to the play being critiqued by scholars such as David Farrier who denounce 'the risk that the experience of displacement will be reduced to a spectacle by its interpretive frame, in which the audience's experience is the real focus' (2011:187). However, while the *play* is performed and addressed to the citizen, I resist the anticipated humanitarian impulse prompted by this 'interpretive frame' by moving away from the performance and instead responding to the *text* as a refugee-reader.

Secondly, a brief note is needed with regards to both the language of the texts and of the analysis. Since the emerging field of literary criticism concerning 'refugee writing' has thus far largely focused on literary texts published in European languages, the multilingual dimension underpinning this project – which purposefully views all four texts as equal, rather than through a hierarchical frame – provides an important entry point to explore not only how specific thematics are narrated in relation to displacement in texts written in different languages, but also to examine the multiple meanings of 'refugee writing' in the plural, in so far as '*linguistic* plurality (multilingualism) becomes *literary* plurality' (Omri 2015:25, emphasis in the original). As part of this approach, each

of the main chapters revolves around my exploration of two texts, in which I pair an Arabic text with a text written in English: Chapter 1 examining the refugee protagonists' relationships to archival practices in *Hiyāj al- Iwazz* and *By the Sea*; Chapter 2 on time and temporality in containment in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea;* and Chapter 3 on the refugee body in containment in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *The Container.* My examination of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* pertains to both the Arabic and Hilary Kilpatrick's English translation of the novella.[19] In turn, since only the Foreword and Chapter 1 of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* have been translated into English by Thomas Aplin (Barakat 2011:n.p.), I primarily analyse that text through the Arabic original. With the exception of the quotations extracted from Aplin's translation of the Foreword and the introductory chapter, all quotations from the novel from p.54 onwards have been translated from the Arabic by me, as part of a broader effort to make Barakat's work accessible to an Anglophone audience.[20] Although I introduce Salim Barakat and his novel in further detail in the next chapter, I offer a brief reflection here with regards to the language in which his novel was written and through which it is analysed.

Literary critics have denominated Barakat's inimitable skill in writing as a 'linguistic conquest' (Fakhreddine 2019:134; also see Ḥadīdī 2002, 2017; Būʿazza 2015), with the Syrian poet and critic Adonis asserting that '[t]his Kurdish boy carries the keys to the Arabic language in his pocket' (cited in Hosny 2017:n.p). Indeed, Barakat's linguistic trickery has long been praised for its breadth, where imageries are not only derived from and grounded in the classical specifics and canon of the Arabic language, but are continuously regarded as contributing factors 'in modernising the [Arabic] language itself, as well as the styles and themes in contemporary Arab literary modernity' (Ḥadīdī 2002:1). Through a constant 'interrogation' and 'violent playfulness with its grammar and syntax' (Fakhreddine 2019:134), Barakat recognises his knowledge of the language as that of the foreigner who entered the body of Arabic through his father, who himself was a Kurdish religious scholar whose commitment to the Arabic language was also a commitment to the divine, unlike his son who

[19] All in-text citations are from Kilpatrick's translation unless stated otherwise; all citations in Arabic script are from the original 1963 novel.
[20] I adopt the Anglicized spellings both of Kanafani's and Barakat's names, and of the main protagonists in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* as offered by their respective translators.

mastered it so he would belong to a place where his local languages were seen as taboo (see Rooke 2006; Abī Samrā et al 2007; Ahmadzadeh 2007). Thus, his path to Arabic is a noteworthy one as it is closely intertwined with his development as a writer (both as a poet and a novelist) who started with the autobiographical (Abī Samrā et al. 2007: n.p.). Spanning Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and Sweden, his poetry and prose have come to document, in varied measures and temperaments, the very meaning of being a Kurd writing in Arabic, whose infatuation with Kurdish folklore and mythology extends an unwavering commitment to the Kurdish body being reclaimed in writing by 'superimpos[ing] the linguistic into the ethnic, sublimating the tension of Arab and Kurd into an invasive linguistic intervention' (Fakhreddine 2018:134; also Rooke 2006).

Recalling the different genealogies of the term refugee in English and in Arabic, it is worth stressing Barakat's alternation between the word refugee (*lāji'*) and (im)migrant (*muhājir*) in *Hiyāj Al-Iwazz* when discussing the protagonists' lives and the lives of others. I posit that Barakat's use is in line with contemporary scholarship which seeks to disrupt and interrogate such categories and labelling processes, and which attempts to move away from the fetishization of the refugee as a particular type of being (i.e. see Abdelaaty and Hamlin 2022). While Barakat alternates between these terms, and the word 'refugee' is present throughout both *By the Sea* and in *The Container* as used by the protagonists as self-descriptors as well as in relation to camps and organisations, it is notable that the word 'refugee' is entirely absent in Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams.* The absence of this label in the latter could be understood in relation to the implied reader of Kanafani's novella: the label is effectively superfluous due to the 'iconic status of the Palestinian cause' and the situation of Palestinian refugees more broadly in the context of the Middle East (Fábos 2015:99), where the readers' knowledge and understanding of the positionality of the protagonists is expected, rather than having to be imparted by the author. Inter alia, this powerfully reminds us that, just as the writer who is a refugee does not necessarily need to write *about* refugees, it is equally the case that a text does not need to include the term 'refugee' to fall under the remit of 'refugee writing.'

Structure of the Thesis

Building on this Introduction, in Chapter 1 I examine how *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *By the Sea* address the essential question of who writes the archive, and what position and role refugees themselves/ourselves embody in relation to this process. In so doing, I am guided by a multifaceted conceptualisation of the archive whose inherent plurality is itself reflected by the plurilingual frames of reference that emerge throughout the texts. I read these novels as direct attempts at writing their refugee protagonists into literature as creators and bearers of their own archives and materialities which themselves engage different times and tenses, including not only the past but also the future. I analyse the protagonists' emergent archives and materialities as both preserving and negotiating different moments of significance throughout the protagonists' lives before and after seeking asylum, including in contexts where the refugee is not consumed by asylum and refugeedom per se. I argue that *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* demonstrate that the archive and its corresponding materialities both carry the capacity to personalise and situate the refugee's journey *and* demonstrate the need to view asylum and refugeedom as an integral part of their lives: asylum is thus not separate from, or a new phase in, their lives, but instead is part of a set of broader spatio-temporal junctures.

My analysis of past, present and coming archives, and refugees' engagements in *contested* archival processes which are futural in nature, lays the foundations for Chapter 2 in which I seek to demonstrate the ways that the protagonists in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea* invert the assumed position of the refugee as a passive victim or passive wait*er* imbued with other people's times. In doing so, I do not deny the protagonists' experiences of liminality, or the different forms of violence and precarity they face in their respective journeys. Instead, by examining the narration of their times in and through old and new places alike, I argue that reading these texts together leads us to acknowledge refugees simultaneously as active time-*keepers*, time-*seekers*, and *makers* of time. In so doing, I pay particular attention to age and ageing as invoked by refugees themselves and immigration officials alike, focusing throughout on different rhythms and time-places of living, surviving and dying. Importantly, as I note in the chapter's conclusion, what I conceptualise as

'refugee time' is neither linear, nor homogenous, raising the important question of *whose* time is centralised in the texts under analysis and whose is left in the margins.

As hinted at in Chapter 2, refugee journeys are differentiated according to protagonists' real or perceived biological and bodily lack, and how their vulnerability and worthiness as refugees (or the lack thereof) are interpellated and responded to by different audiences in relation to intersecting identities, including their age, race, and their positionality vis-à-vis colonial and postcolonial histories (Crenshaw 1989; Mbembe 2001). Where men and masculinities are at the forefront of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea*, Chapter 3 pays particular attention to gender and embodiment in *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* through a relational frame. Noting that the refugee body is at the core of both mainstream and contrapuntal representations of refugees – variously constituting the refugee as a threat or eternal victim worthy of compassion – I argue that *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* simultaneously challenge, and yet also risk reinscribing, such gendered tropes. I suggest that by incorporating rather than ignoring such tropes, however, such reinscriptions should not be equated with endorsing them; instead, in so doing, the texts powerfully destabilise conventional binary representations of the refugee and thereby facilitate complex discussions about asylum and the particularities of refugees *in relation*: foregrounding not only their heterogeneity but also the co-existence of both solidarity and tensions between and amongst members of refugee communities.

In addition to critically examining how the female protagonists in these texts depict and debate their own bodies as they change over time, thereby paying particular attention to how their bodies are written into literature, I also anatomise how both explicit and implied intertextual instances involving refugee women within *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* draw attention to the very problematic of the refugee themselves becoming part of the ever-expanding corpus. With close attention to the linguistic specificities and multiscalar, corporeal dimensions of language in those texts – in the form of a letter carried by Asha in *The Container* and Darkhu's writing and recitation of her own poetry in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* –, I argue that the refugee body, conceived as both particular and in-relation, is concurrently a source, carrier and producer of knowledge, contra the mainstream depictions that

simultaneously deny the specificity of bodies and also erase that knowledge. Such an approach acknowledges the refugee body not only 'as an epistemological text' (Shildrick and Price 1998:7) written into literature for external consumption and analysis by the reader, but also in the role of refugees as writers in their own right and/or bearers and carriers of the written.

The act and process of writing is a central motif in all of the texts under study, and in Chapter 3 and subsequently in the Conclusion to this thesis I thus simultaneously probe the (ultimately unresolved) question of who writes whom, and who possesses the story and the text in displacement. While Rickel and others are invariably correct to critique the ways that literary humanitarianism reproduces a neo-imperial relationship between 'the refugee and the reader' (see Rickel 2018), throughout my analysis I interrogate the very binary underpinning such a critique by exploring the centrality of writing, the writer and the written within all of the selected texts as processes and materialities produced and shared *by* refugees *for* refugees. Through investigating Marwan's letter to his mother in *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* and by reading this letter in conjunction with the refugee writings that emerge across all of the texts, in the Conclusion to this thesis I take this critique one step further by centralising the refugee not only as the producer of knowledge as the writer, but also as the reader and critic, thereby disrupting the assumption that the 'reader' of refugee writing is necessarily a 'citizen'. In effect, while 'refugee writing' has habitually been analysed as a means of advocating 'for' refugees, I maintain that this configuration contains within itself the assumption that refugee writing is ultimately in fact 'for' the citizen: directed to the citizen as the imagined and expected reader, acting as a catalyst to prompt the citizen/reader to understand and save refugees. Instead, by critically investigating instances of refugee writing engendered within the texts, I submit that one of the key contributions of this thesis is its proposal to shift the critical gaze towards what I conceptualise as 'refugee reading.'

Chapter 1

The Refugee Archive: Materialities and Spaces of Containment in *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*

The Refugee in the Archive

The archive has traditionally been conceptualised as an official and state-centric element, with states having historically been assigned the role (or having themselves sought to monopolise the role) of the protector of the official record. Noting that '[t]he narratives preserved by the state in archives and other public institutions – that is, the narratives most commonly used by historians — belong overwhelmingly to the ruling classes, and owe their existence largely to a ruling class's need for security and control' (Pandey 1995:224; also see Papailias 2006:402; Richards 1993; Stoler 1992), the exclusion of subaltern histories and narratives from official historiographies has by now been widely acknowledged. In response, Penelope Papailias notes that there has been an increasing shift from focusing on the 'closed authoritative historiography to the multiplicity of texts involved in documenting the past and to their open potential for generating future histories,' with a multiplicity of people and institutions increasingly 'revealed to animate the archive' (2006:402). In line with this shift, in her work vis-à-vis the 'catastrophe' of the (forced) population transfer between Turkey and Greece in 1923, Papailias 'approaches the subject of the archive from a deliberately ex-centric location', asking 'what might be learned from looking to the margins of Europe, to personal rather than state archives and to the archiving practices of those who are not professional historians or archivists' (ibid.). Similarly, in her edited project on *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, Ann Laura Stoler maintains that 'rather than the introspective gaze of Europeans on ruins,' it is more pertinent to 'look to the lives of those living in them' (2013:15) to determine what is deemed significant from the perspectives of colonized and dispossessed people themselves.

With regards to the position of refugees within archives and historical accounts, the experiences of refugees have typically either remained undocumented or, at best, documented by others, with Banko

et al. noting that, when it is included at all, 'the history of refugees is usually embedded within the history of the nation state' (2020:18). Since refugees have often been viewed as the 'detritus' of the state and of history (i.e. see Gilkes 1998:143; Rajaman and Grundy-Warr 2004; Adelman 2010), and therefore unworthy of attention in their own right, they have often been relegated to being a mere trace that remains within the archive. In order to redress the historical gap and bias vis-à-vis the exclusion of refugees from archives and historiographies, in their recent intervention on this topic Banko et al. advocate for an 'enlarge[ment of] the field of vision, by taking account of multiple actors without losing sight of specific historical contexts' (2022:18). There is, they posit, 'much more to be done to understand how refugees [have] interpreted their situation and confronted those who exercised power over them' (ibid.:16), including by acknowledging 'refugees' capacity to write their own history, the conditions under which they do so and the purpose these writings serve' (ibid.). In addition to suggesting that refugees' own accounts (including through oral history) 'might complicate or de-familiarize established narratives' pertaining to forced migration (ibid.), there has also been increased focus on the objects and materialities that form part of refugees' personal and collective archives; this has become such a popular approach that in the mid-2010s, UNHCR launched an advocacy campaign around Jenifer Toksvig's poem and subsequent film titled *What They Took With Them*, with Toksvig's poem 'inspired by stories and first-hand testimonies from refugees forced to flee their homes and the items they took with them.'[1]

A focus on refugees' own archiving processes, and on the materialities of displacement, are dual interests that also underpin this chapter and this thesis. However, I take a different stance from Banko et al. who maintain that, although 'material traces of refugees themselves survive in a haphazard fashion, if at all' (ibid.:15), the 'materiality of refugeedom' can be 'illuminated' through analysing:

> the material objects that refugees carried with them and *the significance invested in personal objects*, such as religious artefacts, embroidered items, jewellery, photos and *the objects that acquired significance during the journey*, such as the walking stick and the map.
>
> (ibid:18, emphasis added)

[1] See https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-they-took-with-them.html. Notably, it is Danish theatre director, Jenifer Toksvig, who wrote the poem, 'inspired' by refugees (ibid.).

While agreeing that material traces do not always survive and that key objects may indeed either have 'personal' significance from the place of origin, or be objects that have 'acquired significance during the journey', in this thesis I interrogate and seek to disrupt a fixation on the refugee journey or the moment of asylum as the primary instance of significance for displaced people. As such, I approach the question of the refugee archive not only in relation to whose and which accounts and materialities can be 'useful' and/or mobilised to facilitate refugees' legal, material or physical survival, including as means to contextualise and substantiate asylum claims, or to highlight how refugees themselves draw on individual and collective archives to narrate their own experiences of displacement and of seeking refuge. Instead, I read the novels *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* as direct attempts at writing their refugee protagonists into literature as creators and bearers of their own archives and materialities which themselves engage different times and tenses, including not only the past but also the future. As such, I analyse the refugee protagonists' emergent archives and materialities as both preserving and negotiating different junctures of significance throughout the protagonists' lives before and after seeking asylum, including in contexts where the refugee is not consumed by asylum and refugeedom per se. In so doing, I posit that the texts under analysis demonstrate that the archive and its corresponding materialities not only carry the capacity to personalise the refugee's journey but also demonstrate the need to view asylum and refugeedom as an integral part of their lives – asylum is thus not separate from, or a new phase in, their lives, but instead is part of a set of broader spatio-temporal junctures – and equally, that the items kept and invoked by refugees situate said refugees in a wider spatial and temporal context.

Guided by a multifaceted conceptualisation of the archive whose inherent plurality is itself reflected by the plurilingual frames of references that emerge throughout Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Salim Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* (*Rampaging Geese*), I seek to contribute to ongoing scholarly debate by examining how the novels address the question of 'who writes the archive', and what position and role refugees themselves/ourselves embody in relation to this process. My argument draws on previous work in which I reflected on the intersecting roles of writing and archiving in

relation to, and through, Baddawi refugee camp in North Lebanon (where I was born and raised) (Qasmiyeh 2020a, 2021:61; also see Qasmiyeh 2020b). In my interjections to this debate, I conceptualised the camp as a living archive and enacted my commitment 'to document[ing] the lives of its residents in both life and death through processes that privilege the ordinary and the everyday at the expense of the extraordinary and the unique' (2020a:53). In so doing, I sought to expand the parameters of the archive by centralising the active and intimate involvement of camp residents, provocatively positing that '[o]nly refugees can forever write the archive' (Qasmiyeh 2020a:55, 2021 – for engagement with and responses to my work on this topic, see Saber and Long 2020; Stonebridge and Qasmiyeh 2018; Stonebridge 2021). Such a provocation did not intend to claim that refugees have a *monopoly* on the archive, which of course both runs the risk of creating new forms of exclusion and also of reifying and reducing certain figures to be defined solely through their refugeeness. Instead, I argued (2020a:56) that:

> inviting an act of writing from within does not necessarily imply a *uni*-writing, which is based upon one 'narrative' or on a language that claims absolute entitlement to the future by virtue of having been born in/to the camp. On the contrary, it is the direct opposite of such an archival monopoly.

Recognising refugees as archiving subjects, rather than merely as archived objects, simultaneously rejects the archival monopoly held by those who have historically 'archived' us, in the official sense, but also seeks to acknowledge that refugees' narratives and archival practices exist alongside those of others. Here and elsewhere I thus take as my starting point that refugees are active participants in the archive (not merely a trace therein), playing a pivotal role in determining what is deemed significant and worthy of inclusion, alongside the acknowledgement that refugees' archival practices are often fragmentary and dissonant in nature.

Where my previous work has engaged with this question in relation to the roles of writing and archiving in refugee camps, in the novels in question neither the protagonists nor the authors are in camps, as they have arrived and/or have been living in their host places (the UK and Sweden respectively) for many years. Through a multilingual analysis of *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, I

thus seek to explore how the archive is articulated and enacted by the novels' protagonists, as written by their authors who have themselves experienced displacement – Gurnah from Zanzibar and Barakat from Syria. In *By the Sea,* both the narrator-protagonist Saleh Omar (who has sought asylum in the UK from Zanzibar) and the author, Gurnah, arguably emerge as archivists in their own right through their careful narration of colonial histories of Zanzibar as they relate to displacement, thereby fulfilling the role that Banko et al. (op cit) acknowledge that refugees can hold in their 'capacity to write their own history,' under different conditions, and for different purposes (2022:16). In turn, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* author Salim Barakat not only inscribes the histories of Kurdish places and people in Northern Syria and in Sweden, but also explicitly introduces himself in the first pages of his novel as the *documentarian* of his protagonists' lives (2010:5-6). Barakat thus sets up the novel itself as a historical document or chronicle, in which the author interpellates himself as the official archivist. However, this does not lead to his absolute 'ownership' of the archive, as it is the Kurdish women who meet weekly throughout the novel themselves who emerge as counter-archivists throughout the text, as I discuss below and in Chapter 3.

In effect, in conjunction with the question of whether Gurnah and Barakat are 'refugee writers' and archivists in their own right, I argue that the question of the archive and production of knowledge is embedded within and enacted by the characters in both novels. While both of the authors document the names and histories of selected protagonists, objects and places, it is equally the case that the protagonists themselves play an active roles as writers – in *By the Sea*, for instance, I examine the novel's intertextual references to Elleke's memoir of her time (as a German settler) in colonial Kenya, which I read in relation to the writings-in-progress of Alfonso, a newly-arrived Angolan refugee who is writing in a detention centre in the UK – and as actors engaged in contested and complex processes of naming and de-naming both people and places. With regards to the latter, where *By the Sea* centralises the naming and renaming of people as a means of transferring the ownership of objects (in Zanzibar) and the rights of people to mobility (to the UK), the protagonists in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, led by Tassu, enter into a contest for the inscription of Kurdish versus Somali names into the future of the Swedish topographic archive. As I discuss below, the politics of re-

naming in both the public and private spheres plays an important role in both novels: in relation to reimagining Kurdistan in Sweden – the ordinary Kurdish name travels to Stockholm through Tassu's quest for it to be 'preserved' for the new generation born in exile and for Swedish citizens alike – and in marking and enabling the transition from Zanzibar to the UK, where Saleh Omar's new name, inscribed on the fake passport, becomes an integral part of his emergent refugee archive.

Throughout this analysis, I seek to complicate the boundaries not only of the archive and archival practices – joining Stoler and others in questioning who determines what 'counts' as archiving (see Stoler 2013:5) – but also the apparent boundaries of the identity of the 'refugee' and 'non-refugee' themselves. While the state and citizens are present in both novels, it is nonetheless the case that all of the main protagonists in both novels have displacement backgrounds, including not only those who are immediately recognisable 'as refuges' (ie. Zanzibari and Angolan refugees Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, and Alfonso respectively in *By the Sea*; and Kurdish and Somali refugees in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*), but also those who might initially appear to be 'citizens': Elleke may have been a colonial settler, but it is equally the case that her relatives were displaced or killed by war and/or expelled from Czechoslovakia (p.136); Rachel Howard, initially depicted as a refugee advocate (presumably a 'British citizen'), is subtly revealed towards the end of the novel as having ancestors who were Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain to Trieste, migrating onwards to Geneva and eventually to London (see p.204); and immigration officer, Kevin Edelman, asserts that his parents were refugees from Romania who were granted refuge in the UK (p.12). In addition to complicating the boundaries of key legal and migratory statuses, both novels thus centralise interactions between different groups and generations of refugees, thereby disrupting the assumption that the key debate and arena of contestation in relation to the archive is one between the refugee and the citizen.

In reading these texts together I therefore propose that an analysis of the refugee archive must include acknowledging refugees' roles as archivists, not least because refugees' own positionalities (like their archives) change and develop over time, often in ways that challenge rather than reproduce the positionalities and archival priorities of other refugees. Beyond this, I maintain that the novels offer

a critical contribution to the broader question of who determines the parameters, boundaries and contours of the archive, and embody an expanded conceptualisation of the archive itself, encompassing tangible and intangible elements on the one hand, and a plurality of times and spaces where archiving processes emerge and are contested by, and between, refugees on the other. By examining *both* the nature and implications of that which travels with them from their place of origin – including in the forms of knowledge, memories and materialities such as documents, photographs, incense, pieces of cloth, and dust – and *also* by emphasising the archive as being embedded in and expanding throughout ongoing processes of renewal and contestation in the UK and Sweden, I suggest that the archive as it emerges in the novels under analysis is a renewable process which moves with the protagonists towards futures of their own making. Throughout my analysis the archive thus emerges in these works not only in complex, but also potentially in dissonant, ways.

Approaching the Archive

A plurilingual etymological treatment of the word 'archive' is a relevant starting point for this chapter, which examines texts which are themselves plurilingual. None of the main protagonists in the selected novels are monolingual, and all of texts analysed in this thesis include multiple languages, whether comprehensively or in fragments. In *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the protagonists speak English and Kiswahili in Gurnah's novel and Arabic, Kurdish (Kurmanji) and Swedish in Barakat's.[2] Although both Gurnah and Barakat write in their respective colonial languages, I would contend that they do so in a way that disrupts, rather than reinforces, dichotomies of the centre (coloniser) and the periphery (colonized) in (post)colonial chronicles (on Gurnah, see Cooper 2008 and Chambers 2011; on Barakat, see Ahmadzadeh 2003, 2007 and Jayyusi 2002; more broadly, see Memmi [1965] 2003). In so doing, I maintain that both authors challenge essentialised representations of disenfranchised individuals and communities, without idealising or romanticising refugees' agency in the books under study (on Gurnah, see Olaussen 2009; on Barakat, see Rooke

[2] Palestinian, Iraqi and Kuwaiti dialects are at play in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (if covertly, given that the text is written in *Fuṣḥā*), with the allusion to English acting as a signifier for the lingering effects of Britain's colonial presence in Palestine; the protagonists of *The Container* speak Pashtu, Kurmanji, Somali and Turkish.

2006). As I explore in this and the following chapters, the selected texts centralise protagonists who are, in different ways, in control of their speech and silence (see Fabris 2012), act as interpreters for one another, and archive and narrate their own accounts of displacement and containment, including through writing. This plurilingualism, equally, leads us to recognise a plurality of meanings of the archive, and relatedly, as I explore throughout this chapter, not only diversely-positioned archivists but also a plurality of archival practices and spaces.

Genealogies of the term 'archive' often start with the meanings and origins of the archive in the classical languages of Greek and Latin. The term is often traced to the Greek *arkhe(ion)*, 'initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded' (Derrida 1998:2), or to the Latin *archivuum* or *archium* which expresses both the written texts as well as the place of such texts, i.e., stored in the residence of the magistrates (ibid; Stoler 2009:50). In turn, if we were to start from contemporary Arabic, and in particular as referred to in official and institutional contexts, we would find that the word archive is commonly referred to as *arshīf* (pl. *arshīfāt*), which is itself identified as having been transmitted and slightly altered from the English *archive* and the French *archiver* during the colonial rule of France and Britain in the Middle East and North African region. However, it is important to note that in the *classical* Arabic corpus, the notion of archiving has long been attributed to two verbs, which, importantly, also echo the incarcerality espoused in Greek and Latin: *rabada* (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015a:131-2), which means 'to incarcerate' in the domain of the domestication of animals (ibid:131),[3] and, most pertinently in the context of this chapter, *khazana* (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015b:105), meaning to store away, and its cognates, the nouns *khizāna* and *makhzan,* which are rendered as 'locker' and 'repository' respectively. Despite being assigned the name of a place, *khazāʾin* (plural of *khizāna*) are also the divine secrets which are overseen, according to Islam, by an all-knowing God where

[3] *Rabd* is the 'prison' and 'enclosure', and *mirbad* is 'the place where camels and other animals are kept', 'a space behind the house', a place that 'resembles the room inside the house', 'the place where dates are kept to dry' (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015a:131-2). Similarly, *rābid(a),* which shares its root with the above definitions, can be translated as 'the keeper' and 'the preserver' of what is inside these contained spaces, and *rubda* – also etymologically linked to the verb *rabada* – is 'a colour between blackness and dustiness' (ibid.: 132).

their place outside the human realm is closely tied to a future time only known to God (ibid.). Additionally, the term *khazāʾin* also refers to the 'verses of the Quran' in which not-entirely-visible and yet multiple layers of meaning are contained. In turn, the *makhazan* (pl. *makhāzin*) is a place where materials are kept intact for long periods with the intention of revisiting them at a later date (ie. a store house). This intention, in turn, implies a relationality between the archivist and the archive which is not only subject to a past but also anticipates a future encounter. Equally importantly, in the context of a study of the archive in literature pertaining to refugees, it is in the *makhzan* where the material and the textual continually intersect. This intersection is apparent in the term 'magazine'[4] where both the origin of the word and its various meanings are not only derived from Arabic but also retrace the very evolution of the word 'archiving' within Arabic: from the divine to the personal.

While Salim Barakat does not engage directly with the *makhzan* in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, he nonetheless includes multiple words which can be seen as evoking its spirit. In the final chapter in particular, reference is not only made to one of the protagonists' bedside *khizāna* (cabinet, p.313), which is a cognate of *makhzan* (sharing the root *kh-z-n),* but also to archival practices as they take place in one singular space which is poignantly described through three intersecting terms which highlight the abovementioned multi-perspectival approaches to the archive: what is in practical terms the apartment block's *mustawdaʿ* (storage unit, p.320, used twice on the same page), is also referred to as the *qabw* (the crypt, p.320), a space which is subterranean and concealed from the public eye, and also as *aqfāṣ* (a cage, p.320) (sing. *qafaṣ*), thereby embodying incarcerality.

Far from offering a comprehensive etymological and theoretical treatment, through this brief introductory analysis I have sought to highlight both the plural articulations of the archive but also the subtle synergies that exist in and between the Latin, Greek and Arabic which acutely stress the situatedness of the archive and its complex relationships to both time and space. The intersection of the private and public spheres, including different forms of containment across these, is central to

[4] The word reached the English language via the French *magasin*, from Italian *magazzino* and originally from the Arabic *makhzan* (OED 2005:1054).

the overarching debate to which this chapter contributes with regards to the ways that refugees themselves engage in archival processes throughout their asylum journeys.

While the analytical contexts are different, I extend Derrida's conceptualization of 'the archive' to the texts under consideration in line with the broad understanding that Derrida's essay, *Archive Fever*, 'led the cultural meanings of the archive to become a new site of contestation' in diverse disciplinary fields (Nicholson 2012:1). As noted by Helen Nicholson (ibid.), 'Derrida's argument that the archive is not a "question of the past" but "of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (1995:36) has prompted a renewed consideration between the archive, temporality and embodiment,' all of which are thematics at the core of this thesis (Chapter 1 on the archive; Chapter 2 on time and temporalities; Chapter 3 on the body). For Derrida, the activities of the archive can be located 'in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest […]. The dwelling [that] marks this institutional passage from the private to the public' (1998: 2), and I maintain that drawing on Derrida's works in this context is apt for many reasons, including in light of his own personal experience of displacement and expulsion from his country of birth and the ways that his writings embody a political, philosophical and personal commitment to the rights of refugees (i.e. see Derrida 1998:16-17; 2001; Kelly 2004; Carroll 2007). This includes his writings on the meaning of 'home', the potential for unconditional hospitality, and his 'vision for the International Parliament of Writers' (IPW) cities of asylum within the context of his political philosophy of a democracy to come' (Kelly 2006:421), where he asked 'that cities "reorient the politics of the state" in protection of the "foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person" (1997/2001, p. 4)' (cited in Kelly 2004:427). Such people, as analysed by Derrida in *The Paper Machine*, are also often known as 'sans-papiers', translated by Derrida's translator Rachel Bowlby as 'undocumented people' (2005:ix). In the context of this chapter, I go further to argue that Derrida's commitment to the rights of the *sans-papiers* in turn returns us to the question of the 'un- or under-documented person' who is seeking their position in, and future through the archive.

Temporally speaking, the archive, as Derrida reminds us, is 'a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow' (1998:36). As demonstrated in my analysis of the texts under study, and in particular through my investigation of processes of naming and renaming in both novels, such archival promises are enacted by the refugee protagonists as disruptive modes of thinking and remembering towards a new *future*. In this sense, the refugee's archive not only constitutes the material possessions of the refugee, be they mementos from the place of departure, or accumulated en route, or samples of official – authentic, forged or otherwise – documents such as passports or birth certificates, but rather the ongoing invocation of histories and conditions in their lives. 'As much as and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future,' reiterates Derrida (ibid.:33, emphasis in the original). This unrelenting insistence on the future, strictly on its coming, on Derrida's part, positions the archive ahead of time, as though for the archive to be seen *as* an archive it has to project and be projected in/for the future.

Furthermore, since refugees during their journeys and in their destinations are no longer under the remit of their national states or their respective representatives, as it is in most cases either an ongoing or *prospective* fear of or the absence of a protective state that forces people out, their archive becomes a personal archive *despite* the state. This does not mean that it is an archive that is entirely free of the state or its institutions; as Ann Laura Stoler discusses with regards to the archive in relation to the colony and the refugee camp, these spaces can be read, together, 'as distinct, substitutable, adjacent, and interdependent forms of containment' (2014:37; also see 2016:68-121), thereby highlighting their paradoxical interconnectedness. As such, the archive can be identified as that which is initiated, conceived of and enacted by the individual – the refugee, in this case – who is transgressing the state and its systems in her asylum claim. Since archives – written, photographic or as elements of material culture – have historically been perceived as official accumulations for the survival and sustenance of the so-called collective memories of the nation states (see Stoler 2009), the refugee archive emerges as an alternative archive whose meanings can be read against the

state rather than through its optics.[5] Notably, this alternative archive is not in lieu of official collections, but exists as a complementary dimension initiated by those who are outside the nation state.

In her reformulation of the archive and its workings through her nuanced re-reading of the Dutch colonial archives, Stoler privileges 'the archive's granular rather than seamless texture' (2009:53). In so doing, she not only re-centres our attention on the archive as textural in nature but also actively engages senses and their perceptible capacities in this actual reading of the archive. To Stoler, insisting on the fact that archives should be treated as 'unquiet movements in a field of force' (ibid.:32) is an invitation to the reader to view archives both as unsettling in their own right and as parts of ever-evolving systems, with traces of multiple sites, histories and peoples. Such a view, in its capacity to focus on the textured, multi-layered and storey-ed nature of the archive demythologizes the archive as an impenetrable set of documents which belong to one institution and instead 'undoes the certainty that the archives are stable "things" with ready-made and neatly drawn boundaries' (ibid.:51). Acknowledging the multi-textured and sensorial dimensions of the archive also prompts us to consider the relationship between the tangible and intangible, transcending the focus on examining what people 'hold' and 'take' with them (as discussed above), and instead to develop a more comprehensive analysis of that which travels with and is invoked by refugees beyond such evident and evidentiary materialities. As Stoler argues in *Imperial Debris*, '[r]ethinking and expanding how to approach the "tangible" effects of ruination is key. If the "tangible" most commonly refers to that which is "capable of being touched," it equally refers to that which is substantial and capable of being perceived' (2013:5). It is precisely a range of *intangible* components –including smells and sounds– which emerge throughout both novels as having travelled with the protagonists and being drawn on not only to evoke or memorialise the past, but also to make sense of the present and catalyse futural archives. In this manner, my analysis of these texts and the centralization of the ways that the refugee protagonists both engage in archival practices and, in so

[5] On the multiple meanings and readings of refugee and migrant archives, see Duggan and Gandolfo (2011:316) and Parkin (1999).

doing, push for a reconsideration of the very meaning of the contours and contents of the archive, enacts Stoler's vision of the importance of 'identify[ing] new ways to discern and define what constitutes the tangibilities of colonial pasts and imperial presences' (ibid.). Noting Stoler's argument that 'postcolonial studies has too readily assumed knowledge of the multiple forms in which colonial pasts bear on the present, and has been too quick to assert what is actually postcolonial in current situations' (ibid.), I posit that the texts in question combine elements of what can be conceptualized as 'traditional' approaches to the archive with an insistence on more expanded and expansive ways of 'discern[ing] and defin[ing]' the archive and the enactment of archival practices.

In effect, beyond institutionalized and state-centric depictions of the archive, in texts which revolve around displaced identities, languages and ruptured times, the archive includes the lived archive or the archive of the lived where the intimate and the national continuously intersect (Qasmiyeh 2019a, 2020a). Antoinette Burton's critical reflections on the question 'Who writes –who even sees– the histories of subjects exiled from the "national body"' (1997:227), with a particular focus on 'people of color and ex-colonial migrants in Britain' (ibid.:243), have highlighted what the 'ramifications are for national histories in the wake of postcolonial studies and work around diasporic communities and subjects' (1997:227). In her words, expanding the archive's terrains – which is paramount if we are to have a more equitable view of the archive – takes place 'by recognizing domesticity and its interiors as legitimate archives' (ibid.:143). Legitimating the archive by allowing the individual and her place or places to be sites of production and productivity is a crucial thread as I analyse the works under study. This 'dwelling *in* the archive,' as Burton calls it, brings to the fore the question of who knows the archive (ibid.). In addition to being a critique of the elitist nature as well as the discursive and official perceptions and parameters of the archive, such a proposition, from within the home, introduces another form and positionality of the archive, that of the place. By returning the archive to the individual and in doing so granting her the right to dwell *in* it, the refugee's individual story comes to be on a par with accounts and spaces of national significance.

As demonstrated through my analysis of spaces associated with domiciliation in *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, ranging from detention centres to B&Bs and apartments, the house as a place or a precursor for other places, is where histories, materialities and languages interlace, subtly at times, violently at others, in order to find their ways, not as totalities but rather, to echo Derrida's words, as promises and responses to a state of being (1998). Notwithstanding their temporal nature, houses in this instance turn into spaces which are worthy of archiving, both, as Burton espouses, as 'critical sites of history,' and for their uncompromisable 'material and symbolic' standing (2003:142). This reorientation of the archive has manifold motives. Firstly, it unsettles the official nature of the archive as an apparatus which is 'born out of a determination to survey, an outgrowth of states convinced of their all-seeing and all-knowing capabilities' (ibid.:140). In the same vein, it critiques the colonial desires behind its first creation and ultimate uses (and abuses), by reinscribing the individual (rather than the institution) as both the creator and preserver of the archive (see Stoler 2009). It entails moving away from colonial depictions and conceptualisations of the archive, not by forgetting them but by highlighting the rupture that exists between the static repositories of the archive in/of the past and the archives of the displaced, and through attention to how such a separation is what is needed when the archive becomes that of the individual in an emerging or settled community.

In all, in conjunction with recognising the role played by refugee-archivists themselves, as espoused by Banko et al. (2022) cited in the opening pages to this chapter, my conceptualization of the camp-archive (Qasmiyeh 2021, 2023a) sits alongside Stoler's insistence on '[the] move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject' (2009:44). This transition shifts the gaze from the archive as a source of knowledge, managed and controlled by institutions, to the archive as a subject whereby multiple representations can happen within but also around its remit, including through processes of contestation and questioning. It is through 'the pulse of the archive,' as identified by Stoler (ibid.:49), if read *in* and applied *to* contemporary contexts such as mass displacement, where the life (and the afterlife) of the archive can be detected and then interpreted. As such, instead of the archive, as is normatively acknowledged, informing us about the absent, or who or what is represented in the archive, it dwells on the present and the becoming, on the archive that is evolving. It is in this vein

that this chapter treats *By the Sea* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* as sites worthy of archival attention, independent geographically and linguistically and yet intersecting in the way in which their characters, across both works, try to comprehend their manifold lives in asylum and beyond.

Gurnah's Archival Knowledge

In his 2004 article, 'Writing and Place', and again in his 2015 article, 'Learning to Read', Abdulrazak Gurnah reasserts his belief that 'writers come to writing through reading, that it is out of *the process of accumulation and accretion, of echoes and repetition*, that they fashion a register which enables them to write' (2004:59, emphasis added; the wording is almost verbatim in 2015:31). In the latter piece, he further expounds the development of his reading-writing practices across languages and traditions (in particular Kiswahili, Arabic and English) in Zanzibar and the UK, noting that '[i]f I cannot say that there was a dramatic afternoon in August when I began to read part of my own story in the world, in history and in literature, then it is certainly an *accumulation of such moments that made this knowledge possible*' (2015:28, emphasis added). In these articles Gurnah interrogates what it means for a 'reader from outside Europe' to engage with the 'European canon,' asking 'if such a reader were also a writer, how would he or she locate him- or herself in relation to such European writing?' (ibid.:26). At the same time, and most pertinently in the context of this chapter, in utilising the term 'accumulation' alongside 'accretion' (terms which, according to The Society of American Archivists, respectively refer to '[t]he organic process by which a collection of records grows out of a routine process' and 'an acquisition of materials added to an existing series or collection'[6]), he draws the processes of both reading and writing directly to the question of the archive. Gurnah thus reminds the reader that accumulation is intimately related to the production of knowledge: building a repository provides the author with the foundations to create their own particular writing register, and in so doing the archive not only '[makes] this knowledge possible' but also leads to the expansion and renewal of the archive of knowledge itself.

[6] See https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/accumulation.html and https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/accretion.html, last accessed 17/01/2023.

Such thematics, and terminology, equally underpin *By the Sea*, a novel which Gurnah first published in 2001. Notably, in the novel the verb 'accumulate' and the noun 'accumulation' are used specifically in relation to possessions (linked to capital, fortunes and gifts on pp.7, 27, 80 respectively) and with regards to knowledge and wisdom. The first sustained engagement with accumulation in the novel pre-dates Gurnah's critical reflections (*op cit*) on his experiences of learning to read in colonial Zanzibar, recounting through the protagonist's voice that: 'at school there was little to no time for those other stories, just an orderly accumulation of the real knowledge they brought to us, in books they made available to us, in a language they taught us' (p.18). In this context, the 'orderly accumulation' of the ironically-labelled 'real knowledge' brought by the colonisers – to the detriment of 'these other stories'– in essence rebuts the false equivalence of accumulation qua *meaningful* knowledge. The limitations of Eurocentric knowledge are also hinted as the narrator, Saleh Omar, suggests that the reasons behind the 'a' remaining in the anachronistic and racially-charged noun 'blackamoor' is 'a conundrum of the first order, beyond the *accumulated wisdom* of the OED' (p.76), before turning to the relationship between accumulation and the partial nature of knowledge as a constituent part of the lived archive.

A further engagement which has bearing on how to analyse the archive, emerges in a scene where the recently arrived Saleh Omar awaits Latif Mahmud by the open door of his flat, whose windows 'held particles of dust and organic debris' (p.141), and the narrator reflects on whether he would have recognised Latif Mahmud (who he knew from Zanzibar, and whose father's name he has appropriated in order to reach the UK) if he had passed him in the streets. With the passing of time, Saleh Omar continues (p.142), 'time dismembers the images of our time. Or to put it in an archaeological way,'

> it is as if the details of our lives have accumulated in layers, and now some layers have been displaced by the friction of other events, and bits of contingent pieces still remain, accidentally tumbled about.

The past experiences and knowledge which constitute 'the details of our lives' are thus not evenly gathered or assembled, but instead 'have accumulated in layers' which remain only partially accessible, simultaneously fragile, competing and incomplete. Gurnah's depiction of what we can identify as the lived archive is thus reliant on uneven processes of accumulation in which different 'bits' and 'pieces' are variously included and excluded, visible or beyond reach. Just as it is not possible to directly and immediately access 'the details of our lives', so too, as Gurnah demonstrates throughout *By the Sea*, is the excavation of the lived archive a complex and often fraught one, characterised by power inequalities, such as those that emerge in the intertwined and intersecting lives of the two Zanzibari narrator-protagonists, Saleh Omar, who claims asylum under the name Rajab Shaaban, and Latif Mahmud, previously called Ismail Mahmud.

Tracing the Archive in By the Sea

The spatial configuration of *By the Sea* through naming and un-naming is germane to our discussion, with Chapters One, Three and Five titled Relics, Latif and Silences respectively, whereas the remaining three Chapters (Two, Four and Six), are left untitled. Thematically, naming and un-naming permeates and is central to the novel given that the departure of the main protagonist, Saleh Omar, from Zanzibar to the UK was made possible through acquiring a dead person's birth certificate, that of Rajab Shaaban, to forge a passport. This act of 'borrowing' names (as it is referred to throughout the novel) manifests itself in the choices made by two main protagonists and the novel's narrators: Saleh Omar borrowing Ismail Mahmud's father's name, Rajab Shaaban, while Ismail Mahmud disowns his first name, Ismail, and adopts a new name, Latif. More importantly, these Relics and Silences are not only halved by the proper noun, Latif – which is both one of God's many names in Islam and Ismail's new name –, but are mainly separated by histories, places and futures that sit in and in-between these untitled chapters.

In the late 1990s, Saleh Omar, the main narrator and a former furniture shop owner who is now in his mid-sixties, having spent eleven years in detention in various prisons in Zanzibar and whose imprisonment only ended due to an amnesty issued in 1979, arrives at Gatwick Airport, in England,

as ‘a refugee, an asylum seeker’ (p.4). His escape from Zanzibar was accomplished through a passport bearing the name of the now dead Rajab Shaaban – a forged passport obtained on the basis of the latter’s birth certificate which was amongst the possessions that Saleh repossessed almost three decades earlier. Saleh Omar’s escape was prompted by his fear of being subjected to further retributions and false imprisonment, this time to be orchestrated by Rajab Shaaban Mahmud’s eldest son, Hassan, who had returned to Zanzibar after a long disappearance. Facilitated by Hassan’s mother, Asha, who is one of the mistresses of a powerful government minister, these retributions – which in the past resulted in long periods of detention – are now imminent. These paybacks are viewed by Hassan’s family as a justified revenge against Saleh Omar for having repossessed their family house along with its contents but also for having inherited a property through his stepmother that was meant to be theirs. As is narrated *by* Saleh Omar and later divulged *to* Latif Mahmud (Hassan’s younger brother) in England, the acquisition of the house was initially part of a legal agreement between him and the Persian trader from Bahrain, Hussein, who in turn was in a failed business relationship with Rajab Shaaban, Hassan’s father. According to Saleh Omar, repossessing the Mahmud family house was only carried out as a last resort when all his propositions to Rajab Shaaban were rejected outright and when taking loans from Zanzibari banks, in light of the post-independence nationalisation of all financial services, was no longer an option. This intergenerational property feud, which started in the nascent post-colonial Zanzibar, has now travelled across time and space, featuring at times pithily, other times elaborately, throughout the novel only to reach a degree of resolution when Saleh Omar encounters Latif Mahmud in England.

Latif Mahmud, the novel’s second narrator, is the youngest son of Rajab Shaaban and Asha, and the younger brother of Hassan. Latif Mahmud reaches England by sea in the late 1960s after spending a short period in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on a scholarship secured through his mother’s intimate relationship with the minister. He exaggeratedly and almost caricaturally announces to the Harbour Police in Plymouth: ‘I am a refugee … [f]rom East Germany’ (p.138). In contrast, since his arrival in England, Saleh Omar has maintained a performative silence upon the smuggler’s advice, prompting refugee advocate Rachel Howard to search for an interpreter and ‘an

expert on [Saleh Omar's] area' (p.65) who could explain things in Saleh Omar's local language. This urge takes Rachel in the direction of Latif Mahmud, who is now a professor of English at the University of London (paralleling the journey of Gurnah himself, as outlined in the Introduction). Gradually, the enduring effects of Saleh Omar's and Latif Mahmud's pasts, from the postcolony, Zanzibar, to the former colonial power, the UK, which is now their host country, and their intersecting stories, start to unravel in multiple directions.

Names and Relics

Constructing new identities and relinquishing old ones is at the very centre of *By the Sea*, where names are either true names or 'fake aliases' (p.144), adopted during specific times and for specific reasons. The two narrator-protagonists, Saleh Omar and Ismail Mahmud, have, either forcibly or of their own volition, adopted the names Rajab Shaaban Mahmud and Latif Mahmud respectively. Since he was deprived of the right to a passport as part of his conditional release from prison in Zanzibar, Saleh Omar had to use the deceased Rajab Shaaban's birth certificate, kept aside when the latter's house was repossessed (p.41):

> And my name is Rajab Shaaban. It is not my real name, but a name I borrowed for the occasion of this life-saving trip. It belonged to someone I knew for many years. Shaaban is also the name of the eighth month of the year, the month of division, when the destinies of the coming year are fixed and the sins of the truly pertinent are absolved. It precedes the month of Ramadhan [sic], the month of the great heat, the month of fasting. Rajab is the month which precedes both, the seventh month, the revered month.

To the reader, Saleh Omar divulges that Rajab Shaaban is not his 'real name' but a 'borrowed' name for the asylum journey ahead. This confession is incisive: it states the 'sin' succinctly, that is of using another person's name on his identification documents, but also dilutes the effect of doing so since it is a sin committed for 'this life-saving trip,' not for other untoward and malign intentions. Hence the name which is meant to be part of its bearer's history now belongs to the present, the future that he is chasing, his wishful survival and his eventual granting of protection. Furthermore, the adopted name carries powerful Islamic significations. It includes Rajab and Shaaban, which according to the Islamic calendar are followed by Ramadan, the holy month of fasting during which the Qur'an was

revealed to the Prophet Mohammad and promises are made by Muslims. In line with this understanding, the 'futural' in the name corresponds to Saleh Omar's arrival in England as an asylum seeker validating what the proper name's function is, which is 'to insure a certain *passage* between language and the world, in that it ought to indicate a *concrete* individual, without ambiguity, without having to pass through the circuits of meaning' (Bennington and Derrida 1993:104, emphasis added). In this vein, it is clear that it is within the name's remit that the individual becomes concrete. For Saleh Omar, the new name – which is now embedded in the asylum system and is therefore *his* – is what makes him a refugee in waiting and makes a future beyond the postcolony possible for him.

On the other hand, Ismail's conversion to Latif was conceived of during his flight to the GDR. His decision to become Latif is 'for [the name's] gentleness and the softness of its modulations, God's name…' (p.133). The 'formal name' (p.134) is now dispelled and instead one of God's names is embraced. In doing so, Latif Mahmud expresses a long-held wish to desert the name he was given by the father (Rajab Shabaan) whose name in turn would 'save [Saleh Omar's] life' (p.146). This disavowal of the original names offers both Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud new paths, new passages to the future, ones which are partly of their own creation.

To paraphrase Derrida, the name is relational in nature and its multiplicities can be attributed to survival as well as death (Derrida 1995:35): through the name 'it is always necessary to be more than one in order to speak, several voices are necessary for that …' In effect, whether bestowed on the person at birth, or chosen or denounced by the person herself at some stage, the name will continue to have its life with or without the named. At the same time, like altered and at times deserted names, relics are the left, the left behind and the refuse of time (on the refuse of history, see Benjamin 1999). They exist in the shadow of empires or mere places, long gone or on their way of going, like colonial debris and ruins (see Stoler 2013). Relics bear signs. They can be seen, detected, smelled, touched and reassembled. They can also be historical, colonial, material or metaphoric. In *By the Sea*, they are all of the above.

Relics, the title of the opening Chapter, takes the reader from the beginning to intersecting histories, colonial and beyond. It begins with waiting for the caseworker who will be looking after Saleh Omar's asylum claim and also addressing his logistical needs, from housing to language classes. The waiting precedes Saleh Omar's arrival at Gatwick Airport as details are being divulged by the narrator/Saleh Omar. So it is from the future, from where Saleh Omar at the moment is, that histories are remembered and old places are reconstructed and restored – not entirely, but like ruins, in segments and segmented forms. In the novel, we see the word 'relics' before reading it. 'Relics,' as a chapter title, thus acts as an elegy for something that once existed, inviting the reader to acknowledge it as an entry point to and a sighting of the pre-colonial, colonial and independent Zanzibar. Following Stoler's conceptualisations of the 'granular' and the non-monolithic in the archive and the archive as a subject (2009), but expanding her articulation of ruination as 'an *act* perpetrated, a *condition* to which one is subject, and a *cause* of loss' (2013:11) by instead emphasising ruination as an ongoing and mutable process, I trace the relationality in place that governs the coming archive (as Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud reflect and dwell on their pasts and presents) and the ways in which relics, ruins and remains of the past act as a progressive reminder of the refugee's future.

Like Gurnah's, Saleh Omar's life is shaped by the colonial and de-colonial sentiments of the past. Reflecting on his new life as a refugee, Saleh Omar contends that 'it is [his] fate to live in the wreckage and confusion of crumbling houses' (p.1). According to him, this state of 'wreckage' is progressive. It is the ruins of houses that precipitate his previous and current lives. In other words, what he is comprehending is a state of being that belongs to him irrespective of time and place. Drawing on his past, Saleh Omar locates a continuum of ruination: these 'crumbling houses' which are there to be inhabited, restored or deserted altogether. It is not a coincidence that the words 'relic(s)' (pp.1, 166, 169), 'ruin(s)' (pp.27, 30, 32, 42, 137), 'debris' (pp.84, 101, 141), 'rubble' (pp.137, 237), 'monument(s)' (pp.224, 244), and 'ash(es)' (pp.127, 245) permeate the novel and, I

would posit, act as a motif or a multitude of motifs for the dissipation of one life and the emergence of another.[7]

In claiming asylum, Saleh Omar has become the refuse of the state, 'a condition, without even a story' (p.143), or, as Zygmunt Bauman pithily puts it: '[r]efugees are human waste, with no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay' (2004:77). This, however, does not mean necessarily that this 'relic' (p.169), as Latif Mahmud poignantly calls him, will have a restored life (ibid.):

> I think I imagined you as a kind of relic, a metaphor of my nativity, and that I would come and examine you while you sat still and dissembling, fuming ineffectually like a jinn raised from infernal depths.

This *imagining*, based on a call seeking help with the English language for Saleh Omar, is thus conceived of by a fellow Zanzibari – a refugee who arrived in England almost three decades earlier. The expert is now Latif Mahmud, swapping roles with the white expert who would normally 'come and examine' the natives. But what would a metaphor of his 'nativity' be other than that of abjection – a state which is eloquently rebutted by Saleh Omar. This 'kind of relic' (p.169), 'cannibal' (p.156), and 'licker of British arses' (p.101) is the main storyteller in the novel. Alongside Latif Mahmud, the narrator who knows. As this is their first encounter in the UK, a new knowledge has emerged. It is a new knowledge, for it is grounded on disrupting their perceptions and ideas of each other and of their respective families: neither Saleh Omar nor Latif Mahmud are total victims. Nor are they total victors. These confessions are far from straightforward as they meander through colonised and independent Zanzibar, through East Germany (in Latif Mahmud's case), eventually arriving in England. They are more correctly founded upon and justified by places, times and histories, collective and individual. For Saleh Omar as much as for Latif Mahmud, the place originally manifested in the contested houses in Zanzibar leading to their places of habitation in England while

[7] It is Saleh Omar's repossession of Latif Mahmud's family's house itself, and the ensuing inter-generational feud, which 'ruins' the bonds between those involved, whilst ushering in a new relationship between the protagonists in the UK.

transiting through airports and harbours, dormitories, detention centres and hostels, is of acute importance. It is important on two levels. First, in line with Derrida's conceptualisation of the archive as a form of a 'house arrest' (1998:2), as an ongoing state of confinement, for the refugee himself but also for his times which aspire to the future. Secondly, 'dwelling *in* the archive' (Burton 2003) can reconfigure these places of containment as productive spaces; as domains for self-reflection in addition to being settings for new – mainly personal – archives.

In order to disrupt the testimonial (Rickel 2018:97) and the banal and most often predicted self-abjection of the now new refugee, Saleh Omar engages in the process of narrating *back* (following Ashcroft et al. 1989). He does so only to and for the reader, while being discredited by Kevin Edelman, the immigration officer at Gatwick Airport (p.12, emphasis added):

> Think of me *as one of those objects that Europe took away with her*. I thought of saying something like this, but of course I didn't. I was an asylum seeker, in Europe for the first time, in an airport for the first time, though not for the first time under interrogation. I knew the meaning of silence, the danger of words. So I only thought this to myself. Do you remember that *endless catalogue of objects* that were taken away to Europe because they were *too fragile and delicate to be left in the clumsy and careless hands of natives*? *I am fragile and precious too, a sacred work*, too delicate to be left in the hands of natives, so you'd better take me too. I joke. I joke.

Saleh Omar's history and his future's projection are being narrated here. In the folds of this powerfully all-encompassing enunciation of the refugee's human condition, Saleh Omar, starting from the colonial framework wherein the colonised individual is rendered invisible (Fanon [1967] 2001; Mbembe 2001), offers – ironically – an incisive analogy: refugees *qua* objects and objects *qua* refugees. He does so by returning to the historical premise of his asylum claim, tracing the colonial violence and expropriations of objects and people (see Chatterjee 1993) and the interrogations, beatings and incarceration which became the norm in post-independence Zanzibar. According to Saleh Omar, only the colonial powers deem themselves suitable for the preservation of these objects and artefacts (c.f. Mbembe on Africa archiving itself – 2001:1, 3).[8] The preservation that Gurnah

[8] Notably, Saleh Omar himself had traded in antiques and objects left behind by the British administrators and was consequently viewed with suspicion by fellow Zanzibaris.

alludes to is an equitable way of looking at people and their things in unison. It does not preach stasis but instead its opposite. It is a process which seeks to '[k]nit together today and yesterday, integrating new events and relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people' (Young 1997, cited in Newns 2015:509).

This 'catalogue of objects' which now sits somewhere in a museum, or a museum's cellar, and therefore constitutes part of the colonial archive, is being counter-narrated and archived afresh. In so doing, this counter-narrative disrupts the canonical story and '[supplants] a testimonial dialectic which centers a privileged, "humanitarian" reader in relation to a victimized refugee storyteller' (Rickel 2018:98). Saleh Omar has been made a refugee due to (and as a result of) systemic failures and authoritarian governance in his homeland. This, however, should not necessitate an acceptance of self-erasure. In returning to key episodes and events in the colonial history of Zanzibar, he sets the record straight and in the process he rejects 'a master narrative that disconnects personal suffering from historical and contemporary imperialism' (ibid.:104).

Unravelling Histories and Languages

In this face-to-face encounter between Saleh Omar and the immigration officer Kevin Edelman, multiple histories unravel. Therein, the ultimate question of deservedness and its withdrawal is invoked. To 'leave Europe to its rightful owners' (p.13), as Kevin Edelman continuously tells Saleh Omar, or to enact history and claim asylum at the airport uttering *only* two disembodied words: 'refugee' and 'asylum' (p.9). Saleh Omar decides to perform the latter until 'the other stamp, the good stamp' (p.13) is inscribed in his passport. This conditional admission to England echoes Saleh Omar's admission to the colonial educational system, first, as a student infatuated by 'their' literature and then in his capacity as a seller to and buyer from resident British colonials in his furniture shop in his coastal hometown (p.18):

> In their books I read unflattering accounts of my history, and because they were unflattering, they seemed truer than the stories we told ourselves. I read about the diseases that tormented us, about the future that lay before us, about the world we live

> in and our place in it. It was as if they had remade us, and in ways that we no longer had any recourse but to accept, so complete and well-fitting was the story they told about us. […]. The stories we knew about ourselves before they took charge of us seemed medieval and fanciful, sacred and secret myths that were liturgical metaphors and rites of adherence, a different category of knowledge which, despite our assertive observance, could not contest with theirs. So that is how it seems when I think back to the way I was as a child, with no recourse to irony or knowledge of the fuller story of the multitudinous world. And at school there was little or no time for those other stories, just an orderly accumulation of the real knowledge they brought to us, in books they made available to us, in a language they taught us.

In this evocative intervention, Saleh Omar retells the story as told to him in 'their' language and through their books. He admittedly accepts the fact that then he was 'a child, with no recourse to irony or knowledge' and that the colonial discourse propagating 'the real knowledge' contra his and his people's 'different kind of knowledge' is what he believed in and therefore accepted. In the archive, while this colonial knowledge is being centred, as Stoler accurately observes with regards to the Dutch colonial context, other 'stories get relegated to the miscellaneous and 'misplaced'' (2009:37), proving that it within the archive's means to convert certain 'narratives' into qualified knowledge while repelling and refusing others. Indeed, this archive, whose ultimate goal is to displace other archives and render them unworthy of inclusion, as Saleh Omar suggests, is punctuated with acts of *making* and *remaking*: in the colonial schooling there was 'no time for those other stories.' To the young Saleh Omar, the futural in/of the archive, as theorised by Derrida (1998a), is monopolised and foretold by those who '*can* read about the *future* that lay before us, about the world we live in and our place in it' and those who are fixated on their 'liturgical metaphors'. These 'accounts' and 'accumulations' (Gurnah 2002:18) are being challenged and disrupted as critical assessments of the colonial history, primarily education, take place, ushering in new or altered 'archival moments' (Stoler 2009:51).

In marking the shift from colonial to post-independence Zanzibar, Latif Mahmud recalls entering the newly-built 'air-conditioned library and reading room' which is 'an annexe to the [American] embassy' (p.105). This library, built and equipped by the Americans, appears as a striking contrast to the now deserted British library which 'look[s] like a disused warehouse or store' (ibid.). The British library, as recalled by Latif Mahmud, was 'strictly for members only' and admission was

'granted or withheld' by the doorkeeper sitting at the desk. Alongside the fading British library and the new American one, there was also Latif Mahmud's school library wherein departing colonial administrators 'bequeathed their *surplus* books […] – so the departing conquerors could feel that they were leaving this fruit of Europe's intellect in responsible hands' (ibid., my emphasis). These *places*, imbued with the colonial smell, with 'a history which was never separate from their former owners, whose names or dedications or marginal notes sometimes appeared to claim them back' (pp.105-6), equate the archive – as a site – with 'house arrest,' as Derrida evocatively suggests (1998:2, also see Stoler 2009:23-5). In this instance, the archive which 'gathers together signs' (Derrida 1998:2) grants no entry to those who are not considered an integral part of the archival project and are therefore cast aside. Not having access or at the most having limited access to these colonial sites perpetuates 'a discourse of tutelage and hierarchy' (Gurnah 2002:106), reflecting an owner-intruder dichotomy and the assumption that natives are only worthy of receiving the 'surplus' (p.105).

Reflecting on his childhood, precisely on his father's (Rajab Shaaban's) complex friendship with Hussein, the Persian trader from Bahrain, Latif Mahmud (Ismail, at that time) recalls 'all [speaking] in loud voices mixing English and Arabic and Kiswahili in polyglot good humour' (p.87). In depicting the use of the autochthonous Kiswahili, Arabic as the language of the Arab Muslim conquerors and traders, and the colonial English, Latif Mahmud paints a picture of these overlapping histories and languages in informing, but also constructing, the post-colonial history of Zanzibar. Bearing in mind that 'the planet is not always written in English' (Jazeel 2019:8), the English in question is the one manipulated by Hussein to prey on Latif Mahmud's older brother, Hassan – as his English teacher when he was lodging in Rajab Shaaban's house – and sexually abusing him while offering him English lessons. Given this ambivalence, and since English has often been identified in colonial and postcolonial settings as the revered language contra the 'unnameable or unknown… language they spoke *out there'* (p.73, emphasis in the original), it is worth interrogating the position

of Kiswahili in the narrators' archives, in an attempt to situate the Kiswahili fragments throughout the novel and eventually to reweave them into the question of the personal archive.[9]

In *By the Sea*, using Kiswahili, a language containing Arabic and other colonial languages within its folds, *only* takes place as complete sentences *in* Zanzibar, shedding light on the dissolution of home during the colonial era. Kiswahili features in a limited number of conversations, epithets, prayers (alongside Arabic), and in transience (Kiswahili is explicitly named on pp.21, 82, 87 and 133); in these instances Kiswahili words can be viewed as either organic interjections or internalised interventions. While in these first examples Kiswahili thus sits relatively quietly in the overall narrative, Kiswahili is used in a final example with huge historical bearing by Elleke (Latif Mahmud's German childhood pen-pal), in conversation with Latif Mahmud, in Dresden in the GDR: it sheds a different light on Kiswahili as a colonial trace, emerging as remnants which have travelled across time and place (following Said 1983) in manifold ways and throughout different historical periods, colonial and post-colonial alike.

In this encounter, the trace appears in the form of an individual Kiswahili word '*asante'* (p.133):

> 'Asante,' she said in Kiswahili, and then smiled. 'I still remember a few words. My dear friend how shall we call you? Shall we call you Ismail? Is that what your friends call you?'

This 'thanks' is part of Elleke's colonial depository as a person who 'still remember[s] a few words', juxtaposed with her articulation of well-detailed memories of her and her family's time in Kenya as 'settlers' (p.131). In this sense, '*asante'* is notably decontextualised, and is not intended to be an integral part of the conversation: the term is arguably used to substantiate her past presence and is used in this specific context because she considers Latif/Ismail to be a witness to her time in East Africa, rather than as a means of instigating further exchange on or through Kiswahili. It remains

[9] By fragment I mean that which can be viewed as simultaneously complete and incomplete, including footnoted and decentred remnants of Kiswahili in *By the Sea*. On the fragment and/as the trace, see Derrida ([1974] 2016:66) and Qasmiyeh (2019b).

not only unanswered but also suspended in that distant history. This is not to say that it is irrelevant or surplus to the narrative. Instead, I view Elleke's '*asante*' as an intertextual intervention aimed to position Kiswahili, or rather a trace of it, as a precursor for the history that continues to pervade Elleke and Latif Mahmud's present lives, and the power differentials inherent in their contrasting positionalities. In her discussion of intertextuality in Arabic literature, Wen-chin Ouyang astutely acknowledges intertextuality's potential to 'access and assess tradition' (2013:55). While of course tradition is more-than-the past and its conceptualisation (and also application) may vary across time and space, it is still the case that 'asante' as invoked by Elleke has given *access* to some of the memories that are already inscribed in her memoir, raising the prospect of placing her memoir under scrutiny as it is juxtaposed with (and also *assessed* against) the Angolan refugee's, Alfonso, on-going writing.

To further contextualise the encounter between Latif/Ismail, Elleke and her son that has originated through *writing*, while expecting to meet a young woman as per the name Elleke in their childhood correspondence as pen-pals, Latif Mahmud was instead collected at the ticket office by a male, Jan, who in turn admitted having borrowed his mother's name, Elleke, for this experiment, which was invented 'on a whim' and 'for fun' (p.124). When Latif Mahmud enters their apartment, leaving blood from his wounded foot on their doormat, this ushers in a new starting point in their contact which is now in person and through the English language, which is neither Latif Mahmud's nor Elleke's or Jan's. While cleaning Latif Mahmud's wound, the colonial wound (on the latter, see Anzaldúa 2002:11), Elleke evokes *The Odyssey*, in particular Odysseus's return to Ithaca disguised as a stranger and the subsequent question of recognition or the lack of it (pp.127-8; see also Farrier 2008:134-5):

> Do you remember when Odysseus comes home, after twenty years, and does not announce himself… Do you remember? It is an old woman who recognises him, Eureclita or something like that [subsequently corrected to 'Euryclea' by Jan], because she washes his feet to welcome him to the house… Eureclita recognises the scar on

> Odysseus's foot, and she knows that the master of the house has come back. When you return to us in time to come, we will know you too? [10]

According to this formula, recognising the other person from his scar is premised on the occurrence of an old wound and the act of seeing its trace – the scar – in the future and being able to recognise it and relate it to its true bearer (Anzaldúa 2002). This 'incident,' as conveyed in *The Odyssey,* is not static, nor is it solely located in ancient history. Rather, it is a travelling event which has received multiple contemporary treatments; for instance, as reported by Elleke, '[Erich] Auerbach does such wonderful things with that passage' (p.128). As such, 'the scar' (ibid.) prefigures the proceedings of this advancing encounter between Latif Mahmud and Elleke and Jan and therefore brings to the fore interconnected times as regards their respective histories in East Africa.

Narration and Writing

While the question of hospitality can be obvious within the novel (Farrier 2008:121-39), I would argue, in line with the positionality of the archive as an account, or various accounts, of materials and times (see Sekula 1986), that the encounter between Elleke, Jan and Latif Mahmud transcends the parameters of the giver-recipient equation and instead gestures towards the interrelatedness of times and events in narration more broadly. Indeed, the invocation of Odysseus's return is coupled with Elleke, upon Jan's request, narrating (to Latif Mahmud) their diasporic and diasporised families, spanning the former Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany through Kenya (p.129-30):

> 'Tell him about that time, Mama,' Jan said, nodding vigorously. 'You always tell the story differently, so I never tire to hear about it. Please tell, Mama.'
>
> 'Oh no, we don't want to bore our friend on his very first visit,' Elleke said, chuckling at what Jan had said. 'But it is true what you say about stories. They are always slipping through our fingers, changing shape, wriggling to get away.'

[10] Jan's and Elleke's use of English here and elsewhere in the novel, adds a further dimension with regards to the questions of language, authenticity and translation, with the phrasing being lightly suggestive of 'translationese' from German. On such dynamics of 'translationese', see Reynolds (2016:4 and 2013). Equally, it is important to note the discrepancy between Elleke's recollection and citation of Odysseus's wound being on his *foot*, and the original epic poem which locates the injury on this *thigh*. This suggests a conflation between *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. The question of 'misremembering' and partial citations is worthy of further analysis.

Narrated and re-narrated 'differently' whilst continuously 'changing shape,' stories are retold and eventually stored in memoirs (p.132; see also Said 1999:3):

> 'My mother has written a memoir about the years in Kenya,' Jan said. 'In German. It's beautiful writing.'

This transferral from the oral to the written – a process which took place many years earlier – is particularly salient here. Elleke has written a memoir about their time in Kenya from 1919 until 1938 which, in her words, is 'only lying nostalgia,' and 'if [she] were writing it now, [she] would also tell the horrible stories and depress everyone…' (ibid.). While contemplating whether she should revise and rewrite her memoirs to acknowledge new understandings of the colonial and colonised relationality, these thoughts never venture beyond the realm of the unlikely and the hypothetical, as reflected in the conditional sentence above. One might say that Elleke's archive (as yet) is based on the colonial mode of seeing, on the young eyes she once had. In this instance, as inscribed in her writings, the colonial history has become the sole custodian of the archive – a static and impenetrable archive *contra* the fluidity of storytelling (Jackson 2002; Burton 2003:141). In her own admission (p.131):

> We were European. We could go anywhere in the world we wanted […] Even fight and maim for what you had no right to […] Well, because we lived at a time when it seemed we had a right to do all that, a right to places that were only occupied by people with dark skins and frizzy hair. That was the meaning of colonialism, and everything was done to persuade us not to notice the methods that made it possible for us to go where we wanted.

The ease with which Europeans could travel 'anywhere' is set in direct contrast to the almost immobility and stasis of the postcolony. These problematics, dictated by the suspicious clarity and assertiveness with which Elleke mentions the word 'European,' posit more questions than they offer answers. On the one hand, there is an acknowledgment by Elleke that such barbaric practices are at the heart of the 'meaning of colonialism' and yet, still within such an acknowledgment, there is no 'possibility of [actively] "decolonising" the culture' (Ashcroft et al. 2010:28).

In his ground-breaking text *The Colonizer and the Colonized* ([1965] 2003), Albert Memmi acutely reminds us that '[a] colonial [a European living in a colony but having no privileges] so defined does not exist, for all Europeans in the colonies are privileged' (2003:54). In this clear-cut assessment of the colonial versus the coloniser, Memmi's aim is not merely to come up with new 'colonial' taxonomies but instead to attribute privileges to specific colonial practices and actions. Such a proposition follows from Memmi's assertion that '[i]t is impossible for the [coloniser] not to be aware of the constant illegitimacy of his status' (ibid.:52). We have to bear in mind that this encounter was happening in the late 1960s when refugees, displaced and placeless people's numbers were increasing in a changing Europe as new borders were being demarcated and/or dismantled and people were assigned specific nationalities and national affiliations (Achiume 2019); it was, indeed, in the late-1960s that Latif Mahmud arrived and applied for asylum in the UK.

If Elleke's writing is intended to capture *settlers'* imaginaries of and eventual return from the former colonies, of equal importance, and in a more contemporaneous setting, is Saleh Omar's fleeing from Zanzibar and seeking refuge in England in the late 1990s. Saleh Omar's transferral to a detention centre, after having his 'joke passport' inscribed with 'the good stamp' (p.13), despite the immigration officer's incessant assertion that Saleh Omar is not one of Europe's 'rightful owners' (ibid.; Chakrabarty 2007), fixates the reader's attention on a series of transit places: beginning in Gatwick Airport, to a detention centre, to a hostel (for refugees whose claims are under scrutiny) and eventually concluding in a private dwelling.

In addition to Saleh Omar's own narration – and archiving – of this past through the present, I here bring Elleke's memoir into conversation with Alfonso's book, as a text that is in process and yet-to-be-written by Alfonso as a newly-arrived refugee from Angola; in so doing, I posit that these instances not only supplement the intertextual references throughout the novel (which include *The Odyssey* and Melville's *Bartelby the Scrivener*, as I discuss in Chapter 2) but also directly bring the

reader to the question of whose knowledge is worthy of being transformed into the written and acknowledged as a text and future archival source in its own right.

We meet Alfonso through Saleh Omar's account of his time in the detention centre following his arrival in Gatwick airport. Despite its gates not being properly locked and the apparent absence of armed guards, the cold detention centre, located in a remote area in the English countryside, to which Saleh Omar is moved, is privately-run. Comprising three structures which resemble sheds or warehouses, between ten and twelve detainees would sleep 'in spaces partitioned with boards but without doors' (p.43) in each of the two buildings in use. Reflecting on his confinement, Saleh Omar declares (ibid.):

> The sheds that accommodated us could once just as easily have contained sacks of cereals or bags of cement or some other valuable commodity that needed to be kept secure and out of the rain. Now they contained us, a casual and valueless nuisance that had to be kept in restraint.

In this containment are two contrasting materialities: the 'valuable commodity', represented in cereals and/or cement, and the 'casual and valueless nuisance' represented by refugee detainees.

In this passage, Saleh Omar engages different times and periods while at the same time staying in the present in the detention centre: here is a place which has been reconditioned, readjusted, restored and/or partially erected to accommodate another 'commodity' – the new arrival, the refugee. Additionally, in creating this binary – inanimate versus animate, useful versus useless, of valuable versus valueless, all contained in 'sacks' or 'bags' or in actual 'encampment' –, the reader is simultaneously offered insights into the interiority of this place and into the possibility of more divisions and hierarchies, where refugees are (also) segregated according to their nationalities, regions, race and/or time of arrival (p.44):

> There were twenty-two men in the camp. The twelve in our building were four Algerians, three Ethiopians, two Iranian brothers just out of their teens […], a Sudanese and an Angolan […]. No Nigerians here, the Angolan told us […] The detainees in the

> other building were all from south Asia, from Sri Lanka, and perhaps people of Indian origin from elsewhere. I don't know.

What Saleh Omar does here is to document these places and people while experiencing a new life in detention, a life that directly speaks to his past imprisonment; this thereby allows him to move in and out of his previous times without disrupting the flow in the present.

Sharing the same space, but engaging in a different form of documentation, is Alfonso, who practises writing in detention in ways that correspond with Elleke's memoir, but as a post-colonial response to it. As narrated by Saleh Omar (p.44),

> [h]is name is Alfonso, and he had a deep and unrelenting antipathy to Nigerians, which he did not explain but which illuminated every day of his life, it seemed. He had been in the camp, the barracks as he preferred to call it, for several weeks. He refused to be moved, saying he needed the seclusion and the rural air to finish the book he was writing. If he went and mingled with the English in the streets and spent all his evenings in their pubs watching football on TV, he would lose the edge of his recollections and there would be no point to anything he had done. He liked it there in the barracks among his rootles brethren, thank you.

It is 'among his rootless brethren' in the detention centre, not in his native Angola, where Alfonso embarks on writing a book. We are not told what type of book it is going to be. Nor are we informed about the themes he is planning to explore in this writing, or in which language, local or colonial, the book going to be written: these are questions whose answers will be part of Alfonso's book itself. What we do know is that he simply does not wish to 'lose the edge of his recollections' since his arrival in the detention centre several weeks earlier. What is certain is that this writing is moving towards some type of completion, unlike Elleke's memoir which had been completed some decades earlier with precise (if idealised) recollections of her life in Kenya and also her colonial perceptions of the Kenyan people.

For Alfonso, stasis and seclusion are essential for his writing project to avoid further interruptions which are mainly premised on the stereotypical and homogenising time-wasting proclivities practised by the English. At the core of this writing project is an understanding of the necessity of

not moving as writing is commencing; as though this detention centre – these barracks – has been rematerialized (to borrow Burton's word, 2003:144) by those inside it in order to archive its stillness.[11] In explaining the concept of the text, Said contends that '[t]the usual sort of prestige suggested by *text* is preservation: on the assumption that only what has distinction is preserved, the text lifts out or perhaps rescues language from the bustle of time and keeps it in writing' (2012:197). In this sense, the preservation that is underway in Alfonso's promised book is writing itself. Beyond an act of preservation through writing, this imagined future is to be achieved through what James Clifford terms 'textual rescue' (1988:115), as Joe Cleary also posits in the context of Palestinian writing and the quest to reclaim identity, memory and belonging (2001:203; also see Omri 2005). I would suggest that in this context, writing has become an alternative *status* in itself, beyond the legal status held by (or withheld from) the writer in the detention centre.

Detritus in Containment

While Alfonso remains behind in the detention centre, Saleh Omar is transported from detention (on the basis of his age, a motif I return to in Chapter 2) to a B&B run by Celia and her silent husband Mick, whose other occupants are Ibrahim from Kosovo and Georgy, a Roma from the Czech Republic, whose asylum cases are still pending. Even though Saleh Omar reluctantly agrees to such a transferral, his acceptance stems from the fact that it is no longer he who decides for himself. Reflecting on the pungent smell of the new place (p.49), Saleh Omar states,

> At that time it made me think of damp chicken shit in an enclosed space […]. Now I know it's not the smell of chicken but of old dusty closed rooms: upholstery that had soaked fluid detritus over decades over decades, faded and worn rugs that clung to tangles of human hair and animal fur and crumbs and seeds, the reek of old fires and soot, the stale miasma that the bundles of cloth and bags in corners of the room gave off. In one side of the room were three bird cages on brass stands with creatures in them that looked more or less alive, at least to judge by the bits of food around the cages.

[11] Building on Said, who asserts, with regards to the text, that 'as a presence it occupies a place actively' (2012:197), we could say that Alfonso's pending book is not only born of but also occupies the detention centre actively, displacing other places and times as the book moves towards completion.

In this ‘enclosed space’ what echoes is not the smell *per se* or what is detected as a smell of past times but rather the uninterrupted state of enclosure wherein smells can never escape the place but instead multiply and fester. For Saleh Omar, everything in this new place of confinement resembles incomplete states descending from bigger or more complete things. These things which originate from or are discarded by, amongst other things, animal and human bodies, are what remain for the naked eye. In other words, the ‘fluid detritus’, ‘faded and worn rugs’, ‘tangles of human hair and animal fur’, ‘crumbs and seeds’, ‘old fires and soot’, ‘creatures… that looked more or less alive’, and ‘bits of food’ (ibid.) are traces of past things or remainders of what was once complete. The trace, as Derrida reminds us, is ‘never present, fully present by definition; it inscribes in itself the reference to the spectre of something else. The remainder *is* not, it is not present either, any more than a trace as such’ (2005:151, emphasis in the original). In Derrida’s analysis, the lack of the trace’s full presence should not merit not taking the trace into account (ibid.). As these are traces of his new life unfolding and of what he can see inside yet another place allocated to him, it is inside this three-tiered confinement [house – room – cage] where Saleh Omar’s future is being drawn.

Entering Celia’s B&B also demarcates a break between Saleh Omar’s old life in Zanzibar and his current life as a refugee awaiting some kind of a resolution to his asylum claim even though ‘the previous [life] still pulses within [him]’ (p.63). The *pulsing* that Saleh Omar is carrying follows from his initial admission that what he is experiencing is ‘the beginning of the feeling which would grow on [him], that [his] previous life had ended and [he] was starting a new one, and that now that earlier life was closed off for ever (sic)’ (ibid.). Even though these statements might, at first reading, seem contradictory, they in fact correspond to two crucial strands as per the question of the archive. First, the temporal association between the old and the new lives sets us in the direction of Saleh Omar, not only towards his lives as two apparently opposing paths but towards him, the refugee, *now*. Derrida, in seeking a definition of an archival order, poignantly asks, ‘What comes first? Even better: Who comes first? And second?’ (1998:37). In shifting from ‘what’ to ‘who’ in Derrida’s scale, Saleh Omar appears to gather his thoughts for the future, for a life that first and foremost belongs to him and cannot but be built on traces of other lives. Secondly, through the *pulse* of the old life – as

reiterated by Saleh Omar – exists 'the pulse of the archive' (Stoler 2009:17-54). What I mean here, and in line with Stoler's argument, is that the archive can be located 'in the quiescence and quickened pace of its production' (ibid.:35). In other words, it is through these different rhythms and experiences that lives and histories intersect and collide, as is the case with Saleh Omar's attempts at dispelling (albeit partly) old places and living in emerging ones.

He is now in the new place, in the room allocated to him (p.56), where

> The bed-sheets looked and smelled as if they had been slept in before. There were spots of blood on the pillowcase. The bed had the same smell as the upholstery downstairs: old vomit and semen and spilt tea. I daren't even sit on it out of an irrational fear of contamination, not just fear of disease but of some inner pollution.

The circularity that Saleh Omar is alluding to is that of the coming and going of refugees who, far from being 'collective replicas' of one another (Bauman 2004:66), are bodies of distinction (building on Ahmed's conceptualisations of strangerhood and difference, 2000:55-9). In this context, swapping positions between refugees while transiting in the same liminal places is not only marked by the individuals who move in and out of these locations, but also through referents of their presence in the form of bodily fluids and secretions. Whilst Saleh Omar's fears can be seen as both rational and irrational and internal and external simultaneously, his main fear is the fear of being environed by contagion and contamination that would render him incapacitated and therefore even more vulnerable. What is being reassessed and critiqued in this scene is thus the representation of refugees as one 'collective' body (Bauman, *op cit*) emanating the same smell and secreting the same fluids. Saleh Omar's repulsion and hygienic observances to counter contamination and pollution, following Mary Douglas, 'become a kind of safety net' (2002:170), equipping him with the necessary means to be part of a situation without erasing his individual and distinctive sensitivities to place and people.

To counter 'contamination', Saleh Omar uses the towel, offered to him by Alfonso in recognition of their friendship and 'as a gesture of respect for his instinct for self-preservation' (p.62) immediately before his removal from the detention centre. This gift, stolen from the detention centre, is not only

a material which has travelled beyond the detention centre's borders into somebody else's hands. Rather, it gathers all these temporalities in Saleh Omar's life in one place. Undeniably, the towel becomes both a reminder of a past life as well as a connector of past and present events. Put differently, it is the object that re-connects Saleh Omar to the detention centre and the other detainees while compensating for the loss of the casket of *ud-al-qamari* (incense) he brought with him from Zanzibar and which is stolen by Kevin Edelman at Gatwick Airport under the pretence that it may require further testing. It is no coincidence that, when introducing the assemblages of his belongings, of what 'he had selected as signals of a story [he] hoped to convey' (p.8) during the journey, Saleh Omar compared the process of including and excluding such materials to 'a hermeneutics of baggage that is following an archaeological trail or examining lines on a shipping map' (p.7). After the loss of the *ud*, the original assembling of his materials (which apart from the *ud* were all items of clothes) is disrupted. In asylum, the towel now takes the place which was once occupied by the casket of *ud-al-qamari* in his little bag. Even though the *ud* and the towel are dissimilar material objects to the reader and should consequently engage different senses, they still evoke overlapping affective responses as items of the same journey (see Cooper 2008).

What may be regarded as modern theft committed by an immigration officer is not an isolated historical incident but actively corresponds to and discourses with earlier colonial thefts of a 'catalogue of objects' (p.12) as recounted by Saleh Omar. These acts as well as the objects involved do not carry exclusively (post-)colonial significance. Instead, in them, whether lost or found, the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial significations meet and clash (Cooper 2008). A striking case that catapults the reader further into these intertwined languages, places and histories is the name *ud-al-qamari* which has itself travelled from Khmer to English, through a corrupted version of Arabic (p.14),

> Aloe wood, *ud-al-qamari*, the wood of the moon… the translation was really a corruption of *qimari,* Khmer, Cambodia … The *ud* was a resin which only an aloe tree infected by fungus produced. A healthy aloe tree was useless, but the infected one produced this beautiful fragrance.

It is through this lexical conversion (on conversion through language and translation, see Derrida 2001), from the word *Khmer* to the Arabic *qamari* (moon-like or lunar), as manifested in these versions that these multiple accounts of competing trade histories, conquests, and colonialisms can be uncovered and traced. In this regard, it is within these materialities, which 'testify to the experience of encountering the Other' (Dias 1998:173) irrespective of where they are, in Zanzibar or elsewhere, that the individual and historical archives linger. The trope of these two forms of corruption, arboreal and linguistic, endures through Alfonso's towel which is given to Saleh Omar as a means to counter 'contamination' and maintain 'self-preservation.' As much as the lost *ud* '[makes] tolerable the smells of unwashed humanity' (Douglas 2002:36), the towel, as an archival substitute, belongs in the future of Saleh Omar, the refugee. Poignantly, it is with the towel and its capacity to shield Saleh Omar in the uncertainty of that which is to come, that the novel ends: in the absence of clean sheets in his new flat to keep him warm and clean, the final line of the novel determines not only that Saleh Omar is depositing himself and his belonging in this new domicile, but that 'I had Alfonso's towel with me if the worst came to the worst' (p.245).

As discussed in the preceding pages, Alfonso is a refugee who is writing from within the detention centre in the UK, and yet he was also a writer before seeking asylum: the origins and thematics of his writing, and his identity as a writer, are not born from his experience of displacement, thereby pointing to the complex relationship between 'refugees' and 'writing.' In turn, together, Elleke's and Alfonso's writings draw attention to the tensions between colonial and postcolonial vantage points, and highlight the unequal positions of power held, by Elleke – whose memoir is already complete – and Alfonso – whose writing is still in progress while the author seeks stasis and stability beyond the colony. Notably, in the final chapter of the novel, Saleh Omar invokes a third instance of writing with regards to a fellow detainee in Zanzibar who, rather than inscribing his memories (as is the case with both Alfonso and Elleke), 'kept a diary of all the persecutions that befell them [the detainees], hiding the torn scraps of his futile indictment between the pages of his copy of the Koran' (p.225). Here, the detainee is the archivist not only for himself, but for the group, and his diary is an archive of the every-day violence which is inflicted upon them. In this way, writing and (the potential of)

self-preservation work in tandem, enabling the detainee to keep evidence (or in effect to build a case) *against* the state, as represented by 'the commanding officer and his troops' who were 'tormenting them… abusing them, and at times beating them' (ibid.). It may have been out of necessity that he stored the 'torn scraps' in the folds of the holy book, in so far as the Qur'an may have been the only book allowed to be kept by detainees (it may even have been issued to detainees by the institution itself). Nonetheless, the fact that it is the holy text itself which has been utilised to preserve the ongoing accumulation of incomplete evidentiary writing, points us to the Qur'an as the bearer of the divine secrets overseen by an all-knowing God (which is referred to Islamically as the *khazā'in*) as these sit alongside 'scraps' inscribed in secret by the detainee, to bear witness to the violence committed behind closed doors.

Where the unnamed detainee was documenting the persecution faced by himself and his fellow prisoners in Zanzibar, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* the author, Salim Barakat, asserts himself to be the *documentarian* of Kurdish women's lives (pp.5-6), setting up the novel itself as a factual historicization of the former refugee women's experiences in Sweden. Before turning to my analysis of the novel itself, I offer an introduction to Barakat in an attempt to contextualise and render visible the significance of an author who, unlike Gurnah (who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2021), has been marginalised from the official (literary) archive in Arabic, Kurdish and English alike.[12]

The Languages and Places of a Placeless Author: Salim Barakat

Salim Barakat (b.1951) left his hometown, Qamishli, in northern Syria in his twenties in the early 1970s (similar to Abdulrazak Gurnah, who was forced to leave Zanzibar in his late-teens), initially to study Arabic literature at Damascus University but quitting before completing his first year in

[12] Some of Barakat's work has been translated into French, Swedish, Spanish, Catalan and German (see Hosny 2017).

search of another place which would offer him more artistic and intellectual autonomy. It was in Beirut that the Syrian-born Kurdish writer Barakat become part of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), working and taking up arms with them. His active political engagement with the PLO would incur the wrath of the Syrians (the PLO's arch-rivals then) resulting in the Syrian authorities withdrawing his Syrian passport and therefore making him stateless. Handed a false South Yemeni passport under the alias Zakariyyā Sḥaḥāda, he joined his Palestinian and other Arab comrades in exile in Cyprus. Like Beirut, Nicosia became another 'soil of significance' (see Hoffman 2001:278) for Barakat and thus featured covertly (alongside other places) in his latter works, including in his novel *Al-Rīsh* (*Feathers*) (1990). For over fifteen years, Barakat lived and worked in Cyprus as the editor of the prestigious Palestinian cultural quarterly, *Al-Karmel*, while also publishing his own work. After the Oslo Accords agreed between the PLO and Israel in 1993 and the departure of most PLO affiliates from Cyprus to the West Bank, Barakat sought to settle in Cyprus but to no avail. In an attempt to find an alternative place where he and his family could live with a sense of legal security, Barakat, upon the invitation of Swedish PEN and other literary and human rights organisations, arrived in Sweden in 1999 claiming political asylum immediately, becoming a permanent resident two years later and eventually a Swedish citizen.

It is not unorthodox to assert that Barakat's Kurdishness is never absent from his writings, even if the Kurdistan in his writings is far from homogenous nor is it a place with definite borders and a national language (Rooke 2007:182-5). Indeed, many of Barakat's texts are interspersed with the names of Kurdish people, places and deeds and often engage with versions of Kurdish folktales and historical accounts of a Kurdistan which is no more (Fakhreddine 2019:137). However, such engagements, which happen through his characters, take the shape of temporal coverages, echoes and montages of places scattered across independent (and divided) countries, including, most notably, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and Sweden.

Likewise, it is a widely held view that Barakat writes in a language that is not officially his and yet in a kind of knowledge (of the language) that is indisputably his (Jayyusi 2002). Barakat writes, as

he himself has often highlighted, in '[an] Arabic language [that] enlists the Arab as a partner in my Kurdishness, a partnership in the heritage of imagination' (Barakat 2010 cited in Fakhreddine 2019:137) – a nuanced, bare, classical register with multitudinous scopes rooted in his unwavering and uncompromising command of a language that is not his in the national sense. In many ways, this echoes Gurnah's own reflections (*op cit*) which implicitly frame Arabic as a partner to Kiswahili, while also noting that although he writes solely in English (the coloniser's language in the context of Zanzibar), this writing register is inherently informed by his multilingual 'readings': based on his polyglot childhood, the transition from Kiswahili and Arabic to English may be embedded in the colonial power differentials and yet the prioritisation of English over Kiswahili does not, according to him, position these languages 'as cultural contestants in a polarized encounter,' since the relationship between these languages and traditions is 'more complicated' (2004:29-30).

Writing in Arabic, Barakat's craft is entirely his, conveying his positionality as a writer with a distinct corpus and an inimitable style. Since his first writings in the early-1970s, he has been perceived as antithetical to the normative, and a long-awaited and necessary interruption to the stagnant Arabic literary production of the time (Ḥadīdī 2017:105). His language corresponds to the Arabic practised and propagated by the forefathers of classical Arabic poetry, Abu Tammām and al-Mutanabbī who lived in the 9th and 10th centuries respectively (al-ʿAwīt 2007:11-12); it is never rendered derivative or ineloquent. Rather, his writing locates the modernist in the classical without laboriously looking for the former. As the Jordanian poet and novelist, Amjad Nāṣer (2017: n.p), succinctly puts it:

> there is a total congruence between [Barakat] and what he writes; not with regards to the written dwelling on the self or feeding from the autobiographical […] but what I mean is how this writing carries both explicit and implicit characteristics that resemble its writer, such as: its wildness and resistance to siding with a particular line or direction …

In adopting Arabic as the language of his writing, Barakat has problematised the notion of a national language. On the one hand, he acknowledges the fact that as a stateless Kurd growing up in Syria, his Kurdish language (Kurmanji) has exclusively been assigned to orality and is therefore used

with/by those who are part of the same community. Contrariwise, Arabic, the language of writing as well as the de facto language of one form of colonialism over Kurdish, is where Barakat's literature is found, documented and archived.

Excluded from the oeuvres of Kurdish literatures and anthologies, Barakat has been castigated at times for not being Kurdish enough, and at other times for not adopting one of the Kurdish registers[13] in his writings (Ahmadzadeh 2007:584-5, see also Rashidirostami 2016). Almost completely overlooked by Kurdish and Arab scholars for almost four decades and yet cursorily revered for his unmatchable mastery of the Arabic language (Ḥadīdī 2017), Barakat, in essence, as his writings, sits on the fence 'nationally' and linguistically. With the exception of a small number of studies which have, as a whole, primarily focused on the inimitability of his language, Barakat continues to be a writer whose placelessness as a Kurd has been translated, to a large extent, into an out-of-placeness (to borrow Said's word, 1999) in both the Arabic and the Kurdish literary scenes (Jayyusi 1987; Rooke 2006; Ḥadīdī 2017; Hirmiz 2020). With no direct colonial excavations in his writings to bear direct resemblance to the often well-choreographed (and well-repeated) 'official' representations of Kurdish national identity or the overarching question of self-determination, Barakat has been seen by some as 'a great writer' but 'a small Kurd' (Sūz 2016: n.p.). Insisting on presenting himself as a Kurd who writes in Arabic (al-ʿAwīt 2007; Hirmiz 2020), Barakat interiorises his Kurdishness as a question in and for writing, but more pertinently as a state of being: a placeless writer, who writes about numerous geographies always accompanied by fragments of imagined Kurdistan and Kurdish places, and a Swedish citizen who was initially a political refugee.

Translating Barakat or the Literary Reject

[13] The Kurdish language is equated with two major dialects: Kurmanji and Sorani, which are divided regionally, ideologically and their respective writing systems. Although there is a long history of classical Kurdish poetry written in Kurdish, Arabic and Persian (see the works of Mehvi, Nali and Talebani), the first contemporary Kurdish novels were not born within the Ottoman or Qajar Empires but in the former Soviet Union (see Ahmadzadeh 2007).

In many regards, Barakat's oeuvre falls clearly within the remit of literatures written by placeless people where uprootedness is subsumed by different forms of exclusion. However, this categorisation does not necessarily take place willingly but more in connection with his life trajectory as a Kurdish writer who happens to be a refugee (Jayyusi 1987). In his writings, both topically and thematically, Barakat has steadily repelled the label of the subaltern, constantly arguing against the national mantras eclipsing (and guiding) his craft as a writer (Ḥadīdī 2017, 2019). In relation to his literature, this resistance is possibly premised on his timeliness as a writer who, from his early work, has taken it upon himself to disorder chronology by beginning with his autobiography (*Al-Sīra*),[14] or what resembled a quasi-autobiography in its incessant digging in the personal, national and topographical strata of his life (Rooke 2017:183). Furthermore, his writing about his and other Kurds' statelessness as characters in his literature has never been portrayed in such direct terms, but instead has been written into narratives which carry more personal motifs than representational ones (Nāṣer 2017:n.p.).

In my view, Barakat's positionality corresponds to that of the figure of the reject as articulated by Irving Goh (2016), as briefly discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. The reject, according to Goh, 'is never always passive' and therefore 'can project a force of rejection in return, to counter the forces that are targeting or oppressing it' (2016:137). With his publications exceeding thirty books, the gap between the number of novels and poetry collections Barakat has written so far, and how much of this corpus has been translated into English (the language of our study) is wholly unintelligible (McManus 2014:323; Hosny 2017). Apart from sporadic translations of some of his individual poems and chapters of novels appearing either as part of larger academic studies or as appendices to scholarly articles or selected poems or opening chapters in 'newer' works, Barakat hardly exists in English (McManus 2014:323). While his unique and at times encyclopaedic references and lexicons may be seen as impediments when it comes to meeting deadlines set by publishers, it is worth highlighting that this lack of translation is part of a bigger picture of critical

[14] The first part of *Al-Sīra*, titled *Al-Jundub al Ḥadīdī* (*The Iron Grasshopper*), was published in 1980.

unrecognition which corresponds in some ways to his uncompromising questioning of every *stable* in literature.

This is not to say that such an exclusion is based on the value(lessness) of Barakat's writings in a way that would position Barakat against the institution of translation – if such a thing exists – but to ponder, especially in the context of refugee writing, what is deemed worthy of translation. As the trope of suffering in literatures concerning refugees and displaced communities is significantly over-stressed, typically at the cost of other thematic and aesthetic elements within these works, Barakat, as the *reject* writer-Kurd (in this order) is not seen – neither through his writings in Arabic nor, potentially, in translation – as the 'ideal' writer for a readership fixated on victimhood as the viable human condition (on the 'ideal refugee', see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014a). This does not mean, however, that refugees are always obvious or easily traceable in his work. Rather, through my analysis I regard the characters in his novel (and in the other selected texts) as individuals in their own right whose historical placelessness is part of a larger archive which is worthy of attention. What I propose here is querying these characters' lived experiences against the backdrop of the archive as conceptualised above and as developed through my analysis of *By the Sea*, but more importantly in view of a future that is independent of prefigured outcomes of either absolute triumphalism or crushing defeatism.

Hiyāj al-Iwazz

Set in Stockholm's suburbs in 2008, while intermittently venturing out to the Syrian-Kurdish towns on Turkey's southern border with Syria to revisit previous lives and reconfigure vacillating self-identifications, languages, and places, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* (2010) is as much a novel about the Kurdish diaspora as it is about old and new refugees who have arrived or are still arriving in Europe. Narrated by an omniscient narrator in the third person, the novel traces the lives of ten Kurdish women, Tassu Arif Miran Bak, Nazli Rakan, Shiraz Rahman Rahmani, Rawat Khalil, Zintana Hassan, Shtula Jabri, Rihani Mohammed Sikar, Darkhu Khalas, Zulaikha Abdulqadir, and Salam Sheikh Ghardaq, who formerly met 'in the corridors of the [Swedish] immigration department' (p.248), and now meet

sequentially every Saturday in each other's apartments. In accordance with the ten intended gatherings and a culminating chapter, the novel is divided into eleven chapters. The chapters, or more resonantly what I would call 'interiorities' – as they develop inside these women's apartments and at night, with the exception of the last chapter which begins during the day and on the road -, trace the protagonists' individual journeys in Sweden but also their separate pasts in Syria. Amidst their semi-convivial gatherings, food, Kurdish and Arabic in particular, music like 'wailing' (*ʿawīl,* p.27), and Rihani's 'ungodly' (*kāfir*) (ibid.) home-brewed wine are all consumed, gifting time and space to life's meanderings that end with another promised meeting on another Saturday.

While the novel itself is not centred on a linear plot, it fronts individual sub-plots ranging from the women's past lives in Northern Syria to chitchat revolving around the body, their daily routines, and their work as official interpreters at various Swedish immigration centres for Kurdish- (Kurmanji-) and Arabic-speaking asylum-seekers from the Middle East. The novel is replete with uninhibited expressions and images concerning the body and sex which these divorced women, to various degrees, do not shy away from mentioning as glaringly as possible. At times, their statements seem to act as vocal precursors for their disrupted lives both as women but also as strange bodies in distant geographies (Al-Karāwī 2019:n.p.). Ranging from 27 to 50 years in age, with sons and daughters born in Sweden, the women have arrived in Sweden at disparate times, some as refugees, others as irregular migrants who arrived on visas to visit a sibling or another relative and who never returned to Syria. It is through the time spent in Sweden, between two and three decades, that their command of Arabic, Kurdish and Swedish alike have come to play a role in their ad hoc interpreting duties, reversing an order that they themselves have been part of: that is, from being interpreted and interpreted to, to becoming interpreters themselves. What might be seen as *their* language in the functional and institutional sense (Arabic) is in fact what the majority of these women had to study (or were coerced into studying) officially in Syrian schools and institutions while Kurdish was relegated to the private space in their country of origin. This forced conversion from Kurdish into Arabic (in Syria), into Swedish (in Sweden) and back into Kurdish (in Sweden) is practised inside

these women's households but also in their workplace during their interactions with prospective refugees.

As Kiswahili and English are assigned specific and specialised contexts in *By the Sea*, Arabic, Kurdish (Kurmanji) and Swedish form the trinity of languages in the protagonists' apartments. Since Arabic is the language of the novel, it is their main language of communication and yet without knowing for certain whether all the conversations which are in Arabic are in fact *entirely* in Arabic at source. Kurdish, on the other hand, is used intermittently in what could be seen as brief functional conversations with the women's immediate families. In turn, Swedish primarily belongs to the outside of these apartments, at work, while interpreting back and forth between Swedish immigration caseworkers and refugees, not in writing but in allusion.[15] In the novel, the terrain of interpreting, despite its impermanence, is these women's most important outlet to the outside world. It is where their knowledge of Arabic and its varied dialects is put to the test (p.89):

> قبل ثلاثة أيام، أو أربعة، استُدعيْتُ للترجمة بين المحقق في دائرة الهجرة، وبين ثلاث سيدات سودانيات. أعترف أنني لفَّقت معاني كثير من الكلمات لم أفهمها. والكلمات، التي فهمتها، اضطررْتُهنَّ إلى تكرارها مرتين، أو أكثر.

> Three or four days ago I was summoned to interpret for the investigator at the immigration office and three Sudanese women. I must confess that I fabricated many of the words I didn't understand. And the words that I understood I forced them to repeat twice or more.

Darkhu's admission to her friends is not entirely uncommon in interpreting where, in certain instances, the interpreter's credibility and that of the refugee are equated and are as such put to the test before the eyes of the immigration officer (Gómez Díez 2010; Fiddian 2006; Smith-Kahn 2017). This does not mean that they are equal, however. On the contrary, Darkhu in this example appears to invent a narrative for these asylum seekers but also for the immigration officer who expects that the asylum seeker's version of the story will shed critical light on who owns the story and, if stories are after all owned, what is considered a lie. These confessions not only reaffirm Barakat's words

[15] There is one *inside* exception, in Shtula's apartment, to include the latter's female Swedish housemate in the conversation.

on ‘fabrication’ and ‘falsities’ in the Foreword (which I discuss below) but most pertinently invite us to engage the archive in relation to such processes: in addition to revealing the incomplete nature of Darkhu’s (and others’) linguistic repertoire, it is equally the case that the resultant ‘fabricated’ translation will invariably become a constituent part of the *institution’s* archive of the asylum-seeker, as these asylum interviews are methodically recorded, transcribed and subsequently stored by and for the state, even if it does not become part of the asylum-seeker’s *personal* archive.

As my focus in this chapter is to detect the archival trace in these settings (see Stoler 2009) – even the ‘hybridised’ or ‘complementary’ archive, in light of Darkhu’s confessions – it is important to unpack this instance of ‘lying’ as per the archive and the relationality between the refugee and the interpreter. As argued by Derrida, ‘… the process of the modern lie is no longer a dissimulation that comes along to veil the truth; rather, *it is the destruction of reality or of the original archive*’ (2002:42, my emphasis). While Derrida’s argument is in essence to do with what separates modern and traditional lying, what interests us here is the ways in which lying constructs its own reality and ultimately archive. In Darkhu’s case, the asylum seeker’s and the interpreter’s testimonies have become intertwined, producing a third one which is neither party’s entirely.[16] Nor does it hint at a collective archive in the egalitarian sense, instead replacing one archive with another without erasing the former completely.

Questions of authenticity and competing archives in both the public and private spheres arise throughout the novel, as the protagonists navigate power differentials between different groups of refugees and reveal contested processes of inclusion and exclusion in relation to their personal and collective repositories. In analysing the multidimensional and multisensory archival traces that emerge throughout *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* – from Barakat’s explicit framing of his own role as the archivist of the Kurdish women’s lives as per the novel’s Foreword, to the protagonists’ diverse archival practices – I seek to demonstrate that the novel embodies an expanded conceptualisation of the

[16] Here I echo Bhabha’s third space of enunciation (2006), as discussed in Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013).

contents and contours of the archive, reaching beyond tangible objects which were brought by refugees due to their personal meanings or which have taken on special meaning during the journey (as proposed by Banko et al. *op cit*) by expanding to the unseen, the unknown and unknowable.

Barakat the Archivist: The Genesis of the Archive in Hiyāj al-Iwazz

In the novel's first pages, Barakat provides the reader with a section titled *taṣdīr* (foreword) (2010:5-6), the equivalent of a foreword that would normally precede documents which carry historical resonances:

> جرى توثيق أقوال الشخصيات، في هذه الرواية، على نحو لا يجعلنا مسؤولين عن أيّ تحريف، أو اختلاق للوقائع، أو حتى كتمان ما لا يجعل المشهد مكتملاً أحياناً. أسماءُ الشوارع، في مناطق العاصمة السويدية ستوكهولم، وضواحيها، دوّنتْ كما أُعطيتْ شفهياً، ولم نحاول، نحن، التأكد من وجودها على الخريطة، باعتبارنا غير معنيين بتحقيق لا يتصل بعملنا.

> The [characters' words in this novel] have been documented in such a way so as to absolve us of responsibility for any distortion or fabrication of events, or even the suppression of details that might sometimes leave the scene incomplete. The names of streets and districts in the Swedish capital, Stockholm, have been written down as they were given verbally. We have made no attempt to verify their existence on the map, since this is of no importance to our work.

Thus, in front of us, is a set of conditions which Barakat is relying on to set the record straight, so it would not be his responsibility if 'any distortion, fabrication of events or […] suppression of details' (p.5) were to happen. What we are reading are not his words since his only job, as affirmed in the quotation above, is to *document* what is being uttered in front of him, that is to say, to transfer the verbal into a novel. Nevertheless, this is not an ordinary disclaimer but one which is loaded with history. As these Kurdish women are former refugees and current Swedish nationals, it is worth considering why Barakat, at this point and in such a format, brings up the question of orality. It is, I suggest, to draw a line between the oral (*shafahī*) as transmitted to him by these individuals, and the written (*maktūb*) as transcribed by him; in doing so he also ties the occurrence of these statements (in Kurdish) to the interiority of the house (see Burton 2003; see also Suwaydān 1986:158-159).

While the gaze might be on the women's current residencies and lives in the 'streets and districts [of] the Swedish capital, Stockholm' (p.5), 'Kurdistan' is a central (non)space, as reimagined and referred to throughout the novel as well as, most poignantly, in Tassu's campaign to replace the name of a Swedish street with the name of a Kurdish nobody, as explained further in the subsequent sections of this chapter. In alternating the gaze between various times and places, Barakat 'accumulates' (to draw on Derrida's words from his classic text, *Archive Fever*) 'so many sedimented archives' (1998a:20). In the case of 'Kurdistan', these 'sedimented archives,' which are residual in nature, do not exist in their official capacity but rather as intimate repositories of places and times. For instance, in this equation, Swedish names of streets and cities become referents to Kurdish names. Thus, not wanting 'to verify [these Swedish names'] existence on the map' (p.5), as indicated by Barakat, should not necessarily render other places non-existent. The chiasm between the real, on the one hand, and the fictional or fictionalised, on the other, is what makes the archive, according to Derrida 'spectral,' which 'is perhaps a general structure of every archive' (1998a:68, 84).

Barakat declines to tell us how he established contact with these informants/women (p.5):

> أما كيفية اتصالنا بالشخصيات، وتسجيل أقوالها، فهما غير مُفْصَح عنهما، في النص، وذلك من مقتضيات الاحتراف، الذي لم يجاوز التسجيل إلّا إلى بعض الوصف التصويري، أو النفساني، وكذلك التعليق المتقشّف مستوراً بشكل لا يُخلُّ بالتوثيق نفسه. وما قد يُفهم منه أنه خروج على سياق التوثيق سنعتبره سوءَ تقدير، أو فهم، نُعْذَر عليه، ويُعذَر عليه من يعتبره كذلك.

> How we contacted the characters and recorded their words are not revealed in the text, owning to the requirements of professionalism which do not go beyond recording, with the exception of some graphic and psychological description in addition to some brief commentary whose nature does not impinge on the actual documentation. Anything that may be deemed outside the scope of documentation, we shall put down to poor judgment or misunderstanding, for which we apologise.

In line with the archivist's role, as he initiates his novel, Barakat distinguishes between 'words' *(aqwāl*), 'description' *(waṣf),* and commentary *(taʿlīq)*. He is quick to view the latter two as the exception *(istithnāʾ)* to his characters' *(shakhṣiyyāt*) official words *(aqwāl*), hence not as central as his characters' sayings. Such an order, conveyed through the use of direct lexicons of archiving, such

as 'recording' *(tasjīl)*, 'documentation' *(tawthīq),* 'distortion' (*taḥrīf)*, and 'fabrication' (*ikhtilāq)*, sheds further light on the ensuing tension between 'archive-as-subject' and 'archive-as-source,' as Stoler contends (2009:44).

While Barakat's point, on the surface, is to allege that he is writing these characters' statements into literature as they are, without distortion (*taḥrīf)* or fabrication (*ikhtilāq)*, he deliberately questions whether such *writing* is verifiable at all. Such tensions mirror the positionality of the archive more generally as, in Derrida's words, 'always at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State' (1998a:90). In a sense, it is at this 'unstable limit' where the archive is actualised – a limit where some communication may happen between Barakat, the male, and his ten female characters. However, this is never straightforward since, from the outset, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* is presented as a pact between the scribe (who can write) and his written subjects, whose names are either announced or withheld (pp.5-6):

> والآراء الواردة على ألسنة الشخصيات لا يتحمل تبعتَها سواها. ومَنْ يُرد التأكد من أمر التبس عليه، أو الاستفسار عن مُلْغَزٍ، أو معطىً مرتبك، ففي مقدوره الاتصالُ بالشخصيات الرئيسة، الواردة أسماؤها في الفصول، والتي احتُجِبَتْ أسماؤها أيضاً، لأنها آثرت أن تكون لسان الرَّاوية، وتبقى محتجَبةً، على أرقام هواتف منازلها، لا غير، بعد ما رفضت إعطاء أرقام هواتفها المحمولة.

> The opinions expressed by the characters are theirs alone. Anyone who wishes to verify an uncertain matter, or clarify an ambiguity or confusing detail, can contact the main characters, whose names are given in the chapters, and also those whose names are withheld – they having preferred [for the narrator to speak for them] and to remain anonymous – via their home telephone numbers only as they have refused to give their mobile numbers. *[The names with their respective telephone numbers follow]*

To maintain a distance from the written, Barakat stresses that it is not he who should be approached in the case of any lingering questions but the women who have consented to their names and home telephone numbers being included in the Foreword and eventually in the subsequent chapters. Positing that some characters have opted for their names and details to be withheld, thus handing the narrator *(al-rāwiya)* the keys to their stories while relinquishing their 'real' names, contributes further to the segmentation of these distinct voices. Another significant detail is the inclusion of the ten main characters' home telephone numbers (and not their mobiles) alongside their names and ages at the end of the Foreword. While such numbers might signify homeliness or might give the

impression of a connection with home, they are, however, adjuncts of a fixity and not the fixity itself. Throughout the novel, addresses and marriages continuously mutate, making us think that including these numbers is, after all, only a bait to rightly or wrongly associate numbers with credibility and presence (Al-Karāwī 2019:n.p.; see also Rooke 2006 in a different context). With relevance to the archive, since these personal records are included alongside other exclusions, they appear to suggest some egalitarianism in the manner they have been attained and accumulated. What is quite obvious from such a Foreword is how much information Barakat would like to share with (or withhold from) the reader. In addition, by affirming that that which has been written down is ostensibly what these women have agreed to, Barakat to a large extent aligns himself with the 'official' archivist while engaging the women's subjectivities.

Names and the Authentic in the Archive

The transposition of names and naming emerge as both individual and collective archival reconstructions across both *By the Sea* (as discussed above) and in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, where 'the name' and contestation surrounding naming pervade the first three pages of the novel (pp.7-9):

> سأغيّر اسمَ هذا الشارع.
> 'غيّري اسمك، يا تاسو، أولاً '، قالت زليخا عبد القادر، العريضة الصدر.
> 'سأغيّر اسمي يوماً. سأغيّر ديني، وفرْجي أيضاً. لكنني سأغير اسم شارع كاترينا باركنْ هذا، أولاً. سأطلق عليه اسم الملا علي خابوتْ'. رسمتْ في الهواءِ حروفاً مقتطعةً من نشيد ضائع: 'الملا علي خابوتْ، وليُّ القشدة في شتاءات قامشلوكي'، قالت. عضَّت كُمَّ قميصها حَنَقاً. 'لو أكلتُ أمي قبل أن تلدني. لَو أكلتها من جوفها قبل أن تلدني'.
>
> 'I'm going to change the name of the street.'
> 'Change your own name first, Tassu,' said the big-bosomed Zulaikha Abdulqadir.
> 'One day I'll change my name. I'll change my religion, and my vagina too. But I'll change the name of this Katarina street first. I'll call it Mulla Ali Khabut.' She drew letters from a lost song in the air:
> 'Mulla Ali Khabut, Wali al-Qishda – Patron Saint of Cream in the winters of Qamishli,' she said. She chewed the sleeve of her blouse in resentment. 'If only I'd eaten mother before she gave birth to me, if only I'd eaten her from the inside before she gave birth to me.'

Before I explore the above quote further – with particular attention to Tassu's re-naming project, which is territorial par excellence (p.8) – I will begin with the word *ʾism* (name) in Arabic as it is *the name* that will not only undergo the proposed change but which was also, immediately before

this interaction, mis-remembered by Tassu's son, Rand ('My brains are silicone Umm Tuva') leading to him being reprimanded by the mother ('Her son's name is Tufu, you son of a whore' – p.7).[17] Although the most common term for 'name' in Arabic is *ʾism* (with an initial elided or softened glottal stop), in classical Arabic the same word is enunciated in four ways, effectively as four variants, *ʾism*, *ʾusm*, *sim*, and *sum*, all originated from the same root (*s-m-w)* which connotes highness and stature (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015:716-20).[18] Also, as echoed by Derrida, 'when a name comes, it immediately says more than the name: the other of the name and quite simply the other, whose irruption the name announces' (1995:89). In this light, it becomes impossible to name without evoking the other, her presence but also her life as a whole. As propositioned by Tassu, it is a change that will happen in the future as captured in the verb *'sa-ughayyir'* (I will change). As a former refugee, she is proposing a new positionality for herself and her Kurdish heritage, actively participating in rewriting the history of her adopted place.

As such, what is in front of us is not entirely an undependable proposition; rather, a statement of intent on Tassu's part to change '*ʾism al-shāriʿ'* (the name of the street) into another, followed by changing her own 'name', 'religion' and 'vagina'. In wishing she had eaten her mother before 'she gave birth to [her]' (ibid.), Tassu reverses her birth and suspends history by pondering the killing of her mother and rendering herself unborn. She wishes that her birth had been made non-existent in

[17] In a third invocation of 'the name' in this scene, Aplin decides to translate the word '*nakira*' (nobody) as 'nameless':

- خصيتا أبيه النَّكرة كانت مليئتين بغبار قامشلوكي. تفو.

- The nameless testicles of his father were full of the dust of Qamishli, huh!

While I analyse Tassu's line with regards to dust below, here I note that the translation offers a thematic continuity with the mis-naming of Tuvu's mother, and Tassu's proposed re-naming processes (of herself and of the street), even if the adjective is incorrectly used: in the original, the term *nakira* is used adjectivally to refer to the *father,* and yet Aplin mis-translates this as describing the *testicles of the father*. In the Arabic, the connotation is that the father is a nobody: not even worth naming, which contextually could be translated as 'good for nothing'. Notably, the direct opposite of *nakira* in Arabic is *ma'rifa*, which is translated as 'knowledge' and 'cognition'. I return to the unknown and the unknowable in relation to the archive in the following sections.

[18] Generally, the word *ʾism* sits in close proximity to the named (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015:1-5). Here, the word *ʾism* becomes emboldened by the named (proper noun). This attribute confirms the reverence and exclusivity of the name in Arabic and, as such, makes its translation or its presence in another language an act of *renaming* altogether (Qasmiyeh 2023b).

direct contrast to what she is planning to do: to *give birth* to the name of her original place in another milieu and inside the body of her new state. Through disembowelling the mother (and not the father), she remembers herself in the mother she is now: divorced and with two 'Swedish' sons. Her presence now can never be reversed and yet in order to claim a stake to it, she returns to her birthplace in Qamishli through the name.[19] This renaming or de-naming simulates another way of living; a living, one might say, which proceeds in close proximity to the chosen name which 'metonymically stand[s] in for [part of] Kurdish history' (Fakhreddine 2019:145).

But whose name is it to start with? It is Mulla Ali Khabut's name – a non-assuming Kurdish yoghurt and cream seller from Qamishli in northern Syria where Tassu was born and raised. Tassu refuses to approach the council to facilitate re-naming the street, but instead insists on doing it herself through galvanising the Kurdish communities in Stockholm and Uppsala online (p.15); starting with her neighbourhood, Tassu is adamant that she will be able to submit the petition herself (through what we can identify as a process of *self*-archiving), with its ever-increasing number of signatories, to the council with a viable chance of the council agreeing to it. This inclination to invert reality or to submit it to another reality is not novel in Barakat's writings (see Rooke 2007:185-7). Indeed, this is an aesthetic diversion that Barakat has often relied upon to gently prod his reader to note the historically significant through the phantasmic (ibid.). Seemingly, it is an attempt to change a Swedish name, Katarina (in Stockholm's Rinkeby district), into a Kurdish one, and yet within the boundaries of such a proposed change more multifarious filial, national, and legal quests happen covertly. By refashioning names into other ones which, as an act is enshrined in the law, is therefore 'a legal right' (p.15), Barakat reconstitutes divided loyalties between the original place in non-present Kurdistan and Stockholm as the new order for these refugees.

In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the author does so by privileging the name Mulla Ali Khabut over those of national and anti-colonial standing in Kurdish history. Through selecting Mulla Ali Khabut, both Tassu and

[19] I use the English version of the name Qamishli in my translations, whilst noting that in the novel Barakat uses the Kurdish name, transliterated as *Qāmishlūkī*.

Barakat explicitly turn away from celebrating the 'extraordinary' Kurd, maintaining a focus on the ordinary and 'small' Kurd instead (following Sūz's reference to Barakat himself as 'a small Kurd' – 2016:n.p.). In this regard, it becomes apparent that what is undergoing rehabilitation is Tassu's own history as she herself wishes it to be: one which is envisioned by her in the form of renaming and, in doing so, forcing the original name into her archive. Her attempt to rename the street is also an attempt to convert the Kurdish name into Swedish sounds, thereby making the name in-place and in situ *contra* out-of-place. Furthermore, this request, if successful, will culminate in *seeing* as well as *pronouncing* the name inscribed on the street sign (instead of the Swedish name), ensuring a multi-sensory experience compounded with the regular *listening*, in these evenings, to the '[t]he cry of the singer, the guardian of the Kurdish folk spirit' (p.17). Pertinently, Tassu's mobile phone chime is that of an ice-cream van, which corresponds closely to Mulla Ali Khabut's profession as a yoghurt seller.[20] In this chime, Tassu 'can hear Qamishli' which 'sounds like what [she] think[s] about without thinking' (p.20). Alongside other memories, this ringing tone appears to mark the transformation of Qamishli, a place Tassu left twenty-four years ago, from 'its emergence as a land and a people' into 'a sound' which is saved in a mobile telephone (ibid.). In this transition, and in the proposed inscription of and listening to the name, places are transformed into sounds which allude to more comprehensive memories of sites that are no more. At work in all of this are substrates of remembering, but also the tastes, sounds and rhythms of the Kurdish archive: the Kurdish language, the Kurdish food, the music, the individual sounds and the intended renaming.

Tassu's petition is gathering pace and 'in addition to the Kurds and the Swedish person, and the Latin name, there are also a Greek name and an Asian one' on the list (p.211). While renaming the street is initiated by Tassu alone, she expects her nine female friends in due course 'to protest [with her] in Rinkeby Square for the street name to be changed' (p.15). Beneath all of this, there lies what can be labelled as anti-refugee sentiments practised by one group of refugees against another, newer group (a dynamic I explore in more detail in Chapter 3). In the protagonists' view, '[t]he number of

[20] I suggest that the ice-cream van acts as a modern supplement or alternative to the yoghurt-seller.

Kurdish asylum seekers is going down' (p.13), while simultaneously the practices of some Muslim asylum seekers, mainly Somalis (pp.15, 18), have rendered the latter group of refugees more visible, not actually because of their large numbers in Sweden but rather as people who are seen as different (see Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). Involving 'newer' refugees in the novel, Somalis in this case, is employed by Barakat to set refugees against one another, paralleling these groups' respective histories of displacement and their splintered communities at home and abroad. In so doing, Barakat demonstrates that refugees' archival practices are not solely developed against the state and the citizen, but also in ways that challenge the presence, positionalities and archival priorities of *other* refugees. By locating such hierarchical scales amongst refugees, Barakat also acknowledges the role that private gatherings in these women's apartments might play in unearthing racial tensions that would otherwise be suppressed in public. In doing so, he centralises the relationality between the private and the public, whilst also inviting us to foretell what will be a protracted fight with other refugee groups over the question of renaming the street.

These projected disputes over renaming the street usher in what could be denominated as competing archives – that is, archives which are based on past names that have travelled to modern times and spaces of refugeedom. In this regard, these archives, which take the shape of rewriting names as they used to belong to these people's pasts, do not simply refer to cultural specificities; they most importantly carry a symbolic value for these competing refugees, embedded in the ways they envision using these places, the neighbourhood and the street in particular, as alternative soils for past memories (see Hoffman 2001). Although such actions could be viewed as coping mechanisms or markers of living-on in places which will never be entirely familiar to those involved, in engraving a name with all its inflectional linguistic shifts and personal and spatial resonances, a new place is established and written into the contemporary European history of forced migration. In the same vein, whilst 'refus[ing] the equivalence of belonging with stasis' (Gedalof 2001:110), it seems that it is in Europe where the women have committed their futures and consigned their upcoming memories. This is not to say, however, that all of the protagonists share the same form and degree of

commitment: while Tassu *expects* all nine of her friends to join her in the protest, only *one* ultimately does, revealing the protagonists' diverse and divided priorities and commitments.

Eating the Archive

That it is a yoghurt-seller's name which Tassu is petitioning to be inscribed in the public sphere and an ice-cream van's chime that is her mobile phone's ring tone, alongside Tassu's reference to eating her mother, all draw the reader to the multifaceted significance of eating and food in the novel. As noted by Dianne Taylor in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, '[n]onverbal practices—such as dance, ritual, and *cooking*, to name a few—that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory, were not considered valid forms of knowledge' (2003:18, emphasis added). In her book she invites a remapping of the relationship between the archive and intangible, embodied and performative repertoires in relation to cultural memory, to remedy 'the rift' that she identifies between 'the archive of supposedly *enduring* materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called *ephemeral* repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)' (ibid.:19, emphasis added). In addition to viewing cooking as part of refugees' non-verbal repertoires, I propose expanding this to include the other two ends of cooking: that which is before (ie. the inclusion and exclusion of ingredients) and after (ie. eating). Analysing selected practices surrounding food not only reveals the roles that specific ingredients and recipes play in people's imaginaries (including vis-à-vis national and cultural boundaries), but also the extent to which the consumption of food should not be envisaged as *the end*. Indeed, I would argue that while food may be 'a material and yet ephemeral object' (Ibrahim 2015:1)—in so far as it is perishable, subject to decomposition and (returning to Stoler's words (2013:5) cited above) no longer 'capable of being perceived' after eating—, it does not disappear: instead, like Tassu's invocation of 'the dust of Qamishli' (discussed below, p.8), it *endures*, becoming an inherent part of non-spoken practices and knowledge.

In *Eating the Archive* (Qasmiyeh 2023a), I suggest that the refugee camp is itself a living archive and that the intimate in archiving must be acknowledged as part of a broader constellation of archival processes – by positing that the archive is not merely a collection of items that are held to be revisited

for later use, but is, instead, part of that which is *produced, sampled* and *consumed* by displaced people. On the one hand, it could be argued that the rations that my and other families received from the UN in Baddawi camp, alongside the food that we dried and preserved ourselves, could be viewed precisely as objects to be stored and kept for another time. On the other hand, however, I offer an alternative, and relational, reading of both food and eating through identifying the preservation of food – through means which enable ingredients to be preserved and *resuscitated* at a later date – as being intrinsically bound to the preservation of refugees' own presence and existence: 'dried vegetables marking the continuous nature of our presence' (2016:304); '[i] n the camp, time is hung like threads of dried okra' (2021:67). While emphasising the intimate and private in such processes, such materialities in turn may travel to the public sphere through different means, as I note in the encounter between the refugee and the anthropologist in the refugee camp (2021:17):

> After spending hours with us, in the same room, she left with a jar of homemade pickles and three full cassettes with our voices.

Drawing an equivalence between the preservation/consumption of food and of refugees' voices, I highlight the complex power dynamics at play in processes of so-called refugee representation, suggesting that, as part of refugees archiving back (following Ashcroft et al. 1989) and archiving afresh, the gesture of gifting our (intimately) preserved food to the (non-refugee) ethnographer who has assigned herself the role of 'preserving' our voices in interviews (for subsequent consumption by the researcher and her readers), positions refugees and researchers on a par in spite of the extractive process underpinning the encounter. In this regard, the rations 'gifted' to us by the UN, prepared by us for our own (immediate or deferred) consumption in the private sphere, have been transmuted into a gift which we (as the researched) have offered to the ethnographer, with the intimate travelling (or being taken) from the home to the public sphere; from the domestic to the international.

Through invoking 'eating' in relation to the archive, I do not intend to suggest a form of ingestion that leads to the consequent *disappearance* of the archive's constituent parts, but, rather to assert that it is through the *process* of consumption that such components are themselves transformed and, in

turn, become an *integral part* of the refugee-as-consumer-and-producer themselves. In this sense my conceptualisation is aligned with, but also builds upon Stoler's (*op cit*), in acknowledging the archive as simultaneously 'source' and 'subject', that which is drawn upon in and for different times, and, equally, that which defines and redefines the self in its search for a better future.

In the context of the novels under study, food, as a tangible materiality, alongside smell and taste, is essential to the protagonists' archival practices. Here, the food-refugee nexus is not reducible to questions of humanitarian control (the receipt of a ration being contingent on registration) or of physical survival (both of which are long-standing scholarly and practitioner interests – see Harrell-Bond et al 1992; Oliver and Ilcan 2018); or as a means to mobilise citizen-refugee hospitality (as per extensive advocacy campaigns interpellating refugee cooks and meals as bridges for intercultural understanding – see Murphy 2019). Instead, I maintain that the treatment of food in these novels demonstrates that it is not merely that which is consumed which is significant, but also who it is who is both producing, sharing and consuming this, with what ingredients and to what ends. Throughout, food emerges as deeply political, simultaneously a spatial vector – in its response to and correspondence with its original place, or in anticipation of a new one – as well as a temporal one – in terms of situating and contextualising the refugee protagonists' quests; creating times that resonate with past times; and also as something that is futural in spite of its ingestion.

Questions of survival are, of course, essential, to refugees, as demonstrated in the case of *The Container*, where food is necessary sustenance for people who are being smuggled across borders, as a temporary source to be ingested, hidden or rationed until they reach their destination (see Chapter 3)[i] in turn, in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, the smuggler, Abul Khaizuran, promises that he '[will] slaughter two chickens'[21] to provide the men with a celebratory feast to mark their successful crossing of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border (p.66). These texts demonstrate that food can be a *prerequisite*

[21] I have replaced Kilpatrick's 'I'll have two chickens killed' with 'I'll slaughter two chickens' to capture, as conveyed in the Arabic, the proximity of blood to Abul Khaizuran's hands. In Kilpatrick's translation there is a sense of distantiation between the promised feast (as initiated by the driver/smuggler) and the promised people (Abu Qais, Asad and Marwan) on the condition of arrival.

for survival or, in the case of the promised 'splendid lunch' (ibid.), *contingent* upon survival. However, food is also much more than either a basic set of rations (*anything* will be eaten to guarantee survival) or an opulent means of celebrating. In line with, but also beyond, the broader literature that maintains that 'food gets at the centre of negotiation of meanings, memories and identity and plays a role in constructing place and making a "home"' (Al-Sayed and Bieling 2022:555), in both *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *By the Sea* it is not merely 'eating,' but eating and drinking *properly* that offers a return 'home,' emerging as an expression of homeliness and homesickness alike, and equally as a way of engaging in the complex politics of self-preservation.

In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the Kurdish protagonists meet weekly in one another's apartments, reminiscing over food and drink, bringing together the production, sharing and consumption of memories, meals and drinks alike.[22] In the novel, cooking for one another can be seen as an active re-enactment of what belongs to people's 'original' places and times, and yet this food is to be consumed by the individual and by the members of the collective in the *here and now*. In so doing, it is eating *well* that foregrounds what it means to be a host (in a foreign land), endeavouring to feed her guests, not just any food, but that which is part of the host's culinary repertoire. Importantly, the recipes themselves are worthy of being defended as a means of upholding the authenticity and integrity of the community and nation of origin: as such, Khalil, Zintana's ex-husband, denounces cooks who bastardise kebab recipes, thereby both expecting an alignment of the origin of the food and those cooking it, and professing to have the necessary skills to discern and locate what is *fake* in food (p.63). Eating in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* is grounded in claims surrounding what constitutes the *authentic* in food. Indeed, it is through claiming the 'authentic' where the personal and national history intersects, in turn bifurcating to engender the history of the migrant as someone whose allegiances are dependent on and can therefore be articulated through what she consumes. In the novel, the protagonists' divided loyalties, to which I alluded earlier and which I explore in more detail in Chapter 3, emerge clearly with regards to what I conceptualise as the gastronomic archive (building

[22] In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the protagonists drink home-made wine or canned beer during the gatherings, while Zanzibari-styled tea is ingested and shared in *By the Sea*.

upon Symond's 1994 recasting of Georg Simmel's classic 1910 text, 'The Sociology of the Meal,' as 'Simmel's Gastronomic Sociology'), highlighting the extent to which contestation and power inequalities surround what might appear to be mundane and insignificant: which ingredients should be included in the recipe.

The political dimensions of this are powerfully expounded in the novel, as it is insufficient for a Kurdish recipe to be prepared 'authentically' by a Kurdish cook, when the very origin of the ingredients themselves is also called into question and actively debated by the protagonists, thereby drawing attention to the contested matter of which ingredients are worthy of inclusion within the Kurdish archive in Sweden. In this sense, okra, for instance, is not just a source-less, landless vegetable but one which is loaded with national and territorial signifiers. In the novel, okra's 'invasion of Sweden [emanates] from two lands [which] share the faith of one sea' (p.34), thus pitting two types of okra against one another: the Egyptian (qua Arabic) okra and the Turkish one. In response to Tassu's declaration that '[she] only eat[s] Turkish okra,' Zulaikha asks back, 'Isn't it better that we buy Arabic okra rather than Turkish okra, Kurdish woman, Tassu?' (ibid.). Beyond 'food security' or 'food authenticity,' Zulaikha reminds Tassu, as a Kurdish woman, of the urgency of what I would call 'gastronomic loyalty' – highlighting the intersectionality between *good* food and national loyalties –, where buying (and consuming) the *right* variety of okra is politically charged, so much so that the consumed becomes an embodiment of the consumer's political and national views. To grant the Turkish okra a superior position at the expense of the Egyptian undoubtedly embodies an undisputed alignment with a current occupier. Consequently, food not only conserves the body proper. Rather, it bolsters the body politic of which the personal is a part. Taking on great significance to the broader politics of archival loyalties, this entanglement of the personal and national through food is clearly manifested throughout the novel, to the extent that within the act of 'eating together' lies a precursor, another form of together-ness as Kurds.[23]

[23] As Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) reminds us, 'being-with' is not the same as 'being together': where a community formed or in-becoming is not exempt of its own demise and the sacrificial obligations demanded in its name would certainly hollow it out of life (1991). The potential dissolution of the community in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* is at the heart of my analysis in Chapter 3.

The *intergenerational* presence of Kurds in Sweden is also intimately tied to authenticity and national loyalties in this opening exchange in the novel: in spite of seeking her son's help to remove the original Swedish street sign (as part of her renaming initiative), Tassu's son Rand completely overlooks her request, leading her to admonish him in front of her friends as someone that she cannot rely on as he has only a 'sprinkling' of Kurdishness (p.8):

'كيف لي أن أعتمد على هذا القديد المعفَّر بغبار قامشلوكي؟'.

'How can I rely on this strip of meat [only] sprinkled with the dust of Qamishli?'

In response to her friend's assertion that her son's divided affinities are to be expected since he 'was born in Sweden,' Tassu juxtaposes her son's lack (as a 'strip of meat' only lightly seasoned with Kurdishness) with the father's full-bodied Kurdishness, whose testicles, according to Tassu '*kānata malīʾatayn bi-ghubār Qāmishlūkī* ('were full of the dust of Qamishli') (p.8). National loyalties and identity are thus tied both to territory and to genealogy: born in Sweden to a Kurdish father, whose 'testicles' are the 'full' bearers and transmitters of the 'dust of Qamishli' (even if the father himself is a good-for-nothing – Tassu refers to him as '*nakira*,' a nobody). Unlike the semen stains that contaminate the bedsheets in the B&B in *By the Sea* (p.56) and which mark the continuous (and yet transient) presence of migrants and refugees and the traces they leave behind, the 'dust,' accumulated in this case in the 'testicles,' cannot seek legitimacy on its own but rather becomes significant *after* the original place (Qamishli) and in this instance *within* the body (testicles). Furthermore, what Tassu gestures towards is that these particles that intrinsically belong to Kurdistan simultaneously remain within the family (via the father's testicles) and have travelled from the Middle East to Europe but have also dissipated en route. In reviewing the word '*ghubār*' (dust) in the original Arabic, we are steered towards conflictual meanings and connotations which are in line with the above readings. Sharing the same root *(gh-b-r)* as '*ghubār*' and of a special relevance to our discussion are the verb *ghabara* (to stay or to go) and the adjectival *ghābir* (the remaining and the past) (Ibn Manẓūr [1970] 2015:1-5). In this regard, Tassu's evocation (founded on Barakat's acute knowledge of Arabic)

appears to suggest that the dust of/from Qamishli may have reached Sweden and yet, intergenerationally, it exists in varying degrees, almost being imperceptible in the case of her son. As Tassu's son is clearly not part of her national project, in seeking to re-inscribe the Kurdish name in Sweden, this tension demonstrates that the projection of the national archive is subject to the personal and intergenerational. Resonating with Lisa Stead's suggestion (in her analysis of what a focus on the archive can offer to literary scholarship) that 'archives are incomplete sites of knowledge, necessarily fragmentary and changeable – subject to growth but also to diminishment and deconstruction' (2013:2), it cannot be assumed that loyalties and commitments to both the personal and collective archive exist and endure.

Battles of the Archive and **The Thing** *in the Crypt*

The day when all the women agreed to attend the demonstration in solidarity with Tassu's initiative to change the name of the street has come. It is the Thursday after a full cycle of their ten Saturday gatherings. In Tassu's words, '90,000 people have [so far] signed the petition' (p.169), prompting her to 'see the houses of Qamishli facing each other on both sides of Katarina street' (ibid.). Yet the prospect of having 'the first Kurdish street in Europe' (p.301) has enticed none of Tassu's friends, except Nazli. Both women are alone, heading to Rinkeby Square (p.306):

- أتسمعين أصواتاً، يا نازلي؟.
- أية أصوات؟.
- من جهة ساحة رنكبي، يا نازلي.

'ربما هي أصوات الطناجر في العمارات، يا تاسو. الناس تطهو، منذ الظهيرة، للعشاء. أسمع توابل الصوماليين، والأتراك، والكُرد، والسريان، والعرب'. تصنَّعت أنها تشمُّ الهواء: ' لا توابل سويدية'.

- Can you hear noises, Nazli?
- What noises?
- From Rinkeby Square, Nazli.

'Perhaps these are the noises of the pots in the nearby buildings, Tassu. People are cooking since noon, and will be until dinner time. I can hear the spices of the Somali people, and those of the Turks, the Kurds, the Syriacs and the Arabs.' She pretended to smell the air: 'No Swedish spices.'

Competing noises and smells, all of different refugee groups, with Somalis at the forefront (as they are at the demonstration), can be detected in the air, rendering, to a large extent, Swedish 'noises'

and smells absent. Tassu (who thinks that she is representing the Kurds) is both on edge and 'on the edge' (*ʿalā al-ḥāfa*) (ibid.), as a clash with another refugee group is looming (p.308-9):

> جماعة من الصوماليين دخلت الساحةَ، ناشرةً عريضةً من القماش بطول أربعة أمتار، يتولّى عرضَها ثلاثةُ رجال وامرأتان، ممسكيْنَ بها من وسطها والطرفين، يتبعهم الآخرون […]. اقتربتا فتوضَّحتْ لهما خطوط الكلمات بالسويدية:'لا شارع كاترينا باركن، بل شارع مَغَديشو-عائشة'.
>
> A group of Somalis have entered the Square displaying a banner made of fabric, four metres long, held by three men and two women, holding it from the centre and the edges while followed by others […]. They [Tassu and Nazli] got closer and the shades of the Swedish words gradually became clearer: 'No Katarina Street but Mogadishu-Aisha Street.'

Feeling doubly-betrayed, first by her friends' lack of support and then by this unexpected turn of events, Tassu alongside Nazli rush to open 'their banner with clear Swedish words' (p.309) to counter the other group (ibid.):

> 'وداعاً كاترينا باركن.
> تذكَّري اسم شارعنا الجديد:
> علي خابوت. الملّا علي خابوت.'
>
> 'Farewell Katarina.
> Remember the name of our new street:
> Ali Khabut. Mulla Ali Khabut's [street].'

Within this battle of words and what might appear on the surface a failed attempt at archiving a Kurdish name in another setting, more cracks emerge between these different refugee groups with regards to their respective understandings of how best to write their cultural presence and historical representation into the daily life of Sweden. For Barakat, the significance of places is also '[f]or the place not to be the certain' (1987:66). It is through renaming that Tassu has endeavoured to create a home beyond her own place, in the process deconstructing and shattering other names, potentially constructing archival spectres (i.e. Derrida 1998a), which would contain traces of Qamishli and a future that would inevitably feed off her uprooted past.

To return to Barakat's words to elucidate this further, in making the place into a certainty strips the place of its capacity to welcome difference and otherness, thereby rejecting refugees *a priori*. This

is why such a battle between these two disenfranchised communities over naming in a place which strictly speaking belongs to neither party, opens up the novel to a *worldliness*, as expressed by Said (2000:382-3), which is not specific to either of these groups but one which warrants more interpretation. Tassu may feel defeated this time, but this does not mean that her search for a symbolic foothold, ideally through transferring her places of memory into a new reality, will cease to exist.

Feeling defeated and out of place, Tassu draws on her memories of the Northern parts of Syria as she reflects on the seasonality of watermelon, and how the fruits which are old and out of season are sold for lower prices. Like the watermelon vendors in Qamishli, who are denominated *muta'khkhirūn* (late, p.312) when they fail to sell the fruit at the right time, Tassu considers that the Kurdish women were *late* in responding to the Somalis' organised mobilisation, thereby missing their opportunity to inscribe themselves into Swedish history, being defeated and replaced by those who are fresher, newer and also younger and more desirable.[24]

Through juxtaposing seasonality and temporality, Tassu implicitly posits that the Somalis have replaced the Kurds in terms of their freshness and desirability. As she remembers, Tassu does so through her senses, and specifically 'through her tongue' (ibid.):

> تاسو تتذكَّر بلسانها: بطيخٌ لا يشبه البطيخ الأحمر في مَتَاجر السويد. خريفٌ لا يشبه خريفَ السويد، في أسبوعه الأول أو الحادي عشر. تاسو تتذكَّر بلسانها بطيخاً هو الخريفُ بذاته؛ بطيخاً هو المكانُ بذاته.

> Tassu remembers through her tongue: watermelons that do not resemble those in the Swedish supermarkets. An autumn that does not look like the Swedish autumn, whether it is in its first week or its eleventh. Tassu remembers through her tongue. Watermelon that is autumn itself; watermelon that is the place itself.

[24] It is in relation to these Somali and other 'new' refugee arrivals to Sweden that the Kurdish women discuss the changes in their own menstrual cycles and the irregularity of their periods as they confront ageing and the 'autumns' of their lives (see Chapter 3).

The memory of the watermelon has thus not only *travelled with* Tassu to Sweden but *returns* her to the place itself: the watermelon is not merely an alternative or a substitute for Qamishli, it 'is the place itself', acting in this way as an extension of a very *distinct* place with is *distinctive* taste. It is through her tongue that she re-members the place (ibid.):

تاسو مولعة ببطيخ الخريف الأحمر: بطيخٌ بارد، وخريف بارد، يجتمعان على ترتيب ذاكرة لِلّسان.

> Tassu loves the autumnal watermelon: cold watermelon and a cold autumn, [work] together to rearrange the tongue's memory.

Throughout, food appears in the novel as more than a marker of authenticity or cultural identity: the senses intermingle and intersect to preserve the place, ultimately becoming indistinguishable from the place. Tassu's sensory archive returns her to Qamishli – it is also the memory of the yoghurt-seller's wares (not only his name) that brings her back to her childhood in Northern Syria, and through the ice-cream van's chime that she can '*hear* Qamishli' (p.20). Tassu thus both remembers through her tongue and hears through her palate (she can '*hear* the spices of the Somali people' which are overpowering (and displacing) the Kurds', p.306) as taste and sound become one, with the intermingling gastronomic senses overlapping and encroaching on each other's sensory tasks to *become* the place itself.

As she dwells on the failure of her re-naming initiative, Tassu moves from the public sphere – wandering through the streets of Rinkeby – to the private sphere: first to her building, then to her flat, and to her bedroom, arguably the most intimate of domestic spaces. Bearing 'a wound in the corner of [her] mouth' (p.311) from her scuffles with the other demonstrators, Tassu returns to her apartment, the site of the first of the ten gatherings. Out of breath after climbing the stairs to her apartment, the first person she remembers is the youngest of the female protagonists (p.313-314):

لا تعرف تاسو لماذا خطر ببالها، وهي تفتح دُرْجاً في خزانة صغيرة قرب سريرها، أن تهاتف شتولا، الظاهرة السُّرَّة، أبداً، تحت قمصانها القطن القصيرة. أخرجت أطواقاً موصولة بمقاوِد للكلاب من الدُّرْج. وضعتها فوق السرير. أخرجت هاتفها من حقيبة يدها الموضوعة فوق الخزانة الصغيرة، قرب ساعة

على شكل تفاحة حمراء. نقرتِ الأرقامَ بأنملة أصبعها السَّبابة اليمنى. وضعت الهاتف على أذنها. جاءها صوت شتولا بالسويدية: 'اتركي لي رسالة رائعة. أنا شتولا'.

Tassu does not know why it occurred to her while she was opening the drawer of her bedside cabinet to call Shtula, the one with the bellybutton always exposed from under her low-cut cotton blouses. She pulled out collars attached to dog leads from the drawer. She put them on the bed. She pulled her telephone out of the handbag placed on the small cabinet, near a clock the shape of a red apple. She pressed the numbers with the tip of her right index finger. She placed the telephone to her ear and Shtula's message in Swedish emanated: 'Leave me a wonderful message. It's me, Shtula'.

This is a scene that is replete with references that draw us back to the plural meanings and spaces of the archive with which I opened this chapter, bringing together the domestic sphere with incarceration, and (as I discuss below) both the quotidian and the futural with the divine and that which is not-entirely-visible, outside the human realm: the two references each to the *durj* (drawer, p.313) and the *khizāna* (cabinet, p.313), are followed by three references to *maṣkūkāt* (documentation, pp.314, 318, 319), *qabw* (the crypt, p.320), *mustawdaʿ* (storage unit, p.320, used twice), *ṣundūq* (box, used three times on p.320, 321, 322) and *aqfāṣ* (cages, p.320) (sing. *qafaṣ*). Carrying the collars she has collected from the drawer in her bedside cabinet, Tassu hurriedly descends to the storage space allocated to her apartment in the basement of the building (p.320), a space that is described by Barakat as a 'desolate crypt' whose storage units preserve, enfold and protect (as connoted by the Arabic term *munṭawiya* (f.)) 'its histories as relics' (p.322):

أسندت ظهرها إلى الجدارِ الشَّبَكِ المعدنيّ، ثم أشعلت لِفافةَ تبغٍ في الضياء الشاحب، الموحش، للقبوِ الموحش، المقسَّم مستودعاتٍ منطوية على تاريخها كآثارٍ.

She leant her back against the metallic trellis, then she lit a rollie under the pale, desolate light for this desolate crypt that is divided into storage units preserving its histories as relics.

Having failed in her attempts to inscribe the Kurdish name in the public sphere, Tassu re-visits the crypt and the cardboard box that she has stored in this space, notably the sole object therein, contra her neighbours' units which are replete with discarded furniture and old machines (p.320):

خشخش شيء في أعماق الصندوق. جلست تاسو على الأرض، قرب أطواق الكلاب ومقاوِدِها. مدَّت يدعا إلى أعماق الصندوق. أخرجت إطاراً مهشَّمَ الزجاج لصورة أبيها، وأمها، بالأبيض والأسود. أبعدتِ الهشيمَ جانباً، بتأنٍّ، حتى لا يخدش الزجاجُ يدَها.

Something has rattled in the depths of the cardboard box. Tassu sat down on the floor near the dog collars and leads. She stretched her hand out to the depths of the cardboard box, pulling out the frame of a photo, with broken glass, of her father and her mother, in black and white. She cast the debris aside, slowly, so the glass wouldn't injure her hand.

This *'shay''* (thing) is as yet to reveal itself or to be revealed by Tassu:[25] the reader does not know what the 'thing' is, or why she is revisiting it at this point, but the narrative places this unknown alongside both the tangible and perceptible and also the 'known' frame, as the reader first encountered the frame in the novel's first chapter (p.14-15):

استدارت تصحِّح المَيْل في إطار معلَّق بسلك قصير إلى عقفة من البلاستيك مثبَّتة إلى الحائط بلاصقٍ. صححت الميلَ، لكن العقفة انكسرت، بغتة، فسقط الإطار بالصورة السوداء والبيضاء فيه. تهشم الزجاج على حافةِ كرسيّ. جمدت النساءُ برهةً، ثم ضحكن. دفعت تاسو الزجاجَ الهشيم، والإطارَ، بقدمها الحافية إلَّا من جوربها، أسفلَ الأريكة الرمادية: 'يا أمي وأبي هنا، الآن. سأعود إليكما صباحاً'. تأوَّهتْ. عضت على أسنانها. جلست على الأرض تتحسس قدمها. أخرجت شظية زجاج صغيرة من إبهام القدم: 'يا قحبة'، تمتمت. وضعت الشظية في منفضة الرماد، على المنضدة.

She turned to adjust the angle of a picture that hung on a short string on a plastic hook fixed to the wall. She righted the slant but the hook broke suddenly and the frame, which contained a black and white photograph, fell. The glass smashed on the edge of the chair. The women froze for a moment, then laughed. Tassu pushed the broken glass and the frame under the grey sofa with her foot, that was bare save for a sock. 'Hide here for now, Mum and Dad. I'll come back for you in the morning.' She groaned, gritted her teeth, and sat down on the floor to feel her foot. She pulled out a small splinter of glass from her big toe: 'Whore,' she muttered. She dropped the splinter into the grey ashtray [sic[26]] on the table.

In the opening chapter, Tassu initially seems unperturbed by the picture falling and its frame breaking, subsequently humanising the content by referring to the father and mother tenderly while simultaneously expressing her desire to put what is left of the frame away, first under the sofa and later, we come to know, in *al-mustawda*'. From the outset, the precariously hung picture, hanging

[25] The predominance of the '*sh'* sound in *khashkhasha* (ratttled), *muhashsham* (broken) and *hashīm* (debris) is notable in this extract, taking us from noise and rattling, to death, breakage and complete silence.
[26] The Arabic for 'ashtray' is *minfadat al-ramād* (literally a tray for ash) but Aplin has conflated the words *ramad* (ash) and *ramādī* (ashen or grey), using the latter adjectivally to describe the colour of the ashtray.

literally by a thread, draws the reader towards the inevitability of its fall. The picture may have kept its original shape and colour but it, and its frame, have nonetheless aged and become less secure, having the potential to disrupt and even cause harm.[27] However, while Tassu was injured by the broken shards of glass in the beginning of the novel, she consciously 'casts the debris aside' to avoid further harm when she encounters the photograph and its broken frame again in the crypt.

In the underground storeroom is where the refuse and what is deemed superfluous to daily use are stored away (on refuse and the left-overs, see Benjamin 1999:460). There is '*hashīm'* (debris), discarded and shattered bits of glass and metal, which in turn hints towards a once lived life consumed in a picture where the pictured, Tassu's parents in 'Kurdistan,' are no longer part of the house interior (see Burton 2003:144) but instead are relegated to this deserted crypt. That which remains is thus not only still within the domestic sphere but is in a space of incarceration, with the crypt (*qua* archive) not existing merely to leave things aside, but to be able to return to them in the future. In the novel, the crypt constitutes a place and time where the surpluses of life can be deposited so as to be memorialized. The broken frame is not permanently discarded or destined to complete oblivion since, through opening and concluding the novel with it, it is brought one step closer to what it contains (i.e the photograph) through juxtaposing the shattered glass with the oldness of the picture and whom it depicts. In this picture, the present is being reassembled after having lost the re-naming war to a newer refugee community. Invoked twice, the frame's debris evokes the living dead, Tassu's parents, who are being brought to and revisited in Sweden, in spite of their physical absence. The family photo is the locus of her private life, and yet this is contrasted with her attempts to bring (through inscribing, reciting, and hearing the name of) the yoghurt seller to the Swedish cityscape.

[27] The blood seeping from Tassu's foot in the opening chapter resonates with Latif Mahmud's bloodied foot cleaned by Elleke in *By the Sea*. Tassu's is an intergenerational blood caused by the broken glass but also reaffirming a blood bond between one generation of Kurds who stayed behind in Kurdistan and another who made it to/in Sweden; as such, it initiates a three-generation dialogue (parents-Tassu-children). Furthermore, blood is expressly invoked throughout the novel in relation to the changing and in some cases the total disappearance of the women's menstrual cycles and their changing bodies, providing the foundations for the conversations and debates that take place between the protagonists. In turn, Latif Mahmud's blood reconnects and thus interlaces colonial times with newer times directly coming from a former colony. More importantly, by washing off the blood the wound becomes clearer and more visible to the naked eye.

Tassu thus reimagines the ordinary Kurd – from the yoghurt maker to her parents – seeking to bring them variously to the public sphere or the domestic sphere. While the Mulla's name will not be visible in the public square, her parents, and that which frames their picture, will remain in the crypt/*mustawda*ʿ (at least for now). An important dilemma highlighted by Stoler is relevant in this regard, when she posits that 'leftovers are assigned as detritus because they are rendered into neglect or valorized for insistent remembrance' (2013:x). It is precisely this tension between erasure or marginalisation on the one hand, and memorialisation on the other, and everything in between, that emerges through the pulse of the archive throughout both novels under study.

The picture and broken frame are all traces of the past coming together with collars and leads that are either for an existent or non-existent creature. The possibility that this 'thing' could be alive is hinted at by the presence of the collars and the leads on the one hand, and the 'rattling' emanating from the box, on the other. As Tassu implores to 'the thing' to 'come out', through the imperative verb *'ukhrujī'* – the order for a *female* to 'come out' -, we are taken to a feminine entity (p.322). After stomping on the box in a state of rage and completely flattening it 'like a notebook with no paper', potentially proving that there was nothing inside it to begin with, or pointing either to the flatness of this thing or its imperceptible body, she nonetheless, panting, addresses this 'thing' as a female dog (ibid.):

> ' اخرجي أيتها الكلبة [...]. أنا هنا. اخْرُجي. لا أحدَ، في السويد، جَلَبَ لكلبة مثلك أحدَ عشر طوقاً بألوانٍ شتَّى سواي. لا أحد. اخْرُجي. '

> 'Come out bitch, I'm here. Come out. No-one but I in all of Sweden bought a dog like you eleven collars in different colours. No-one. Come out.'

While there evidently is no dog in the flattened remains of the box, we are returned to the collars – whose shape denotes that which encircles, encloses and leads the collared *thing* but also points to that which is encircling, enclosing and can pull (and therefore resist) in the opposite direction, acting as a link between the one who leads and the one who is led but also as a supplement to the parties

involved – and the number eleven (used to enumerate the collars), which strikingly matches the number of the chapters in the novel. This is not an ordinary number, as Ibrahim Al-Karāwī (2019:n.p.) has rightly pointed out with reference to the novel, as it is embedded in the Qur'an: in Sūrat Yūsuf (Chapter Joseph), Joseph's dream is shared with the father (Jacob), prompting Jacob to start interpreting *(tafsīr)* his son's dream, therefore ratifying the beginning of the story:

> [These stories mention] when Joseph said to his father, 'O my father, indeed I have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.'
>
> (Qur'an 12:4)

So, it is this dream as narrated to the father and the subsequent events that would reconfigure Joseph's life as an exile-refugee forever. Thrown by his eleven brothers 'into the bottom of the well' (ibid.:10) and inadvertently found and rescued by 'some travellers' (ibid.), Joseph would be sold and acquisitioned by another family. The eleven collars in the eleven chapters can be seen as the trace of something that is not present (as yet) – what Derrida, with reference to the trace, calls 'a kind of voice-writing' (2005:150) – of an archival presence that is caught between multiple loyalties and places and yet which is always in action and incessantly with a view to the future.

What – or who – these dog collars and leads are for ultimately remains unknown and, perhaps, unknowable. The collars act as signifiers, gesturing towards 'the thing,' and yet only Tassu knows for sure if this thing even exists, or if it is she herself that is being sought. Ultimately, the ambiguity and uncertainty that lingers around the contents of the box shed light on the nature of the archive: its contents are not fixed and can never be fully known or understood. In light of this, I propose that it is not necessarily the identity of 'the thing' that should be excavated in this context, but the process of *self*-preservation in relation to the archive. Tassu in her monologic implorations, tells us that her relationship with 'the thing' is as old as her, showing that this link spans both Kurdistan and Sweden (pp.321-322):

> 'اخْرُجي. هَيّي اخْرُجي. أفي كل مرة عليَّ أن أذكِّرك بي؟. ستةً وأربعين عاماً ذكَّرتُكِ بيَ – سنة بعد سنة. بلغتُ السادسةً والأربعين، كما ترين. اخْرُجي.'
>
> [...]

’اخْرُجي. كفى. لم أعُدْ أحتمل. اخْرُجي‘، قالت تاسو.
[...]
’ اخْرُجي. كلما استطلعتُ أعماقَ هذا الصندوق لم أركِ. لكنك هناك. اخْرُجي‘، قالت تاسو.

> ‘Come out. Come out. Do I need to remind you of me every time? For 46 odd years I’ve reminded you of me – year after year. I’ve turned 46, as you can see. Come out.’
> [...]
> ‘Come out. Enough. I can no longer bear it. Come out’ Tassu says.
> […]
> ‘Come out. Whenever I probe the depths of this box I can’t see you. But you are there. Come out,’ Tassu says.

As Tassu re-visits this thing, it is not to remember ‘the thing’ *per se*, but rather to implore ‘the thing’ to remember *her,* an imploration she has repeated since birth. That she should revisit ‘the thing’ immediately after her renaming project has failed, – recalling that the banner used the singular feminine imperative to demand that the Swedish Katarina ‘*remember* the name of our new street’ (p.309) – brings her efforts to inscribe the Kurdish presence in Sweden together with her having been continually forgotten by ‘the thing’. For this encounter to take place after this moral defeat, characterised by her friends failing to attend the demonstration and support her, is poignant in so far as it makes the crypt a place where Tassu can engage with *herself* outside of her community; and yet this is not the end because, despite the fact that we do not know for certain what kind of thing there is (if there is any), what is certain is that is Tassu who insists on this thing becoming visible and remembering her. Whether blaming the failure of the initiative on the thing or positioning the thing’s-forgetting-of-her as part of a broader continuum of remaining unacknowledged throughout her life, what is clear is not only that this thing has not remembered her, but also that Tassu has repeatedly reasserted her expectation that she should be remembered. One could argue that the renaming project was not only a way for her to remember Qamishli and to put Qamishli on the Swedish map, but also a way for *her* to be remembered, as the lead petitioner insisting on this inscription, as the one whose childhood in Kurdistan is shaped and validated by the memories of the yoghurt seller; her archival efforts could variously have been *in spite of*, or *because of*, Tassu herself having been continually forgotten. Most powerfully, I would maintain that throughout *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, archiving practices return us to the determined insistence on the (refugee) self being recognised as part of the archive itself, one which is more inclusive and egalitarian in nature.

Tellingly, both *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *By the Sea* conclude with the protagonists either revisiting or drawing on objects that they have carried with them from another time and place, and which they mobilise for self-preservation. In the case of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, Tassu revisits both a family photograph brought from Qamishli to Sweden (as anticipated by Banko et al, op cit), but also the destabilising, unknown 'thing' which has refused to remember *her* since birth, requiring Tassu herself to repeatedly remind 'the thing' of *her* existence. In turn, in *By the Sea*, it is not a material object from *Zanzibar*, but a mundane item gifted by a fellow asylum-seeker incarcerated in the UK, that Saleh Omar invokes as having the potential to protect him: it is with Alfonso's towel – which substituted the place once occupied by the Zanzibari *ud-al-qamari* confiscated in the airport – that will shield him 'if the worst came to the worst' in this new phase of his life in the UK, as he asserts in the final line of the novel (p.245). Where Tassu's implorations to the unknown 'thing' embody the ongoing struggle to be remembered, Saleh Omar interpellates Alfonso's towel as a preserver (p.62), as an object that will not only shield his body from contamination, but as a provider of security in the face of the unknown. It is thus the contested and fraught nature of self-preservation in relation to the archive that comes to the fore in both of these novels, whether through the appropriation of a name for survival or a failed attempt at re-naming a street; the power inequalities embedded in Elleke's, Alfonso's and the un-named Zanzibari detainee's writings; or the ambiguous position of the archive as that which can variously enable self-preservation or perpetuate exclusion.

Such archives, as the novels demonstrate, are fragmented and dissonant in nature, marked by incompleteness and contestation, drawing the reader to the questions of who determines their parameters, boundaries and contours. I have posited that both texts reveal an expanded conceptualisation of the archive itself, encompassing tangible and intangible elements, on the one hand, and a plurality of times and spaces where archiving processes emerge and are challenged by, and between, refugees, on the other. The protagonists' commitment to archiving the intimate and the ordinary, alongside the activation of what I have conceptualised as the gastronomic archive –

including not only recipes and ingredients, but also the intermingling and overlapping of the senses – are part of ever-evolving systems framed and propelled by multiple sites, histories and peoples.

As such, reading these novels together compels us to acknowledge the archival practices of refugees, whilst recognising that these are neither solely defined or delimited by their refugee journey per se, nor are they necessarily developed contra the state or the citizen. A focus on the archive and the materialities of forced migration thus *may* provide an opportunity to personalise or 'humanise' the refugee (as suggested by scholars like Banko et al. (2022) and advocacy campaigns alike), but also situates refugees in wider spatial and temporal context, including in relation to other refugees. Indeed, in both *By the Sea* and in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* the protagonists' archiving practices exist *alongside* and *against* those of other refugees, characterised by an ongoing struggle between current and former refugees over what and who is to be included or excluded, to be remembered or forgotten. Refugees (in their inherent heterogeneity) are thus not merely the bearers of archival traces and objects, and the archive is not solely a repository or an attempt to re-write and enunciate the past (see Chambers et al 2014:23); instead, refugees are the creators of the archive as both subject and source (see Stoler 2009:44), and their archiving practices emerge as part of a broader quest for both survival and self-preservation.

Chapter 2

Rhythms of Refuge: Time and Temporalities in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea*

Recapturing Time in Displacement

Much scholarly attention has been given to place and space in relation to migration and asylum, and yet this has been to the relative detriment of research into time and temporalities (see Pascual-de-Sans 2004; Griffiths et al 2013; Griffiths 2014; Page et al 2017; Wang and Collins 2020). Addressing this gap, Wang and Chen (2020:2) emphasise the interdisciplinary and multiperspectival nature of contemporary research in this field, noting that 'over the past decade, more and more scholars have called for the need to give greater attention to time and emphasised the necessity and significance of bringing temporal dimensions into migration studies.' Supplementing the long-standing interest in memory and trauma as related to displacement (see Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013 and Hron 2018 respectively), special attention has increasingly been paid to the relationship between waiting and (im)mobility in refugee camps and during the asylum process, and the ways that bureaucratic regimes of temporariness and liminality (re)produce insecurity and a sense of powerlessness amongst refugees (ie. Conlon 2011; Bissell 2007; Rotter 2016; Turnbull 2016; Griffiths 2014; Canning 2021).

Contra the assumed 'temporal stability of life' of citizens and of refugees' lives before displacement, 'the emergent trope of displacement as a condition of liminality' has both become 'central' in such scholarship, but has also been increasingly critiqued (Ramsay 2020:393). Inter alia, there has been a strong emphasis on the all-consuming nature of waiting and being suspended 'in-between' times in refugee camps – spaces which are conceptualised as being 'bound up with a temporality of *liminality* and enduring temporariness' existing, 'in Agamben's terms, in a 'zone of indistinction' between permanence and transience' (Ramadan 2012:72, emphasis added) – and of being stuck in the asylum-process. Whilst acknowledging that the asylum journey is simultaneously characterised by ruptures and continuities as refugees leave their times and places of origin and seek to settle in the present/host

society,[1] ongoing research has focused on documenting asylum-seekers' 'existential liminality' in the context of North American (Haas 2017:76) and European asylum-systems (Rotter 2016:96), and the destructive impacts of institutions that 'steal time' from asylum-seekers and refugees (Bhatia and Canning 2021) and 'compound trauma through temporal harm' (Canning 2021:105). Such processes and institutions drag and keep asylum-seekers in what Melanie Griffiths, in her research with asylum-seeking men in the UK, refers to as 'the timeless present' (2014:1997): refugees' need to intently focus on meeting their *immediate* needs and the 'day-to-day,' due to 'a temporal hostage system' which means that refugees struggle to 'continue simply surviving their lives' (Ramsay 2020:400).

It is in this sense that Georgina Ramsay argues that 'displacement, fundamentally, pulls people out of the teleology of their own lives,' ultimately 'dictat[ing] the temporal rhythms of life' (ibid.:401). While I agree with Ramsay that 'there is an important distinction between characterising the displacement of forced migration as a state of liminality based on the experiences of interlocutors and the *theoretical conflation* of such displacement with liminality' (ibid.:394, emphasis added),[2] in this chapter I critique not only such a 'theoretical conflation' but also Ramsay's conclusion (*op cit*) that displacement necessarily 'dictates' refugees' 'temporal rhythms of life'. Instead, I would suggest that such a conclusion itself leads to an equally pernicious risk of reducing refugees to the position of passive objects whose 'rhythms' are 'dictated' by displacement *per se,* rather than acknowledging refugees as actively engaging in their own *narration* of rhythms of both life and death.

In developing this argument, I build on insights from studies that increasingly acknowledge that waiting in displacement can be a time of productiveness and resistance (Conlon 2011), including resistance to intersecting systems of inequality, exclusion and injustice. In effect, drawing on

[1] Abdelmalek Sayad argued that migrants are subjected to a 'double absence', feeling connected to both their home and host countries, and concurrently 'in-between' the past and the present (1999).
[2] Ramsay critiques this conflation for problematically exceptionalising refugees and failing to recognise the broader structures of precarity that 'create uncertainty' amongst *both* refugee and *non*-refugee populations (2000:401; also see Ramsay and Haugen Askland 2022).

Nicholas De Genova (2002) and Nadine El-Enany (2020), Monish Bhatia and Victoria Canning assert that 'certain forms of time are perforated by globalised inequalities, exclusion and racialised forms of injustice' (2021:xvi). This reminds us that time is not 'universal', but instead is subjectively experienced, depending amongst other things on intersecting identities and positions which are subject to different systems of inequality, including, as I delineate below, on the basis of a person's gender, age and race. Such *diverse* times are 'interwoven with the *production* of meanings, feelings, memories and social relations across the migration process' (Wang and Collins 2020:4, emphasis added), and as such I start from the assumption that 'encounters with others… *do not simply only occur in time* or space but are themselves *generative of new times* and spaces' (Dikeç et al. 2009:1, emphasis added).

Building on the above, in this chapter I seek to demonstrate the ways that the protagonists in Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (*Men in the Sun*) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* invert the assumed position of the refugee as a passive figure – as a passive wait*er,* whether in a camp or during the asylum process – imbued with other people's times (such as those of official institutions and border forces), and argue that both texts challenge conceptualisations of displacement as 'dictating' refugees' rhythms of life, or relegating them to being held 'hostage' (Ramsay 2020) in 'the timeless present' (Griffiths 2014:1997). In doing so, I do not deny the protagonists' experiences of liminality (or indeed the authors' invocations of archetypal tropes of liminality within their texts), or the different forms of violence and precarity they face in their respective journeys, which, in the case of *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* results in three men's suffocation inside a lorry, and their ultimate 'non-arrival' (as anticipated by Abu Qais from the onset: 'I may arrive, I may not' – p.63). Instead, I seek to interrogate how refugees in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (analysed in both the original and translated versions) and *By the Sea* both narrate and live their time, with an emphasis on the concerted and conscious movement marking a willingness *to live on* beyond the boundaries of refugeedom and displacement while simultaneously looking for a future of their own creation.

Echoing Ilan Pappé's assertion in his reading of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* that (certain) refugees are *historians*[3] in their own right (1995:161), I propose that the protagonists not only recall but also create *new times* through multiple means, including as individuals whose temporalities offer an entry point to national and transnational histories (rather than vice versa) but who also narrate their own intersecting rhythms of both life *and* death; and, most importantly, are not merely time-*keepers* stuck in the past or the present, but as time-*seekers* navigating many times simultaneously and actively pursuing better times. In all, what is in the balance when time is surveyed in these refugee narratives, apart from past and present events, is to determine where the future is heading. In the two novels under analysis, the characters are moving towards the future, futures which are not only ushered into being, but also punctuated and qualified by past events. These novels thus demonstrate that seeking asylum (or finding an alternative place in the world), entails a reconfiguration of time as both lived and national, in line with rhythms, past and present. As such, through my close reading of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea*, I investigate what it means to focus on the refugee journey, containment, and the asylum-process as times which are active, productive and futural, including through the linkage between waiting and narration.

With regards to national time, in his field-defining chapter, 'DissemiNation,' Homi K. Bhabha starts by noting that, more than any other historian at the time, Eric Hobsbawm had documented 'the history of the modern western nation from the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrants' exile,' and that it was widely maintained that 'the nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor' (1990:291). In dwelling critically on the relationship between nation and narration, Bhabha argues that his own interest is not in 'the discourse of national*ism*': instead, he seeks to write *against* nationalism by proposing the 'cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation' (ibid.:292). Through bringing migration, exile, the cultural construction of nationness, and narration together, as he does in conversation with key theorists including Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Julia Kristeva, Bhabha emphasises 'the temporal dimension in the inscription of … political entities' (ibid.), thereby closely

[3] Pappé identifies 'Abu Qais […as] the historian of the group' (1995:161).

aligning with my own interests in this chapter. However, where Bhabha continues to dwell in his chapter primarily on 'the structure of cultural liminality — within the nation […]' (ibid.:299), thereby emphasising the importance of *national* time and temporalities, my starting point lies elsewhere.

To an extent, I echo, but also expand, Bhabha's relatively brief acknowledgement of 'the desolate silences of the wandering people' (Bhabha 1990:316), to which he dedicates 4 out of 36 pages, by exploring how time and temporalities are experienced and narrated – including through silences and internal monologues – by the refugee protagonists in these novels, viewing them not in isolation from their national boundaries, but instead as active participants engaged with both the national and more-than-national. In line with increasing critiques of the methodological nationalism that has pervaded scholarship on migration and displacement (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Anderson 2019) my interest thus transcends the narration of *national* histories in relation to refugees, and instead explores the personal in relation to multiple times and temporalities across different spaces.

By exploring lived as well as 'thought' time, I thus counter the frequent reduction of refugees' time to that of arrival, and instead pay attention to how time is carried from one place to another, not as a singular time, but as a series of overlapping temporalities spanning multiple geographies and legal statuses. Importantly, through this approach I do not seek to privilege time at the expense of place or space, but instead seek to stress an often-overlooked angle (Griffiths et al 2013) as per refugees' times. As such, I start from the premise that configurations of space and time affect how meaning works (Lefebvre 2013:14) and posit an indissoluble relationship between time and space.

Rather than exploring time as a theme in these novels, the analytical approach applied throughout the chapter pays particular attention to relationality, including the relationality of time and place; of the past, present and future; and between the times of different narratives (spoken and unspoken) and protagonists in these novels. By viewing refugees themselves simultaneously as active time-*keepers*, time-*seekers*, and *makers* of time, I examine the narration of their times in and through old and new places alike, via the application of a *rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre ([2004] 2013). This entails

locating disparate times and rhythms, noting that Henri Lefebvre posits that for there to be rhythm, there must be repetition in a movement (ibid.:86). Far from passivity, redundancy and inevitability, rhythm brings with it a differentiated time, a qualified duration, including repetitions, ruptures and resumptions. As C.F. Audebert notes with regards to repetition as a literary device in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, 'just as it emphasizes similarities, repetition also insists upon disparities and contradictions' (1984:91). In all, attention to rhythms dispels the assumption that refugees' journeys are monolithic or passive, as they intrinsically harbour multiplicity, and simultaneously gesture not only towards the lived (ibid.:86) but also towards the future in their capacity to inform the production of other rhythms. In all, through my rhythmanalysis of these novels, I thus propose the importance of what I conceptualise as 'rhythms of refuge'. Drawing on Lefebvre, Paolo Novak (2017) and Jonny Darling and Vicky Squire (2012) respectively propose a rhythmanalysis of cross-border movements and the process of applying for asylum. Where Novak examines movements across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border through what he refers to as 'border rhythms' (2017), Darling and Squire trace the 'rhythm of asylum' with regards to 'everyday temporal rhythms of the asylum process' and the relationship between the slow and faster tempos of different stages of seeking sanctuary. In relation to my own analysis of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea*, my focus on rhythms of *refuge* (rather than the rhythms of the *refugee*) spans the journey (including in relation to the border) and asylum, but equally transcends these by demonstrating how the protagonists in the novels under study refer back and forth in ways that acknowledge their self-hoods both prior to and in conjunction with their quests for a better future.

In this chapter I thus bring into conversation two texts whose protagonists are at different spatio-temporal junctures: one, *Rijāl fī al-Shams* in which three Palestinian refugee men of different ages – 'Abu Qais, the old man, Asʿad, the young man, and Marwan, the youth' (Magrath 1979:95) – 'symboliz[ing] three generations of Palestinians' (ibid.:99) are en route, having left the refugee camps and gatherings where they had spent the last 10 years, in an attempt to be smuggled by another refugee in a water tanker across two borders in the quest to secure a better life in Kuwait, ultimately suffocating in their journey; and the other, *By the Sea*, narrated by Zanzibari asylum-seeker Saleh

Omar who has recently arrived by plane in the UK, where he seeks asylum. While set in and addressing different geopolitical contexts I posit that these texts are complementary in many respects. Where *Rijāl fī al-Shams* combines the past and present tenses through the joint perspectives of an omniscient narrator and the protagonists' dialogue, in *By the Sea* the first-person narratives' overwhelming tense is the past, and yet both notably feature flashbacks and interweave the past and the present, in conjunction with discussions of the meanings of life and death as they relate to the present and future. In line with the centralisation given in much scholarship to waiting, *Rijāl fī al-Shams* dramatically revolves around the refugee men's 'waiting' for the smuggler to open the door to the water tank (in addition to repeatedly invoking that 'in the last ten years you have done nothing but wait' in the camp – p.26) and *By the Sea* starts with Saleh Omar 'waiting' for the asylum advocate, Rachel Howard, and emphasises his navigation of pending time in the UK. However, contra the tendency for ahistorical accounts of forced migration, and the risks of rendering refugees as passively stranded in liminality, both texts carefully contextualise and historicize individual and collective experiences of displacement, with historical events acting as catalysts for newly emerging self-hoods; in turn, both novels trace the protagonists' attempts to find and reach a future beyond lives that have become unliveable, thereby emphasising the possibility of creating new times/places, even if they are not ultimately achieved.

Furthermore, I would argue that in many ways, the protagonists in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* join Salah Omar in *By the Sea* in offering a historical answer to a question posed by the immigration officer in the latter text: 'Why didn't you stay in your own country where you could grow old in peace? (p.11). In conjunction with answering the common question 'What makes people take such extreme risks?' (The New Humanitarian 2020; Josoor 2021), both sets of protagonists also challenge official and popular representations of asylum as 'a young man's game' (p.11), even if this is ultimately a 'game' that is lost by both old and young in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*. Challenging another key representational frame that *bona fide* refugees are passive and vulnerable 'womenandchildren' (Enloe 1998; as discussed in the next chapter), and filling a notable gap in research vis-à-vis men and masculinities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014b; Wojnicka and Pustułka 2019) and of ageing in relation to migration and

displacement (King et al 2017; Sampaio and Amrith 2022), both novels focus on refugee *men's* journeys, and in particular *older* men's quests for a better future. While Kanafani's '*Men in the Sun* is a totally male-dominated novel' (Cleary 2001:211), far from masculinity being equated with domination, Joe Cleary notes that the novel 'sustains and amplifies the correlation of masculinity and castration until the very end' (ibid.:212). In turn, Maria Olaussen notes that *By the Sea*, like other Gurnah novels, revolves around the 'complex relationships between men, family feuds and estranged relationships' and the extent to which migration and exile lead the male protagonists to 'find that definitions and ideals of masculinity change' over time and space (2009:217-218). In exploring the male refugee protagonists' narrations of diverse times in both novels, including times of loss and vulnerability, I probe some of the key temporal instances in both texts which could be interpreted as rhythms,[4] paying special attention to the question of ageing amongst the male refugee characters in the novels, and how age itself is at times rendered detrimental to survival, focusing throughout on different rhythms and time-places of living, surviving and dying.

Equally importantly, however, physical vulnerability is not the sole preserve of refugee men in these novels, as they span the weaknesses, frailties and ill-health of the refugee, smuggler and immigration official alike. I argue that both the smuggler (in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*) and the official (in *By the Sea*), are ultimately the *bawābs* (custodians) of time and space, respectively holding the power to open or close the door to the water tank and the gateway to asylum – thresholds which may offer the possibility of reaching security, but also embody insecurity, non-arrival and death –, and yet these figures are simultaneously depicted as stripped of their manhood or as infirm and feeble, in turn demonstrating that their power is limited rather than absolute. As the refugee men negotiate and navigate their encounters with these and other interlocutors in the novels, I propose that it is both narration and enunciation, but also the lack of narration inside the tank (in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*) and the mobilisation of silence (in *By the Sea*), which offer divergent possibilities for the future.

[4] By examining these as rhythms, my intention is not to present them as unified units but rather to stress their 'unity in diversity' (Lefebvre 2013:86).

Narrating Time in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*

Time in Kanafani's writings has long been considered by scholars to be a vital point of departure, with his works writing into literature the process of replacing the time of a people with a time of uprootedness precipitated by the gradual vanishing of Palestine and the subsequent diasporisation of Palestinians across various refugee camps in the Middle East and in cities and towns further afield (ie. see Magrath 1979; Said 1983a:23; El-Hussari 2009; Al-Nakib 2015). This cut off or uprooted Palestinian time, which is often referred to in Arabic as *al-zamān al-filisṭīnī al-maqṭūʿ* (Al-Beik 2021:np, see also Sanbar 2001), not only situates Palestine in the overarching historical course of postcolonial and decolonial studies as the place (despite its ever-shrinking space) to which this time is attributed, but also recentres those refugees, the product of such a time, who have long fought to reclaim their time. In essence, as noted by Elias Sanbar, '[b]y departing from space, the Palestinians, about whom the whole world agreed to say, 'they do not exist', also departed from time. Their history and their past were denied. Their aspirations and their future were forbidden... [they were] driven out of time and space' (2001:90-91). In turn, Kanafani ensures that the uprooted time (*al-zamān al-maqṭūʿ*), or the post-Nakba time, continuously permeates his writings, by tying his text (back) not only to the place, Palestine, but also to the time of the refugee, whose quest is to forge their own time as they look for historical survival. In this sense, Kanafani enters history through the individual protagonists in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*.

With specific reference to *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, time and temporalities have often been at the heart of analyses, ranging from being viewed as a key thematic – for instance, Magrath and others view the story as 'a search of a better life … bright with promises for a secure future' (1979:95) – or part of formal literary techniques employed in the text, including through the novella's 'temporal shift[s]' and 'almost imperceptible' textual movements 'from present to past' (Al-Nakib 2015:99) and the centrality of repetition (Al-Nakib 2015:98; Audebert 1984:80, 81, 93), flashbacks (ie. Magrath 1979:107; Audebert 1984:81) and foreshadowing (ie. Magrath 1979:98). In addition to arguing that time in the novella 'is durational rather than chronological' (Al-Nakib 2015:100), Mai Al-Nakib

goes as far as to argue that Kanafani offers a 'de-chronologisation' of time as a means of 'construct[ing] an untimely experiment for future actualisations' (ibid.:101).

Here it is worth briefly revisiting Kanafani's own understanding of time and how it unfolds in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*. While this novel stresses 'the necessity of rediscovering the historical action' (Kanafani 1966:7, 1963:10) within its remit, in order to counter the state of paralysis that punctuated Palestinian life since 1948, it equally places the individual action on a par with a historical one (Harlow 1985). This is not to say that Kanafani directly promoted a clash between the historical and the individual experiences of time; instead, he viewed them as inseparable (El-Hussari 2009). In doing so, Kanafani problematized the meaning of being 'an individual refugee' whose own (historical) refugeedom is that of a collective. This intersection between the individual time (as it progresses or stagnates in newly-discovered spaces), on the one hand, and the historical (attributed to and apropos the original place), on the other, is what, according to Kanafani with regards to another novella, *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum* (*All That's Left to You*, 1966[5]), facilitated an '*iltiḥām'* (a 'coalescence') between time and space, 'where it is no longer the case that there is a discernible difference between distant places and disparate times' (p.11). Placing time within writing, as Edward Said reiterates, makes 'the novel […] the most time-bound and circumstantial' (2000:42) of all genres, arguing that '[t]ime – or rather temporality […] – is the novel's life' (ibid.:44). In the case of Kanafani, his focus on the Palestinian Nakba and its aftermath provides the temporal crux for his writing, with his works often conversing and connecting chronologically and spatially (especially his novellas *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum* – i.e. see Magrath 1979).

This common narrative, not in terms of sameness but more as a continuum, as Barbara Riley and Karen Harlow argue in connection to Kanafani's writing, would eventually lead to 'historical necessities los[ing] their implacableness as faits accomplis and becom[ing] rich with possibility'

[5] While here I focus on time in relation to *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (1963), this re-emerges in a more focused and vocal manner as a fully-fledged character, 'Time,' which is partly and rhythmically conveyed in 'the clock' in Kanafani's second novella *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum* (1966), which famously includes the line '(The Clock) ticks, ticks, ticks, there is nothing but bitter waiting which I know will never end' (Kanafani 1973:198). On the entanglement of space and time in Kanafani's *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum*, see El-Hussari (2009).

(cited in Kanafani 2000:15). In *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* this possibility-engendering opportunity can be found in the three Palestinian men's struggles in search of better *times* (and places) outside their refugee camps and hosting places. While one might say that such a possibility is exhausted in the men's eventual tragic death, portraying their times as worthy of attention in an overarching Palestinian Time is in itself a way of forging a place for the individual within the historical.

Before I tackle specific times in containment within the tank, it is important to note that the handling of time in the first three sections of the novella – each section named and dedicated in turn to each of the three refugees, Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan – is both complex and striking, with the novella itself opening with a first line replete with rhythms:

> اراح أبو قيس صدره فوق التراب النديّ، فبدأت الأرض تخفق من تحته: ضربات قلب متعب تطوف في ذرات الرمل مرتجّة ثم تعبر الى خلاياه...
> (p.13)

> Abu Qais rested on the damp ground, and the earth began to throb under him with tired heartbeats, which trembled through the grains of sand and penetrated the cells of his body…
> (p.21)

The exhausted and trembling intersecting rhythms of the lost land, the body and the desert, which Abu Qais recalls in the very first page of *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* lead the reader into a narrative which is home to in-woven flashbacks, close attention to temporalities such as education, pregnancy and birth, and multiple invocations of numbers and counting, in conjunction with the feeling of blockage and disruption of time that lead the three refugee men to strike 'The Deal' (the title of the fourth section) with smuggler Abul Khaizuran, before they set off on their journey together with the aim of crossing two main border checkpoints – Safwan in Iraq and on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border –, in the hope of reaching Kuwait. I posit that it is precisely because of the emphasis and close attention to narrating temporality and existence in the first sections of the narrative, that the later absence of narration of what happens in the tank takes on particular salience.

Time in Containment

As part of the broader references to counting and numbers that pervade the novella, as the men negotiate with the prospective smuggler, the latter (Abul Khaizuran) explains that '[t]his isn't the first time' (p.49) that he facilitates such a journey, and that on the basis of his past experience:

> ستنزلون إلى الخزان قبل نقطة الحدود في صفوان بخمسين متراً، سأقف على الحدود أقل من خمس دقائق، بعد الحدود بخمسين متراً ستصعدون إلى فوق.. وفي المطلاع على حدود الكويت، ستكرر المسرحية لخمس دقائق أخرى، ثم هوب! ستجدون أنفسكم في الكويت!
> (p.56)

> You'll get into the tank five minutes from the frontier, and fifty meters beyond it you'll climb out. We'll repeat the performance for another five minutes at Mutlaa on the Kuwait border, and then suddenly you'll find yourselves in Kuwait!
> (p.49)

As the journey progresses and they approach the first border crossing, the lorry stops, Abul Khaizuran opens the cover and explains:

> الحر خانق ومخيف هنا وسوف تعرقون كأنكم في المقلى.. ولكن.. لخمس دقائق أو سبع، وسوف أقود بأقصى ما أستطيع من السرعة..
> (p.68)

> The heat's stifling, terrifying and you'll sweat as though you were in an oven. But it's only for five or seven minutes, as I'll drive as fast as I can.
> (p.57)

With the group reluctantly preparing to enter the 'hell' that is the water tanker (p.57) to cross the Safwan border control, Abul Khaizuran's declaration of this temporal range is an example of leaving time itself open for interpretation: simultaneously specific and yet not exact, the difference between five and seven minutes is far from inconsequential, as becomes clear as the plot develops.

Moving on from the complex narration of temporalities in the opening sections, and Abul Khaizuran's invocations as he desperately seeks to pass the first border crossing and reach a safe time-space to open the tank to release the men – '*Yā ilāhī al-ʿalī […] a-yumkin an takūn hunā hāzihi*

al-marra. Hāzihi al-marra faqaṭ' (p.74), 'O almighty God […] can you possibly be here *this time*? *Just this time*?' (p.60, emphasis added) – Kanafani's decision not to assign a narrative to Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan's time while they are inside the tank emphatically concurs with the highly anticipated progression that the novel is moving towards: from a near death experience in the first instance of being in the tank, to the actual death in the second and final instance. Guided by Paul Ricoeur's notion of 'narrative as the guardian of time' (cited in West-Pavlov 2013:9), acknowledging the relationality between 'narrative' and 'time' in both of these instances leads to the recognition that it is time itself that is being guarded by a non-existent narrative.

The absence of narrativity within the tank is partially broken in the first instance of border-crossing, after the men emerge, shaken, when Abu Qais claims he had counted under his breath for the whole six minutes that he was inside the tank, and his retrospective act of sharing his counting with the group reveals a facet of time-keeping in containment that would otherwise be overlooked:

> كنت طوال الوقت أعدُّ.. من الواحد إلى الستين: دقيقة هكذا حسبت.. عددت ست مرات.. في المرة الأخيرة عددت ببطء شديد..
> (p.76)

> I was counting the whole time. From one to sixty, a minute. That's how I reckoned. I counted six times. The last time I counted *very slowly.*
> (p.62, emphasis added)

The privilege accorded to counting – even though nobody knows for certain whether Abu Qais *actually* counted inside the tank – provides insight into what might have been taking place during the men's time inside the tank, and their disappearance from the scene (and the narrative). Furthermore, disrupting the assumption that containment is characterised by non-activity and passive waiting, in this instance 'counting' offers a course of action through which this assumed passivity is directly interrupted: by returning to speech, Abu Qais takes control temporarily, reasserting that the men's intangibility in hiding is no longer the case and that their physical and rhetorical presence has therefore resumed.

The fact that it is the eldest of the refugee men, Abu Qais, who intervenes in the fraught exchange between Abul Khaizuran and the men as per the *exact* time they had actually spent inside the tank (pp.61-62), while stressing the *slowness* therein, merits further interrogation on two intertwined levels.[6] First, in mediating, Abu Qais brings to the fore two intersecting temporal moments, one in which subjecthood is reclaimed through the recollection of *their* time in containment. This is a factor which is often relegated in group journeying (Griffiths et al. 2013). Secondly, this slowness in counting, strictly exercised between minute five and minute six, and transmitted in the Arabic version by a preposition and a noun *bi-buṭʾ* (with slowness) and translated as 'slowly,' is not only a circumstantial slowness, or one which exclusively belongs to a singular state of containment. Noting that '[i]n waiting, time is slow and thick' (Schweizer 2008:2), it is, rather, when the protagonists' ever-present historical and existential conditions are taken into consideration, the long-standing and ever-expanding slowness which punctuates their lives. Echoing Said's *Out of Place* (1999) these refugee men are persistently out of time, in other words, forced out of a universal time which is supposed to mark their presence (also see Sanbar 2001). The Palestinian malaise has persisted throughout different times post the 1948 Nakba, making it more poignant whenever time passes, leaving behind its refugees (see Jabra 1979). As Shahram Khosravi contends, '[e]xilic life is the constant presence of the absent' (2010:74) or more pertinently the presence that is forcibly absented from time and as such rendered out of it.

Abu Qais's recounting of his time-keeping endeavours within the tank, as he is 'swallowed up in his own thoughts' whilst travelling towards the second border crossing and he dreams of a better future to escape the 'misery and despair' of the past (p.63), returns us to the same protagonist's memories as narrated in the first section of the novella. In surveying instances of remembering in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, the critic Sāmī Suwaydān dwells on Abu Qais's earliest memories, positing that these memories in particular constitute a singular temporality insofar as they are initiated by and constantly return to the (lost) '*al-arḍ*' (homeland) (1986:76). What Abu Qais *still* remembers, ten years after

[6] Another reading might point to the irony embedded in the slowness of his counting: as time passes in the intense heat, Abu Qais is aware that, in his desperation, he is likely to count too quickly, and thus he asserts that he had counted very slowly precisely to convey that he had been trying to count accurately.

forcibly leaving Palestine, is his fallen village, followed by the death of his two-month-old daughter, Hosna, three months after their departure as a family (p.25). These dates (1948 and 1958) and numbers (two and three), according to Suwaydān, embody an ' *inqiṭāʿ* ' (caesura) (1986:76) whose aftereffects are in charge of the very meaning of time, resulting in '*al-lā-zamān'* (the non-time) (ibid.:98), a mirror image of '*al-lā-makān*' (the non-place) (ibid.) these characters now occupy.[7] It is not a coincidence that Abu Qais's age is never definitely revealed: instead he is only referred to as 'an old man' (p.27) *contra* the specific ages of Assad (22 years) and Marwan (16 years) (p.59). In this sense, Abu Qais's old age can be viewed as a metonymy for a time which is persistently departing him not merely physiologically but also in terms of ability (Suwaydān 1986:101). Ageing, in this context, seems to be a 'temporal void' (West-Pavlov 2013:164), a transition into *out of time* and total stasis.

While Kanafani does not condemn Abu Qais's ageing vocally, he nonetheless uses the word '*ʿajūz*' (old and frail) (p.27) to describe him, connoting a vulnerable state of being dwindling in the face of time. Further, identifying synergies between Abu Qais (old age) and Abul Khaizuran's impotence (p.53), also referred to in Arabic as *ʿajz*, is relevant to this discussion especially apropos temporalities which play out physically and, in so doing, function as a constant reminder of his physical frailties. Stripped of his 'manhood' (ibid.), due to an urgent medical procedure following serious injuries sustained whilst militarily involved in the resistance movement in 1948, Abul Khaizuran, and the ageing Abu Qais, carry 'the burden of physical temporality' (West-Pavlov 2013:111) in different forms and manifestations. Compromising part of Abul Khaizuran's body to rescue the rest of his body and keep him alive in the process has essentially meant that his national time, with reference to both Palestine and his past involvement in the resistance movement, is tinged with what Russell West-Pavlov refers to as '[a] temporality of lack' (ibid.) which is founded upon 'a narrative of time as lack-waiting-for-fulfilment' (ibid.:110).

[7] I would also add the two moments of border-crossing as themselves embodying an *inqiṭāʿ*.

This ‘temporality of lack’ in Abul Khaizuran’s case has meant a different reconfiguration of allegiances and the future, ones which are premised on financial benefits and individual survival (Kanafani 1999:53, 64) irrespective of the cost and time. In other words, *lacking* physically has in a way given Abul Khaizuran a sense of being as an individual refugee whose time is not solely located within national frameworks or in conjunction with a community which holds a common set of aspirations, but one where one’s subjecthood, irrespective of the ensuing repercussions, still plays a role in living time.

Acknowledging the representational structures that Kanafani inferred in this novel, critics (such as Suwaydān 1986; Meryan 2016:27-28) have often isolated Abul Khaizuran’s actions as those of an anomaly or a pariah which do not fit within the overarching sensibility of what a refugee is and what their ‘ideal’ refugeeness should entail (on the latter see Malkki 1995a, 1995b; Khosravi 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). With that in mind, I would argue that reading such actions as per time problematises such binaries: despite his role as a paid driver-smuggler for the men, Abul Khaizuran’s time still corresponds to his compatriots’ on various levels, including, most importantly, on the question of survival and living-on beyond the camps, even if Abul Khaizuran himself is implicated in somewhat different interpretations of what survival is. By means of an interpretive mechanism designed to reconnect the past and the future, in Abul Khaizuran’s individual survival, Kanafani draws a connection between the smuggler and the refugee protagonists in order, as Dania Meryan argues with regards to Kanafani’s novella *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum*, to open up new ‘possibilities for the politicised subject to move from death zones into becoming as characters’ (Meryan 2016:24; also see Kanafani 2000:15, *op cit*).

In essence, as the characters embark on their journey in search of better times, they also become part of a continuum of refugeeness whereby surviving, like dying, risks becoming a mere statistic. Distinguishing himself from other smugglers in order to convince the group that he is at their service and that their survival is paramount to him, Abul Khaizuran simultaneously highlights the tendency

of other smugglers to demand upfront payments while they eventually 'melt away like a lump of salt' (p.50), leaving the smuggled 'in the middle of the road', in turn invoking percentages:

> عشرة بالمئة على الأكثر.. ثم اذهب واسألهم وسيقولون لك أنهم أكملوا الطريق بلا مهرب وبلا دليل، وان حظهم قد ساعدهم على النجاة.
> (p.58)

> Ten percent at the most [arrive with other smugglers]. Go and ask them [those who attempted the journey], and they will tell you that they finished the journey without a smuggler or a guide, and that their luck helped them to survive.
> (p.50)

Whilst this might be a strategy to coax the group into committing to the journey with him, Abul Khaizuran's reference to the low likelihood of surviving the crossing (ten percent at most) with other (we are led to assume, less scrupulous) smugglers should at least alert the group to the precariousness of such a trip, in particular given that Assad had himself experienced a previous failed attempt at reaching Kuwait, when he nearly died. Clearly these references have failed to deter the group but have instead led them to accept Abul Khaizuran's plan: for the group to spend time inside the tank on two occasions during the journey. In collapsing the group's past and future experiences into one setting, Abul Khaizuran envisages (but also identifies) synergies across these times, as chronologies which have hardly changed, ones whose recurrence is the recurrence of the protagonists' intersecting destinies.

The Rhythms of Life and Death in Displacement

The figure of the refugee as 'neither completely dead as subject, nor completely alive' (Agier 2005:65) is one of the most commonly re-produced images in refugee literature. This has long been predicated on a binary assumption which conveys an inbetweenness or a liminality which reflects that of a figure on their way to dissolution, *contra* the citizen who is supposedly at home and both in place and time (see Ramsay 2020:393). However, as noted earlier, 'the emergent trope of displacement as a condition of liminality' (ibid.) has been extensively critiqued, inter alia because when this liminality is exclusively ascribed to the refugee subject, as proposed by Michel Agier, it

runs the risk of reconstituting a new state of exception (see Agamben 2005) which is neither transformative nor futural in nature (ie see Malkki 1995a; Ramsay 2017, 2020; Mason 2021).

While Kanafani arguably invokes diverse archetypes of liminality – the novella is saturated with references to paradise and hell (ie. pp.52, 57, 65), and the very setting of the journey narrative has been described by Nadia Yaqub as 'caught in a liminal space… on the road'[8] (2012:306) and analysed in relation to the 'anti-space' of the road, the desert and the border (Cleary 2001:221) – in this section I focus on the novella's invocations of life and death through a temporal lens. In so doing, I propose that far from the death of the protagonists in the tank proving the fatalism of Kanafani's account (.ie. see Magrath 1979), the state of being 'between life and death' in fact propels the protagonists both into movement and into their quest for a better future. Indeed, scholars such as the historian Ilan Pappé have read 'the futile death of the three men as part of Kanafani's universal cry *against* fatalism' (1985:170, emphasis added).

Pushing against the assumption that the men's deaths were inevitable, Audebert notes that by ending the novella with Abul Khaizuran repeatedly and insistently asking the same rhetorical question in three iterations (one in the third person, and two in the second person) in the aftermath of the men's death: 'Why didn't *they* knock on the sides of the tank' (p.74, emphasis added), 'Kanafani suggests to the reader that the destiny of his main characters was not a foregone conclusion and that they might have come out alive' (Audebert 1984:77).[9] On the one hand, the certainty of the protagonists' death emerges through the second iteration which addresses the corpses and thus brings death closer to the surviving smuggler: 'Why didn't *you* knock on the sides of the tank?' (ibid., emphasis added). On the other hand, while this death is the death whose time will never be exactly known, it also

[8] While beyond the scope of this chapter, building on Bakhtin, Cleary (2001:220) identifies both the road and the border as 'two primary chronotopes' in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*. Yaqub surveys 'a number of reasons for the centrality of road narratives in Palestinian literature and film' (2012:306).

[9] Kanafani's own reference to choice, as opposed to inevitability, is apposite here: as noted by Macgrath, the author suggests in his play *Al-Bāb (The Door)* that the three men might have *chosen* death when he writes 'Death, Death, it is the only true *choice* left for us all... it is the only place left for the single true final freedom' (cited by Magrath, 1979:102-103, emphasis added). I return to 'the gate' and those who guard the gate (the *bawāb*) below.

remains unknown if the men did or did not actually knock, and, indeed, whether their knocks were unheard and unanswered.[10]

In effect, far from rendering these protagonists as apolitical and lacking in subjecthood or agency – as liminal readings may suggest –, the narrative demonstrates the men's clear determination to seek a better future through the choices that they make and the actions that they take (also see Audebert 1984). In many regards, this aligns with Ramsay's powerful critique of liminality in displacement (*op cit*), in which she stresses (building on her own research with refugees and non-refugees) the need to differentiate between refugees' liminal *experiences* and '*the theoretical conflation* of such displacement with liminality' (2020:394, emphasis added). In line with Ramsay's critique, Kanafani's narrative subtly explores (to expand the argument made by Halleh Ghorashi et al. vis-a-vis the asylum-system in Europe) 'the possibilities for refugees' agency *within the impossible structures*' of displacement (2018:374, emphasis added).

In this vein, what is of interest to me here is the centralisation both of choice and agency in the novella, and more specifically of diverse and competing priorities and conceptualisations of what entails a 'better future,' including with regards to how the protagonists engage with the relationship between, and the rhythms of, life and death. Abu Qais's insistence on moving out of what he sees as stagnant time and embarking on a treacherous crossing despite his initial reticence and fears of the risks involved – 'It's a long way. And I'm an old man. I can't walk as you [his friend Saad] did. I might die' he acknowledges (p.27) –, captures a clear and distinctive connection between a *motionless* death happening in the camp and one which may happen *in motion* in search of better conditions:

> تموت؟ هيه! من قال أن ذلك ليس أفضل من حياتك الآن؟ منذ عشر سنوات وأنت تأمل أن تعود إلى شجرات الزيتون العشر التي امتلكتها مرة في قريتك... قريتك! هيه!
> (p.22)

[10] This question of whether the men and their desires were *heard* is echoed by Najat Rahman, who posits that Kanafani's novel poses the broader question: 'When the men speak, are they heard' (2015:84).

> Die! Who says that isn't preferable to your life at the moment [*al-ān*]? For ten years you have been hoping to return to the ten olive trees that you once owned in your village. Your village! Ha!
>
> (p.27)

What the above monologic statement retains – in response to and against waiting in the refugee camp (p.26) – is a hierarchical scale of living: that in this specific moment and these specific conditions, death is preferable to a life which resembles death. Unlike the English translation, 'at the moment', which has an air of ambiguity between 'in its current ongoing state' and 'at this particular passing instant,' the Arabic, temporally, denotes a very specific instant and the exact current state: *al-ān* (p.22) being a combination of the definite article *al-*, with *ān*, which is moment or instant. I would argue that in this sequence, Abu Qais drags the past (ten years), what the past constituted (the ten olive trees he used to own in Palestine) and the present (*this specific* life that he is living *now* outside Palestine) together, into the possibilities of a new future.

It is for these reasons that Abu Qais ultimately considers that the risks of the journey are worth taking, to move beyond being a time-*keeper* counting the years as they pass in the camp, to being a time-*seeker*. In effect, as noted above, placing *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *By the Sea* into conversation with one another, in his interjection, Abu Qais (the oldest of Kanafani's protagonists) offers a historical response to the question posed by the immigration officer Kevin Edelman in *By the Sea*: 'Why didn't you stay in your own country where you could grow old in peace? (Gurnah 2002:11).

Hierarchies of living and dying apropos various times, past and present, are set forth from the beginning of the text, with the first chapter (dedicated to Abu Qais) clearly setting the scene for competing chronological and existential trajectories vis-a-vis survival. Abu Qais's monologic statement above reveals a kind of knowing (contra Gurnah's Edelman) which, whilst difficult to enunciate forthrightly, is propelling Abu Qais to a better future than the one to which he believes he is destined if he remains in the camp. Grounded in intersecting times, this knowledge, ensuing from initial reservations in accepting his friend Saad's proposition to follow in the latter's footsteps by

risking the dangerous journey to Kuwait, is poignantly punctuated in the opening chapter by the rocking of Abu Qais's and Um Qais's child (p.27), inserting a rhythmic pattern that clearly equals the redundance of their overall living. Synchronously, as the persistent rhythm of the rocking of the child, permeating the conversation between Saad, Abu Qais and Umm Qais, resumes, Abu Qais's dilemma seems to move closer to a decision. Yet, the rocking can also be perceived as a rhythm which remains independent of the setting, as an overall oscillation between past and present geographies and temporalities. The Arabic *hadhada* (to rock), in addition to conveying two equal halves morphologically (*had)* and *(had)* and portraying two entities co-existing spatially and temporally, also serves as an onomatopoeic and monotonous impulse whose ultimate effect is to make the child sleep. That the verb itself is mentioned twice in the novel makes it more visible as a rhythm by allocating a time which precedes the conversation itself: 'and began to rock her baby again' (p.26) and '[h]is wife was still rocking the baby' (p.27). On the basis of the two adverbials 'again,' or 'anew,' (*min jadīd*) and 'still' (*mā zāla*) the reader is made to think that this rhythm, likely in slightly varied speed and vigour, extends beyond that particular occasion. As this is a child who will ultimately grow up without his father, 'rocking' undoubtedly conflates two intergenerational temporalities: the imminent sleeping of the child (temporary) and the father's projected death (permanent). As LeFevbre notes in *Rhythmanalysis* (2013:96-101), rhythms are the specifics of time: in addition to being indissociable from one another, they are also corroborated by what may otherwise seem transient or at best superfluous in time. In this case, the 'rocking' which naturally happens to settle or make a baby fall asleep, herein enacted in an enclosed setting, in a divided room in a place which does not belong to them (p.26), is also a physical reminder of a pendulum-like movement, wherein time is dragged from one side to another, closely tied to the ticking of a watch, measuring the three protagonists' time (including Abu Qais's) inside a water tank at the other end of the novel.

Counterposing the 'rocking', and by way of interrupting the stagnancy of waiting which has pervaded Abu Qais's life since the 1948 exodus, Kanafani invokes the act of 'shaking' (p.26) as an interventionist framework exercised by Saad on Abu Qais: '[y]ou stayed squatting till Saad came

and started to shake you as milk is churned to make butter.' In the Arabic, the verb 'to shake' (*hazza*) is repeated twice, first in the active and then in the passive voice '*yahuzzuka mithlamā yuhazzu al halīb liyaṣīra zabadan*' (p.21), literally 'to *shake* you as milk is *shaken* to become butter,' echoing the emphatic sense inherent in the Arabic action. While this 'shaking' may be seen as an attempt at reclaiming what Faiṣal Darrāj calls '*al-zamān al-sawī*' (the normal time) in the Palestinian narrative (2002:58), to redress 'the hurt of history' (Jameson cited in Cleary 2001:8), it ushers in its own times (also see Sanbar 2001). It is notable that both 'shaking' and 'rocking' happen within the parameters of the discussion between Abu Qais and Saad as it advances at that specific time but also as it is recalled in the novel. By invoking the changeability of states whence subjected to different factors, in this regard from liquid to solid, Kanafani captures the temporal interval leading to such changes, thus converging 'waiting' and 'movement'. In so doing, I would propose that he is reminding the reader that time is not just the time inherent in both 'waiting' and 'movement,' but between them as well. As is the case in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, and in line with West-Pavlov's conceptualisation of time, '[time] demonstrates progressively the material and political entanglements in which temporalities have always been embroiled' (2013:11). These 'material and political entanglements' are clearly discernible in the manner in which the 'rocking' and 'shaking' in the camp and within one form of containment, is carried over through the desert as the three protagonists are driven by Abul Khaizuran, 'shaking' in the truck, but most pertinently inside its empty water tank: the word recurs in both the English and the Arabic versions, with three references to the lorry 'shaking' when the men are first locked into the tanker in the translated version (p.59); and the Arabic including two references to the verbal noun *hazīz* and one to the verb, *hazza* (pp.71, 72). The rocking and shaking in the first chapter, is thus echoed in 'On the Road,' with the tank emerging as a ghastly reiteration of the cradle.

Despite Kanafani's constant obfuscation of the past and the now-moment and his predisposition to metaphoricity in the first three chapters of the book, he articulates easily discernible temporal synergies between some of the protagonists under study. In keeping with the above is Abu Qais and Abul Khaizuran's desire for death at different junctures in their lives, as both a counter-narrative and

a new and untrodden time, in lieu of persisting to live in stasis in a refugee camp or bereft of manhood respectively (Darrāj 2002). Whilst the quest for dying to counter these particular times may have taken different routes and manifestations in these two individuals' lives (despite it being initially pondered as a transient wish which was not meant to go beyond the realm of fantasy), it nevertheless culminates in Abu Qais's suffocation inside Abul Khaizuran's truck, making one a victim and the second a witness, if not the very cause of this death (Suwaydān 1986:108-9).

To Kanafani, the Palestinian death is not a mere or inevitable outcome in a long and protracted struggle. Nor is it a senseless death, as maintained by ʿĀshūr (1977) and critiqued by scholars such as Suwaydān (1986). Instead, I would argue that it is a juncture in time preserved in writing, in which the men's presence, even in death, is inscribed in anticipation of another time (see Darrāj 2002; Sanbar 2001; Sa'di 2002). Far from their individual deaths announcing the death of a community, the politicised stateless subject, the refugee, the 'whatever being', as Giorgio Agamben suggests (1993:107), unearths the 'coming community,' and in so doing gives the refugee's presence – and agency – more salience.

In trying to locate the cause of the three protagonists' death, Suwaydān perceptively posits that this death could be attributable to '*iltiḥām binyawī makānī-zamānī*' (a structural spatial-temporal coalescence) (1986:72) marking their lives, concluded inside the water-tank (during their second attempt) and for a specific time (approximately twenty minutes). In this reading, Suwaydān privileges refugeeness as a motif through which place and time are always in relation. This is not to say that this 'coalescence' is constantly perceptible or always in action but rather to stress the fact that the space-time nexus is far from being only phasal or ahistorical (ibid.). It is similarly important to consider the protagonists' suffocation inside the water-tank as emblematic of a time being relived, recalibrated and/or readopted in various shapes and modes as time moves. In the context of *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* this event, which is far from a mere accident, might in all likelihood be based on what had in fact happened to Palestinians (and other refugees) trying to leave the camps which were officially designated as their temporary homes (ibid.; see also Sa'di 2002).

Here I revisit a detail that may, at first, seem a mere technicality. Suwaydān, who belongs to a small minority insofar as critical insights on this particular event are concerned, argues that this death could have been easily averted had the protagonists' questioned the detrimental effect of Abul Khaizuran 'clos[ing] the cover and turn[ing] the curved metal handle twice' (p.66), which prevented access to circulating air, instead of being fixated on the time they were supposed to spend inside (Suwaydān 1986:112). (Notably, while Kilpatrick resorts to the term 'cover', the original Arabic text uses the term '*bāb'* (door, p.82)[11], thereby reinscribing Abul Khaizuran as the '*bawāb':* the guardian of the door, ie. the gatekeeper, an identity and thematic that I return to below in relation to *By the Sea*). While failing to challenge the locking of the lid might appear an oversight on the protagonists' part, it nonetheless constitutes a sub-narrative of excluded speech that may directly correspond to (but also supplement) the three refugees' silence inside the tank, making it suggestive of times beyond itself. In this context, not shifting focus at the right time in a sense rendered their time decremental in the same way that it made their life lifeless. This is not to say that their lives did not matter to them, since the very aim of this treacherous journey was for them to continue living beyond their respective spaces and to send remittances to their families in the camps. Furthermore, in leaving a gap in this narrative, by adjourning what could have resulted in their survival (first, resisting the shutting and locking of the cover and to a lesser extent through banging on the sides of the tank), Kanafani reifies this exact time, transmuting it into an embodied experience of their actual death. Besides, what should be borne in mind is that this human loss happened ten years after the 1948 Nakba and yet, as Suwaydān contends (1986:112), Kanafani still 'objects to the passing of these (ten) years', grappling with their time to engage history as an extension (not just the past) of what is to come, while concurrently forgetting or side-lining other details which are pertinent to the narrative.

[11] The full Arabic quotation is:

> هيا بنا.. لقد تعلمتم الصنعة جيداً.. كم الساعة الآن؟ انها الحادية عشرة والنصف.. احسبوا.. سبع دقائق على الأكثر وأفتح لكم الباب.. تذكروا ذلك جيداً.. الحادية عشرة والنصف..

Injecting memory with sporadic spells of forgetfulness, through interruptions, exclusions and/or 'pre-meditated' forgetting altogether, allowing details to be sieved through with an eye toward an eventual recording or erasure based on specific hierarchies (identified by the author) as per where they fit in the overall narrative of Palestine, also characterises the work of another prominent Palestinian author: the poet Mahmud Darwish (Muhawi 2013), whose political formation intersects with that of Kanafani, even when their choice of literary genre and their context differed. Like *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, which has been identified as 'emblematic of the question of Palestine' (Makdisi 1995:103), Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness* (*Dhākira lil Nisyān*) (1995) has also been described as a quintessentially 'Palestinian text' (Muhawi 2013:x).[12] Loosely considered a memoir conceived of during the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982 (when the Palestinian and Lebanese populations were living in containment), *Memory for Forgetfulness* subliminally invokes the month of August, as is the case in Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* but also employs the siege of Beirut as an entry point to memory and history. In addition to both being set in the month of August, the month chosen by Kanafani and that marking the end of the siege of Beirut in Darwish's case, leaving a temporal gap between the actual time and the time of writing and publishing is also a striking commonality in these two texts. For instance, Kanafani's narrative, which was set in 1958, appeared in 1962. Similarly, what had taken place in 1982 was completed in 1986 in Darwish's book. The four-year hiatus in both works [(1958-1962) and (1982-1986)], between the actual action or the setting and the physical appearance of the written, may be interpreted, I would argue, as carving time out of a redundant time, what in essence represents an immutable time-cycle where stasis and containment are the only constants.

While binaries (memory-forgetfulness, presence-absence, life-death) have long been identified as key motifs running through his work, Darwish himself considered that paying attention to where dominance is located in these opposites is highly important to the question of representation and positionality in writing (see Wāzin 2006). Importantly, interruption is one strategy that is often

[12] Darwish's work has also been explored in relation to liminality, including by Hamamra and Abu Samra who emphasise 'the liminal states of sleep and insomnia in his poems and prose' (2022:3).

applied by authors to overcome the sense of the alleged completeness in history. Hence, drawing on her reading of Derrida, Hodges argues that 'interruption, as both textual strategy and as feature of temporalisation permits a rethinking of an asymmetry between past and future which allows the determinations of time in the tense structure of the language of analysis to be used at the same time as putting the underlying conception of time into question' (2007:22). Like Kanafani, Darwish was cognizant of the pitfalls of complete narratives and, in leaving gaps through 'fragmentation, deferrals, and silences' (Akaltun Akan 2020:7), he ultimately memorialized that which is typically considered less important, or what he powerfully refers to as 'the history of the bottom, the history of the moss' (Darwish 2013:118).

When Kanafani made his men 'forget' to connect the first time spent inside the tank with the second, prompting them not to question some crucial technicalities in the process (the cover being tightly locked shut, as stated above), his aim was not *necessarily* to push for their death (a conclusion also reached by scholars including Magrath (1979) and Audebert (1984)). Rather, *Rijāl fī al-Shams* seeks to stress how time has pushed these people outside the boundaries not only of space (Palestine) but also of time and, while the water tank is a means inside which their death was announced, other deaths are pronounced whenever time passes. Temporalities are also constitutive of their own moments. These 'moments,' when initiated by and attributed to writing on Palestine, as Sinan Antoon contends, inevitably become 'a phase in the larger historical context' (2013:xii). Created by the individual themselves, it is in this phase, which can also be history itself, where national identity[13] plays a central role in re-attaching the writing to what Suwaydān refers to as '*al-arḍ al-aṣīla'* (the original homeland) (1986:87) wherein '*al-zamān al-aṣīl'* (the original time) (ibid.) is also in play.[14]

Inside the Tank, Outside Time: In Search of a Normal Death

[13] Nonetheless, Kanafani's men arguably risk death and ultimately die in pursuit of their *own* cause rather than the *national* cause (see Magrath 1979; Cleary 2001).
[14] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop a comparative analysis of the narrative treatment of time in the broader corpus of 'Palestinian literature' (for selected comparative readings, see Saloul 2012; Singh 2019).

The predictability of the men's deaths invites us to see how this predictable (yet not *inevitable*) occurrence is formed and under which structural conditions, and in what ways death is related to time and vice versa. A key starting point is to return to the time suggested by Abul Khaizuran to draw attention to the ever-expanding time outside (the tank) which in effect precipitously shrinks inside, eventually resulting in the protagonists' suffocation:

> هيا بنا.. لقد تعلمتم الصنعة جيداً.. كم الساعة الآن؟ انها الحادية عشرة والنصف.. احسبوا.. سبع دقائق على الأكثر وأفتح لكم الباب.. تذكروا ذلك جيداً.. الحادية عشرة والنصف..
> (p.82)

> Come on, you've learned the art well. What time is it now? Half past eleven. Think, in seven minutes at the outside [*sic*] I'll open the cover for you. Remember that, half past eleven.
>
> (p.66)

Whilst the verbs 'think' and 'remember' (as used in the English translation) may have been used imperatively to reassure the increasingly anxious protagonists as they are about to enter the tank for the second time, they undoubtedly make both times inside the tank temporally intertwined, reiterating, not necessarily in the same form and tense, temporally charged verbs of equivalence. As he tries to approximate the time spent inside the tank in the first instance, in the original Abu Qais refers to the verbs '*ḥasaba*' and '*ʿadda*' (p.76) translated by Hilary Kilpatrick as 'reckon' and 'count' respectively (p.62). Similarly, in the second and final attempt cited above, as he briefs the protagonists on the specifics of the last period of hiding, Abul Khaizuran resorts to '*ḥasaba*' and '*tadhakkara*' (p.82) which in turn are rendered 'think' and 'remember' in Kilpatrick's translation. More so than Kilpatrick's 'think', however, which is arguably out of synch with the progression of time announced by Abul Khaizuran, I would argue that a more appropriate translation of the term '*ḥasaba*' here should be the imperative 'count', following the root of the Arabic verb as it pertains to settling accounts and calculating, as opposed to thinking (ie. as per *Yawm al-Ḥisāb,* The Day of Reckoning, in the Qur'an – 38:53; 78:27). Inter alia, this return to counting, and the corresponding intertwining of the first and second instances, seems to grant the reader an entry point to a rhythmic

persistence going back to the time of Palestine which, since 1948, has been dissipating while time outside, in exile, is ever-expanding.

The ten years that all the characters repeatedly refer to, compounded further by the time spent in search of new possibilities, simultaneously signify the time that keeps growing without its people, and affirm a sense of chrono-cide wherein specific time was taken away from them (see Hanafi 2020). Since chrono-cide is the temporal extension of spacio-cide (ibid.; also see Burris 2019; Tawil-Souri 2019), reclaiming time in one way or another becomes the equivalent of a survival kit. In this respect, on the question of time and timing, what a verb means and connotes is both relationally and dialectically relevant to the ways in which time itself is envisaged and processed by these people. By opting for 'reckon' instead of a verb such as 'calculate' or 'estimate', the translator, Kilpatrick, inverts the register of the original: *from* a direct and more precise interjection aimed at condensing time, *to* a looser and somewhat open-ended assessment of a generic time. While such a rendering may be more pertinent and more in line with the overarching experience of timing throughout the novel, in containment, however, time recoils to its specific units for the purpose of enduring it so that a possible end is in sight (see Singh 2019). In the same vein, in the second instance, translating the same verb as 'think' purges it of its temporal underlayer, reducing it to a mere thought or consideration which is disconnected from the reality of time. Furthermore, in 'think' the Arabic '*ḥasaba*' no longer gestures towards the previous event. Rather, it is posited as an action not born of another action.

The 'seven minutes at the outside' (p.66) becomes circa twenty-one minutes as Abul Khaizuran is prevented from returning to the tank in a timely manner by the border officials:

> حين ترك القرص لمح عقارب الساعة الملتفة على زنده: كانت تشير إلى الثانية عشرة إلَّا تسع دقائق. وكان زجاجها المدوَّر قد تشقق شقوقاً مضلعة صغير. الفوهة المفتوحة بقيت تخفق بالفراغ لحظة، كان وجه أبي الخيزران مشدوداً إليها متشنجاً وشفته السفلى ترتجف باللهاث والرعب...
> (pp.89-90)

> As he let go of the disk he caught sight of the heads [sic.] of the watch on his wrist. They pointed to nine minutes to twelve. The round glass had cracked into little pieces. The uncovered opening yawned empty for a moment. Abul Khaizuran's face, drawn to it,

twitched compulsively, his lower lip trembling as he panted for breath, overcome with terror.

(pp.70-1)

Deciding to use the idiomatically informal 'at the outside' in the English translation instead of the literal translation of the original as 'at the most' (*ʿalā al-akthar*, p.82) may ostensibly juxtapose the 'inside' of the tank with the outside world, thus envisioning two spaces which may appear (in that exact moment) irreconcilable. Yet this decision is disconcerting on many levels. By relegating the temporal significance of such a proposition, it fundamentally subdues the nuances of the 'original' language, thus de-centering 'the particularity of the language of the translation' (Reynolds 2020:6). This decision may have been premised on injecting a degree of casualness to what is otherwise a sombre setting and could also perhaps be viewed as responding to the spatial issue of the inside/outside; in so doing, perhaps this translation can be considered to be a kind of unconscious interpreter of the narrative. Nevertheless, it ultimately carves out an alternative focal point when the proposed time is actually contested:

...بينما هز أبو قيس رأسه وقال:
- سبع دقائق؟
ربت أبو الخيزران على كتف أبي قيس ونظر مباشرة في عينيه، كانا واقفين هناك معاً يتصببان عرقاً، ولكنهما لم يستطيعا الكلام.
(pp.82-83)

Abu Qais shook his head, saying: 'Seven minutes?'
'At the outside!' [sic][15]
Abul Khaizuran patted Abu Qais on the shoulder and looked straight into his eyes. They stood there together streaming with sweat, neither of them able to speak.

(p.66)

As the contestation occurs in the form of a question which concludes with 'neither [Abul Khaizuran nor Abu Qais are] able to speak,' time on the threshold of the tank stops there and then. The 'promise' which intended to cap time at 'seven minutes *at the most*' transpires to be neither sustainable nor

[15] Although there is no reference to *ʿalā al-akthar* in the second invocation of the 'seven minutes' in the original, the translator inserts 'at the outside' again in the English version, as though presenting the seven minutes as the absolute maximum; in the original, however, the reference to seven minutes is left hanging, and is uncontained.

achievable (Suwaydān 1986:91, emphasis added): it is, after all, a time which incessantly expands out there: from 'five or six minutes inside [the tank]' (p.65) as initially proposed, culminating in the total shrinkage of these people's lives in death. For the protagonists' dying to be corroborated by Abul Khaizuran's cursory sighting of 'the heads [sic] of the watch on his wrist' (p.70) as he lets go of the tank's cover is further proof of how '*al-zaman al-qātil'* (the killer time) (Suwaydān 1986:88) is not just the cause of 'the [Palestinian] phasal and historical death' (ibid.:110-111) but a direct reflection of their lived time as well.

The inclusion of the term 'heads' here by Kilpatrick appears to be a typographical error, as the English idiomatic usage would be the 'hands of the watch'. In tracing the apparent disjuncture between the translation and original in this scene, it is notably the Arabic term *ʿaqārib* (sing. *ʿaqrab)* which is used to refer to the 'hands of the watch' (p.89-90), and yet the term *ʿaqrab* in Arabic refers both to a pointer *and* a scorpion. The dual meaning of this term as it is used in the original brings an additional layer to the reading of the novel (which to the best of my knowledge has not received attention elsewhere), and in particular with reference to the inclusion of symbols of death therein. While the first of these symbolic instances has received critical attention, it has arguably also been characterised by an oversight or perhaps conflation. Scholars such as Magrath have emphasised the significance of the 'black bird' as an omen of death in the opening pages of the novella (p.14 of the original text; p.22 of the translation). While the original literally refers to a 'bird that is black' (*ṭā'ir aswad,* p.14), this is a descriptor which has been *assumed* to refer to a crow. For instance, Magrath (1979:101), asserts that 'the bird is a crow (*ghurāb*), which obviously symbolizes estrangement (*ghurba*) and death', a conclusion reached by drawing a correlation between the term *ghurba* which is included in the following line, and the crow, which is *ghurāb*. Notably, however, the description of the bird's behaviour in the novel – 'circling high up, alone and aimless' (p.22) – suggests that this is a bird of prey (rather than a crow), which would also contextually be more apt as a bird of the desert; this conclusion is further substantiated by Kanafani's own reference in the first page of the final chapter, titled 'The Grave', to *al-jawāriḥ* (p.92): birds of prey. Whether a bird of prey or a crow,

the black bird whose circling opens and closes the novel invariably is an omen of death, while Abul Khaizuran's sighting of the pointer/scorpion demonstrates that time has continued to pass, in spite of or leading to the men's death.

In the passage overseeing the protagonists' death (pp.70-1), time's ineffectuality is captured in multiple circular and semi-circular objects: disk, watch, wrist, round glass, opening, Abul Khaizuran's face, his trembling lip. The resonance of these words is clear: they entrap, albeit in different capacities and forms. When Kanafani determined that it is death that these protagonists would eventually face, he also ensured that the conditionalities of their death would be deeply entrenched in (their) politics, that is: who these people are and from where and in what time they are departing. Submitting the men to their '*mawt ṣāmit'* (silent death) (Suwaydān 1986:110) remains a *de facto* death despite not being allocated a place as such or not happening in a time which can be claimed as national sensu stricto (see Sacks 2019:357-380).

For Kanafani's men to die in an arid desert, is also dying in 'no man's land' (Cleary 2001:198), a time supposedly bereft of any signification or worth. Since this death will never be substantiated through physical evidence such as retrieved bodies, identity cards and/or personal items, it is *only* through their non-return, their permanent absence, that this death will be pondered by their next of kin. While makeshift graves mark presence in death, the deaths of Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan are marked with no graves; instead, their bodies are discarded at 'the end of the road, where the municipality's dustcarts usually stopped to dump their rubbish, so that the first driver arriving in the morning would easily have an opportunity to see them' (p.73). Soon after having disposed of them, Abul Khaizuran 'walked back to where he left the bodies, and took the money from their pockets. He also removed Marwan's watch' (p.74). Taking Marwan's watch (which as an act is conveyed faster in the Arabic due to the apparent lack of a full stop in the sentence, after the taking of the money) undeniably signals 'stealing time' – an acquisition whose value is premised on its functionality as an object. The watch (*al-sāʿa*), Quranically the Day of Judgement, and, according to Cleary, in this context 'a metaphor for the termination of Palestinian time' (2001:223), is

essentially in place to counter Abul Khaizuran's watch (only his and Marwan's watches are mentioned in the novel) and hold him accountable to *real* time (*contra* the constantly changing time he proposes). Instead, this time which is supposed to watch over the time of dying – as accounted for by the watch – is illegally extracted from these people.

As the root cause of their death is *technically* entangled in and temporally split between the past of Palestine and an imagined future in Kuwait, it is apt that this death occurs on the border between Iraq and Kuwait, 'quite literally a "no-place" since the men die in a juridical "no man's land" between states that defies representation' (Cleary 2001:13). More importantly, in this violent death lies agency which is linked to a dying that is palpably enabled by the lack of time (numerically), which itself is an indicator for the total vanishing of what Darrāj terms '*al-zamān al-sawī*': 'the normal time' (2002:58). The no-placeness which is sorely evident in the historical erasure of Palestine, as Cleary (2001) contends, is undoubtedly manifested in the out-of-timeness that has long punctuated these refugees' lives.

By virtue of dying abnormally, or out of time, or outside the remit of what may be benevolently considered normal, *Rijāl fī al-Shams* in a way advocates for a more normal death (even if such an advocation is never articulated forthrightly). What is referred to as survival in that case is also longing for normality; a dying – if possible – where refugee time is *another* time and not the *only* time (Qasmiyeh 2016). Engaging key questions which are repeated in Kanafani's novella, Darwish, in *Memory for Forgetfulness* (discussed above) queries his own 'forebodings' of what might cause his future death – 'perhaps it won't be a rocket that'll kill me in a flash… Perhaps a wall will slowly, slowly fall on me, and my suffering will be endless… or I may be forgotten in the crush of mangled flesh left behind in the rubble' (2013:24-25) – and shares his concern 'with what will happen to my corpse and where it will end up' (ibid.:25), alongside his desire for 'a calm, orderly funeral' (ibid.). Echoing both Kanafani and Darwish, this is what the Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti, evocatively calls the desire for 'a clean death' (*mīta nadhīfa*), 'paying no attention to history' (2009) as though the refugee (time) never were:

It’s also fine to die in our beds
on a clean pillow
and among our friends.
It’s fine to die, once,
our hands crossed on our chests,
empty and pale,
with no scratches, no chains, no banners,
and no petitions.
It’s fine to have a clean death,
with no holes in our shirts,
and no evidence in our ribs.
It’s fine to die
with a white pillow, not the pavement,
under our cheek,
with our hands resting in those of our
loved ones,
surrounded by desperate doctors and
nurses,
with nothing left but a graceful farewell,
paying no attention to history,
leaving this world as it is,
hoping that, someday, someone else
will change it.

لا بأسَ أن نموتَ في فِراشِنا
على مِخَدَّةٍ نظيفةٍ
وبين أصدقائِنا
لا بأسَ أن نموتَ مَرَّةً
ونَعْقدَ اليديْنِ فَوْقَ الصَّدْرِ
ليس فيهما سوى الشُّحوبِ
لا خُدوشَ فيهما ولا قُيودْ
لا رايةً
ولا عَريضَةَ احتِجاج.
لا بأسَ أن نموت مِيتةً بلا غُبارْ
وليس في قُمْصانِنا
ثُقوبْ
وليس في ضُلوعِنا
أَدِلَّة
لا بأسَ أن نموت والمخدَّةُ البيضاءُ،
لا الرصيفُ
تحتَ خَدِّنا
وكَفُّنا في كَفِّ مَن نُحِبّ،
يُحيطُنا يأسُ الطبيبِ والممرِّضات
وما لنا سوى رَشاقَةِ الوداعِ
غَيرَ عابِئين بالأيامِ
تاركين هذا الكونَ في أَحوالِهِ
لعلَّ ‘غَيْرَنا’ ...
يُغَيِّرونَها.

As I have argued elsewhere with reference to Barghouti’s own death (see Qasmiyeh 2021:130), this could be seen as survival in dying precisely by reclaiming the conditions needed for an ordinary death. Such a quest for a ‘clean death’ (to return to both Barghouti’s and Darwish’s words cited above) embodies an attempt to reclaim ‘sovereignty in death’ in direct rejection of the necropolitical apparatus which simultaneously renders certain lives disposable and subjects populations to both mortality and different forms of both social and political deaths (see Mbembe 2019:66). Such an approach could be conceptualised as another attempt at surviving in anticipation of a future whose concretization is only imaginable in (Palestinian) refugees traversing time in the same way they traverse geographies in search of a new presence for a decentered existence.

Time and Temporality in *By the Sea*

Where the death of the three protagonists in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* confirms their *non*-arrival in Kuwait, in *By the Sea*, the death of Rajab Shaaban Mahmud in Zanzibar does not mark the end of a journey but in fact enables the arrival of another person, facilitating the narrator's journey across borders to seek asylum in the UK as the bearer of both the passport and name of the deceased (as discussed in Chapter 1). Challenging the assumption that refugees' journeys are inherently arduous, with an increasing fixation on the risks of travelling in lorries (as in the cases of *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and *The Container*) or in dinghies, *By the Sea* demonstrates that it is neither displacement nor the journey per se, but diverse structural barriers, border controls and specific institutions that create risks and vulnerabilities for specific people. Challenging the 'conflation' of displacement with liminality (Ramsay 2020, *op cit*), or of journeying with risk, Saleh Omar's arrival by plane to Gatwick airport in many ways reaffirms Gurnah's own experience – 'I did not cling to the side of a ferry or wedge myself under a train to enter Britain. My brother and I arrived on a Sabena flight and were courteously interrogated by an immigration official' (2001:np) – although in *By the Sea* (and in my own experience upon applying for asylum in Heathrow airport – Qasmiyeh 2014, 2016a), the encounter with the immigration officer is imbued with different forms of epistemic violence. Nonetheless, far from being a passive wait-*er* stuck in a 'non-place' (see Augé 1996) and the 'timeless present' (Griffiths 2014:1997), or having his time and temporal rhythms 'dictated' to him (Ramsay 2020:401), in this case by the immigration officer Kevin Edelman, in this part of the chapter I argue that silence and monologues are mobilised by Saleh Omar as a mode of narrative resistance (Fabris 2012:96) in the quest for a new life.

In many regards Saleh Omar and his narrations act as a bridge between the past and the future, destabilising the assumption that it is the present that is always present for refugees (as asserted by Griffiths 2014). Indeed, it is notable that in *By the Sea*, the overwhelming tense is the past, in many ways reasserting the presence of times prior to asylum, and thereby historicising and contextualising individual experiences of seeking refuge. In the novel, the past is a tense where intersecting histories are kept alive, from the Muslim conquests in East Africa, the competing trade routes from and

through the Indian Ocean, to the colonial presence, in particular the British, not in equal measures but, to use West-Pavlov's words, as 'timed pasts' (2013:172), both informing and feeding ongoing and emerging histories. While the past is, or more accurately the pasts are, what lead the way in *By the Sea* (like in Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams*), the present only comes into sight when dialogues are enacted in Britain, allowing both of the main protagonists – Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, who respectively claimed asylum in Britain in the 1960s and 1990s – to claim their own stakes in history. Told as a dual-narrative in the first person singular, versus the prominence of the third person in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, *By the Sea* resuscitates history to such an extent that historical events themselves become catalysts for newly emerging selfhoods (see Hand 2010:74-92). Importantly, such resuscitations remind us, as Achille Mbembe asserts, that time in colonial and postcolonial histories is never subject to a singular event[16] nor is it a transparent series of temporalities, but 'an *interlocking* of presents, pasts and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering and maintaining the previous ones' (2001:16, emphasis added). As Hodges, in her reading of Derrida's conceptualisations of time, notes: there is the 'possibility of rethinking time as a many-dimensional temporality, inflected through its various points of origin, forms of articulation and modes of attestation' (2007:156), which can be traced in a multiplicity of forms, including historically, 'legally' and post-colonially.

In my analysis of *By the Sea*, I suggest that the narration of time as a 'many-dimensional temporality' acknowledges the significance of waiting and liminality (thereby resonating with a key concern in the existing literature as discussed above), but simultaneously rebuts the assertion that refugees are fixated on the present and consumed by their asylum claim alone, precisely through its insistence on multiple 'interlocking' times and granting the past, present and future an equal footing. Equally, I continue my application of a rhythmanalysis through an ongoing focus on ageing, noting that where Abu Qais acknowledges his age from the onset in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (which is to a degree measured

[16] Likewise, postcolonial scholars have highlighted that to render time in postcolonial milieus as monolithic or as unmistakably well-delineated instants which are concretised and therefore made present in one singular time (at the expense of others) risks constituting these times as disjoined and to a degree ahistorical (see, for instance, Chakrabarty 2007; Young 1990).

against his time inside and outside of Palestine), in the case of *By the Sea* it is Kevin Edelman who invokes Saleh Omar's age to undermine his right to seek asylum, with Saleh Omar in turn inverting the notion of decrepitude through his own reading of Kevin Edelman's ailing body, and the latter's role as 'the *bawab* of Europe' (p.31). In so doing, I not only examine who determines (or *polices*) the 'right' age for asylum and the manner in which age is extracted and abstracted when it becomes or is made visible, but I also re-join time to hegemony, arguing that although the *bawab* seeks a monopoly of time and place, such a position, and the 'dictation' of time to which refugees are often subjected (see Ramsay 2020), is itself not absolute, being subject to counter-narratives and resistance by refugees themselves.

Time of the sea

In contrast with *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, where the desert is an undoubted embodiment of the void and a pervading motif for the Palestinian condition of uprootedness in the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba (see Darrāj 2002) – with Salma Khadra Jayyusi arguing that the desert has a 'place as a crucial existential entity in Palestinian life… where the "desert" plays a major role in the…symbolization of man's tortuous journey through life' (1992:31) -, the sea, in *By the Sea*, ensues, but also calibrates, times which openly interlock (see Nuttall 2019:28-39). In this sense, time in/of the sea emulates what the sea does to its surroundings: through its own rhythms, it refashions them in its own image while granting itself the only static position in the narrative. By persistently returning to the sea throughout the novel, Saleh Omar's memories connect various times and settings reinforcing that individual and geographical times are intrinsically interrelated and/or in rhythmic agreement, feeding one another. In the process, this questions the often-held assumption that refugees' times are en masse conditional on 'indefinite temporariness' (Rigo 2005:15, cited in Farrier 2011).

This is not to say that this 'indefinite temporariness' does not exist at all nor that the guises and indicators of such temporariness are always easily discernible, but rather to articulate alternative readings of experiencing time. Saleh Omar's case as a political refugee seeking sanctuary in Britain is of particular importance here, as it non-emotively rebuts the 'indefiniteness' of what can be

referred to as the asylum process and beyond, instead seeking solace in the interlocked times of Zanzibar as he gradually submits – at his own pace – his own 'truths' to the immigration officer, asylum advocate Rachel Howard and compatriot and fellow refugee Latif Mahmud. Additionally, expatiating on his past times leaves Saleh Omar little time to dwell on his asylum journey, strategically – as managed by Gurnah – reverting to the past in an attempt to inject more truth in his story. Since asylum processes in Britain have traditionally undergone innumerable bureaucratic changes almost with every outgoing and incoming government, it is worth noting that what is benevolently referred to as 'indefinite leave to remain' – which has remained as a stable category for many years – is in one way or another a re-formulation of an indefiniteness/permanence through which the length of time becomes atemporal and therefore unaccounted for as soon as the refugee subject is given permission to settle.

This atemporality is echoed in the sentiments expressed in the final chapter of the novel, giving the impression of new beginnings characterised by Saleh Omar venturing out beyond his place of residence for a prearranged trip to Latif Mahmud's flat in London. Surveying Latif Mahmud's apartment, Saleh Omar remarks, 'The walls were bare, no pictures or decoration or even a clock' (p.244). In depicting Latif Mahmud's bare walls, whose life has long been established in Britain, time – as preserved and indicated in the missing clock -, appears physically absent. While such aesthetic choices (or the lack of them) could be predicated on and justified by the lack of time on Latif Mahmud's part, they, nonetheless, mark an important transition from Celia's B&B (the other setting where decoration and furniture were pondered by Saleh Omar) by the sea. What these two settings divulge is contrasting times, one imposed on Saleh Omar by the immigration authorities as his asylum claim is being considered and, following Rachel Howard's intervention, is released from the detention centre and rehoused in a B&B under the care (and control) of the public authorities, and another agreed to (the trip to Latif Mahmud's apartment in London) in better times.

As 'by' in the title returns all things to the sea, rendering the sea, as I submitted earlier, as a fixity amongst mobile objects and people, it simultaneously alludes to the means by which these objects

and people end up in other places and effectively in newer times. Travelling by (the) sea has, both historically and contemporaneously been at the core of media representations of migration to Britain, reproducing images of precarity but also of accessibility as opposed to other routes and modes of transportation (see Clancy-Smith 2013). It is no surprise that Latif Mahmud's arrival in Britain in the 1960s was by sea, corresponding directly to Saleh Omar's memories of his home and the Island Detention Site in Zanzibar as well as his more recent arrival in Britain, all places by the sea. While Kanafani's desert effectively propagates redundance and annihilation throughout *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, the time of the sea enshrines exposure to difference, as things are regularly recalled or done afresh.

In the hands of time

In temporal terms, studies pertaining to waiting in the asylum system have increasingly challenged the depiction of asylum-seekers as passive objects awaiting externally provided intervention (see Rotter 2016:81), whether such intervention leads to the granting of international protection or deportation, or what Bridgett Haas refers to, in the case of the U.S., as the asylum-seekers' 'dual positionality of citizen-in-waiting/deportee-in-waiting, as they often spend many years waiting for the adjudication of their cases' (2017:75). In line with ethnographic studies which problematise the assumption that waiting is either intrinsically passive or liminal in nature, Rebecca Rotter and others 'attest to a more complex lived experience of waiting as affective, active and productive' (2016:81). In this regard, both the wait*er* (qua the asylum-seeker) and wait*ing* are agentic and productive, with the former not only being time-*keepers*, but also active time-*seekers*, in search of better times.

An analytical focus on waiting can offer an opening wedge to stories which are seldom heard in official asylum settings or interviews (ibid.). While not directly engaging with either asylum or waiting *per se,* the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero's conceptualisation of the 'narratable self' (2007:33-34) lays the foundations for a recognition that it is through time, encapsulated in waiting, when one's narratability can work in tandem, in a dialogical manner, with an Other who is either actively involved in the story or is at a minimum willing to listen (2000:24; 1997 *passim*). Relatedly, as the refugee protagonists in these novels show, the narratorial self is equally at play in waiting,

including where two temporal confluences meet in a refugee's life: what precedes and what succeeds their efforts to secure safety. When Saleh Omar asserts 'I have time on my hands, I am in the hands of time' (p.20), this is not an ordinary statement since it weds the idiomatic 'on my hands' with the genitive unit 'hands of time' through the presumed superfluity of time in the first instance and the total and potentially fatalist submission to time in the latter. Noticeably, parts of the body, in this case 'hands,' accompany 'time' in both instances, suggesting a corporeal-temporal correspondence therein. For the protagonist, subscribing to such an iteration seems to be a precondition for telling his story (as he sees it), thus what he needs at that moment is to summon over all his times, present and past, as he projects the future. Transiting between Britain and Zanzibar throughout the novel, he disrupts a linear chronological order (as does Kanafani's novella), setting out from the condition of *waiting* for Rachel Howard at the outset of the novel. By inaugurating his novel with waiting, Gurnah establishes pending time as a motif that runs throughout. Where the present is absented in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* as it always competes with an unfulfilled future, *By the Sea* assumes the present to be a beginning spatially and temporally synchronised by/with Britain.

It is worth noting that at the start of Chapter One (p.1), Gurnah engages the future simple tense, establishing a routine which seems to have been happening for a while but also inducing an already established bond of care between the refugee (Saleh Omar) and his advocate (Rachel Howard): 'She said she'll call later, and sometimes when she says that she does. Rachel.' While, on that occasion, Rachel failed to come, it is nonetheless a tense that anticipates other promises which might tell us that despite the overreliance on the past throughout the novel, as some events are recounted and others start to take shape, such narration will eventually lead a future subject to new routines and activities. Such a broken promise (which we assume will have less dramatic effects than Abul Khaizuran's broken promise to the men in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*[17]), almost in a similar fashion as the

[17] Abul Khaizuran asserts 'You must decide quickly! I've no time to waste. I swear to you on my honour', and yet his is a promise that cannot be kept (p.50), in turn not only 'wasting' the men's time as the novel unfolds, but in fact leading to their untimely death. The original reads (p.58):

يجب أن تقرروا بسرعة! ليس لدى [sic] مزيد من الوقت لأضيعه، أقسم لكم بشرفي..

previous time, is replicated at the start of Chapter Two (p.41), this time dwelling on Rachel Howard 'not coming' rather than 'not calling': 'She didn't come. Sometimes she doesn't, even when she says she will.' Powerfully, Salah Omar continues 'She comes to me when it suits her, or so it seems, which is not always how I would prefer things to be,' articulating a clear resistance to the assumption that he should fit into her time and instead acknowledging that their times should be on a par. Poignantly, Saleh Omar refers to Rachel Howard's 'deferred moments' (ibid.), alluding to, and in so doing rejecting, her self-congratulatory busy schedule looking after other refugees. Those two opening sentences, in Chapters One and Two respectively, reaffirm what is often discussed in the broader literature in relation to the sequential waiting that marks asylum-seekers' lives, where updates pertaining to the case are in the hands of those who are in direct contact with the immigration authorities, thus acting as intermediaries, and in effect voices for those refugees (see Qasmiyeh 2019). In that vein, as waiting pervades various times in the novel, those repeated rhythms which are 'also the rhythms of beginning' (Lefebvre and Régulier 2013:97), in turn echo the cyclical nature of the asylum process, but at the same time emphasise the active position that the refugee protagonist embodies. For Gurnah, as displayed in Saleh Omar's life experiences, waiting can be subsumed under two broad periods: in detention in Zanzibar and awaiting asylum in Britain. Despite their visible disparity, both periods are assumed to facilitate alternative routes to resolution. In the former lies an escape from not only the threat of re-detention but also a previous life which has become unliveable. In the latter, it is the focus on the futural in waiting that is at work, which can be seen as readjustment to human contact post-Zanzibar. In both instances, Saleh Omar is an active agent, not a passive wait-er, acting and *narrating against* the status quo.

Before I delve more deeply into a close analysis of Saleh Omar's encounter with the immigration officer upon his arrival at Gatwick airport, I would like to draw on Mark Wallinger's *Threshold to the Kingdom*[18] (2000), 'a single channel colour video projection consisting of slow motion footage

[18] The video itself (available to view at https://vimeo.com/403313134) was shot on the same day in 1998 alongside two other video works and projected for the first time at the Tate Modern London in 2000. For further context, see Martin (2014).

of people arriving at London City Airport' (Martin 2014) as viewed from the landside of the airport hall. The reasons for doing so are manifold. Essentially, the aim of including the video in this chapter is to concretise what it would be (like) to arrive in a new place, i.e. to enter a new medium which is permanently under surveillance, in this case an airport's arrival hall, whereby the *actual* arrival – as a numerically-monitored activity – and not the human one, is captured and therefore recorded temporally. Moreover, as Wallinger's filming in the airport was carried out covertly, the artist adopts an approach normally practised by immigration authorities, and surveillance becomes twofold, compounding the sense of containment experienced by travellers in a space which is intrinsically perceived as claustrophobic (see Tally Jr. 2013: esp.44-78). More importantly, this video-installation is particularly of relevance in tracing how such a production, when compared to the event of arriving in *By the Sea* (or to that of non-arrival and lonely death on the border in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*), recaptures the sense of time seeming to be lost or relegated in the airport, and in other border settings. In engaging *Threshold to the Kingdom*, I reimagine the sense of containment within the airport space by referring the reader to other media where time can also be seen in its 'stuckness.'

In keeping with my critical focus on 'the door' and the *bawāb*s who guard it throughout this chapter, the frontal view of the airport's international arrivals doorway serves two purposes: first, while permitting people into a demarcated space, it immediately entraps them, amassing all passengers in one space by depicting them as moving away from the only entry/exit point. It is notable that Wallinger purposedly re-enacts only one aspect of the overall experience, that is, entering an airport or entry itself but never exiting (from) it into the outside world, at least not in film. The critic and curator, Ralph Rugoff, remarking on the artist's use of slow motion in *Threshold to the Kingdom*, asserts that Wallinger 'lends the tiniest gestures of each airport pilgrim a heightened significance, and effectively *dislocates them from everyday time and space; indeed they seem to exist outside of our mortal world*' (2001:12, cited in Martin 2014: np, emphasis added), something which is accentuated through the accompanying soundtrack of Miserere, a Renaissance setting of Psalm 51 by the Italian composer Gregorio Allegri (b. 1582). What Rugoff sees in this video, in addition to it being otherworldly in its capacity to transfer its subjects to an ethereal place and time, is that it

obviously draws a line between the inside of the airport and what is being experienced outside. Casting the arrival hall as a space where people disappear into thin air without a trace strongly corresponds to these people entering or being moved into a time which is no longer in their hands. In effect, the '[dislocation] from *everyday time and space*' (ibid., emphasis added), I would argue, mostly goes unnoticed by the naked eye in contexts of displacement.

In this sense, I treat this video as a vignette through which a particular experience of time is precipitated before our eyes, as a partial visual synopsis or a cue to what could have been a similar experience to Saleh Omar's and most probably other people's, including my own. This sense of no-return and the extent to which, in that setting, time belongs to those who were staffing the immigration desks, is a sense of time that I myself experienced as both an asylum-seeker entering the arrival hall of Heathrow's Terminal 4, and subsequently watching Wallinger's installation at the Tate Modern. Besides, I mainly deploy the video as an entry point to the core body of Gurnah's novel in the same manner as 'the airport's international arrivals doorway [is] an entry point' (Martin 2014) to different passengers, be they citizens or would-be refugees. It is, after all, the time that will eventually lead to other times that is being depicted in this work, or as Wallinger himself points out, 'a state […] like confession and absolution' (cited in Herbert 2011:112) determined and accepted or rejected by an immigration officer.

Furthermore, bringing Wallinger's *Threshold to Heaven* into closer conversation with *By the Sea* could prompt a reading of the airport as the gateway to not only Britain, but as 'the threshold' to Wallinger's eponymous Heaven. Similarly, Ezekiel Kimani Kaigai posits that 'Saleh Omar equates the host with God, while the United Kingdom is equated with the Kingdom of God in 'the upper air', where 'God and his angels live . . . and debate high policy, and flush out treachery and rebellion'' (2014:190). Here, the immigration officer 'resemble[s] the angels that deliberately keep unwanted people out of God's Kingdom.' However, in contrast to depictions of Britain as 'paradise' or 'heaven' for refugees, Sofía Muñoz Valdivieso distances the United Kingdom from 'heaven' by arguing that 'it is difficult to find this vision of paradise in *By the Sea*, since the narrative of the

elderly Saleh Omar shows little idealization of the future possibilities of his life as an asylum-seeker in Britain' (2011:136), and, indeed, the encounter with the immigration officer is itself imbued with epistemic violence.

The Rhythms of Age and Ageing in Asylum

The question of ageing beyond one's national borders, as I shall explain, is arguably also that of a certain time when the subject's abilities are assessed as being of benefit, or not, to a workforce (Gurnah 2002:11; Bolzman 2014; see Chapter 3). This assessment may differ slightly across nations and yet what is stable is the perception of vulnerability in ageing and the presumed inability for older refugees to cope in alien circumstances (see Bolzman 2014). Consequently, invoking age is far from benevolent, since it inherently tips the power scale in favour of the immigration officer, lending him a helping hand in allowing or rejecting admission beyond a national entry point, be it an airport, a port or an irregular crossing. In positioning age as a crucial determinant, or even an arbitrary litmus test, for the progression of an asylum claim may suggest that cases can be determined *a priori* with or without the physical presence of those involved. In the context of older refugees, what is incessantly being questioned is not the actual age itself (cf. age-status-determination *qua* refugee-status-determination amongst unaccompanied *minors*) as much as what normatively is perceived as a prerequisite for survival. Invoking the refugee as an aged figure implicitly constitutes the older refugee as lacking (in physical capabilities and future possibilities alike), thereby corresponding to what West-Pavlov, building on Julia Kristeva's work vis-à-vis the female lack in 'Women's Time' (1986:188–213), denominates the 'temporalized lack' (2013:111). The 'temporalized lack'[19] inherent in ageing becomes even more visible in refugee contexts because of what it feeds into representative frameworks apropos deficiency and need (see Sayad 2007). While it is not exclusive to refugees, not giving people the right to cross the threshold in order to enter the national space, on the basis of a document submitted or in accordance with certain looks or appearances, is in line with 'the burden of physical temporality and the ravages of time' (West-Pavlov 2013:111) becoming

[19] This term is also used by Kathleen Frederickson in relation to 'the short horizon-less timeframe' of instinct versus William Stanley Jevons's conceptualisation of desire (2007:310).

particularly noticeable in refugee imaginaries. In that sense, the biological lack conveyed and apparent in ageing (which is itself gendered in nature, as I discuss in Chapter 3), mirrors the (il)legal lack that a refugee goes through. Such an equivalence condemns the refugee/immigrant body to temporalities that s/he carries but also to those that are bureaucratically managed with regards to statuses (Sayad 2007; also Puumala 2016). In this temporality of lack also lies the imminent death of the refugee, away from his original place, a death which is realised and therefore confirmed through his ageing. *By the Sea* deals with, and responds to, such questions in a multivocal manner: it attends to the temporalities as arbitrated by the immigration authority but also to those resisted by the refugee himself.

Revealingly, Saleh Omar's *actual* age is not uttered at first, but his *ageing* instead (p.11):

> Why didn't you stay in your own country where you could grow old in peace? This is a young man's game, this asylum business, because it is really just looking for jobs and prosperity in Europe and all that, isn't it?

What is being professed by the immigration officer is in no way interrogative, but a declaration predicated on clear-cut assumptions vis-à-vis who is and who is not worthy of asylum. In tying young age to ability, the officer proffers two rather incongruous suggestions: it is only the young who can endure this 'game,' which is called asylum. Yet, what on the surface appears to be asylum, is ultimately interpellated as a 'bogus' quest for jobs. Labelling asylum a 'game' is not uncommon (ie. see Liu 1993; Lulling 2007) since it tempers the tone of such a serious 'business' (and its concomitant risks and dangers) while simultaneously conveying the notion of refugees 'playing the system'. The metaphor of the game also corresponds to similar frames used in both the Arabic original and the English translation of *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* as uttered at a specific juncture in the protagonists' journey: the Arabic term *luʿba* (p.56) ('game') is used directly by Kanafani, as are the terms *ṣanʿa* (p.51, 82) (the 'craft' or 'art' in this context) and *masrahiyya* (p.56) ('performance'), which in translation emerge as semi-equivalences. As such, when Assad proposes negotiating with the smuggler on the men's behalf, the original line '*anā ʿatīq fī hādhihi al-ṣanʿa'* (p.51) (literally 'I'm old [ie.

experienced] in this craft' (ie. it is his second attempt at being smuggled, and he has thus spent enough time to master the craft) is translated by Kilpatrick idiomatically as 'I'm an old hand at this game' (p.46), only for Marwan to later question Abul Khaizuran by stressing '*hādhihi al-luʿba lā tuʿjibunī'* (p.56) ('I don't like the sound of this game,' p.49), where both the Arabic and English are aligned. Throughout, the convergence of these terms – game, performance and the 'craft' of smuggling and being smuggled – work to both reduce the severity of the deadly 'game', highlighting the performative elements of border crossings and seeking asylum, while also being tied to the covert battle between the refugee and those who guard the border.

From the outset, the immigration officer identifies Saleh Omar as not being 'young enough' for asylum, that is to say, that his time (as an older person) does not align with the time of asylum, which is marked by laboriousness, precarity and almost certainly temporal protractedness. Still, to discredit an asylum seeker on the basis of his age – 'a man of your age should know better,' the immigration officer declares (p.11) – is undoubtedly a direct means of othering, of broadening the temporal gap between his time and the time of Britain so the two would not meet. Even though it is not the body in its entirety that the immigration officer is referring to, age is still a constituent of it. In her pivotal article, *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance*, bell hooks argues that the displacement and eventual denial of the significance of the Other's history occurs 'through a process of decontextualization' (1992:373), proclaiming that any form of otherness is intrinsically based on exclusionary frameworks, history-based in essence, which are in no way benign. To put it simply, hollowing one's history or 'decontextualising' one's submission, even though it might not capture all aspects of history, in essence denies the Other a presence. What is obvious in such dynamics is that one party owns knowledge by reasoning a facile reading of vulnerability. In *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, ageing also maintains a historical thread as is clearly expressed in the case of Abu Qais who is not only 'the historian of the group' (Pappé 1995:161) but who is depicted as being the most vulnerable of the three refugee men precisely because time has passed him by (*op cit*, also p.63). While ageing for Abu Qais corresponds to time outside of Palestine, it represents an intimate reflection on history moving farther as the body ages as well (see Layoun 1990). Yet, while Saleh Omar's ageing, which

started in Zanzibar and is continuing in Britain, is more of a *condition* taken out of context by the immigration officer, Abu Qais's age is seen as a *precondition* to an imminent death which would be temporarily interrupted if only he could secure work outside of the camps (ibid.; also Suwaydān 1986). In both cases, the specificity of ageing is denied, whether by the person who is consciously ageing (in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*), or by institutional interpellations of what age connotes and unearths (in *By the Sea*).[20]

In anticipation of a looming battle, Saleh Omar comments on the immigration officer's visibly unhealthy appearance (p.6):

> … I saw that he was overweight and looked unhealthy, and by the time we reached an interview room, he was breathing heavily and tugging at his shirt. He sat in a chair and immediately shifted uncomfortably in it, and I thought of him as someone sweatily trapped in a form he disliked […]. May God give you health, Kevin Edelman.

Shifting the gaze from his perceived ageing to the officer's unhealthy appearance, Saleh Omar seems to reverse the order of time by implicating the officer in a state of feebleness which is more susceptible to ill-health. Narrating his first encounter with the immigration officer, Saleh Omar recalls how he was led to the interview room by an apparently 'overweight' and 'unhealthy' officer as part of a process which is supposed to give him more time to explain his case and on what grounds he is seeking to enter (and remain in) Britain. During this short distance, he 'saw' the officer in such a state, basing such a judgment exclusively on rhythms and practices happening before his eyes. Interestingly, the refugee's eyes whose job is normatively not to see (following Mallki 1996) are now actively seeing in resistance to a process marked by extreme subjectification and uneven power dynamics. As Michel Foucault reminds us, '[a]s soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance' (1996:224). However, what is considered distinct in this kind of resistance is the temporal observations vis-à-vis the aged body on the one hand and the infirm one on the other.

[20] The bureaucratic eligibility to access a legal status (asylum seeker – refugee – citizen), is contingent on the accumulation of time over several years, ironically validating such schemes through growing old in displacement.

When ill-health is invoked in the text, it draws the reader's attention to what normally goes unnoticed in spaces such as airports and also the extent to which it is the refugee himself who is typically the target of such evaluations. In *By the Sea*, the officer who will soon demean the agedness of a refugee, is himself read by Saleh Omar as being both biologically and functionally above his chronological age. Since both ill-health and old age have long been attributed to the refugee/migrant taking advantage of the welfare state (Sayad 2007), *By the Sea* realigns these maximums: instead of connecting them solely with the refugee, through narrating the infirmity and incompleteness of the *bawab* at the border, it poses them as natural conditions for all. Through his internal monologue Saleh Omar not only reverses the gaze, but also de-exceptionalises the refugee by emphasising the conditions that are shared with non-migrants as well (Ramsay 2000:401; also see Ramsay and Haugen Askland 2022).

The sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad in his book *The Suffering of the Immigrant* discusses the 'distorted temporality' (2007:199) whereby illness, age and both illness and age combine in certain settings to produce a temporality, in this case a distorted one, which is the creation, or more accurately, the fabrication of other temporalities. He dwells on how illness and age are played out in certain migrant contexts, at times diluted and in other times exaggerated. As he suggests, when a certain reading of age is imposed on an immigrant and is a process through which the immigrant himself is rendered incapacitated by the institution, the immigrant may resort to 'age[ing] themselves almost deliberately' (ibid.: 201), pre-empting an institutional categorisation of their age which would eventually allow them to simultaneously enter retirement and move outside the active workforce (ibid.).

Importantly, vulnerability is situational (depending on the context in which the refugee is at a particular moment), and is not only initiated (some would say embodied and lived) by one party, but also normally read and responded to by another.[21] In the case of *By the Sea*, it is not only the

[21] For instance, on the UNHCR's determination of 'vulnerability' as a precursor to the UN agency's mandate to seek durable solutions for *particular* refugees, see UNHCR (2013).

immigration officer who responds to ageing and vulnerability as discussed above, but also those who represent the 'care' system and/or function from within refugee solidarity and advocacy groups. In effect, *By the Sea* highlights different constituent parts of vulnerability, mainly those steeped in ageing and the manners in which old age can come to act as an advantage beyond border points such as airports.

For instance, when the immigration officer eventually gives him permission to exit the airport, Saleh Omar is sent to a detention centre, in the company of other fellow asylum seekers:

> We'll have to have you moved somewhere where you can have classes. Get you out of this detention centre, anyway. *I don't think that will be too hard because of your age, you see*. That's the first thing we've got to do, arrange for you to be moved to the care of our area authority.
>
> (pp.46-7, emphasis added)

The speaker is Rachel Howard, a legal adviser with a refugee organisation who has taken on Saleh Omar's case. Briefing him on the order of things, Rachel Howard's priority is focused on moving him out of detention so he can access language classes and other forms of assistance. In this context, it is his age which acts as a catalyst in expediting his removal from detention so he, in due course, would be enlisted as being under the care of the public authorities, paving a pathway of semi-normality and eventual integration in his new society. Unlike the way that age is treated in the airport and its perception as an incapacity behind which 'bogus' asylum seekers hide, age at this juncture seems to have adopted completely different sets of rules: its time is no longer associated with imminent dying but with a promised future which can still be lived within the assumed normality of society. Essentially, by virtue of his old age in the context of detention, Saleh Omar appears to enjoy favourable treatment, or even positive discrimination, which is presented as benefitting him at the expense of other refugees. For there are also other refugees inside this detention centre, likely younger than Saleh Omar, and yet they continue to be stuck in incarceration and, as a result, deprived of the agency that Saleh Omar now enjoys. While such multi-scalar regimes of care are not new in

asylum, their ascription to age in the narrative consequently highlights the disparities that exist amongst different refugees' lived times.

As recognised in the broader literature, and as represented by Gurnah in the case of *By the Sea*, in the detention centre it transpires that for refugees to be viewed as individuals worthy of extra care, responses must be prompted by and dependent on the visibility of vulnerabilities and not by the discrete nature of suffering per se (see Lenette and Miskovic 2016). Attentive to the various and often undeclared needs of old age, Rachel Howard's intervention pushes for an opportunity for Saleh Omar to be rehoused in a different form of accommodation through giving priority to visible and legible forms of vulnerability, ones which would entail no further action other than moving such people away from those who are viewed as more capable of enduring detention. In prioritising the time of the older refugee, the young refugees are left behind.[22]

In all, ageing and age-bound assumptions emerge throughout the text as being neither static nor universal, nor uncontested: Saleh Omar is thus presented as benefiting from Rachel Howard's invocation of his old age to secure *his* release from detention, and yet he powerfully inverts the gaze through narrating the immigration officer's own physical frailties, and, as I discuss below, the officer's invocation of his own personal history as it relates to racialised processes of Othering.

Narrating the Self through Silence

In Saleh Omar's case, it is his age as perceived by the immigration officer which is viewed as an incapacity and not his intentional silence and the lack of communication (Rickel 2018:100-102). Resorting to silence, in line with the advice he received in Zanzibar, Saleh Omar takes full charge by restricting his speech so that speech itself will not count against him. Accepting the role of the silent witness instead of that of the eloquent speaker of the host's language, Saleh Omar translates

[22] The intersectionality between age and enduring containment is evident in both novels, as *Rijāl fī al-Shams* also draws a clear temporal line between those who can cope with the scorching heat inside the tank on the border and those who may not be able to survive the journey.

silence into his own time, originally, by enacting it as a response to speech uttered at him. By depriving the officer of the information he is after, he also gives himself enough time to rethink the officer's monologues and the time beyond the airport. This does not mean that narration has been interrupted in the process, or that his position as a refugee has been compromised. Rather, as Federico Fabris notes with regards to the prevalence of 'refugee silences' throughout what he refers to as Abdulrazak Gurnah's 'trilogy of silence' – *Admiring Silence* (1997), *By the Sea* (2001) and *The Last Gift* (2011) –, 'silence can be read as a pragmatic act of individual resistance' (2012:96) and as integral part of 'self-narration' (ibid.:101). In the process, silence emerges not only as an act of resistance to *silencing* (ibid.:96; also see Haile 2020), but also as a narrative strategy that *retains* the subjecthood of the silent speaker. As such, beyond Bhabha's invocation of 'the desolate silences of wandering people' (1990:316, *op cit*), here I seek to highlight that 'wandering people' are not inevitably silent, as they narrate themselves and others, but also that silence is not necessarily desolate, as it can also harbour productiveness and resistance.

In *By the Sea,* time in silence is what returns to the self, that is, the outside entering the inside. Unlike the lack of and/or unnarrated speech inside the tank in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, this silence is more in tune with not acceding to the demands of what speech is for in the first place, i.e. who it is that ought to speak and who should listen thereafter. Saleh Omar successfully inverts the order, not only in terms of what is expected of the refugee at the first instance, but also with reference to the chronology of events. As Benita Parry posits, '[w]ithin the discussion of colonial and postcolonial discourse, silence has been read as many-accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance, of the denial of a subject position and its appropriation' (1998:152, cited in Fabris 2012:95). Amidst all of this, silence has seldom been determined on its own. This plurality within/of silence, as formerly theorised by Foucault (1990), not only binds people 'to the social and temporal contexts of [their] enunciations' (Fabris 2012:99) but reconstitutes itself as a time distinct to that of speech: a time in its own right, 'which functions […] as a means not only of communication but also of representation' (ibid.), and which can therefore garner uncharted times and multiple readings. In other words, in order to enter his country of asylum unimpeded, Saleh Omar submits to a performance conditioned

by what I refer to as a *timed silence*, one which is meant to facilitate his entry into the time of his adopted place. Thus, in *By the Sea*, performing silence must not be viewed in isolation from history, for it is the post-independence Zanzibari arriving in Britain in the mid-1990s where speaking colonial languages is a mere formality and is never in dispute. In that sense, despite it being an imitation of the wishes of the person who sold him the plane ticket, silence is maintained for the sake of promised speech, that is to say, for the place and time beyond the airport or as soon as asylum is granted.

Interestingly, 'silence' in this case not only inextricably coincides with the claim of 'not speaking English' but also collapses into it, deliberately commingling 'not knowing' with 'silence' as a way of mobilising discreet knowledge for the sake of securing asylum. While such an assumption is strongly challenged through this self-imposed silence, it still lays the foundation for a future which remains dependent on specific colonial representations of the Other. For Saleh Omar, survival is no longer subject to community or belonging since all that is left for him is a time that is in the hands of the immigration officer. The long-held view that '[i]t takes time to feel at home' (Ahmed et al. 2003:9) is subject to time being given to the claimant beyond the interview room, since what is being contested in this encounter/interrogation is not only the lack of space but also the lack of time. Since '[t]he affectivity of home is bound up with the temporality of home, with the past, the present and the future' (ibid.), in *By the Sea*, the future seems to be totally preoccupied by the idea of an alternative home which can only be thought of when the present inside the airport is over. Equally, for the past, where silence was originally initiated and is now exercised before a stranger, it is what can no longer be revisited physically but only through remembering which, as the story tells us, only properly takes place in front of a fellow Zanzibari in the UK.

Grounded in speech, legally speaking, and in stories shared openly with the immigration authorities, refusing to talk may in some cases jeopardise asylum claims and in extreme scenarios render them void (Johnson 2011:59). This, however, does not mean that silence and overlooked asylum claims are mutually exclusive. Deeply embedded in silence is silencing, including where often minute details of repression go unnoticed. In effect, what appears in the balance in this case is not silence

itself but the extent to which speech is being dictated by the immigration officer, a dictation which Saleh Omar rebuts through narrating his silence. Tying refugeeness to subalternity, Liisa Malkki submits that speaking in a particular way, i.e. wordlessly, is what the refugee is *normally* expected to do (1996:390); equally, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak interrogates whether, or under what conditions, the subaltern can or cannot speak (1999:275-309). The 'wordless' mode of submission that Malkki postulates is not silence per se. Nor is it a voluntary engagement on the part of the refugee. It is a quasi-language which extricates the refugee from subjecthood and resubmits them as a figure devoid of their particularities. What the immigration officer expects is a forthright 'wordless' submission *contra* the status quo. That is why such expectations act in accordance with what Spivak's calls 'practices of muting' (1999:308-9) where what is expected is always to hand so that the unexpected is not uttered. Similarly, examining speech in the context of race, bell hooks ponders who owns 'significant speech' and whose speech is relegated to insignificance (1989:6). Speech is a highly important trope as it is not only the generic refugee's speech that is evaluated in an asylum claim, but also who this refugee is in relation to processes of racialisation. From the perspective of the immigration officer himself – denominated as 'the *bawab* of Europe' (p.31) as I discuss in the next section – the black Zanzibari exercising silence is in no way recognised as uttering 'significant speech,' a perspective which arguably intersects with postcolonial critiques that there is 'hardly any discourse about Africa for itself' which means that 'narrative about Africa is always pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people' (Mbembe 2001:3). Thus, with or without speech, Africa and Africans are always portrayed as 'lacking the vantage to return the gaze' (Akinro 2019:n.p.), something which is directly challenged through Saleh Omar and his encounter with the immigration officer.

Guarding Time and Space

Bawab, derived from Arabic and still in use in Kiswahili,[23] meaning gatekeeper, guardian, or custodian, is used by Gurnah to refer to the immigration officer, and is embedded in hegemony, wherein space and time amalgamate to create an entity which is conventionally safeguarded and controlled by those whose unquestionable loyalty to authority is clearly on show. As such, while the *bawab* controls and guards the threshold, it does not mean that he is fully in charge (as can also be suggested with regards to Abul Khaizuran in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*) or that it is within his rights to challenge what authority is, since it is the rules and orders of the one who oversees this guarding that ultimately matter. Foucault, in his nuanced readings of authority and its ramifications, rightly reminds us that within authority's structure, there in fact lie multiple structures (1996, 2002). These multiple structures are conceived of spatially but also temporally, reaffirming the unity around which authority pivots. When the *bawab* is the immigration officer, it is because both positions (*bawab* and immigration officer) are subject to contracts which indisputably stipulate that it is the institution that they are protecting. Guarding the border at the airport and the kingdom on the other side (as also evoked by Wallinger in his film), as enacted by the immigration officer, from those who are presumed alien to the intactness of national space and time, is strictly in compliance with such a contract.

As it is historically the space and time beyond the *bāb* (door/gate) that the *bawab* protects (both terms are derived from the Arabic root *b-w-b*), there is a collision between exterior temporalities (i.e. what and who is outside the door or literally at the threshold) and interior ones (what and who *normatively* belongs in the original place and time). In the case of such a collision, the *bawab* not only aims to prevent the foreigner from entering but makes sure that the foreigner, in this case the non-European refugee, is never predisposed to cross the threshold in the first place or to encroach on said border. Conversely, as the refugee sits in anticipation at the threshold awaiting being granted

[23] *Bawab* (as used by Gurnah), pronounced *bawāb* in Arabic, is an emphatic adjective which acts as an active participle and in so doing embodies a role which is characterised by emphatic authority normally passed on by a bigger authority.

the right to enter, always temporarily in the first instance, his task becomes fixated on bringing himself closer to the *bāb* to the point of no return. In contrast, in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* the door to the tank is itself also arguably the point of no return, but in the sense that when the refugee men cross the threshold and enter the 'inside' this does not ultimately lead to safety.

In the case of *By the Sea,* the *bawab*'s positionality is to reject one space-time entering another (in this case, the nation-state) by demarcating what could be perceived as the last line of defence:

> Kevin Edelman, the *bawab* of Europe, and the gatekeeper to the orchards in the family courtyard, the same gate which had released the hordes that went out to consume the world to which we have come sliming up to beg admittance. Refugee. Asylum seeker. Mercy.
>
> (p.31)

What is at work here is intrinsically linked to both individuals' histories: the *bawab* and the asylum seeker. Signifying temporally, albeit in generic terms, what was committed throughout history against 'the world' is a clear rebuttal of what could be viewed as a charitable act on behalf of the granter of asylum, Europe. In that sense, this is not an ordinary supplication for what can be seen as a plea, on behalf of an individual asylum seeker, for reconsideration and then attainment of his right to asylum. Nor does the lack of ordinariness therein put it at odds with the most sobering message of all: the time of asylum and history are inexplicably entangled and will always cross paths. Therefore, within the folds of this passage is a condensation of times, the present as depicted through the encounter between the immigration officer and the colonial past where the colonised and the coloniser were made to share the same time and space, all happening at once. By consuming everything present, past and future, Europe takes ownership of the world and positions itself as the Earth's 'true owners' (Mbembe 2019:n.p.), while 'Africa is never seen as possessing things' (Mbembe 2001:1). Such a long-standing fleshly consumption of the world is resonant with the consumption of the Other and their land, compounded by a systemic erasure of the colonial history and its impact on those involved both territorially and corporeally (ibid.). It is no surprise that the airport is the actual *bāb* (gate or door) which should remain guarded at all times and if needed

completely shut in the face of those whose times do not correspond to Europe's and whose temporalities – characterised by time-lags and decelerations – are permanently lagging behind and therefore ruptured.

For refugees to arrive at a place to seek refuge suggests a transferal from one time to another, where 'time [itself] could be seen as a means of resistance' (Lilja 2018:419; also Foucault 2002). In his discussion of (im)mobilities in airports, Tim Cresswell contends that what might be benevolently viewed as a place and/of overlapping times is also a metaphor of contrasting images (2006:219-258). The airport, as the *bāb*, retains the exactness of the territory so its interior is kept intact and free of outsiders. When 'the *bawab* of Europe' bases his decision-making on temporal resemblance, he equally grants those who are *like him* access to Europe but rejects, outright, those who are different. Undoubtedly, what the *bawab* does is to bifurcate temporalities into two deeply divergent contingencies, one which is centred on what or who a European is or might be and the other concerning what homogenously represents the rest of the world: as the *bawab* reveals (or, in fact, confesses) to the silent Saleh Omar, '[m]y parents were refugees, from Romania… But my parents are European, they have a right, they're part of the family' (p.12). In contrast, he continues, 'look at yourself… You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things we value, you haven't paid for them through generations, and we don't want you here.' As such, for the immigration officer, the idea of the European is established strictly through family lineages and, most importantly, through the colour of the claimant's skin. Those who procure hospitality, do so on the basis of a 'presentist bias' (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020) comfortably reposed upon a monolithic reading of history which dictates that it is those who are in the presentist sense 'European' who are worthy of acceptance, and yet those whose histories and lives are affected, implicated and at times shaped by colonial interventions are outside of this equation and are thus (in the words of the narrator of Edouard Glissant's novel *Mahogany,* which is set in the Caribbean) merely a 'series of erasures in the mess of time' (1987:167, cited in West-Pavlov 2013:167). Cynically endorsing the immigration officer's discourse, Saleh Omar wordlessly fights back, by turning European colonial history inside out and recentring it on the omnipresent figure of the *bawab* whose articulation of history is ahistorical and

seldom based on realities beyond the so-called European borders: ‘Edelman […] the name of the owner of Europe, who knew its values and had paid for them through generations’ (p.12).

In the context of migration, Sayad asserts that ‘illusion and collusion go hand in hand’ (2007:141), thereby informing complex relationalities in so far as power is concerned. That is what the immigration officer intentionally disregards, prompting once again the refugee to resist and insist in silence: ‘I was an asylum-seeker, in Europe for the first time, in an airport for the first time, though not for the first time under interrogation’ (p.12). Herein, the order of the various states is crucial. The time that is being born in that instant is that of legality – a right which precedes destinations and in congruence with the overwhelming tense in the novel, it occurs in the past. Now he is in Europe for the first time simply because of a declared political position by the British circulated for international consumption that ‘people who came from where I did were eligible for asylum’ (p.10). It is, as he clearly states, his first time in the airport where further interrogation continues to take place, repeating a rhythm which has encircled his previous life and is remaining with him in waiting. Essentially, what seems like order is temporally disruptive and even disorderly. Here, we have ‘Europe’ and ‘airport’ interposed between ‘asylum-seeker’ and ‘interrogation,’ thus placing his current state/status and the circular and uninterrupted interrogation at each end as though to reclaim the human time in seeking refuge.

Indeed, as one claims asylum, one also claims one’s time whereupon newer times are founded (Griffiths et al. 2013; also Jacobsen et al 2021). The interrogation sessions mentioned throughout the novel, before and during his imprisonment in Zanzibar and more recently in Britain, should be enough to substantiate the ‘well-founded fear of persecution’ that is fundamental to any asylum claim under the 1951 Geneva Convention. Yet, because of his self-imposed silence and the immigration officer’s failure to situate Saleh Omar’s personal history globally, the potential of such a claim is seriously undermined. It is not surprising that in that encounter, Saleh Omar’s time is depicted as neither specific nor non-specific fully, making way for an unassignable body of knowledge which is difficult to locate. In a not dissimilar manner, Mbembe’s notion of the postcolony facilitates similar

readings of these overlapping temporalities and points to what he refers to as the '*time of existence and experience*, the time of entanglement' (2001:16, emphasis in the original). Therein, time is multifarious, personal and impersonal at the same time, and never linear (ibid.). In addition, in those times, the interpersonal enters the historical and vice versa, where '[f]luctuations and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to the lack of order' (ibid.:8), but necessary disturbances for time's progression. For Mbembe, age, whether personal or epochal, is denotative of happenings which have either been witnessed or overlooked in time (ibid.:1-23). Therefore, to assume temporality as subjectivity is one way of retracing the interconnectedness between time and power 'to initiate some thinking about the postcolonial African subject, his/her history and his/her present in the world' (ibid.:17).

As in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, the position of history in Gurnah's *By the Sea* appears unwaveringly constant insofar as it assiduously keeps the company of events throughout, be they memories which tie various times together or projections for upcoming times, while simultaneously returning to specific phases in the narrative, either incrementally or in full-bodied surges, where the two protagonists' shared history gradually intersects and eventually unfolds as time is dragged from Zanzibar to Britain through their respective tales. The question of shared history in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, conversely, adopts a more direct link to the one place, Palestine. From the outset, the protagonists are *presented as* refugees, not because of their failed attempt at escaping from alternative places (refugee camps and host countries), but rather to retrace these individuals' history of displacement from the original place and for not having had the time to comprehend time beyond that historical juncture as they pursue their survival elsewhere (see Layoun 1990). While Gurnah's protagonists *became* refugees at two different junctures, the 1960s and 1990s, Kanafani's characters *were* refugees because of history, as marked by the 1948 Nakba. Thus, to continually return to history is to hand time the opportunity to permeate both narratives either from the beginning of each time/chapter assigned to the main characters in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* or in a tangled format as in *By the Sea*. Accordingly, history is performed so that both novels, at different intervals, are *re-peopled* with characters who either continue to be stranded in camps and refugee gatherings (Kanafani) or are dead and no longer able

to recall for themselves (Gurnah). This non-exhaustive and yet intimate portrayal of history reposes upon times which can be described as rhythmic, with history's grip in Kanafani's novel appearing to move (away) and loosen as time passes, hence the intended acceleration towards the end in reaching somewhere; while in Gurnah's, history seems 'over there,' grasped and mobilised when needed by Saleh Omar and 'the *bawab* of Europe' alike, especially as it repeats itself and continually intersects with and travels between the present and the future.

Refugee Readings and Intertextual Times

In *By the Sea*, colonial history occupies a substantial part of the text, not just through allusions to this history, regardless of how diverse, multitudinous and, in many cases, multipartite it is, but more often through examples, anecdotes and events predicated on specific times. In lieu of surveying all these examples and intertextual instances,[24] I here primarily focus on one tale which has travelled with the protagonists from Zanzibar to Britain, where it has found fertile ground for it to be enacted and re-produced afresh. The title of the story is *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853) by the American writer, Herman Melville. On the surface, the story details the transformation of a legal scribe called Bartleby who, despite initially performing his work dutifully and effectively, one day decides to turn down his employer's request to proofread a document, conveying his reluctance through the phrase, 'I would prefer not to' which itself becomes a fixity to every other request. Ultimately, for various reasons, Bartleby's health hugely suffers, culminating in his refraining from eating until his death. While his depression and mental struggles may have played a key role in his demise, it is worth remembering that what Bartleby stands for has never been monolithic but continually open for multiplicity,[25] always leaving room for further generative interpretations that may explain the intended application of the formula 'I preferred not to' in *By the Sea*.

[24] Other examinations of intertextuality in *By the Sea*, including with regards to the same story under analysis here, can be found in Steiner (2006), Cooper (2008), Farrier (2008), Bosman (2021) and Liang (2022). As articulated below, I diverge from Steiner's reading of Gurnah's invocation of Bartleby as 'a metaphor for Saleh's and Latif's positions of vulnerability in exile' (2006:320).

[25] Critical readings of Bartleby's intervention span different genres and disciplines (i.e. see Deleuze 1998:73; Agamben 1998:48, 270; Hardt and Negri 2000:203).

In total, there are five key instances where 'I preferred not to' is invoked by Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud alongside direct references to Bartleby. The first instance corresponds to Saleh Omar's response to Rachel Howard's 'stunned disgust' (p.64) when she discovers that he does, in fact, speak English and asks 'why didn't you reply when you were spoken to in English?' (p.64-66); the second arises during a telephone exchange between Latif Mahmud and someone from the refugee support agency, when Latif Mahmud notes '[t]he way the man inflected *preferred* made it sound as if he was quoting. 'Preferred. Like Bartleby,' I said, always eager to show off, to confirm my credentials as a teacher of literature' (p.75). In both of these invocations of the formula, both protagonists note that the citizens do not 'know the story' (p.65,75) or understand the reference, while the refugees from the postcolony most evidently do. In the third instance, it is Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud's shared knowledge and love of the story that emerges as a binding document softening their otherwise fraught first encounter in the UK, with Latif Mahmud 'grinning all over his face, the skin round his eyes creased in lines of surprised pleasure, suddenly happy. "You know the story! It's a beautiful story..."' (p.156). When Saleh Omar later declines Rachel's invitation to dinner it is through stating 'I'd prefer not to'; with the refugee having previously introduced her to the story, this leads to divergent readings both of the text and of Bartleby himself, with the citizen rejecting Bartleby as 'an abuser' (p.198), whereas Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud 'love the impassive authority of that man's defeat, the noble futility of his like' (p.156, also see p.199). Finally, when responding to Latif Mahmud's assertion that Saleh Omar 'must get a telephone,' the latter reflects on his decision *not* to cite Bartleby verbatim again until he has re-read the text (p.244).

Melville's *Bartleby,* as used by Gurnah, thus has particular epistemological signification, bearing a lasting pulse throughout the novel, its time as a text within a text spanning various spaces and times and bearing a semblance as a shared time between the two protagonists. By invoking Bartleby, Gurnah skilfully re-establishes the temporal common-grounds between Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, in the first place, as compatriots who once belonged to the same place and fought over the same house but also through their intersecting colonial education as well as their exposure to texts which were originally read in Zanzibar and travelled with them to their respective times. I here

briefly stop at the reasons that may have prompted them (and Gurnah) to innovatively (and existentially) resort to – and cite from – this story, including their colonial and aesthetic choices and also their commitment to temporalizing the story's thematics in their respective life experiences. I argue that by maintaining the story's textual presence, or what remains of it, by reverting to the formula 'I preferred not to,' Saleh Omar ensures that the formula lingers in his asylum narrative, thus imparting new meaning and relevance to an experience which is likely to be monotonous and repetitive. In addition, given that Bartleby's phrase is initially uttered in response to Rachel's dismay at him not speaking English from the start, it reintroduces Saleh Omar's resistance to the ways in which speech is viewed and processed by those in power.

In *Refusing to Speak as a Victim: Agency and the Arrivant*, Maria Olaussen argues that *By the Sea* (out)rightly contests the very premise that '[a refugee's] admittance is possible only by accepting a predetermined relationship between himself as a help-seeking stranger and Europe defined as helper' (2009:218). In not committing to a clear enough justification of his silence in the airport and the assumption that he did not speak any English, Saleh Omar instead opts for 'I preferred not to' (p.65) as his answer. This contestation to 'speak[ing] as a victim' (Olaussen 2009:217) builds on Saleh Omar's initial silence and outright rejection of speaking how refugees should all speak (see Malkki 1996). By masking his answer in what is considered to be a canonical English text, Saleh Omar borrows time from a knowledge accumulated in colonial Zanzibar, thus discerning what it means to constantly refer to their knowledge, as Europe systematically does. In that sense, Africa also writes Europe, as Maria Olaussen and Christina Angelfors suggest, through 'ideas of Europe' read outside the context of Europe (2009) or through times, such as this one, when refugees arriving in Europe are able to quote (back). Inside Bartleby's phrase there is the 'preference' that refugees are routinely deprived of and for once are able to reclaim, shifting the power – albeit minimally – from what is expected of the refugee to what the refugee decides to say and in what language and register.

Similarly, in 'relating asylum issues to postcolonial studies' (2008:121), David Farrier calls for 'a postcolonial inversion of neo-colonial relationship of host and guest' (ibid.), whereby a concrete

sense of equity is urgently needed. Centred around an interruption of exclusionary frameworks which have historically contributed to the demotion of the status of the refugee to that of an asylum seeker, Farrier, through times which are only in the hands of the refugee, tries to reorient the debate from that of paternalistic receptiveness to that of a positionality wherein the refugee's needs solely belong to him/her. Along the same lines, Saleh Omar's resistance, whether in his self-imposed silence or in a quasi-answer which privileges choice as expressed in 'I preferred not to', is a direct response to 'liv[ing] in the unhomely world', as Bhabha posits (1994:26-7), where the 'sense of homeliness' is constantly shrinking as time passes. The 'profound desire for social solidarity,' which according to Bhabha is also a desire for those on the margins to '[look] for the join' and to 'want to join' (ibid.), is not a mere wish which entails a one-directional movement but rather a sustained attempt on behalf of displaced people to locate the 'join' before actually 'joining in'.

Before interrogating Bartleby's time, let us briefly retrace how and when Bartleby came to presence in both of the main protagonists' lives in *By the Sea*. As noted in Chapter 1, before departing to East Germany to study at the age of seventeen, Latif Mahmud (then named Ismail) recounts the United States Information Service 'open[ing] an air-conditioned library and reading room as an annexe to the embassy' (p.105), which was perceived as 'a different thing altogether' with 'names [including titles by Herman Melville, Frederick Douglass, Edgar Allan Poe, amongst others] our colonial education had never uttered' (p.106). Those titles which people were allowed to borrow and take home with them, as opposed to the British books which were guarded by a doorkeeper (also a *bawab*) and prison-like infrastructure alike, as Latif Mahmud suggests, 'were not contaminated by a discourse of tutelage and hierarchy' (ibid.). Contrasting different and yet overlapping colonial times through which books the British and the Americans made available to Zanzibaris cannot be read in isolation of the British colonial presence ebbing away and new powers emerging at the same time, not as direct substitutes to the old regimes but rather as newer times displacing older colonial references, including books.

The ‘freshness’ that Latif Mahmud gestures towards in those books is not entirely founded upon the textual. Rather, it is a time that has not been around for long in such a way that reading those stories in itself marks a temporal transference from one canon to another through colonial libraries shutting down and others opening up instead. As Mbembe suggests in the context of domination, culturally as well as disciplinarily, ‘discourses and representations have materiality’ (2001:5) but are also subject to how such materiality manifests itself in various formats, including in texts. For Gurnah, as recounted by Latif Mahmud, encounters with those earlier (guarded) colonial libraries and the manner in which books linked to colonised and colonial education were biasedly processed and handled, provide us with an insight into such periods as both remembered and temporalized times during which ordinary Zanzibaris were only allowed limited and/or conditional access to such books. In contrast with the American books ‘with thick gleaming paper’ (p.106), British books ‘had a look and a smell, the spine faded or darkened […], a history which was never separate from their former owners, whose names or dedications or marginal notes sometimes appeared to claim them back’ (pp.105-6).

Literally, as represented in the textual, history has a smell and this smell emits not merely the source and age of the object under-study but especially the so-called right in re-claiming ownership of that history. Those ‘surplus books’ (ibid.), which departing colonial administrators bequeathed to old school libraries, like Latif Mahmud’s, re-claim history in writing, through inscriptions that retell their names and presence while at the same time rendering the indigenous people of Zanzibar as grateful recipients of gifts whose gifting is only contingent on their superfluity at the source. This aporia, albeit not grounded in colonial times, is eloquently expressed in Derrida’s well-articulated coinage ‘hostipitality’ (*hostipitalité*) (2000), where both hospitality and hostility are absorbed into the same body, thereby engendering a state of being which is neither/nor and both at the same time. By highlighting the complex nature of giving when it is clearly impossible to give ‘without reaffirming this is mine’ (ibid.:14), Derrida deepens the inherent directionality within generosity by reinscribing the omnipresent giver as the sole owner even if it were to mean the disappearance of the gift itself. This does not mean, in light of Derrida’s hostipitality, that those colonial administrators

were caught in a double bind or were unaware that what they bequeathed would eternally be considered theirs. On the contrary, leaving those references behind in the time of departure is deliberate: it is to inaugurate where power historically lies, even when it is ebbing, and in doing so, re-attributing the name to time and vice versa. In addition to the giver's name that is inscribed inside those books, there are also the donor's own commentaries which in turn respond to specific times during the colonial era and yet constitute their own presence within that time, not as extras but instead as essential supplements to those texts. Such a 'gift', if it can be called as such, searingly talks to Mbembe's notion of the 'postcolonial dramaturgy' (2001:123) which, in the postcolony, draws, *inter alia*, on excessive ceremonial acts of 'welcoming' which 'have become the privileged language through which power speaks, acts, coerces' (ibid.). In the same vein, the power of gifting (books) when colonial powers were themselves receding is in line with taking control of time post their imminent departure, through the textual as archival depository in a time that they so strenuously considered theirs but also through a hierarchical act of generosity consistent with what they think is worthy of gifting, thus maintaining a colonial legacy which has proven indestructible (also see Stoler 2008).

Passage of time

In *Story Time*, commenting on Marcel Détienne's choice to tell stories, Michel De Certeau concludes that '[t]he story does not express a practice. It does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It *makes* it' (1988:81, emphasis added). For Saleh Omar, it is the *making* of a movement that takes centre stage in his stories. Equally important is the time that telling stories occupies (and is occupied with) which, in De Certeau's words, '[exercise] an art of thinking' (ibid.). Thus, tracing Saleh Omar's time coming together with Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* in Zanzibar enables us to see how the story *moved* with him across time and space to be narrated anew. In a manner that reveals close proximity to the colonial elite which in turn favoured him at the expense of other furniture traders, he recounts, in his first exchange with Latif Mahmud in the UK (pp.156-7):

> I used to get a surprising number of books when I bought the contents of a house and especially when the British were packing up to go […] But among these books I found the short stories of Herman Melville. I had never heard of him, and I never got to finish the stories at that time, though I did finish them later.

In turn, for Latif Mahmud, it was through the time spent at the newly built American library in the 1960s in Zanzibar that engaged his imagination and gave him the impetus to, at a later date, re-discover Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* with his British students at a London university. For Saleh Omar, however, Bartleby's corpus was put into action in a more contemporary setting: through the encounter between the refugee himself (Saleh Omar) and the citizen (Rachel Howard) in the 1990s. In spite of invoking 'I preferred not to' as a reasoning of and a response to his initial reticence to speak English beyond the two words '[r]efugee' and '[a]sylum' (p.9), directed at the immigration officer in the airport, Saleh Omar's reliance on Bartleby's formula appears to constitute a time inside time where meaning belongs to the speaker himself. In a unique and temporally inclined reading of Bartleby which strongly echoes Saleh Omar's chosen position to never be a passive witness, in *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret* Derrida notes that 'Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to' takes a responsibility for a response without response. It evokes the *future* without either predicting or promising; it utters nothing fixed, determinable, positive or negative' (2008:75, emphasis added). In mimicking Bartleby, Saleh Omar thus retains responsibility towards his constantly suspected subjecthood as a refugee who is assumed to be wordless and 'being-in-question' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000:3); he does so by reclaiming what he read in Zanzibar as his own within a tale which is supposed to be accessed only by those who can read English or who have been educated in that language. To evoke the future in such a quasi-response, or for the future tense to even be contemplated as time is returned to the speaker, as Derrida posits, is a reminder of what it is to delay submission when the expectation of an answer is entirely subject to a presumably tight timeframe (2008:75-77). In other words, within the instant of speaking in response, the instant of not answering (*sensu stricto*) is born, thereby shifting the position of power which inherently belongs to and is consequently monopolised by the citizen asking the question.

In that sense, there are striking synergies between Bartleby and Abraham, as Derrida suggests, in their respective positions as individuals answering an authority by means of borrowing time so that what is projected as an answer would at the same time lead to survival (ibid.). This is not to say that Abraham disobeyed God's commandment in any way when ordered to sacrifice his son Isaac. What Derrida stresses instead, by way of envisioning an alternate dialogue between God and Abraham, is that Abraham *would have preferred not to* be put in that position in the first place. In essence, Abraham's standpoint is that '[h]e will not decide *not to*, he has decided *to*, but he would prefer *not to*' (ibid.:76, emphasis in the original). What saved Abraham from carrying out the killing of his son and for the son to be substituted by a lamb for the holocaust, is God's intervention occurring '*at this very instant*' (ibid.:73, emphasis in the original), temporally coinciding with the act of *sacrificing* and *not sacrificing* meeting at the same time. Deprived of a citizen's prerogatives and, like Bartleby, being 'a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attributed' (Deleuze 1998:73), Saleh Omar reverts the question to the sender, in that way 'stym[ying] the speech acts that a boss uses to command' (ibid.:73). In seeking not to respond *in preference of* the clarity expected in an answer, a new order is established between Saleh Omar, on the one hand, and the immigration officer and the legal advocate, on the other. Furthermore, by reverting to the same answer (pp.65, 75, 156) which 'comes back to me *now* and *then*' (p.158, my emphasis), Saleh Omar ties what the answer actually harbours, that is, 'a tension' and 'a sort of reserve of incompleteness' (Derrida 2008:75), to the event of claiming asylum, which is itself intrinsically temporal and very much dependent on the instant of that claim. In seeking refuge in Bartleby's formula, one might say, the refugee – Saleh Omar – narrates the meaning of survival in a type of knowledge where selfhood is at its epicentre rather than one which renders refugees an amorphous and ahistorical mass, as is often claimed (see Malkki 1995a). Embedded in the lack of speech and the lack of cooperation, Saleh Omar's narration – and citation – enacts resistance to what a refugee's time should be.

The futural elements of this resistance are manifested in the protagonists' understandings and invocations of the story and the formula. This includes Saleh Omar's decision *not to cite* Bartleby in response to Latif Mahmud, as it emerges on the novel's penultimate page: 'He would have preferred

me to say, *I prefer not to*. But I had been thinking of what Rachel said, and thought I would read "Bartleby" again before speaking his words as the utterings of an admired desperado' (p.244). In their analyses of this instance, to date scholars such as Brenda Cooper (2008:92) and Sean Bosman (2021) have positioned Rachel as 'the catalyst' behind the 'important shift' in Saleh Omar finally 'realis[ing]' Bartleby's true characteristics (Cooper 2008:92). Cooper posits that the citizen's success in opening Saleh Omar's eyes coincides with 'the beginnings of his initiation into sociability' (ibid.). This in many ways corresponds to what Arthur Rose identifies as a common feature of refugee writing: the 'fantastical attachment to the idea that the good life might be possible, if only they [the refugee] were better able to merge into the host nation' (2020:53). Through this interpretation, the refugee is assumed to have reached the threshold of 'refugee absorption' (ibid.) into the host society by endorsing the citizen's interpretation. In contrast, however, I suggest an alternative reading which is centred on this act being recognised as Saleh Omar *withholding speech for the promise of a new reading*. As such, rather than assuming that he has 'reject[ed]' his interpretation on the basis of the citizen's intervention (see ibid.), I return the reading of this text to the refugee, and more specifically to a *future* reading whose conclusions remain unknown. It is with the acknowledgment of multiple possibilities that the novel ends, with its final line positing the possibility, as discussed in the previous chapter, of returning to the protective folds of another refugee writer's gift: Alfonso's towel. The intention of revisiting both the textual (Bartleby's story) and the material (Alfonso's towel) in the concluding pages (pp.244-245) affirms that Saleh Omar is cognisant of the challenges that lie ahead as an older refugee in the UK, whilst projecting a time that is unknown and yet of his own making.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have brought Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams* and Gurnah's *By the Sea* together to demonstrate that the refugee protagonists in these novels are not merely passive wait*ers* whose times are held 'hostage' (Ramsay 2020:400) by *bawābs* and bureaucratic systems (whether at the border or inside the host state) or whose temporal rhythms are unequivocally 'dictated' (ibid.:401) by others. Instead, through close attention to the multiple and intersecting rhythms in these texts, I have shown

that they are simultaneously historians in their own right (following Pappé 1995), and time-*seekers* and time-*makers* actively responding to and creating new times as they follow their quest for a better future (whether the outcome of such attempts is deemed successful or not). Throughout my rhythmanalysis of these novels, I have challenged common assumptions pertaining to waiting and refugees by tracing the relationships that emerge between different times and temporalities of displacement and the ways that speech *and* silence, in addition to silencing, relate to the main protagonists in their encounters with one another and with non-refugees. Throughout, I have shown that such engagements are deeply embedded in processes of racialization and Othering which cannot but be read in relation to colonial times and the postcolony (Mbembe 2001:14, 16 and *passim*), highlighting the extent to which individual times relate to collective, national and transnational ones in these novels.

By reading the refugee protagonists' times as rhythms, I have sought to continue prioritising the selfhoods that are central to both of these novels. In so doing, I have posited that refugees' times in these novels span asylum but also refer back and forth, demonstrating the ways that asylum and history are intertwined, and tracing the extent to which protagonists have lived through the historical wound (to paraphrase Anzaldúa [1987] 2002:3) without being consumed by it. Their respective journeys (whether resulting in arrival or non-arrival) emerge as active efforts to escape the status quo with a view to creating better times. If the time of asylum and history are intertwined, it is equally the case that the rhythms of refuge can neither be reduced to the 'timeless present' (Griffiths 2014:1997) nor are they universal, as the protagonists themselves insist on the need to contextualise individual and collective experiences both historically and geopolitically.

Importantly, as these novels show, time is neither linear, nor homogenous, which in turn raises the important question of 'whose' time is centralised in the texts under analysis and whose is left in the margins. Indeed, the 'refugees' whose times I have explored are *specific* refugees, protagonists whose journeys across time and space are differentiated according, inter alia, to their real or perceived biological and bodily lack, and how their vulnerability and worthiness as refugees (or the

lack thereof) is interpellated and responded to by different audiences in relation to intersecting identities, including their age, race, their positionality in relation to colonial and postcolonial histories and, of course, their gender.

Drawing here on the concept of intersectionality[26] is particularly relevant to the broader thesis since it is notable that female refugees *in motion* are almost totally absent in both Kanafani's and Gurnah's works. In *Rijāl fī al-Shams,* Palestinian women are exclusively portrayed as mothers, wives and would-be wives stuck in host places and refugee camps, whereas in *By the Sea*, there is only one reference to individual families, including women, seeking refuge across the newly established borders created in the aftermath of the WW2 (pp.136-137). The lack of refugee women *in motion* in these texts, one might argue, is a lack which is predicated on two novels told from the male refugee perspective, where women, in one text, died in Zanzibar (Gurnah) and in another, are awaiting changes in the form of new economic opportunities abroad which are normatively attributed to the male figure (Kanafani). And yet, other readings and analyses can be offered in this regard.

In a recent interview pivoting around her book, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler remarks on the notion of 'tell[ing] histories' and what it means 'to be a woman at a certain time and place' and how equality is rethought in terms of independency (in Ferber 2020:n.p.).[27] In effect, history as commonly told by men typically does not factor in the optics of women, nor does it assume an active participation of women in such telling, or as producers of what bell hooks (*op cit*) conceptualises as 'significant speech'. With the exception of Elleke telling her version of the intersections between her family's time and colonial history in Kenya (as explored in Chapter 1), neither *By the Sea* nor *Rijāl fī al-Shams* have effectively set aside time for women, nor have they reengaged women's time in a manner

[26] Intersectionality as a concept and framework for analysis and action was originally developed by the African American critical feminist scholar-activist, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), to denote the mutually constitutive identities of gender, race and class and their corresponding structures of inequality and oppression (sexism, racism and classism).

[27] While Judith Butler is best known as a gender theorist, she has written extensively on refugees (see 2004, 2009, 2020; Butler and Spivak, 2007; Butler and Athanasiou 2013) and is therefore of dual relevance to my analysis.

which implies an equitable participation in spaces of asylum. While such choices are understandably grounded in, and justified by, aesthetic and narratorial considerations, and arguably highlight the significance of time and ageing in relation to different experiences of *masculinities* (thereby filling an important gap in their own right), they have nonetheless missed out *women's* gendered experiences of time (and containment) in displacement. Ultimately, what is absent in both *By the Sea* and *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, is Kristeva's *Women's Time* (*op cit*), which persuasively counters the unbalanced and inequitable imposition of human limitation as epitomised in castration by identifying lack as 'the foundation of the human subject's experience of temporal existence' (West-Pavlov 2013:110). In contrast to this lack, in Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and Bayley's *The Container*, women's time in and through displacement is marked by diverse chronological and embodied processes such as menstruation, pregnancies and childbirth, and female protagonists narrate and enact their own time(s) and encounters in containment and with immigration systems, including as refugees but also as producers of knowledge in their own right (and writing). It is the relationship between embodiment, time and containment in relation to both the male and female body in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *The Container*, to which I now turn.

Chapter 3

Refugee Bodies in Containment in *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*

The Refugee Body in Relation

Mainstream representations of refugees have often depicted displaced people as a dehumanised, amorphous mass (see Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017; Bleiker et al 2013) – as threatening floods, carriers of disease and insecurity, or bogus economic migrants –, thereby constituting those in search of refuge as corporeal threats to the healthy national body, which need to be governed and controlled accordingly (Ahmed 2000; cf. Rickel 2018:98). In order to elicit compassion and welcome rather than fear and rejection, one means of redressing the homogenisation of refugees as a threatening mass has been to 'humanise' the refugee face (in the singular), including through testimonial narratives (Szörényi 2009:173; Rickel 2018:97), by focusing on the particularities of individual experiences of displacement. While this has challenged dehumanising processes, and potentially elicited what Jennifer Rickel denominates a 'literary humanitarian' impulse (2018:97) amongst readers of refugee writing, the fetishization of the individual refugee figure has also received critical scrutiny. For instance, the celebration and idealisation of the contributions of certain refugees to particular sectors of neoliberal economies (ie 'the super refugee entrepreneur' and/or the grateful and productive refugee who fills the menial gaps left by the citizen) potentially reproduces racialised and gendered hierarchies of 'good' and 'bad' refugees, thereby reifying instrumentalist systems of exploitation and exclusion rather than recognising refugees as bearers of rights (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016a; Lenner and Turner 2018). In turn, while the androcentric nature of earlier accounts of forced migration have been redressed by documenting the experiences of refugee women[1] (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. 2008; Indra 1999), this has often been identified as reproducing systems of epistemic violence by interpellating women, as an equally homogenised and essentialised 'mass,' as eternal 'corporeal victims of sexual violence, innocent, non-agentive, and apolitical' (Ticktin

[1] The androcentric nature and assumptions pervading accounts of forced migration has been redressed by feminist scholars and theorists especially since the mid-1980s (see Indra 1999), including through the development of gynocentric analyses, placing women at the core to render their experiences visible (see Stacey and Thorne 1985:303).

2005:367), who need to be 'saved' by the active (Western) citizen (see Abu-Lughod 2002). Against this backdrop, and in order to resist essentialist and static depictions of 'the refugee' as a figure which is either a threat to be feared or a victim to be saved, feminist scholars have emphasised the importance of exploring the historically and politically produced conditions which lead to processes of victimi*sation* and also of recognising that victim*ised* people remain active agents in their own right (Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al. 2008:6; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014:403-406; Ticktin 2005). Such attention highlights that far from refugees being eternal victims, they are often exposed to systemic inequalities which lead to their becoming objects of consumption, including potential objects of economic and sexual exploitation, but also that these are processes which refugees can challenge and resist throughout.

Noting that the refugee body is at the core of such mainstream and contrapuntal representations alike, and guided by Moira Gaten's notion of 'corporeal specificity' (Gatens 1996:23), in this chapter I argue that Claire Bayley's *The Container* and Salim Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* simultaneously challenge, and yet also at different junctures risk reinscribing, many such tropes. I argue that such reinscriptions should not be equated with endorsing these tropes; instead, by incorporating rather than ignoring them these texts powerfully destabilise conventional binary representations of the refugee and thereby facilitate complex discussions about asylum and the particularities of refugees *in relation*: the individual as part of a community-in-becoming and/or a community-in-dissolution.

By reading these texts together, and through attention to intersectional markers such as gender, age, nationality, this chapter thus explores the positions and positionalities of refugee bodies in two spaces of containment which correspond to different stages of the refugee journey: the first, in the eponymous container as male and female asylum-seekers with diverse national and ethnic origins travel across Europe in search of safety; and the second within the confines of 10 women's apartments on the outskirts of Stockholm, where former-refugee Kurdish women who are now supposedly 'settled' Swedish citizens work as interpreters for newly-arrived refugees. I argue that these texts offer an important opportunity to pay special attention to specific bodies (following

Gatens 1996) – in particular, women's bodies, which are central to both of these texts – as they are simultaneously subjected to, and resist violence and control, including in relation to the cyclical nature of violence in different spaces of transit, border-crossing and containment. More specifically, through a focus on multifaceted representations of the refugee body in relation to illness, the mutating body, violence against women, and employment, I demonstrate how both *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* refuse to homogenise refugees, instead foregrounding not only their diversity but also the co-existence of both solidarity and tensions between and amongst members of refugee communities.

In both contexts, whilst centralising refugee-refugee dialogue and refugee-refugee relationality[2] throughout, the texts challenge assumptions of 'refugee communities' having one single identity or common cause (for critiques of such assumptions see *Migration and Society* 2018; Crawley 2020). Instead, they document the tensions and potential for dissolution that exist in conjunction with the re-forming of individuals and collectivities in exile. As such, these texts neither seek to idealise refugees' agency and solidarity, nor to demonise or dehumanise refugees; instead, the complexities of human relations are explored with nuance, allowing space for critical reflection on processes of care and support, and also of violence and exclusion, within and between refugee communities.

While both *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* acknowledge women-as-victims of sexual violence – to an extent therefore remaining in line with mainstream tropes – I argue that they provide an important counter-point to this essentialist and reductive interpellation by situating such accounts within the context of refugee-refugee relationality. In *The Container*, it is (some) other refugees who fear the sickness borne by a new refugee, and the risk of contagion; and even if the risk of future violence is at the hands of the smuggler, this violence is ultimately also made possible by other refugees' (in)actions. Yet it is precisely a refugee who cares for the sick refugee and proactively seeks to disrupt violence. In turn, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* violence is not merely suffered by the individual

[2] The term is Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's (2019).

victim but is resisted and embodied by the collectivity of women. As such, and starting from the premise that the refugee body is ultimately marked a priori by her own difference (see Ahmed 1998; Puwar 2004), I posit that these texts offer a nuanced exploration of the position and significance of the individual, specific, body within communities. Unlike assumptions that 'the body is the group made flesh' (as proposed by Sayad 2007:203), which risk deindividualizing what is specific about the body, by recentering the refugee body in this chapter I seek to capture it as a reality that exists prior to, but both independent of and in relation to the group, and not just in their midst.

Importantly, my focus on the body and the embodied person should not be read as a continuation of processes of objectification or the reduction of the refugee to the position of 'an object'; instead, I seek to prioritise the extent to which attention to processes of *embodiment* enables us to transcend a focus on the generic 'person' by recognising the significance of corporeal difference and specificity. In so doing, this chapter thus contributes to an emerging but expanding body of literature vis-à-vis embodiment and embodied encounters throughout the refugee journey (Ahmed 2000; Smith et al 2016; Hodge 2018; Mountz 2018; Häkli and Kallio 2021). As Sara Ahmed, whose work has been heralded as 'influential' for this expanding corpus (Häkli and Kallio 2021:683), argues: 'We need an understanding of embodiment as lived experience which moves beyond the privatised realm of "my body". Such an understanding of embodiment can be theorised in terms of *inter-embodiment*, whereby the lived experience of embodiment is always already the *social experience of dwelling with other bodies'* (Ahmed 2000:47, emphasis in the original; also see Weiss 1999). While Sayad argues that '[t]he immigrant is only a body' and 'is no more than his [sic] body' (2007:213), these texts demonstrate the importance of understanding not only *whose* body is displaced and contained, but also how 'the lived experience of embodiment' (returning to Ahmed) is specific, gendered, and always in relation.

More specifically, I posit that 'a different writing of embodiment' – which Ahmed (1998:64) calls for in her discussions on the hierarchisation of difference as per skin and colour – when applied to the body in asylum, involves the writing of the refugee as a way of reclaiming her body from being

dictated by legal categories and processes. Examining the role and potentiality of writing in relation to refugees – including throughout their journeys and in containment – offers an opportunity to transcend a focus on documenting what is often labelled as refugees' 'lived experiences', instead recognising the 'corporeal specificity' (Gatens 1996) inherent within the telling afresh of the stories of bodies of difference.

In addition to critically examining how the refugee women in these texts depict and debate their own bodies as they change over time, thereby paying particular attention to how their bodies are written into literature, I also investigate how both explicit and implied intertextual instances involving refugee women within *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* draw attention to the problematic of the refugee themselves becoming part of the ever-expanding literary corpus. With close attention to the linguistic specificities and multiscalar, corporeal dimensions of language in the texts under study, I argue that in these texts the refugee body, conceived as both particular and in-relation, is concurrently a source, carrier and producer of knowledge, contra the mainstream depictions that simultaneously deny the specificity of bodies and also erase that knowledge. Such an approach acknowledges the refugee body not only 'as an epistemological text' (Shildrick and Price 1998:7) written into literature for external consumption and analysis by the reader, but also, as exemplified clearly in *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* in the role of refugees as writers in their own right and/or bearers and carriers of the written.

In effect, writing is a central motif in both texts, and in this sense, in this chapter I simultaneously investigate the (ultimately unresolved) question of who writes whom, and who possesses the story and the text in displacement. While Rickel and others are invariably correct to critique the ways that literary humanitarianism reproduces a neo-imperial relationship between 'the refugee and the reader' (see Rickel 2018), in this chapter I interrogate the binary underpinning such a critique by exploring the centrality of writing, the writer and the written within these texts as processes and materialities produced and shared *by* refugees *for* refugees.

The Individual and the Community

At the beginning of *The Container*, Bayley introduces Mariam (an Afghan refugee in her 20s) to the group, the members of whom are pertinently referred to by Sissy Helff as 'the container community' (2016:105). The play's starting point precedes the actual first stop reported therein, which means that Fatima and Asha (Somali), Ahmad[3] (Afghan), and Jemal (a Kurd from Turkey) would have known each other for a few days at least before Mariam's arrival. This prior knowledge is essential as it constitutes some rapport between these individuals and, even though it does not imply equality, it nonetheless offers a space of contestation for the group, especially those whose speech and movements seem less worthy than others'. In essence, through Mariam's introduction to those within the container, I would argue that Bayley invites us to question how spaces and alliances are formed in situ and in transit, interrogating the clear distinction between strangers (Fatima, Ahmad, Asha and Jemal) and what Sara Ahmed poignantly calls 'a *stranger* stranger' (2000:106): in this case, Mariam. While, legally speaking, the bodies involved embody a collective search for better lives, their heterogeneity and distinctiveness emerge, inter alia, from their positionality with regards to each other and also their receptiveness, or otherwise, towards those who are added on rather than having joined from the start. In a sense, making Mariam join the group at a later stage suggests a reconstruction (and as such a rearticulation) of what it is that citizens within Europe posit as foreign in the first place: Mariam's arrival, entering the container at a stop which, we assume, takes place somewhere between Switzerland and France,[4] problematises an oft-invoked problematic premised on what are seen as unidirectional crossings from what is classified as the Global South to the Global North.

It is notable that the nationalities of those who are travelling are repeatedly restated throughout the play either with reference to their local languages or through the protagonists' stories as they kill time in containment. With regards to the ways that nationalities are arranged, it soon becomes evident

[3] Ahmad's name is spelt 'Ahmed' in the preliminary pages (immediately after the title page) of the published version of *The Container*, and yet as Ahmad in the Character list (p.4) and in the script itself (p.5 ff).
[4] While not delineated clearly in the script, Mariam's journey can be assumed to have taken place through the following route, as pieced together from the text: Afghanistan-Turkey-Balkans-Italy-Switzerland-France-UK.

that Bayley resorts to national pairings, with these pairs not only sharing a common language but also hailing from the same geography: Fatima and Asha (Somalia), Ahmad and Mariam (Afghanistan), and Jemal and the nameless agent (Turkey). The interconnectedness that Bayley demonstrates through these duals are also *duels*, such that tension is at its very core, as explored below. The (national) body that is supposed to share commonalities and be capable of repelling divisions (see Neiburg 2001), is instead the source of dissolution and, as emerges in the play, illness and contagion. Far from bodies in harmony, the refugee body emerging in *The Container* is subject to the national and personal troubles it bears, manifested at times in clashes and discord which have been carried throughout personal and collective journeys to spill out in containment.

It is the very meaning of survival that is being recalibrated in these journeys: building on my analysis of the gastronomic archive in Chapter 1, in *The Container* food and water not only sustain the travelling body, but also have the potential to reconfigure alliances between those en route. For example, when Bayley positions Mariam as the bearer of food and water upon her arrival, Mariam is reduced to the body that gives in order to sustain others. At first, Mariam consciously shares what she has. While her sickness (examined below) might be a reason behind relinquishing what she holds, it is equally apparent that in submitting what she has for the group she is deferring her own consumption. Towards the end of the play, Mariam becomes the one that is given (away) for the collective survival of the group, forcibly taken from and ultimately sacrificed by certain members of the group in order to pay (or satiate) the smuggler through her body.

Building, amongst others, on bell hooks' critiques of the gendered and racialised processes of 'eating the other' (1992), Ahmed (2006) delineates the process of eating at the table as an embodiment of kinship where those involved commit to one another and to the survival of the group through eating together and sharing what is being presented before them. Sharing a meal can thus be perceived as a form of collective engagement with the perishable during which conversations can be exchanged in an egalitarian fashion. However, I would add to this the important caveat that this collective process at times conceals the fact that there may be a significant discrepancy in the scale and subsequent

ramifications of contribution between those involved; such a tension is evident in *The Container* in relation to the collective consumption of the food shared by Mariam, and the consumption of Mariam's individual body in order for the collective journey to continue. In contrast with one person's promise to slaughter two chickens in Kanafani's *Rijāl fī al-Shams* as a means of co-sharing (in eating together) to celebrate crossing the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border (which never materialises), I read Bayley as inviting the reader to see the refugee body in a different light: as a specific body competing for survival with other bodies, notwithstanding the fact that all are in a state of incarceration.

Where *The Container* traces the complex relationalities that emerge between refugees of different nationalities in transit, the ten protagonists of Barakat's *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* all share the same nationality, while references feature throughout the novel to other 'peoples' (*shuʿūb*, sing. *shaʿb*) (p.72) and 'ethnicities' (*aʿrāq) (passim*) reaching Sweden and in turn being viewed as dislodging older refugees and naturalised citizens. The novel itself depicts refugee bodies as ever-changing entities which are subject (and subjected) to the perceptions of fellow refugees and citizens alike. While '[h]istory and identity are closely interwoven themes in many of Barakat's works, where people are frequently depicted as caught in the vertigo of history' (Rooke 2006:180), these people, as is the case in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, strive for a mediatory understanding of history where national spaces are seen (in glimpses) through the optics of the everyday and as such are receptive to constant configurations and re-configurations. This is not to claim that history in Barakat's eyes is monolithic or that non-conflicting identities in his writings are ever a possibility (ibid.; also see Ḥadīdī 2002). It is, however, to acknowledge the female characters' presence in conditions which, while apparently manageable, are equally inescapable: these are transferable conditions and also concern incoming refugees at the Swedish Immigration Centres where some of the Kurdish protagonists work as interpreters, and whose daily interactions remind them of the intersecting phases that their actual bodies will/would have endured on the way to citizenship.

By reading these two texts together, I start by investigating the nature of and relationship between individual and collective bodies in containment, including through an analysis of accounts of and

responses to sickness (in *The Container*) and gender-based violence (in both texts). Subsequently, I extend this focus to more broadly encompass an analysis of what I refer to as 'bodies *at* work and bodies *that* work' with regards to the spaces that the protagonists of these two texts can occupy, or imagine occupying, through their work and also through permutations and mutations of their own individual and collective bodies over time and space. In so doing, I argue that these texts confront and provide a counter-point to, rather than avoid, mainstream tropes of refugees as either a threat or as passive victims who are at risk.

Unequal Bodies in Containment

The Container starts off with speech emanating at the lorry's first stop (when Mariam will eventually 'enter' the container), when the travellers' bodies 'emerge from their hiding places behind and under the pallets' (p.5). In this sense, speech appears as selective, prompted by the unexpected stop instigated by the driver and/or the agent. In other words, speaking inside the container begins *in stasis* but also, one might argue, in response to it[5]: initially starting as whispers to eventually become fully and vocally expressed sentences (ibid.). While this initial, underlying caution could be seen as a response to the protagonists' inherent fears of being heard by the border police, and most likely in line with the agent's strict orders of how to behave inside the container, it is nevertheless a reflection of bodies becoming used to expressing themselves in conditions which are subhuman to say the least.

By positioning the refugees 'behind' and 'under' these wooden or plastic planks, Bayley directs their bodies in a multidirectional manner – semi-vertical; horizontal; and in a squatting position –, to draw attention to the individual approach to hiding which in turn responds to *different* bodies in hiding. Those bodies, which 'are always marked by differences' (Ahmed 1998:45; also see Farrier 2011; Jeffers 2012), have been thrown into containment, in the hope of being eventually de-contained once they reach their destination, in this case England; they are subjected to various degrees of containment, some of which belong to the group as co-sharers of the container and through their own

[5] This dynamic is clearly contrasted with the lack of speech in *Rijāl fī al-Shams* inside the empty water tank.

initiatives in finding and sourcing a *proper* hiding place for their own individual survival. This is neither straightforward nor without friction: fighting over a limited number of pallets is inevitable, resulting in those on-board contesting (and ultimately redistributing) the already limited space and resources amongst each other, in line with how central or marginal those people have become during the journey so far. Knowing who is able to speak and move, and who is there to police the slightest of movements is significant as it is an indicator of who is *really* in charge or is at least aligned with those in power. In essence, not all of those in containment have the right to speech, with the policing of speech and movement being subject both to the traveller's expertise in navigating the complexities of the journey, and to different articulations of gendered dynamics which emerge throughout the play (see Jeffers 2012; Farrier 2011).

Just over the first page of the text (pp.6-7) is occupied by a vital encounter between Fatima and Ahmad on the one hand and Jemal on the other:

> FATIMA. What happened? Have we stopped?
> JEMAL. Yes.
> AHMAD. Why are we stopping? What is going on?
> JEMAL. Keep your voice down.
> FATIMA. Someone will let us out.
> JEMAL. Shhhh.
> AHMAD. What?
> JEMAL. I'm listening.
> AHMAD. What can you hear?
> JEMAL. Nothing, if you don't shut up.
> AHMAD. Did you hear something?
> JEMAL. Shut up. There could be police outside.
> FATIMA. Police? Outside?
> JEMAL. Shut up, do you hear me? Shut up.
> *Silence*
> *Fatima stands and starts to move around.*
> What you doing?
> *Fatima ignores him.*
> What you doing?!
> FATIMA. I'm stretching my legs.
> JEMAL. Keep still, can't you. You'll make noise.
> FATIMA. My leg is dead. I have to move.
> JEMAL. Sit down, you stupid woman!
> FATIMA. Don't speak to me like that!

Fatima – who is the first character both to speak and to stand and move around in the play – eventually justifies 'stretching [her] legs' because '[her] leg is dead' as a response to Jemal's repeated question 'What [are] you doing?' and his insistence on silence, in which silence requires both the stilling of the voice and of the body. The numbness caused by Fatima's lack of movement whilst the container was in motion is pronounced as the death of part of her body, a limb. While the English is premised on the metaphorical and idiomatic, I would posit that Fatima's expression sits between the reality of being smuggled in a container and the metaphorical capacity of death, which is inflicted on the part before the whole. Illness and death are direct reflections of the unsustainability of living (even if temporarily) (see Sayad 2007), in a place where people become 'human cargo' (Moorehead 2006) and their dying limbs are just precursors for their highly anticipated death.

To speak back, where sexual difference is at the heart of speaking, as Judith Butler (1996) reminds us, is totally implicated in dominant and hegemonic heteronormative forms. Jemal instructing Fatima to 'Sit down, you stupid woman!' for her audacity to both speak and move her body is a clear indication of the gendered nature of containment (which, in this case, is a prerequisite for arrival), and the ways in which *specific* bodies, normally those of self-proclaimed knowledge, overwhelm other bodies in order to preserve and guard spaces which are assumed masculine. The question of whose bodies matter (to echo Butler's words, 1996) is first and foremost a question of survival: the body which claims supremacy in precarity at the expense of others is the one that predicates its survival through its reliance on other bodies which are rendered superfluous. To engage, and impose, his senses is Jemal's way of exhibiting and enacting knowledge as a seasoned, if 'failed', traveller: Jemal's desperation to do things right this time (his third attempt to reach England), in his eyes, necessitates full understanding of how to manage (and if necessarily ration) speech and the movement of the body in a calculated, discreet and covert manner. His rationale for silencing others is both to 'listen' and 'to hear what's going on' from the inside (p.5, 6), and to avoid the contained voices being heard from outside. As his self-professed responsiveness predates this particular journey – it dictates his use of the imperative 'keep still' and 'sit down' (p.6) – a distinction is

immediately made between varied bodies of surveillance and authority; that is, between those who give orders inside the container and those whose authority is exercised beyond the container.

At the same time as the audience is introduced to the inherently gendered power dynamics characterising the containment that is being endured, and performed, so too does Fatima insist on both speaking back, and continuing to move her body. In speaking back and admonishing Jemal – 'Don't speak to me like that!', followed by four references to Jemal's rudeness on the same page – Fatima demonstrates that women refugees are not merely passive objects, but of course can and do resist being shouted at and silenced, and insist on the right to their own bodies. As I discuss throughout this chapter, female characters' resistance to epistemic and physical violence permeates both *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, and yet, as I now discuss with reference to accounts of smell and sickness, while women's agency can lead to acts of mutual care and support, it does not, necessarily, lead to solidarity and sisterhood.

Smell and Sickness

Far from shying away from conventional tropes of refugees as vectors of disease and as pollutants threatening the otherwise 'clean' and 'healthy' nation, the centring of sickness and smell in *The Container* facilitates a nuanced analysis of refugee bodies in containment, not through the citizen's or the state's representations of refugees as threats, but rather through its emphasis on the complexities underpinning refugee-refugee encounters in displacement. Here, I examine sickness and smell through two main lenses, both in relation to Mariam's entry into the container. First, I argue that, in *The Container*, sickness and smell emerge as being *part o*f the refugee community, in so far as the community and the community's smell exist before Mariam's arrival, and her very first encounter with the community is *through* the smell they have formed en route. Noting that as she becomes part of this community she in turn contributes to and changes the 'smell/community', the second lens through which I analyse sickness is as a marker of othering and difference within the refugee community: in essence, I posit that it is through reference to Mariam's discernible sickness that she is identified by her fellow travellers (all bar one, Asha) as a threat to their collective survival.

Through these intersecting lenses, I argue that *The Container* offers a critique of mainstream accounts of refugees as carriers of disease, whilst simultaneously redirecting attention away from the refugee-citizen dynamic by highlighting processes of othering within and between members of a refugee community-in-transit.

The response to Mariam's sudden initiation into the group is telling, clearly marking the distinction between those within and outside the container (p.6):

> *The doors are opened. The sudden light is dazzling. They all melt back into their hiding places.*
> *Mariam enters.*
> *She stands, trying to see in the darkness, her hand over her mouth and nose, because of the smell in there. She retches. The doors are closed behind her.*

With both the opening and the shutting of the doors enacted in the passive voice, it transpires that those behind Mariam's entry are also the ones who will be authorising the next steps. Withholding the identity of the person or people who open and shut the doors at this juncture can be read as a means of demarcating spaces which separate refugees from other human beings, by deferring the presence of those who are actually in charge. In response to this opening and closing, rather than maintaining their original positions, those who are already in the container 'melt back into their hiding places' (p.6), with such movements – which could be interpreted as reducing them to caged animals, now accustomed to darkness – embodying their fear that the border police may be about to enter the container to detain them.

Importantly, Mariam's first encounter with the container and its occupants takes place through smell, preceding her seeing or speaking with the other travellers. Her first reaction to the darkness inside and the smell of the container (emanating from incarcerated refugee bodies), is to strain to see who and what is there, but also to cover her mouth and nose 'because of *the smell in there*' (emphasis added). When she retches, it is because her body is yet to get used to the smell: she is responding to a combination of smells, body fluids and the stench of defecation and urination by retreating, while

gradually moving further inside the container. The newest body who has now become part of the group is being repelled by what is assumed to be another smell, that which is abnormal to the new refugee's senses, where foreignness as a notion is re-materialised through the old bodies, even though, as the play progresses, it will be Mariam's suspected 'sickness' that will in turn deter the group from coming near her, with the exception of the youngest refugee, Asha. While such degrees of strangeness are tiered in nature and vary in scope and scale, they eloquently communicate a form of othering which does not only concern the citizen-refugee nexus but transcends it to also cover forms of refugee-refugee relationality; processes through which bodily responses are vocal and visual reactions to others which mostly go unnoticed, or at best are diluted, when discussing what could be considered to be forms of internal othering, or the othering that ensues en route (see Khosravi 2010). This internal othering, which primarily concerns refugees' responses to other refugees in containment, becomes even more acute when bodies equate to survival.

Mariam's arrival prompts Fatima to query the duration of the remaining journey – 'How many more days, then? Two more days?' –, returning to the same smell which had repelled Mariam in the first instance, with Fatima voicing her disgust: '[i]t stinks in here' (p.8). As it is a smell that is emanating from inside, it offers a clear reminder that the time spent within the container has been far too long, long enough for the bodies to secrete and accumulate unpleasant odours. In containment, the body is not being washed, resulting in the smell becoming a myriad of smells collapsing into one. As they are in the same place, all their body fluids are now completely shared, creating a smell which no one wants to claim. To realise the impact of the smell, Fatima resorts to 'in here,' to situate the smell, but also to demarcate its source within the parameters of the container, in turn drawing a line between the inside and the outside world where bodies can be washed and basic hygiene can therefore be maintained. To have the smell contained 'here' is another way of looking at the body in containment as it aspires for movement. The smell that is engendered by multiple bodies is also the smell of time, or what ensues when bodies are trapped for long periods.

The response to the newcomer, Mariam, and her body odour, captures what could be seen as individual instants of othering imposed on other refugees. In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, Ahmed argues that 'the stranger [including the refugee] is not *any-body* that we have failed to recognise, but *some-body* that we have already recognised *as* a stranger' (2000:55, emphasis in the original; see also Puwar 2004). So this knowledge, where '[t]he stranger is a category within' (Ahmed 2000:55), is presumed *a priori* and so further complicates the assumption of strangeness as a whole, so much so that the 'already recognised *as* a stranger' can also be anybody denominated as such. What is being smelt is 'the difference' (ibid.), where bodies (are forced to) revert to their own productiveness, in this case, secretions, as marks of the body's stasis, since the smell is now stuck to the body in containment and therefore cannot move, underlying the stuckness that those on board are living.

On the one hand, over time, the same smell that is viewed as *foreign*; alien to the senses; or hostile to the senses altogether, will eventually become *familiar* to the group. This conversion into familiarity is one way of observing these shifting priorities through the refugee body. In this way, discourses of alterity, whether amongst refugees or between refugees and citizens continuously shift to accommodate the changing nature of travel (see Khosravi 2010). At the same time, to declare or enact disgust can also attest to containment being resisted through what I conceptualise here as 'smelling aloud'. On the other hand, however, these displeasures remain on an individual level, since they are neither expressed by those who are capable of altering the course of the journey at that point, nor do they serve a particular purpose other than pushing the smell away from the speaker's body. The smell that was once familiar to the 'original group', the same smell that initially repelled Mariam, is now compounded by Mariam's own smell, repelling the 'original group' in turn (p.12, emphasis added):

> FATIMA. She is sick. Is she sick?
> JEMAL. *We have to smell that for days to come*.
> FATIMA. She is sick. I said she was sick.

While it was merely assumed at the start, Mariam's sickness is now proven and is an indisputable fact: combined with her visible exhaustion, there is now the vomit on her face and on the container's surface. Exemplifying forms of refugee-refugee care which are themselves gendered in nature (on the representation of refugee women as 'natural carers,' see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014), the teenaged Asha wipes Mariam's face with 'a little water' (ibid.), responding to the sight while at the same time performatively calming the group's fears. With likely the same water given to her by Mariam, Asha both cleans and cleanses Mariam's face.[6]

In the above exchange, time is overtly tied to this so-called sickness: not only is this sickness what the audience will eventually recognise as likely *morning*-sickness, but the remnants will live with those on board 'for days to come,' elevating them to the status of a contagion that travels through various bodies and times. What is equally important is the body's own capacity to counter illness, whether on an individual level or as part of a group, as in the case of *The Container*. Here, what emerges en route is both sickness – that tends to stay within the same body – and contagion – that is deemed to spread across different bodies and territories over time (p.13). Since the refugee is the quintessential stranger, and as such, is always assumed to be unwell – pathologized by virtue of her deracination (see Malkki 1995a) –, her entire presence is thought to '[cause] a disturbance in the very order of being as homeliness, as rest and respite' (Ahmed 2000:149). It is her entirety that disrupts, unsettles, and threatens the 'international community'. Yet in *The Container,* Mariam's sickness, which is likely to be a combination of extreme exhaustion and pregnancy, is one that has emerged within Europe rather than – as is often wrongly assumed – being a sickness that belongs to and emanates from the person's territory of origin (Malkki 1995a). In Mariam's case, the cause of this sickness – with all signs in the script alluding to the sexual violence to which she was, and will once again be subjected – is ultimately a *European* responsibility.

[6] This gendered and generational solidarity between refugees powerfully resonates with Latif having his wounded foot washed and cared for by Elleke (the former coloniser) in Gurnah's *By the Sea*.

Here it is my aim to pay special attention to what Gatens calls 'corporeal specificity' (1996:23) in relation to Mariam's body, as a sign of inclusion and exclusion at the same time. As two strange bodies, Asha welcomes Mariam, and Mariam in turn answers Asha's calls, and yet this concurrent engagement is not entirely marked by reciprocity as it moves the two (dual) away from the rest of the group into a space of their own within the container. They are both female and seem to speak for themselves (conversing in English), from the position of sovereign bodies transcending national and age markers. Asha's act of care and kindness towards the visibly sick Mariam leads to candid exchanges, with the two women consciously bridging the spatial and temporal gap as they co-share 'secrets' and details from their past lives. The age gap between Asha and Mariam is almost a decade and yet it becomes the duty of the younger Asha to look after Mariam and ensure that she is well (enough). In this regard, protecting the integrity of the body becomes an important survival tool, since those who are well enough have a better chance of arriving (see Qasmiyeh 2016).

While, in *The Container,* it is Mariam's individual, specific body that is cared for by Asha during the journey, innumerable othering representations constitute refugees as a homogenised mass, condensed in one body which lacks distinction, inseparable from each other and only moving in groups. From a multiplicity of labels and images that homogenise and pathologise 'the refugee', I dwell briefly on two which relate directly to materiality and the body: 'bogus' and 'swamp.'[7] The adjectival 'bogus' originally referred, in the 18th Century, to a machine used to make counterfeit coins, and then to refer to the coins themselves,[8] as worthless objects that should not be in circulation. I suggest that through their classification as 'bogus,' the refugee is stripped of their own material value, being rendered an incapacitated substitute of the (useful) self. In turn, the term 'swamp' positions the prosperous nation-state as being inundated, with its sudden shrinkage and corrosion caused by the arrival of an amorphous mass of unwanted bodies (on the latter, see Mountz

[7] Refugee- and migrant-based labels expand by the day, including those predicated on water imagery (see Pallister-Wilkins 2019). The constantly-used word 'flow' captures the permeable body of the refugee/migrant which supposedly insidiously and covertly encroaches on the body proper of the citizen, but also the common perception that the refugee's body is uncontainable and out of control, causing irreversible damage to the original body which is overwhelmed and indeed overflowed with excess.
[8] See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bogus.

2004; Papastergiadis 2006; Van Houtum 2010). This *bog* which is *bogus* in nature is now competing with the main body of the land, forcing it to shrink in both value and size. To be swamped is to be unbearably drenched with excess water, not the necessary amount as social and legal norms dictate and deem vital but with the excess that prominently suffocates the otherwise living body. From the fake substitute (bogus) to the deadly excess (the bog qua swamp), the refugee body lies in its own zone: simultaneously insufficient and in deficit, and yet always-already too much/too many. I suggest that it is within these extremes, oscillating between the refugee being an *overbody* (positing the refugee body as a *mass* which simultaneously suppresses the individual specifics of the body and reproduces the refugee body as an indistinguishable many (not plural) which threatens to 'swamp' the nation and, by extrapolation, the very existence of the distinct citizen) or an *underbody* (rendering the refugee body *bodyless*, such that its existence is spectral, dematerialised and invisible), that the refugee body is located – as an embodiment of an ordinariness that is being denied through such labelling.[9]

Unlike the inundated swamp, the water used by Asha to clean and cleanse Mariam's face is neither superfluous nor devoid of value, instead exchanging hands and being shared by all. Initially offered by Mariam to the group alongside the bread and chocolate with which she has arrived, the water finds its way back to Mariam's exhausted face. In such circumstances, the scarcity of water dictates some rationing. Ahmad, for instance, the other Afghan traveller, reacting to Asha's 'wasteful' application of water, clearly and loudly states that '[w]e haven't got much drinking water' (p.12). What is at stake in this act of caring for Mariam is the group's own survival, their possible failure to make the journey because of her illness, as they risk running out of food and water *because of her*.

In providing these rationed resources without fear – in contrast with Fatima's urgent instruction to Asha: 'Don't touch that! If she's sick, we will all be sick in a few days' (p.13), and Ahmad's utter

[9] For a synthesis of relevant literature see Häkli and Kallio (2021). My conceptualisation of the 'underbody' and 'overbody' builds on Jean-Luc Nancy's theorisations of the body. With regards to the genocide in Bosnia he argues of the body that it is 'either too many or non-existent' and '[o]f the body, there's always *a lot*. There's always a *crowd* of bodies, there's never a *mass* of bodies' (2008:124).

disgust at Mariam's vomit (p.12-13) –, Asha refers to the prevalence of sickness in the refugee camp (where she lived prior to this journey) to explain that she is not afraid:

> ASHA. Are you sick?
> MARIAM. No. I'm not sick. Thank you. You helped me.
> ASHA. I'm not afraid of sickness. In the refugee camp many people were sick. But sick people don't hurt you.
> MARIAM. Your mother is afraid of sickness.
> ASHA. She is not really my mother. She calls herself my mother. My mother got sick and died.
> This one is my auntie.

Inter alia, this draws a fascinating analogy between the refugee being sick en route and the refugee being assumed to be sick in the camp. In returning to the camp in this way, she shows her maturity to Mariam, disentangling herself as a young refugee whose presence has otherwise been referred to through her proxy relationship with Fatima. As the roles are swapped, and the young Asha cares for Mariam, it is important to acknowledge that it was Fatima who had first requested water from Mariam. The substitutive motherhood framing Fatima's relationship with Asha, and the emergent sisterhood between Asha and Mariam, braids the question of kinship together in the play, where alliances emerge as fluid and static at the same time.

This exchange, which seems ordinary at first, starts with Asha asking Mariam whether she is (still) sick, but concludes with Asha revealing that Fatima is in fact her aunt and not her mother as she claims. The interplay between pretence and reality is significant here. In the conversation, no names are shared directly but instead references to people ('many people,' 'mother,' 'auntie') and places ('refugee camp'), are made with reference to sickness: it is through the signified 'sickness,' that various people and the camp are being recalled. Sickness in this context is posited as a reality in the way it is being verbalised afresh through locating it in the past, in the refugee camp in this context, but also by acknowledging its devastating impact on people and their lives, as in the case of Asha's mother's sickness and eventual death. By means of this death, Fatima made herself the mother.[10]

[10] Fatima is the 'real' mother of two sons (living in the UK and Holland) and one daughter (based in Belgium).

Asha departs from the camp which is simultaneously a no-place and a place where life and death co-exist, and where various times intersect (see Augé 1996; also Qasmiyeh 2021). Sickness in such overcrowded spaces is never sickness alone, instead taking the form of a contagion, and yet 'sickness' itself is acknowledged as such by Asha without unnecessary fears: 'I'm not afraid of sickness.' Asha looks forward beyond the camp by first recognising that those who end up in camps have no other choice. They fall ill ('many people were sick'), but fear is directed at the inanimate in sickness by disentangling it from the ill body ('sick people don't hurt you') and placing it on its own. It is an advanced understanding to humanise the sick while maintaining that illness also kills. Within the parameters of the camp, people share illness so much so that there comes a time when normalising illness becomes another way of caring for the body (cf. Malkki 1995a).

The centrality given to smell and sickness in *The Container* thus offers a powerful counterpoint to common tropes that refugees are a threat to citizens and national integrity, by depicting how refugees respond to the sickness of other refugees, both through fear and care. Rather than excluding sickness in order to disrupt the linkage made between refugees and infirmity, *The Container* recognises not only that sickness emerges in diverse places and settings (including in refugee camps, en route, and within the container) but also raises urgent questions about the ethics of sickness and caring. In so doing, I posit that Bayley opposes (state-centric) ideas of containment and exclusion, whilst also highlighting the extent to which sickness may exist side by side with, and also as a direct manifestation of, diverse forms of violence which are themselves historically and contextually specific. This includes sexual violence, which is both implicitly and explicitly addressed in both texts under study. Importantly, as in the case of sickness, in the following section I argue that *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* directly confront the complexities of sexual violence in contexts of displacement in ways that disrupt, rather than perpetuate, mainstream tropes which depict refugee women as eternal, passive victims.

Self-Preservation and the Legacies of Violence

For both Asha and Mariam, the carer and the cared-for, surviving the journey is tied to their self-preservation, in terms of surviving both the past and what they will be subjected to in the future. It is sexual violence that killed Asha's sister, and traumatised and maimed Asha herself through the violence inflicted upon her by Fatima's son, her cousin Nuruddin (p.39); equally, Mariam was subjected to violations en route, through Europe and, as I discuss in the following pages, such violence will be imposed upon her once again as the container's journey goes on without her. This recognition of bodies being bound by shared histories of sexual violence does not allude to Asha's and Mariam's bodies being similar, but rather seeks to acknowledge their simultaneous specificities as bodies of distinction (see Ahmed 1998; Gatens 1996) while alerting the reader to the realities of sexual violence repeatedly committed against (refugee) women (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010). Asha's hallucinations about the past (p.37-9) can be read as a way of speaking out (and up), albeit through a deeply traumatised body, against what is about to happen to Mariam beyond the precincts of the container. As a direct counterpoint to a humanism that 'can only constitute itself on the bodies of de-historicized, archetypical refugees and other similarly styled victims' (Malkki 1996:398), in bringing these specific bodies to the fore through their overlapping narratives of violence, humanism is reclaimed by the specific, or even the specifics of what and who the human is within these individuals' particular contexts.

In this section, I turn to Mariam's body as a direct substitute for the cash demanded by the Driver (through the Agent). Such scales are not new, as paying through the body in trafficking cases, for instance, has been well-documented and well-researched (Anderson 2014). However, what is of particular interest here is how Mariam's body is consumed at various stages: en route, inside the container when *her* food and water are handed over to the group, and eventually when she is forcibly dragged outside the container for her body to be used as payment. Building on Ahmed's notions of 'eating with them' and 'eating them' as per proximity in hospitality and multiculturalism respectively (2000:150, also 149-160), I would argue that within the container *eating with* and *eating the other* are concurrent, on the basis that it is Mariam's own sustenance and body that are taken

away and thus expropriated. The apparent sharing serves an important entry point to the ways in which some bodies transition to wellness and yet others are left behind to fend for themselves. However, 'eating' Mariam does not implicate everyone but instead questions the almost collective inaction which leads to the disappearance of her body.[11] Thus, eating together, or just eating, should not be exclusively read within frameworks of conviviality and co-sharing, but be read anew and in context as interconnected practices through which certain bodies are consumed to ensure the survival of the group (cf. Phelan (2001:13) on dependency and 'self-seeing' and 'self-being'). Here, dependency on the other is not of Mariam's free will, but rather is what the refugee is left with when (im)mobility occurs through the body. Asha's desperate interjections as Mariam is about to be taken away – 'You can't let her go out alone! She has a baby in her belly!... We know what will happen!' (p.35) –, leading to the powerful admonishment directed at Ahmad, '[w]e ate her food' (p.36), irrefutably reinforce the eater and the eaten dialectic, reaffirming that what had happened in the past (i.e. consuming Mariam's food) is going to be carried over into the future, but this time through Mariam's body being violently violated.[12]

Being forced out of the container not only compounds Mariam's existing strangerness as the late arrival and as a woman who, according to the Agent, can pay through her body, but also as the one who now occupies the position not just of any stranger but rather of the '*stranger* stranger,' comparably speaking (see Ahmed 2010:106). The significance of this strangerness, as Jean Luc Nancy articulates in his broader philosophical meditations on 'Strange Foreign Bodies' (2013), is linked simultaneously to *embodied* foreignness, and to the risk of being subjected to specific kinds of violence: '[t]he expression *foreign body* allows us to sense what the stranger consists in. It is not only a matter of its difference but also, and perhaps above all, the fact that this difference is the fact

[11] The name Mariam (Mary) has rich religious connotations which are worthy of further analysis. Notably, in her 2016 article, Sissy Helff misspells Mariam's name as Miriam throughout; this conversion adds extra texture to how the one body which is forcefully pushed out of the container is now literally another name altogether, but also a bearer of other names/bodies which can foresee indistinguishable destinies for women in asylum.
[12] Where Asha seeks to intervene to save Mariam's body from being consumed in lieu of financial payment, Asha herself was unable to save her sister or the baby to whom she offered her own body for consumption: 'I tried to feed him. But no milk would come' (p.16).

of a *body*' (2013:83, emphasis in the original). Difference takes over the body, subsuming it into a strangerness that is ultimately inextricable from the body itself. Since '[a] body is penetrable only according to one of two opposing logics: the logic of assimilation or the logic of destruction' (ibid.), in this case violence against Mariam's body is now imminent precisely because of being identified as penetrable: her body, which is no longer part of the community, is now on the verge of being subjected to destruction.

To avoid the violence which Asha predicts is inevitable, Mariam wants to barter: for self-defence, Mariam has carried an unloaded gun from Afghanistan to Europe, a gun which was passed on from the father when '[the Taliban] killed [her] husband' (p.32), and which she now wants to use in place of the extra sum of money demanded by the Agent. However, the Agent dismisses the gun as 'old' and 'broken'. In reaffirming its worthlessness, he re-positions Mariam's body as the only available substitute, ominously stating 'you are a refugee woman, who know how to pay…' (p.34). I also perceive a topographical dimension to all of this: the brokenness itself is the mirror image of an Afghanistan that is dissipating. The gun is not just a secret that is kept in a bag, but rather a microcosm of the contemporary history of Afghanistan unfolding beyond its national borders. Furthermore, Ahmad's fat body appears to be another relevant sign of what it means – for the sole survivor – to devour in excess. His refusal to pay for his compatriot, Mariam, is not just a financial decision: it is in line with his unrelenting misogyny towards Mariam. First, by blaming a widow for travelling alone and then by denying her the right of survival by excepting her. Going beyond Agamben's notion of a space of exception, 'where sovereign power suspends the law, producing a zone of abandonment' (Agamben 1998, 2005; also Moran 2015:2), this conveys a tension between being *accepted* and *excepted* as a body. Ahmad's collusion with the Agent (and the invisible Driver) thus corroborates a new space of exception which happens within and beyond the container, wherein their practised sovereignty not just excepts Mariam from the container but also renders her expendable. In this regard, reducing Mariam to 'bare life' entails viewing her permanently as 'a

banned being who […],' *contra* Agamben's suggestion of bare life[13] as 'not being eligible for ritual sacrifice' (Agamben 1998; Moran 2015:19), is in fact being sacrificed herself.

While the broader literature tends to portray refugee women as non-agentic victims of sexual violence (Ticktin 2005:367), Mariam never comes across as 'a docile body' (Foucault 2020 [1977]); on the contrary, she is a 'willful [sic] subject' (Ahmed 2014) whose resistances (in the plural) span surviving multiple journeys as well as advising Asha on matters concerning autonomy and education (as I discuss in this chapter's final section). In turn, Asha repeatedly exerts her wilfulness in challenging the status quo; this, subsequently, leads to her being identified by others in the container as difficult and disobedient: Fatima even invokes Asha's mental illness to discredit the latter's resistance to Mariam being taken away, declaring that Asha is 'getting sick again' (p.36),[14] and describing her as being 'crazy-mad' because 'she's seen some bad things and she gets mixed up' (p.38), which leads to her 'crazy-talking' (p.38).[15] In spite of Ahmad's refusal to support Mariam, and Fatima's discrediting of Asha – acts which are tied to, and lead to, different forms of physical and epistemic violence –, Mariam and Asha's newly-formed community is a clear example of alternative forms of solidarity between refugees which transcend national borders and instead rely on diverse forms of sorority, reciprocity and co-sharing (also see Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2019).

As her compatriot, Ahmad, refuses to pay for Mariam, Asha continues to desperately seek a means to prevent Mariam from embodying her sister's fate, becoming '*very agitated and upset'* and '*tearing at FATIMA's hem'* in search of her possessions. As Fatima dismisses Asha's attempts to prevent Mariam's disappearance and violation by invoking Asha's past traumas, Fatima's own possessions

[13] I do not subscribe to Agamben's 'monolithic vision of [what] bare life [is]' – a conceptualisation which has long '[elided] acts of resistance and other practices which operate to maintain humanity and resist bare life within the state of exception' (Walters 2008, cited in Moran 2015:20).
[14] Mariam and Asha's bond is between the two women who are branded 'sick': the first, the bearer of physical sickness, the second, branded mentally ill.
[15] Being referred to as sick (mentally) by Fatima is one way of discrediting Asha's ability to see (through) and make judgments independently, noting that branding those who can *see* as 'mad' is not unusual and is in line with common assumptions that it is only those who are sound who are capable of making the journey. On madness and seeking asylum, see Qasmiyeh (2012).

are variously tied to diverse temporalities: in addition to some cash, her belongings largely comprise items which have immediate value (such as rice and sugar) and which can be utilised instantly if needed, alongside a gold ring that she snatched off '[her husband's] dead finger' (p.29) and which is now secretly sewn into the hem of her dress in close proximity to her body. Amongst the several items (potentially) serving the present moment, it is in the future where the value of one individual item of the past – the gold ring – can be recuperated (a thematic I return to below with regards to *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*).

It is in denying the existence of any possessions of value that Fatima invokes Allah for the very first time in *The Container:* 'I swear by Allah, my last piece of gold I had to give away to get me and this child across the sea' (p.29), declares Fatima when asked for her possessions, by means of authenticating her denials that she is keeping any gold back from the smuggler. While Allah and his body are conspicuously absent in *The Container* (an absence which has not, to the best of my knowledge, received critical attention to date), when his name is invoked by Fatima, it is, in my opinion, for Allah to be used as an alibi, to be relied upon as a means of corroborating her 'truth'. In this instance, Allah is consciously named (rather than God), marking a dramatic shift in *The Container*, as a deferred acknowledgement of the (implied, but not openly discussed) common faith of those on board, in the hope that those listening would believe her words. To vocally summon Allah's body to the setting, Fatima distinguishes both His body and her own as untouchable, even as Asha tears at the seam of her dress in desperation. Since this temporary summoning of Allah takes place before Mariam *is disappeared*, the sacrificial value of Fatima's performance is sparked by the material value of the ring that she is hiding. At the same time, as this summoning is uttered inside the container and in the presence of 'the container community' (Helff 2016:105), including the Agent, it is Mariam's body alone that will pay the price, by being violated with no witnesses at the threshold of the container.

Embodying and Resisting Violence

Where Fatima's insistence on keeping her gold ring – itself ripped from her dead husband's hand – to protect her future is at the cost of sacrificing Mariam in the present, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* Rihani's attempts to self-preserve through gold must also be viewed in relation to her own history of and against domestic violence. The combined income that Rihani earns through interpreting 'from Kurdish for the Immigration Department's interrogators' (p.216) and from 'working at a nursery near her house' (p.216) sustains her and her two daughters, whose survival is attached to their mother's and who will grow up to become Kurdish Swedish or Swedish Kurdish (depending on how one sees the order) in Sweden. At the same time, Rihani spends the income from her home-made wine *(nabīdh)* (a venture established initially with a Swedish colleague, producing a beverage that she herself does not consume) to buy gold. Accumulating gold *(dhahab)* becomes an obsession of Rihani's – some to be worn in public or on special occasions, adorning her chest, and some to be stored away for difficult times when it will become necessary for her to draw on her savings. This relationship with gold is not born in Sweden but has historical roots within certain cultures and geographies (i.e. see Moors 2013), whereby gold is perceived to be eternally secure; within this security (and stability) comes bodily stability and the potentiality to resort to one's personal assets in time of need.

In the chapter titled '*Sabt al-Nisā''* (Women's Sabbath) Barakat dwells on an extremely graphic recollection of past domestic violence incidents where Rihani and her two young daughters, aged five and seven, are the victims and survivors. It opens with the two young girls debating '[w]hich knife is better?' (p.213), in order to choose the sharpest one to kill the father instantly; as Rihani hurries her daughters to bring her 'just any knife' (ibid.), the girls continue to take their time to identify the best one. The indescribable violence against Rihani intersects with the sexual violence that Asha and Mariam were subjected to in various stages and spaces of their lives, as represented in *The Container*. Unlike the various clues scattered through the latter, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* the violated body is graphically delineated. This is not to suggest that the hyper-visible or detailed recounting of violence equates to a more *violent* violence, *as opposed to* the one that is subtly recalled and hinted

at; instead it is to recognise the many modes through which violence is variously narrated and suppressed in literature (also see Gunne and Brigley 2010).

Having faced physical and ontological violence over the course of more than a decade, it is in the incident recounted in this chapter that Rihani for the first time physically responds and decides to leave her abusive husband. In so doing, Rihani both embodies and resists this violence through her body: her words are no longer sufficient to repel or diffuse his violence, and, instead, it is with her body that she physically defends herself against the father of her children. As Sayad suggests, when migrants can no longer draw on language to transmit messages about their pain and illness, they instead resort to speaking 'corporeally' (2007:212): 'to make his [sic] body speak or to speak through his [sic] body' instead of speaking 'verbally' because 'the body takes the place of the word (which he [sic] cannot use)' (ibid.). In this context, where the word is no longer sufficient to protect herself or mitigate violence, I view Rihani's body as taking the place of testimony not as an ill or ailing body, but as a body of resistance.

The power of her body resisting this violence, as a form of what could be conceptualised as 'corporeal speech,' is further exemplified by the clustering of references to her body's relationship to sound over the course of two pages, ever more powerful given that in Arabic *ṣawt* (the term used in the original text) is both 'voice' and 'sound': in the past, the daughters had witnessed their father striking their mother's head with a remote control (an instrument for controlling not only what is seen but also at what volume), with such force that it split in two as she knelt, protecting her head with her arms (p.215); the children rushing to bring her the knife as the father screams at Rihani and they then hear '*ṣawt suqūṭ jasad ʿala al-arḍ'* (p.214 – 'the sound of a body [Rihani's] falling to the ground'); and finally, when '*Rakala Rīḥānī biqadimihi fa-tahāwat ilā al khalf murtaṭima bi-mustaṭīl khashabī istaqarrat ʿalayhi ālat al-tasjīl, wa sharāʾiṭ mūsiqā*' (p.215 – 'He kicked Rihani, who in turn fell backwards, hitting a wooden rectangular box within which was a recording device and music cassettes'). Having previously been attacked with the controller-of-sound, and her body having produced sound as it fell to the ground, and subsequently impacting upon objects which record, store

and reproduce sound, it is in the instant under analysis that Rihani's body 'speaks' in its own right to defend itself: as he intends to slay her with the knife, '*irtaddat ʿalā zawjihā fa-iqtaḥamathu bi-jasadihā al-mumtaliʾ al-qawiyy al-qiwām fa-tarannaḥa munhāranʿalā ṭaraf al-minḍada al-mustaṭīlā'* (p.216 – 'She rushed towards the husband, ambushing him, with her corpulent, firm body; he shook and then collapsed onto the edge of the rectangular table').

No longer a submissive victim, nor limited to the spoken word, which is no longer enough, '*Iʿtalathu Rīḥānī wāḍiʿatan rukbatahā ʿala ṣadrihi bi-ḥiqd alf qalb'* (p.216 – 'She rode him, pressing her knees against his chest with the hatred of a thousand hearts'), disrupting the previous order and positions of their bodies (it is now he who is collapsed, and she who is above him and in control) and demanding that her daughters give her the knife. As they beg their mother not to kill him (p.216), Barakat immediately makes reference to the weighty pieces of gold which Rihani wears around her neck. Invoking the gold could be read as a stabilising force which gives gravitas to her otherwise brutalised body (p.216). Through this gold, one might argue, Rihani's body protrudes so that the visible jewellery can detract attention from the invisible pain.

Importantly, during the attack, the husband seeks to remove the gold that Rihani is wearing and to grab the gold that she has set aside, something which she fights off, inter alia, by threatening to inform the police: not to report him for domestic violence, but for stealing the gold that she has bought to protect her and her daughters' future. He retorts that he would simply tell the police that she had stolen the gold *from him*, or, he continues, he would smear her reputation by declaring that she is a prostitute (p.218). In effect, when he is eventually summoned by the police, he declares that his wife is either hallucinating (dismissing her in ways that echo Fatima's assertions regarding Asha, as discussed above), or that her pimps have been stealing from her (ibid.). Whether declaring her to be mentally ill, tainted by prostitution, or through physical violence, it is clear that those who dare to challenge male domination are threatened in different ways, including ways that can undermine their presence and standing in relation not only to the authorities but also to their community.

Rihani is ultimately able to repel her violent husband and remain in her place, thereby continuing to preserve and protect her gold/her future. At the same time, viewing the accumulation of gold as a form of archival practice (see Chapter 1) also sheds light on the precarity that marks Kurds' lives, demonstrating how one form of security can be inextricably linked to precarity and violence across various times. While Rihani's decision to invest in gold could be personal, it is nonetheless triggered by her ongoing insecurity surrounding the future (as is Fatima's insistence on protecting her gold ring): preservation, i.e. the storing away of what is deemed of *futural* value, is closely founded on self-preservation, noting that preserving what could (or will) be needed is another way of confronting the future which, if foretold, in such cases will always be a consequence of past violence.

Surviving violence, as Rihani ultimately does, is not easily attainable, nor does it necessarily mean overcoming or coping with its impact. Instead, it is a return to a body (in this case, a supposedly settled body) that is exacerbated by its own memories and pain. Of the multiple pains endured by Rihani, one instance pertains to that inflicted by Rihani's husband when she was attempting to escape his clutches: '*wa huwa yukhrij qaddāḥan min jaybihi […] ashʿala shaʿrahā, fawalwalat Rīḥānī taḍrib raʾsahā bi-rāḥatayhā fa-akhmadat al-ḥarīq al-ṣaghīr*' (p.216 – 'as he pulled his lighter out of his pocket […] setting fire to her hair […]. She howled and with her bare hands she hit her head trying to put the small fire out'). To qualify the fire that the husband lights in her hair as *ṣaghīr* (small) does not detract from its ferociousness; nor is it an attempt to dilute its ever-lasting effect. It is, rather, a relative use of an adjectival in extremely violent conditions susceptible to fast deterioration so much so that what is assumed 'small' could only be seen as the beginning of and/or allusion to more violent acts committed against Rihani and her daughters.

Pain as experienced and in particular as *expressed* by Rihani and other women surviving violence transforms the body into an embodied object where the lived and the living permanently intersect (see Butler 2006). Elaine Scarry, in her book *The Body in Pain* (1987), powerfully retains the multi-dimensional capacities of feeling pain, where bodily trauma sits side by side with shattered languages (caused by pain). What is apparent in Rihani's case is that what she has had to endure (as the novel

guarantees) is being shared gradually with her female friends unified through their (official) dissociation from men, whose consensus against violence is repeated constantly. Mariam's unspoken pain in *The Container* is here juxtaposed with the vocal denunciation of the many causes of pain, not to overlook, of course, 'a connection between the over-representation of pain and its underrepresentability' (Ahmed 2014:22). Speaking about pain, whether vocally or through the body (as Sayad 2007 maintains), takes different forms and venues. In *The Container*, for example, where enduring hardship and committing to silence for the sake of reaching a destination is part of journeying, pain is hardly expressed by Mariam bar the recurrence of fatigue and vomiting. In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, however, possibly due to these bodies feeling *in-place* as naturalised citizens, fully conscious of their exclusively gynocentric spaces, in apartments managed entirely by them, narrating pain, for those women, spans their physical bodies, their national history of displacement, and their struggles as divorced mothers fighting discrimination and misogyny. It is worth remembering that it is during the sabbath *(al-sabt)* that one rests, or as the tales of the Old Testament espouse, creation is followed not only by resting, but a well-earned deserved rest. Assigning the chapter on Rihani the title *Women's Sabbath* directly links it with the women involved not as individuals but as collectives. In other words, the chapter itself becomes a space of meeting – or witnessing so to speak. It is no longer solely 'Rihani's chapter,' as is the case of the other chapters whose contents are assigned to specific figures and apartments. It is, one might say, a chapter calling for the re-convening of these women to share more sentient details.

Characterised by gender disparities and the debased position of women more broadly, the violence to which Rihani is subjected is not particular to one household. It is a violence that has enabled these women to fight it independently and in doing so reclaim their and their family's autonomy. In combating violence, and insisting on remaining in her home, Rihani refuses to be 'removed from history and culture' (Memmi, cited in Curtis and Pajaczkowska 1994:213) by being rendered non-existent. By keeping her home, and her belongings, she seeks to protect her future, and that of her daughters.

As I have argued throughout this section, the texts under study challenge mainstream depictions of refugee vulnerability to violence through asserting women's agency and resistance, and, through disrupting spatialised tropes which assume that violence against women is enacted 'over there' and not 'here' (see Abu Lughod 2002), by undermining the exceptionalist image of Europe as a place of safety for refugee women (also see Rickel 2018). Equally, both *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* are centred upon refugee-refugee dialogue, and instances of refugee-refugee care, thereby disrupting mainstream representational dynamics, tropes and trends reproduced by 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995a). However, 'humanising' the refugee in these texts does not necessarily entail the presentation of an equivocally 'good' refugee. Paralleling the ambiguous characterisations of Fatima, Jamal and Ahmed, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* problematises the notion of refugee-refugee solidarity, including by perpetuating another key trope which constitutes refugees as a threat: by narrating women's experiences of domestic violence at the hands of fellow Kurdish men in Sweden – even if these are experiences of resistance – *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, alongside *The Container*'s representation of Mariam's and Asha's exposure to past, present and future violence, arguably reaffirm instead of disrupting the oft-made (and extensively critiqued) assumption that 'brown men' invariably pose a risk to 'brown women' (to paraphrase Spivak 1993:93, see also Abu-Lughod 2002 on the 'need' to save Muslim women). While I return to this point below, the duality of refugees simultaneously facilitating, delimiting and denigrating the lives of other refugees emerges throughout both texts. Noting that this includes refugees variously enabling or denouncing certain forms of productivity, in the next section I examine the narration of productive bodies through the lens of what I conceptualise as bodies-at-work and bodies-that-work.

Refugee Bodies at Work

As soon as Asha finishes wiping Mariam's face and cleaning up the sick (in this order), Jemal addresses Asha by saying she had 'better get used to doing the jobs nobody else wants to do. The dirty jobs. That's what they'll offer you in England' (p.13). Such statements are not addressed solely

to Asha: they are an indictment of what substantiates, in real economic terms, a refugee body. The 'dirty' body that belongs to the refugee is on a par with the 'dirty' and 'menial' jobs that the refugee herself can (or, rather, is permitted to) do. Noting that 'foreigners taking jobs has been a trope of concerns about aliens and immigrants for generations' (Anderson 2013:10), Jemal implies that Asha will only have access to those jobs because the citizen does not wish to perform them: not because the refugee is needed, but because of the citizen's reluctance to do what he sees as below him and which can then be assigned to non-citizens. The leftover jobs which are rejected a priori by the citizen are what are 'offered' to the refugee. Thus this dirt is both the body and the work that is being done by (and also promised to) the same body.

As Ahmed reiterates with regards to abject bodies, 'disgust involves not just corporeal intensities, but speech acts' (2014:84; see also Kristeva 1984). Throughout his assessment of what might be called the refugee condition, Jemal engages not only the body but also what it means to speak for/about this body. Even though his words might appear completely dismissive of Asha, they offer important insights into the disjuncture between what the refugee wants and what is *really* out there for her in the first place – if anything. Drawing on referents that reinforce clear borders between the refugee and the citizen and the sound and the sick refugee, Jemal complicates the refugee position further, bringing the body closer to the realities of asylum and what the refugee body is expected to perform. The 'nobody else' is in effect the refugee who cannot but accept what is being made available to her by the somebody-citizen.

In reflecting on the self-hierarchy within the same body as per disgust, resulting in well-demarcated corporeal and territorial dissections, Ahmed posits that

> [t]he spatial distinction of 'above' from 'below' functions metaphorically to separate one body from another, as well as to differentiate between higher and lower bodies, or more or less advanced bodies. As a result disgust at 'that which is below' functions to maintain the power relations between above and below, *through which 'aboveness' and 'belowness' become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces.*
>
> (ibid.:89, emphasis in the original)

While this *dissection* is within the same body, it is nonetheless one that responds to distinction conceptually and thus can be easily transferred and applied to various bodies; those which are distinct but also apart. In line with Ahmed's argument, I posit that Jemal, *practically*, equips the reader with undisputed realities: that is, of what it means to be a lower body in confinement while projecting a not-so-different life beyond. Within Jemal's statement lie two key verbs: to *want* and to *offer*, recapitulating the grading intrinsic to the refugee-citizen relationality. 'To want' is not any wanting. It is the wanting that is contingent on the superfluous arising, on survival being intricately linked to acceptance and the ensuing gratitude on the refugee's part. 'To offer,' on the other hand, reorients the directionality of power and tips it in the citizen's favour since the offer is not just his but is in fact what, more importantly, makes him always the *above* body: 'to offer' is to have from the start, whereas 'to want' is to be in a position where one can, at best, accept the only offer in place. When Asha responds by saying '[s]omeone has to clean it' (p.13), she acknowledges her role as this 'someone' when it comes to cleaning and in doing so pre-emptively re-affirms Jemal's words. It is exactly through the scheme outlined above by Ahmed that ''aboveness' and 'belowness' become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces' (2004:89). Building on Ahmed's theorisations, it is through those *specific* bodies, objects and spaces (and I would add, times) that a body is seen as either a *below*- or an *above*-body.

Accordingly, '[t]he bodies that matter, in the sense that they have the power to delineate the zone of home, are those of citizens' and it is they who maintain the right to exclude or include those refugee bodies which do not 'belong' in that zone' (Jeffers 2012:64). This assumption, which is derived from and builds on Butler (1993) and Ahmed (2000, 2006, [2004] 2014), points to the extent to which the systemic exclusion of 'those refugees' is one that is associated with those who have the right to home and those whose wilfulness enables them to determine where home is. Through this delineation, refugee bodies are moved away from the citizens' and yet are summoned over (and included, one might argue) when those places temporarily make room for them. Home, nonetheless, is elsewhere

for those in confinement, and the power to include or exclude arguably does not only lie within the body of the citizen, but also within the body of certain refugees.

In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* the protagonists' 'home' is simultaneously Sweden and Kurdistan. While Jemal's and indeed Asha's expectations in *The Container* are that only menial jobs will be available for refugees to perform *for citizens* in the UK, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the main protagonists have found different forms of employment, including as intermediaries *with* and *for other refugees and migrants*, specifically in their common professional role as interpreters. As the story unfolds, it transpires that Zulaikha was a late-starter, both in terms of joining the group and in the field of interpreting. Zulaikha and Zintana's long-standing friendship, we learn, arose through the services that Zulaikha used to offer and complete in her own home, including crafting embroidered pillows and cushions. Zintana had long wanted Zulaikha to leave the domestic sphere and venture outside to undertake better forms of work. While Zintana emphasises the financial benefits of such work, in many ways this process mirrors Mariam's attempts (in *The Container*) at dissuading Asha from accepting her fate as a domestic servant, as she highlights the importance of stepping outside to find the tools to write her own story (as discussed in the final section of this chapter).

As they recall Zulaikha's initial reluctance to take on interpreting for newly-arrived Arabic and Kurdish speaking refugees, Zintana and Zulaikha's common friend, Noreen, reveals the comparative frame adopted to apply pressure on Zulaikha (p.271):

> المهاجرون بارعون في الأعذار. كلُّهم يعانون أمراضاً في المفاصل، أو في أعمدتهم الفقرية. إن لم تنفع أعذار كهذه لدى الدولة، كي يحصلوا على تقاعدٍ وهم في العاشرة من أعمارهم، ادَّعوا العَتَاهةَ النَّفْسية – الخوفَ من التجمعات، الصَّرَع، الإغماءَ المتواصل كلما سُئِلوا عن أسماء أمهاتهم. زليخا متضامنة مع هذا الصِّنف.

> Migrants are good at excuses. All of them have aches and pains in their joints and spines. If such excuses aren't convincing to have early retirement at the age of ten, they claim to be mad or are paranoid of big gatherings or have epilepsy and constantly pass out when they are asked about their mothers' names. Zulaikha is in solidarity with these people.

While Zulaikha was reluctant, what is hinted at by Noreen is that interpreting is an easy and (relatively) lucrative job, as long as Zulaikha stops making excuses. In insisting that she take on interpreting, Noreen and Zintana posit that Zulaikha's migrant body has the potential to use particular skills to her benefit, in this case interpreting for other refugees and migrants who are denigrated in the process. By positing other migrants as constantly invoking (or inventing) their decrepitude and infirmity in order to avoid work and seek early retirement – importantly, through listing illnesses and medical conditions which are neither visible nor palpably provable, thereby necessitating a performance to substantiate such claims –, and by positioning Zulaikha as being 'in solidarity' with 'those' migrants, the latter's growth and potential alike are assumed to be stunted through her insistence on remaining in the domestic sphere.

In her nuanced reading of the (im)practicalities and pain involved in diverse communities not wanting to leave home, including but not limited to women of colour, Gloria Anzaldúa contends that 'staying "home" and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness and stagnates our growth' (2009:245-6).[16] This is of course not to claim that Kurds across Sweden are *en masse* subjected to such or similar lived experiences, but to acknowledge the shared references between 'venturing out' and 'growth' in Barakat's text. In Noreen's intervention in Zulaikha's case, 'growth' is simultaneously presented as being curtailed by new migrants refusing to leave home and be involved in an active way of living. To claim early retirement as ironically posited above 'at the age of ten' is also arguably one way of seeing physical and mental maturity as lying beyond the remit of the house and not within its boundaries.

[16] Although Anzaldúa's most well-known and oft-cited theorisations revolve around the US-Mexico borderlands, in particular *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987), her work transcends that geography, and extends and 'bridges' connectivities and relationalities between and across 'under-represented voices… including women and men of different 'races', nationalities, classes, sexualities, genders and ages' to 'complicate the debates within feminist theory both inside and outside the academy and inside and outside the U.S' (2009:245). This is not to deny the particular context within, and against, which Anzaldúa was writing, but rather to emphasise the solidary approach underpinning her work, and her explicitly stated desire for this work to be engaged with from and through diverse positions and geographies.

Through Zintana's and Noreen's call that Zulaikha join them, and in line with Anzaldúa's theorisations of shared affinities and communal clusters amongst diverse indigenous and historically marginalised communities, including migrants and refugees, a 'new tribalism' arises between the Kurdish women: an alliance-building initiative seeking 'to define who we are by what we include' (Anzaldúa 2009:245). 'The new tribalism,' as Anzaldúa suggests, 'is a social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition' (ibid.:283). In the novel, the protagonists secure interpreting from one to the other, through what we can call a mutual-referral system, recommending one another, rather than all starting in the same place at the same time. At this stage of the novel, the Kurdish women embody solidarity between themselves, as a community of interpreters, in line with Anzaldúa's proposition; however, not only is this community at risk of dissolution (as I discuss below), but it is also evident that the potential for an inclusive coalition – which is advocated for by Anzaldúa – has not entirely extended to the relationship between the Kurdish women and those for whom they interpret.

Here, the interpreters are situated midway between the citizen-interviewers and decision-makers (as reported by Barakat, those who are in charge of the actual decision-making are Swedes, or, in numbered cases, Finns) on the one hand, and the new arrivals on the other. As intermediaries whose own histories as old-refugees underlie their complex emotional and embodied responses to the new arrivals, the Kurdish women reflect on some of these people's cases during their weekly gatherings. In a way, this job returns them to the changing character of asylum and how lived experiences and judgments evolve over time. In the context of asylum, the interpreter is not only responsible for converting what the applicant says into Swedish (in this case), but she also responds to the presence, success and/or failure of such applicants in diverse ways, including through her body. For instance, as Salam reports on her experiences of interpreting for people who were claiming to be Iraqi even though their dialects were not (p.41, emphasis added):

> فهمتُ رعبَهم. نعم. كانوا سيأكلون أنفسَهم إذا لم أدَّع أنني أفهمهم، وأفهم أنهم عراقيون، وأن أُقْنع المحقِّق بذلك. اليأسُ في أصواتهم لمسَ عظامي.

> I understood their fear. Yes. *They would have eaten themselves*, had I not pretended to understand them and to understand that they are Iraqi, in turn persuading the investigator that this was the case. The desperation in their voices *touched my bones.*

The desperation embodied in the applicants' body language permeated the interpreter physically, as the verb *lamasa* denotes (being a verb that refers to a palpable form of touch, which bears directness) (Qasmiyeh 2023b).

Zintana's overemphasis on the role of the interpreter and her overlooking of other forms of work practised by these women is derived from the value of exposure to the outside world as envisioned by them. To draw a line between their previous lives and their current life in Sweden, the women's conceptualisations of productiveness have also shifted, whether within the household or within the precincts of state buildings. In this sense, the position of the interpreter is one that any woman can hold at any given time whether she is a 'professional' interpreter or not. By means of substituting home-based work for interpreting, these women also separate themselves from their menfolk by reclaiming a space in the public sphere.

Without husbands and through resisting being forced out of their homes (building on my discussion of Rihani's experiences of domestic violence above), the women in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* take control of their bodies and places, 're-becom[ing] "liveable" [and living] subjects' (Jeffers 2012:64; also see Ahmed 2000). In re-becoming '"liveable" subjects,' as Alison Jeffers suggests, refugees regain their own mobility: not just through documents granted by the state, but through different interpretations and understandings of the body and place based on being both *in* and *out* of mobility. In other words, *contra* the stuckness underpinning suffering women, the Kurdish protagonists return to the immigration system that would have likely processed their cases many years ago to act from within it as interpreters and interlocutors, and equally importantly as insiders who closely monitor the activities and developments of both the system and newcomers. In a way, these women's bodies have neither disappeared, nor are they 'out of place' (to use Puwar's terms, 2004:8): instead, they reappear as bodies which are 'in' (ibid.), in the sense of 'occupy[ing] spaces rarely occupied by

them' (ibid:141; Ahmed 2006:136; see also Sobchack 2004; Butler 1993). While Puwar's conceptualisation of white bodies as being inherently 'in' carries a clear racialised strand (also see Ahmed 2006:136), for the sake of this argument I extend this notion to comprise other forms of distinction and discrimination, including legal statuses and gender. Indeed, it is the whiteness of the Swedish citizen-interviewers and decision-makers in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*,[17] compounded with the presumed legality of their status, that underpins their dealings with and renderings of the migrant and would-be refugee. This intersectionalist angle is justified '[g]iven that relationships of power 'intersect'' and 'how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit others' (Ahmed 2006:136; see also Lorde 1984:114-23).[18]

While we might understand that working as an interpreter is tempting by offering the Kurdish women flexible working hours, and potentially lucrative income levels, this so-called flexibility is nonetheless completely in the hands of the immigration authorities who determine when interviews should be held. Furthermore, since it is primarily the position of citizens which is maintained and protected by the system in place, migrants' protection and sustenance become relational in nature and only exist in conjunction with that of the citizen rather than at her expense (see Ahmed 2000; Jeffers 2012). Nonetheless, in this job, the Kurdish women are regularly exposed to new arrivals, and thus are able to keep tabs, albeit within their own geographies, on who is coming in and who is leaving. This sonorous engagement with life, traced back to two zones – the household and the immigration centre – is embodied in women being testified to and testifying through debriefing in their respective households during their weekly meetings. As I now discuss, such narratives often revolve around not only what I have conceptualised above as 'bodies at work', but also the nature and contours of 'bodies that work'.

[17] The interviewers/decision-makers are implied but not directly cited or heard in the text.
[18] Moving with ease and inhabiting 'home,' according to Ahmed, comes from the inter-engagement as well as interchangeability between 'physical motility' and 'social mobility' (Ahmed 2006:136; also see Sarup 1998; Gedalof 2003).

Interpreting the Body and the Body that Works

At one of the weekly gatherings, Salam submits that '*thadyāya lan yatawaqqafā ʿan hubūṭihimā ilā asfal'* (p.88 – 'my breasts won't stop sinking'[19]) and that it is time for the others '*unẓurna ilā athdāʾikunna taʿrifna ayna waṣala al-kharāb'* (ibid. – '[to] look at your breasts to get to know where destruction lies'). I would suggest that even though references to parts of the body that underline ageing and corporeal destruction (*kharāb*) recur throughout the novel (a thematic I return to below), here they carry more weight as they are voiced in relation to a part of the body (the breasts) that is not depicted as isolated in nature but rather is a lens through which the entire body is seen. In my view, such allusions to the fast-mutating bodies of those who once were refugees correspond with and materialise during their path to citizenship. This private body that will inevitably be captured by the public eye is eloquently synthesised by Butler in the following lines (2006:26):

> The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own.

I contend that what is specific in Salam's case is that 'the gaze of others' in this instance originates from the individual's gaze herself and her embodied reading of her own body as a body that is no longer the same and is visibly metamorphosing into a new and yet old body. This form of othering submitted by the self about the self is pronounced in relation to bodily observations that can no longer be ignored. As in *The Container*, one part of the body at times represents and substitutes the entire body, and while the destruction that is ensuing is yet to be captured in full, it should nonetheless be foretold and acknowledged, as Salam suggests. It thus becomes urgent for these women to grasp what is *really* happening to/in their bodies by *looking* at their breasts.

[19] While the term in Arabic is often used to refer to a plane descending and landing, contextually, I have opted for sinking here to capture not only the changing shape, but also the sense of her breasts moving away from her, and equally to echo the weight of the gold on Rihani's chest.

Building on Ahmed's arguments regarding strangerhood (1998, 2000), I would posit that becoming estranged from their own bodies is at the very core of what being a stranger is, where estrangement is not only palpable in their ever-changing appearance but also how such appearances are marked by various legal statuses. For Salam, who is (only) forty-four, such a reflection is juxtaposed with the more youthful appearance, as noted by Darkhu (the oldest of the protagonists), of the three Sudanese asylum seekers for whom she interpreted, '*kānat athdāʾuhunna mukawwara taḥta qumṣān mukhmal qurmuziyya kal-burtuqāl'* (p.89 – 'their breasts were round like oranges peering through their purply velvety blouses').[20] Premised on old refugee-new refugee relationality, Darkhu (partly in response to Salam) seems to suggest that claiming asylum happens through the body whereby one's appearance can be a starting point against which legal progression (or even regression) is measured.

This connection ties us back to the body when it first arrives in Sweden and the way in which asylum, as an epochal procedure, strips the human body of time and renders it aged *a priori* (on ill and aged migrants see Sayad 2007; also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010 on Muslim asylum seekers). This is not to say that there is a set age for asylum (cf. Edelman's views in *By the Sea,* p.11) but rather to see the impact of asylum as both a process that goes through the body and a constant reminder of time and its passing away from other bodies. Furthermore, viewing the body as pendulous not only makes it 'weighty' but also seems to make movement laborious (as opposed to the citizens' assumed *freedom* of movement). In this case, the settled nature of being a citizen is further complexified and even contradicted as seen through the body optics, mapping out fresher forms of 'mortality, vulnerability, agency,' as Butler suggests (*op cit*), ones which become both greater and graver in the light of the new arrivals. Here, the interpreters partake in a form of 'new tribalism' characterised by solidarity and connectivity between the Kurdish women, but, as Anzaldúa

[20] Precisely whose gaze is being inscribed in this account of the Sudanese breasts remains unresolved: on the one hand, Darkhu, as a female interpreter, may be able to undertake and share examinations that may otherwise be seen as intrusive if performed by a man, and yet, on the other hand, it is Barakat who is writing these words as the (male) author who is writing these Kurdish women into literature (or perhaps, as I suggest below, translating the protagonists' Kurdish and Swedish words into the written Arabic).

notes in relation to her desire for cross-community 'bridging', such encounters also risk 'creating new binaries,' in this case between the Kurdish women and the newer arrivals (2009:245).

The former refugee/interpreter and the asylum-seeker are once again engaged through their differing bodies (p.45):

> قبل يومين استدعتني دائرة الهجرة إلى مواجهة بين المحقق وامرأة تطلب اللجوء. امرأة بشفتين منتفختين لم يبدُ عليها أنها تطلب اللجوء، بل تنتزعه منِّي أنا. امرأة سورية، عربية...

> Two days ago Immigration Authorities called me to an interview between the officer and a woman applying for asylum; a woman with enlarged lips. It wasn't like she was asking for asylum, more like she was grabbing it from me. A Syrian woman. Arab…

As Salam hints, this Syrian asylum-seeker transcends key boundaries, her enlarged lips *(shafatayn muntafikhatayn)* being the most prominent part of her body, in this account, rendering the rest of her body non-existent; and yet by dwelling on these very lips – which we may assume have been 'inflated' through surgical enhancement – I suggest that Salam is hinting at the fakeness of the Syrian woman's body and, by extension, of her claim for asylum. Her hyper-visible lips do not appear to perform the normative role expected of the refugee as passive supplicant seeking to elicit sympathy from the system, instead embodying the characteristics which, as norms dictate, should belong to the citizen rather than the refugee. By transforming the pre-conceived body of the refugee into another, and in so doing encroaching on the citizen's space, these lips do not merit pity as they do not 'beg' for asylum as is the norm but rather 'grab' it by force, embodying a sense of ingratitude and entitlement.

Of course, it is not Salam personally who would decide this woman's fate, but given her role as an interpreter (and intermediary), both influencing and being under the influence of the asylum seeker's body language, the woman's appearance in this case would inevitably leave a lasting impression on all involved. Rather than the 'real' interaction between the refugee and the officer, however, what is pertinent here is Salam's position in relation to the voluptuously-lipped new arrival: the woman is

not simply 'grabbing' for her rights as a refugee, demanding asylum, but, from Salam's perspective was seeking to 'grab' Salam's rights from *her*. I propose that the Syrian woman's hypervisible lips can also be read in relation to processes of (actual or perceived) hyper-sexualisation, in this case as viscerally rejected as a potential threat by the 'established' Kurdish refugee who fears that her own source of stability and security is being grabbed from her, and that she risks being replaced in the process. The competition and tension between Salam and the new Syrian, Arab refugee woman[21] emerges on multiple levels, in relation to gender and sexuality but also nationality and ethnicity: ethnic tension – Kurdish versus Arab – is notably present and could be one of the determining factors behind such judgments of the new arrival: in essence, the asylum seeker's body is not only being appraised *bodily*. Instead, through national markers such as language and dialect – as they emerge from her inflated lips –, the body's visibility as other is multiply enhanced (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Qasmiyeh 2021). This is a clear example of the body-politic and the body proper and its excesses being viewed relationally and with reference to different modes of visibility. As the new arrival demands asylum through her own hyper-visible lips, in the eyes of Salam, the new Syrian Arab refugee woman is in control of her own body and is using it not only to secure safety, but to potentially displace Salam in the process.

Embodied and Embodying Mutations

Where the Syrian asylum-seeker's enhanced lips 'grab' Salam, with the latter's account pointing to tensions between new and old refugees in Sweden, Tassu (p.240) ponders on a hypothetical scenario in her hometown of Qamishli in Northern Syria, which she can reach through a transmuted body, embodying the markers of those (white Swedish citizens) who are indisputably 'in' (following my discussion of Puwar's conceptualisation of 'in,' above):

[21] Barakat's novel was published a year before the 2011 Syrian Uprisings. Over 4,625 Syrian refugees applied for asylum in Sweden in 2012 and 13,158 by 2013. Asylum-seeking Kurds are at times denominated as either Syrian, Iraqi or Turkish nationals and are thus absorbed statistically within the remit of other national identifiers (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010).

لو أن لي شَعْراً كشعر امرأة سويدية؛ أعني لو نهضتُ من نومي، صباحاً، وقد نما لي شعرُ امرأة سويدية؛ لركبت الطائرة، من فوري، عائدةً إلى قامشلو. سأدوّخ بيوت قامشلو. سأدوخ رجال قامشلو. سأدوخ نساء قامشلو. ستلتهم مدينة قامشلو نفْسَها، ورجالَها، ونساءَها..

> If I had hair like that of a Swedish woman; I mean if I woke up, one morning, and the hair of a Swedish woman had grown on my scalp, I would rush to take a flight, heading to Qamishli, immediately. I would spellbind every home in Qamishli. All the men of Qamishli. All the women. Qamishli would eat itself up, its men, its women.

Tassu's dream and desire is not incongruous; rather, it reflects the self-estrangement under which the women are living and the elements to which refugees may subscribe in the hope of becoming other. To become other is to start from the self; i.e. to perceive the body as a base from which such change takes root (see hooks 1997). They also follow certain markers of beauty, exclusively part of a discursively Occidentalist outlook which sees the other, in this context the Swedish other, as the beautiful one. To return to Qamishli becomes contingent on a drastic corporeal make-over, reconstructing the self as a hybridised version of itself. Notably, Tassu's proposition focuses on the hair: the uncovered part which is the most visible in/of the body. In my opinion, this particular dwelling on the hair could be construed as a response (and even a rejection) of the hair being veiled more broadly: as such, Tassu's reference is not benign, counter-acting, as it does, the veiling as practised by newer refugees and arrivants from Muslim majority countries, such as the Syrian, Sudanese and Somali women for whom they interpret. So the hair (*shaʿr*) that is pre-empted and conditioned by senses, as its Arabic root vouches, which also corresponds (and overlaps) with *shiʿr* (poetry – as discussed below with regards to Darkhu's writing),[22] is now translated into another language and texture through the total transplantation of what resembles Swedish hair into a Kurdish head.

To envision a possible return to a Kurdish city on the basis of such an alteration is telling, paving the way for difference as embodied within a body part, but also for the return of the *different* Kurd who visits *as someone else*. For Tassu, as is the case for her friends, this extra feature is deemed

[22] Without diacritics, *shaʿr* (hair) and *shiʿr* (poetry) are morphologically similar (see Qasmiyeh 2021), evoking a subtle correspondence between Tassu's *shaʿr* and Darkhu's *shiʿr* and the ways in which the corpus as writing is yet another version of the corporeal and its ever-mutating body.

necessary to confront age(ing) while at the same time appropriating a bodily feature that is genealogically not theirs, with such a change spanning both colour and texture. By resenting her hair, she calls for a changing body, one which, one might argue, adheres to the temporal changes infiltrating her body. To echo Sayad's argument vis-à-vis the migrant body and illness (2007), the immigrant in this case is a body which is persistently viewed through the optics of productiveness but also through the eyes of its owner and inhabitant. The bearer of this body is a woman who is fully aware that in order to be/look different she has to adopt either in full or in part the citizen's infallible body – the one which counters time but also lives within its time as pure (see Puwar 2004). To pass as a citizen, as hooks (1997), Ahmed (1998, 2000, 2014) and others remind us, one should redress one's body as a deficiency, one whose being and becomingness are subject to it being rendered incomplete a priori. This speaking from, or through, the body sums up Tassu's desires: in brief, the cultural shock that she wishes to engineer, and bodily impress on those witnessing the change, through the alteration of her exterior so she can pass as other and/or be a Kurdish woman enacting a Swede.[23]

For migrants to seek a return to their original places as changed individuals, as verbalised by Tassu in this instance, would in turn lead to a clash between two sets of players: a performer (Tassu) and an audience comprising Kurdish men and women in a Kurdish place. Assertively, Tassu anticipates a physical response, entailing the recoiling of those observing, leading to them devouring themselves. It is worth noting that devouring (*iltihām*) rhymes with another Arabic gerund, *iltiḥām* (with the emphatic *ḥ)* which is derived from *laḥm* (flesh) and could be loosely rendered as 'bodily coalescence.' While the first stresses the consumption of bodies by one another, in this case the devouring is self-reflexive, self-committed and self-inflicted, infiltrating the entire body where the *original* version of the body is no longer present but a subsumed mass hiding within its own body's folds. hooks in her oft-cited article 'Eating the Other' (1992) discusses devouring the other as a case of submitting the Black other to the white self; in this instance, however, I suggest that the devouring

[23] This partial assemblage is also pertinent when viewed alongside Tassu's quest to re-name a Swedish street after a Kurdish yoghurt seller (see Chapter 1).

is that of the self (its-self) triggered by its inability to process a version of itself as other, thus retreating not only corporeally through the bodies of men and women alike, but also through the ever-shrinking Kurdish geography which is already too narrow to begin with.

Further elucidating the conception and the dissolution of these women's bodies, Ibrāhīm al-Karāwī eloquently connects them to the way in which the novel's eleven chapters identify with the four seasons, arguing that 'women [in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*] are not only present as reality *[kaynūnat al-wāqiʿ]* but also as spatial and temporal entities *[kaynūna zamāniyya wa makāniyya]*, extending all the way to nature and its cycle' (2019:n.p.). As the women in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* '[dig] in the anthropology of their daily lives' (ibid.), they interrogate the very meaning of their ever-changing bodies as time passes, highlighting divergent perspectives of women as temporal beings. Far from holding a monolithic reading, the protagonists share and debate diverse perceptions of the ways that bodies work, and potentially stop working, including with regards to productiveness and re-productiveness. In conjunction with the instances examined above pertaining to sagging breasts and the changing body in asylum; hypervisible (and sexualised) lips that grab rights; and the mutated body that enables a triumphant return, two diametrically-opposed perceptions also emerge early in the novel of what bodies are for and how the women in question conceptualise growing old and in particular the menopause. As articulated in this regard, and building on Chapter 2, I suggest that the rhythms of menstruation and their cessation through menopause are used to measure bodies against each other, contemplating the feelings ensuing from living inside a body that is undergoing significant changes.

In the opening chapter of the novel, Salam is listening in to a conversation in which Rihani exclaims how painful '*dawrat al-shayṭān*' (p.43 – 'the devil's period') is, announcing that she needs to go home instantly as a result of the pain. Zulaikha continues (p.44) by noting that

لا الساعات في المعاصم، لا آلهة الساعات هي مَنْ تجعل الإنسانَ عبداً، بل الطمث.

> it is neither the watches around our wrists nor the gods of the watches themselves that make Man a slave: it is menstruation.

Observing time through menstruation is a dynamic that is continuously stressed in the novel, leading to these women offering different readings of the presence and absence of their periods. Salam – who is six years younger than Darkhu – enquires (p.45):

ما إحساسُك وقد غدا طمثُك متقطعاً، يا درخو؟ أحسُّ بفزعٍ من الفكرة، بالرغم من أن طمثي لا يزال منتظماً...

> How do you feel now that your period's become irregular, Darkhu? The thought terrifies me, even though my period's still regular.

Conjoining 'feeling' *(shuʿūr)*, 'thought' *(fikra)* and 'period' *(ṭamth)* in her question, Salam moves from the abstract to the palpable which has so far been experienced by Darkhu alone and yet, just as a thought, is already filling her with dread. Salam fears that, as soon as she reaches that stage, menopause will render her body a *meaningless* mass, one which is no longer able to bear life.[24] While Rihani decries her current pain, Salam's fear of menopause could be read as a new coming pain (menopause) for not having pain (menstruation).[25]

Salam's fears are quickly contested in Darkhu's powerful rebuttal (ibid.):

تعنين أنني انتهيت؛ جسدي انتهى؛ رحمي انتهى. ما الذي سيتغيَّر فيك إن تقطَّع طمثُك، أو توقف؟ لا فرق بينك مع طمثك الآن، وبينك مع انقطاع الطمث غداً...

> You mean I'm finished, my body's finished, my womb's finished. What's going to change about you if your period becomes irregular or stops? There's no difference between you with your period now, and you with an irregular period tomorrow.

This powerful deconstruction of the commonly held perception of 'menopause as a deficiency disease' (Ussher 2018:742; see also Ussher 2006) responds to a hetero-normative set of

[24] The novel's focus on older refugee women as they debate the changing body in exile challenges another mainstream trope: the female refugee as a threat to the demographic balance of the host country by virtue of her assumed hyper-fertility, and the related assumption that refugees' hyper-fertility is also a means of securing benefits (see Hendrixson and Hartmann 2019).

[25] The linkage between pain and menstruation is experienced differently by Mariam in *The Container*: the cessation of her periods and her experiences of pain are not openly discussed, but can be inferred through what we assume to be the symptoms of morning sickness due to the pregnancy that has resulted from rape, and Asha's assertion that she knows Mariam's secret.

conceptualisations in which a woman's body is (medically and socially) constructed as inherently lacking, constituting this body as 'finished' without the ability to conceive. To presume that the menopausal body is a 'finished' body forecloses the body's own history and instead fixates on its end as the only moment marking a presence that was. Instead, in her response, Darkhu sets off from the implied subject pronoun 'I' *(anā)*, immediately followed by the 'body' *(jasad)* and the 'womb' *(raḥm)* in order to retain control of herself as a totality in rejection of a reductionist and anatomically-based perception of the body *qua* the womb. As a direct rebuttal of the medicalised discourse of lack in relation to the menopause, in discussing how migrant and refugee women negotiate certain constructions of menopause in their country of asylum, Jane M. Ussher et al. argue that '[s]exual and reproductive embodiment is *a process in which meaning is taken upon the body*, where the body is not viewed as an object, but as a subject that embodies lived experience' (2018:741, emphasis added; also see Csordas 1999; Tolman et al. 2014). In this sense, Darkhu's response – with the ordering of 'I', 'my body' and 'my womb' – re-constructs a woman's presence which otherwise would be forever dominated by 'the manner in which culture [and not the individual herself] marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves' (Gatens 1996:71).

It has been noted that '[m]igration has the potential to introduce women to disparate and competing discourses about menopause, whilst at the same time altering the social, cultural and political context within which menopausal embodiment is lived' (Spitzer 2009, cited in Ussher et al. 2018:742). However, here it is worth remembering that these 'competing discourses,' despite having the potential to incorporate diverse people with overlapping and varied experiences, could also further isolate migrant women on the basis of their youth or agedness, thus pitting them against one another and in the process rendering some inoperative. As noted above, for these women, these embodied fears are arguably grounded in the future of their own bodies as former refugees who, as interpreters, are in regular contact in body and in speech with new and young(er) arrivals.

Through the intersecting lenses of bodies at work and bodies that work, in this part of the chapter I have examined the narration of productive bodies, and the spaces which, according to different

protagonists in these texts, refugees can or cannot inhabit and share with others. Where, in *The Container,* tensions between refugees with shared and different national and ethnic backgrounds are verbally expressed, and can be linked both to epistemic violence and complicity in future violence, *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* repeatedly revolves around the Kurdish protagonists' animosity towards other refugees whose bodies are depicted as younger and more voluptuous, while their own bodies shrink. As discussed above and in Chapter 1, newly-arrived non-Kurdish refugees are viewed by the Kurdish women as threats, including as threats to their bodily presence and broader position in Sweden.[26] Through the direct narration of such refugee-refugee animosity, the protagonists in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* voice what is often perceived, and critiqued, as part of a *Eurocentric* anti-refugee discourse, including narratives relating to malingering migrants and ungrateful arrivals who 'grab' their rights instead of performing acceptable modes of meekness and gratitude (on the latter, see Nayeri, 2017). In highlighting these tensions, as they emerge through the corporeal instances explored above, both texts thus expose the complex dynamics underpinning the crises faced by displaced people, not only delineating the internal heterogeneity of such groups, but also demonstrating that these are neither fixed nor stable in nature, as I discuss further in the next section on the constitution and dissolution of the communal body in *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*.

Rethinking the Body of the Community

Hashem Ahmadzadeh suggests that, for Kurds, the desire to know what it means to be Kurdish on a national level is intertwined with the personal (2007:582), where 'who you are' and 'where you are from' are continuously in deep and ongoing conversation (ibid.). A Kurdish woman who appears on the surface to be enjoying a settled legal status, is the same woman whose extended family is dispersed across different geographies and is as such permanently drawn towards locations where

[26] In addition to reproducing the notion that brown women are at risk of violence at the hands of brown men, other references which could be considered to be Islamophobic arise throughout different parts of the narrative in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, thereby reproducing another main trope associated with Eurocentric accounts of displacement. For instance, Islamisation is explicitly identified as a threat to the changing character of Sweden (passim; esp. pp.87, 89, 90).

one's body is never whole but in a state of dissolution. In effect, Barakat himself, whether through his own life and historical travels or through engaging with Kurds in his literary works more generally, has always been seen as 'both a 'wanderer' and a 'seeker'', and his protagonists across his body of work have tended to be marked with a 'fragmented and polymorph identity' (Rooke 2006:183). Based on such a placeless rendering, it is no surprise that refugee groups are disharmoniously and unfavourably viewed in relation to one another in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* whereby their dealings, such as that of Kurds and Somalis, are mainly consumed by competitiveness and individual survival, echoing the dynamics between those inside *The Container,* which ultimately result in Mariam's ostracization and sacrifice.

In re-capturing the splintered nature of these Kurdish women's lives, Barakat not only appears to invent an alternative nation (of women) through literature (Ahmadzadeh 2007:582) through intimate portrayals of those working women's lives and struggles, but also problematises the very nature of settled-ness and community, when precariousness seems to be a constant reality punctuating these people's ventures. As is the case with people whose citizenship is acquired through a disjuncture with an original place, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* this disjuncture continues beyond what could be commonly viewed as 'legal settledness,' as exhibited through these women's struggles with old and new refugees alike in Sweden, and with Kurdish men establishing their lives amidst the dissipation of the Kurdish household which is now fully maintained and provided for by these divorced women. Instead of recoiling and lamenting their fates, these women, through their matrilineal alliances and grounded in their common struggles and aspirations, seek sociality and work to stay in touch both with one another and also with memories of their respective Kurdish places. While on the surface their lives are being attended to relatively calmly, by denigrating other refugees, they implicitly re-turn strangerness on to them, triggering how they themselves had been treated by older refugees and citizens alike. Functioning within the bonds of kin that are already in place does not necessarily free the women of alienation since, as Ahmed rightly posits (1998), these women are neither completely members nor strangers but instead are people who exist between states of being and legal statuses which are yet to crystallise fully. Their unalterable position is that they have 'come *after'* other

refugees and citizens (see Ahmed 2014), and this *after* is what will always differentiate them from those who arrived before, which is the same approach applied to refugees coming after them. In such a context, the alliance of interpreters is by no means a fixed sorority, but is subject to change and potential dissolution.

The Dissolution of the Community

Articulated as temporal observations, anticipating the disbanding of their bond (which eventually takes place following the failure of the Kurdish challenge to the 'new' Somali refugees), Darkhu engages the frailties of the group, recounting how it is gradually decomposing, pushing everyone to the abyss. As she observes, what might look ordinary on the surface is a façade behind which these so-called friends and allies are hiding (p.272):

> أصارحكن أن لدي انطباعاً غيرَ مريح، يتراكم أمسية بعد أمسية. ألاحظتُنَّ كأنما نحن، الصديقات العشر، امرأة واحدة، لها تاريخ هزيل واحد، تعب واحد، حديث مملٌّ واحد، يا مطلَّقات السويد؟. ألا ترين أننا حين نكون معاً كأن إحدانا جالسة مع نفْسها، تكلم نفْسَها، تخاصم نفسَها؟. زواج. طلاق. مماحكات. ألسنة سوقية مبتذلة. مناكفة أبدية بين زليخا وشتولا. نحن فروج محكومة بالإعدام في يوم واحد.

> I must admit that I've got a disconcerting impression, simmering over evening after evening. Have you not noticed that it is as if we're one, we, the ten friends, just one woman, with one frail history, one tiredness, one boring conversation, you, the divorcees of Sweden? Can't you see that when we're sitting together that it's as if one is sitting with herself, conversing with herself, disagreeing with herself? Marriage. Divorce. Squabbles. Graphic and dirty conversations. Never-ending quarrels between Zulaikha and Shtula. We are mere vaginas sentenced to death on the same day.

'The divorcees of Sweden' are being challenged by the assertion that what was initially considered a stable community formed through a plurality of ten selves ('we') is in fact not only a singular body facing the same fate (death), but also redundant, characterised by a fixation on overlapping frustrations. Instead of being composed by heterogenous individual narratives and perspectives or being a conscious congregation of women united by common struggles, Darkhu reveals that the tie that binds them is a fragile one.

Of course, Darkhu is not questioning their own reality as migrant women who have so far successfully sustained themselves and their families in challenging circumstances, nor is she claiming to be any different from her fellow friends with regards to what they represent as working women/mothers. Instead, she sifts through the women's lives as they perform their intimate and intersecting realities, and asserts that what the women have been enacting is a performance for the sake of an audience comprising present women and absent men. In line with Darkhu's harsh appraisal, Phelan acutely suggests that '[p]erformance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance' (2001:27): the women's 'performance,' initially presumed as an unbreakable tie between refugees supposedly in solidarity with one another, has, to a degree, driven these women to their actual disappearance as active subjects, in the process rendering their plurality non-existent. Their bodies are in sync, not as bodies of difference (see Ahmed 1998, 2000), but as bodies consumed within each other to the extent that they are 'just one woman'; a *singular* body performing the group, alluding both to an overwhelming sense of redundance and of being one body sustained by the multiple (also see Sayad 2007).

Within such admissions, I suggest that the personal is now viewed through the optics of the national where these women's bodily frailties and inferred insignificance powerfully mirror the frailty of their history, thus interlacing the dehistoricised with the disembodied. In other words, the '*tārīkh hazīl'* (feeble history) that Darkhu invokes is no longer just the Kurdish national history which has long grappled with erasure (see Ahmadzadeh 2007). Rather, it is the ageing body which has been trapped within. To return to Anzaldúa, the women's 'new tribalism' has now exhausted itself, so much so that the individual herself is no longer measured by her own position but through the eyes of a failed collective body in sync with a 'frail history'. Furthermore, in spite of attempting to create a space which is free from men, the commonalities upon which the women's bond had been established and maintained throughout their time in Sweden are paradoxically all masculine in Arabic, with the 'one woman' overwhelmingly characterised through masculine terms in the text: as listed by Darkhu, she has one frail history, one tiredness, one boring conversation.

To attribute the adjective '*hazīl'* (frail, feeble, weak and ill) to history, Barakat resurrects what could be seen as an implicit invocation centred around the corporeal in history (also see Rooke 2006), through a fresh recounting of a history which is too weak to stand on its own. This history is that of Kurdish women, and in particular their mutating bodies as they see and are seen through time spent and gained in exile, through disbanded families and the short-lived bounds of pleasure. This aptly conveys the Kurdish condition where even the question of return for Kurds is a return to a history of disjointedness and splintering as is movingly summarised by Barakat himself when reflecting on his positionality as a Kurd and as a Kurdish author writing in Arabic:

> Splinters of family. Imprisoned brothers. Sisters scattered all over the world. Lost papers. Unread writings. A policeman who can kick me out of one country to another. A passport with someone else's name on it, and no idea when that too will be taken from me … Where is exile then, and where is its other.
>
> (al-ʿAwīṭ 2007, cited in Fakhreddine 2018:146)

In this interjection, the continuum of estrangement also encompasses self-estrangement, as Barakat suggests, where bare existence is intertwined with the socio-legal conditionalities of exile and the meaning of being a Kurd in the Arab world and modern day Europe. Barakat, like the women in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, is based in Sweden, not because he chose to be there, but rather because it was the only option available to him and others at that specific time. 'Where is exile then, and where is its other,' asks a perplexed Barakat, as if to admit that boundaries of selfhood and the so-called settledness that we yearn for are no longer crystalline: they have, instead, become perpetually conflated. Like Barakat's sisters, the ten women in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, are (once again) scattered even within their own bodies, bearing the burden of womanhood while attending to their and their family's survival.

As exposed by Darkhu, these women no longer represent their entireties: they are nothing but 'mere vaginas *[furūj* [27]*]* sentenced to death on the same day' (p.272). In my opinion, this reductive disclosure catapults the reader to the inside of the female body, to its essence as it comes to terms with its own vanishing. This is starkly the *naked* truth, as shared by an insider who herself is dissecting (both critically and anatomically) her own body and the bodies of her fellow friends. It is the youngest, Shtula, who half-heartedly questions such sweeping declarations, basing her gentle rebuttal on the difference in age between herself and the rest of the group. Yet, almost instantly, the truth hits her when Darkhu reiterates that it is all over and time has long passed, questioning 'the point of differing in age now? Dead, scattered vaginas are all around you. The death sentence has already been completed' (ibid.).

To assign the poet, Darkhu, to the role of passing judgment on a pact of which she is part, is no coincidence since her writing – to which I turn in the final section of this chapter – itself dwells on history and the body, noting that her critical appraisal is a continuation of what it is to be a Kurdish refugee woman (with other women) seen from the vantage point of an insider. Here I see Darkhu's outspokenness as a crucial interjection which seeks to re-connect her and her fellow women with tough realities pertaining to their position in Sweden but also in Kurdish history more broadly.

Through the announcement of the dissolution of the community of interpreters, Darkhu offers an invitation for the reader to recognise refugee communities as fluid and changeable, thereby disrupting assumptions of homogeneity or organic solidarity across markers such as nationality, gender, legal or migratory status, or professions. What seemed to be stable in the regular gatherings at the core of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* is showing cracks, and the ailing body of the community is under scrutiny. Contesting the argument of the 'refugee nation' (which contends that refugees are united by virtue of their shared 'refugeeness' and should live together as a new political community in a

[27] *Farj* (pl. *furūj*), genitals, is one of the novel's most featured words, appearing circa 100 times between pages 314-318. The word, classically used vis-à-vis both the male and the female private parts, is, in this context, solely used for the woman's.

separate geography – see *Migration and Society Roundtable* 2018), when they are read together, both texts demonstrate that although a community is invariably formed of individuals, and displacement is and can be characterised by solidarity and care, it is equally the case that a collective of individuals does not necessarily 'make' or sustain a community per se.

In the case of *The Container*, apart from Fatima and Asha, whose bond preceded their presence in the container, the other travellers have been forced to share the same space, and, arguably, to 'become' a community constituted and governed by external forces and external actors; in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, the constitutive parts of the community are hazy and shifting, raising questions as to whether it is it their Kurdishness, their gender, their shared legal journeys or status as divorcees, and/or their profession that is, or could be, at the heart of their alliance. In turn, cracks and fault-lines are thought of as arising in response to new arrivals – Mariam in the case of *The Container*, and new refugees including Somalis, Sudanese and Syrians in the case of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*. Notably, this positioning of the new arrival as a threat, rather than the structural inequalities and precarities that underpin their everyday lives, and futures, in displacement, problematically risks perpetuating the very tropes that refugee writing is often assumed to disrupt (cf. Rickel 2018).

In *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, it is shortly after Darkhu announces the imminent death of the community that this in fact materialises: the gradual disintegration of the group concludes in their non-arrival and non-presence at the demonstration organised by Tassu, with only Nazli joining her to challenge the re-naming initiative developed and embodied by the new Somali refugees (see Chapter 1). As the demonstration ultimately fails in light of the strength of the Somali presence, I would argue that the novel shows that the collective project is impossible without individuals coming, and staying, together. The displacement of the Kurdish body by the new arrivals, that had been discussed weekly by the women, is now a reality in the public sphere (p.309):

أشارت امرأة سوداء، من حَمَلةِ العريضة الصومالية إلى تاسو، ونازلي، بالابتعاد، صارخةً بصوت لم تفهما كلمةً منه.

> A black woman, one of those holding the Somali banner, gestured to Tassu and Nazli to move away, shouting in a voice that they didn't understand.

However, whilst the women had consistently depicted the 'new arrivals' as *the* threat to their bodily integrity and survival, it is arguably the failure of the women themselves to join the demonstration that leads to the community being vanquished and Tassu and Nazli being displaced by a 'different voice.' At the same time, and as what I read as a powerful insight derived through this novel, is that Darkhu is revealed to concurrently be a refugee-poet, an agent of resistance and solidarity, a prescient critic and a visionary. Likewise, as I discuss in the final part of this chapter with regards to writing and rethinking refugee writing through these texts, it is Asha – who is carrying a letter written by the leader of the Somali community in her refugee camp home to enable her to secure employment in her longed-for destination –, who denounces and foresees the violence to which Mariam will be subjected in *The Container*.

Writing the Body

In this section I investigate instances of intertextuality, and the position of the refugee in relation to writing and the written in *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* arguing that they not only reflect 'a different writing of embodiment' (Ahmed 1998:64), but also powerfully centralise the refugee as source, carrier and producer of knowledge. In addition to challenging mainstream representations which strip refugees of their specificity and render them as objects to be written by others, I argue that Asha's letter and Darkhu's poems draw attention not only to how writers and the written seek to reimagine and retrace the position of refugee women (a supplication for employment, and resistance to violence against women respectively), but also raise the broader question of who writes whom, and who possesses the story and the text in displacement.

Possessions, Secrets and the Written as the Futural Body

In her exchange with Mariam, Asha returns to a letter which she has purportedly carried with her from the refugee camp to her present location in the container, and which she bears as a secret which will, she hopes, open up her future in her longed-for destination point: England.[28]

> MARIAM. Asha, no. Don't tell your secrets.
> ASHA. It is here.
> *She takes out a letter.*
> MARIAM. I don't want to know.
> ASHA. You have a baby in your belly. That is your secret.
> […]
> MARIAM. Don't tell them. I don't want them to know.
> ASHA. I promise. But I will tell you my secret. Then it is fair. I have a letter. See? A Letter.
> ASHA *produces a letter*.
> This letter is for the Queen of England.

Asha's letter to the Queen (p.17) is not an ordinary letter. According to her, it is written by 'a very important man. He is a king in my country. And he wrote this letter to tell Her Majesty I am a good girl and I work hard and I will make a good servant for her' (p.17). This 'reference letter' is in all likelihood written in Somali (or even classical Arabic), and as reported by Asha, it is from her (Somali) King to her 'future' (British) Queen: 'He is a very important man. I think he has met the Queen already. And so I will give her this letter and she will give me a job.' Here, the letter has the potential, in Asha's eyes, to enable her to secure more than a 'menial' job cleaning for a 'citizen' (as discussed above), and instead lead to employment *by* the Queen, possibly (we could extrapolate) in an important space associated *with* the Queen.

Before examining how this letter corresponds to both the body proper (corpus) that is on the move and the text that is a body, it is worth retracing how this letter came to existence. The letter from this 'important man' was reportedly handed to Asha without Fatima's knowledge, travelling from the

[28] Documents are often viewed with suspicion by the Immigration Authorities and asylum seekers alike as they can variously be used to corroborate or refute the claimant's claim and route to safety (potentially leading to deportation). In this case, the letter is kept, while other documents which situate or trace refugees in or through specific geographies are often disposed of to reduce the risk of being deported, as exemplified in the case of the *harraga* (also spelt *harraqa*) from North Africa (Omri, in Gardini et al. 2017:7). Here, the document is not identified with risk, but rather as a reference letter which can facilitate Asha's integration into her new country.

refugee camp in East Africa across different continents, by sea (p.15), and by land and now in a container across Europe. In crossing territories, the letter has also crossed many languages, remaining intact in a bag tucked away from the rest of the group. However, it remains unknown how Asha, who in her own words is illiterate and can neither read nor write, can ascertain the content of the letter and know for sure that what is written is in line with what was originally relayed to her and what she in turn has relayed to Mariam as her little secret, with the existence of the letter and its reported contents swapping places with the latter's 'secret' (that is, Mariam's pregnancy). As a result, the material value of the letter is limited to what the letter itself promises: acceptance by the head of state who, as the letter purports, is expected to offer Asha some work as 'a good servant' on the basis of her being 'a good girl [who works] hard'.

The letter thus defers the very basis of claiming asylum (i.e. a well-founded fear of persecution) by instead translating asylum into a personalised plea for active participation in the labour market. For Asha, to become a servant for the Queen is to be admitted to places of trust, and as such to be absorbed into the body of the ultimate citizen. Such a request is predicated on an equitable relationship between a king (who is now in a refugee camp) and a queen, noting that such correspondence in bygone days – including throughout the sporadic British colonial presence in Somalia, which goes back to the early 19th century – may have found its way to the royal archive. In Asha's case, the writing completed by the King prior to her departure, with the intention of the young refugee submitting this to the Queen upon arrival, brings another dimension to a form of writing whose value consists in it being submitted in person. This tripartite writing establishes Asha as the messenger who is connecting both the Somali King with the Queen through Asha's body. To put it differently, what the letter embodies is a writing *through* the body; a proposition for the inclusion of the foreign body as a servant for the citizen who is at (her) home. On the intersection between the corporeal and the corpus, Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price shift the focus to 'one highly relevant yet often overlooked consideration [subsumed in] the relationship between bodies and writing', contending that '[i]f the body materialises text, it is not simply *any* body' (1998:12, emphasis in the original). In this assertion lies a relational bond that ties the writer with her own body through

writing. Since the written is currently retained by Asha in the form of 'her' letter, and yet this still belongs to the 'important man,' the writing is inter-corporeal in nature, as it involves the male author advocating on behalf of a female refugee.

These gendered dynamics are also pertinent to the present discussion since, while the letter can be read as opening up a new space, and a new future, for Asha, it is equally the case that Asha's projected services should also be regarded as a continuation of what she has been doing since and before leaving the camp. As a young person, and a young woman in particular, without either an education or a family, it appears that she is convinced that being a servant *elsewhere* is the only job she is capable of doing. However, I would argue that this proposition is also guided by the 'important man' who has assumed a priori that a refugee girl's best place is to be a servant in her place of asylum.

It is precisely the *elsewhere* which is central to the aim of this writing: for the incarcerated refugee, the overarching aim of the writing, which is not hers strictly speaking, is to offer a rewriting of her life as a refugee elsewhere. That is why Mariam's response to such a depreciating proposition for her 'little sister' is to assert that '[y]ou can be more than a servant' (p.18) and that reversing such conditions is solely contingent on Asha 'learn[ing] to write [her] own letters' (ibid.). Thus, for Asha to take ownership of her own body in asylum, as encouraged by Mariam, necessitates moving away from essentialised interpretations of the refugee body as just somebody else's body which is lacking in autonomy. Mariam's resistance to Asha being absorbed into the labour market as someone of use and in particular as someone for *specific* use is in defence of 'those bodies [who are] being denied their being as bodies' (Nancy 2008:122). Where Nancy is writing of 'all those tortured, violated, wounded, humiliated bodies in Bosnia' (ibid.), notably a territory that Mariam and her fellow travellers are likely to have crossed en route, I would argue that identifying with a body as its own possession is what Mariam is fighting for, for her own survival first and foremost. For this reason, I read her interjection as a solidary one, prompted by alternative solidarity networks outside biological kinship and in direct contrast to the matrilineal effect that Asha is subjected to through her

relationship with Fatima in the camp and beyond. In a way, Asha's fixation on escaping those conditions is bifold: fundamentally, it is to flee the camp but also and with the same urgency to free herself from Fatima's reins.

In 'Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers,' Gloria Anzaldúa (2009 [1980]: 30) draws a powerful connection between writing and survival, positing that

> the world I create in writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. […]. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I can and I will write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing.

Mariam's call and insistence on Asha learning to write (by) herself concurs with Anzaldúa's demand – in an open letter which is addressed and directed to '*mujeres de color*' (women of colour) writ large – for writing anew; from the position of the 'unmentionables' but also for them. As this is a clear writing back at what has been written about those who are identified as alien to the 'regular' citizen, Anzaldúa reasserts the corporeal element of writing as an indispensable condition for self-discovery, self-preservation and self-autonomy.[29] That is why this writing which takes shape *through* the body 'shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive' (2009 [1980]:30). While writing alone cannot guarantee survival – Mariam was persecuted for being a teacher and teaching girls to write –, Mariam's interjections intend to protect Asha's body from being consumed, in future, by an exploitative system, instead advocating for Asha to take up the tools to go beyond mere survival, and instead to write and represent herself.

[29] While acknowledging the differences between Anzaldúa's writing situation and that of Asha and Mariam (Anzaldúa writing for publication, while Mariam urges Asha to write her own letter to carve her own future), and what is at stake in *The Container* is substantially different from what Anzaldúa discusses, the broader relevance of her work to this remains.

The futural body is thus at the core of the written text and the process of writing, with an as-of-yet undetermined future ahead of Asha, while she anticipates the violence to which Mariam will be subjected; in turn, Darku's writing within the pages of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* reassembles as it dissects gendered issues pertaining to relationships between Kurds, offering a space of resistance to domestic violence and rendering possible different spaces of individual and collective encounters. Indeed, as it is submitted – through recitation – to a women-only audience, this poetry holds another meaning of intimacy and secrecy, one which suggests alternative spaces and times to what is being lived in the public sphere.

Reclaiming the Place and the Body Through Writing

Where Asha carries the text written by the Somali King in an undetermined language and is encouraged to learn how to write her own letters, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* the reader does not know whether Darkhu had already been a poet before leaving the Kurdish territories of Northern Syria, or whether her writing has exclusively been created in response to her presence in Sweden. As I now turn to my reading of Darkhu's poetry as it pertains to the body, I start by noting that although Darkhu carries the words in her own voice, these poems have nonetheless been written and translated by Barakat. In the novel, two of Darkhu's poems are included, with both appear in Arabic, and yet according to the narrator, they have been written by Darkhu in Kurdish. In this process, the dialectic of the possessor and the possessed as discussed above in relation to *The Container*, is further complicated by Barakat inscribing himself in the novel not only as the writer but also the translator of the poetry – poetry which may be viewed as being both linguistically mobile and mobilising of women to defend their rights to their bodies and spaces. I would argue that even though Darkhu's poetry can be easily ascribed to Barakat the novelist and the poet, its language nonetheless returns the reader to the main poet; in this case, Darkhu, as she ventures beyond the autobiographical, instead capturing the mutating nature of being a Kurdish woman in Sweden.

This process of mutation and translation is poignantly reflected in the very process of writing and reciting these poems: whilst read in Arabic, the poems *textually* exist in Kurdish according to the

narrator, and more specifically are written in 'loud Kurdish' by Darkhu ('*Darkhū taktubuhā bil-Kurdiyya ṣākhibatan*') who not only interprets from Arabic and Kurdish into Swedish in her professional capacity but also translates this 'loud Kurdish' into 'whispered Swedish ('*tutarjimuhā ilā as-Suwaydiyya mahmūsatan*') as she recites the poems for an audience consisting of other Kurdish women (p.21):

.. درخو تكتبها بالكردية صاخبةً، وتترجمها إلى السويدية مهموسةً.

> Darkhu writes it [her poetry] in loud Kurdish, and she translates it to a whispered Swedish.

In this case, Darkhu's writing is produced and shared across languages, trifurcated, and as Anzaldúa argues with reference to a colonising tongue overwhelming the mother tongue, it happens on a 'forked tongue' (1987:55) and a split body. In such a tripartite framework, Arabic is the dominant language and script – that which is read by the reader and, we can assume, that which has the potential to be archived; Kurdish is referred to as the language in which the poems are written and yet both Kurdish and the poems belong to orality in the novel, being ascribed to loudness, while actual textual evidence of the poems' existence is deferred to page 262; and finally, the language of the host state, Swedish is only whispered.[30] As such, I argue that reading these poems critically must take place through sensitivity to a plurilingual lens (a lens which is implied but not explicitly revealed in the novel), acknowledging the extent to which the corporeal and linguistic dimensions are extensions of each other. Indeed, as Darkhu's poems solely appear in Arabic in the novel, they posit an important question as to which linguistic body the protagonists resort to, beyond the practicalities of their daily and professional engagements, and whether a language ascribed to them in their Arabic-speaking territories 'of origin' in Syria and Iraq can itself be a constant returning to what it means to be an exile.

[30] Swedish, in the novel, seems to denote discretion, whether to enhance intimacy or to prevent other Swedish speakers (namely citizen-neighbours) from overhearing the secrets being shared.

For Darkhu to be the writer herself rebuts the common assumption that writings about refugees are produced on behalf of those involved and from an outside that retains the centrality of the citizen whose skills favour her for such a role. Darkhu, the historical refugee who is equally the citizen and an interpreter for other refugees, is also the poet whose writing clearly responds to different forms of violence and insists on her right to write and defend herself and her place in this world. In so doing, her writing also offers a clear correspondence between the corporeal and the textual. While her position as a poet, and her writings, are referred to early on in the novel, evidence of her poetry emerges only in the ninth weekly meeting, when she pulls out scraps of paper from her bags and pockets, carrying within their folds varied enactments (as well as reminders) of who both she and her audience are. Her poems, as they are recited and shared with the group, raise questions as to whether it is the poet's own body which is depicted in these poems or if they encompass other bodies, in particular those of the Kurdish women whose bodies are being disputed and contested across generational and gendered lines alike. In my view, this poetry suggests vistas which are resonant with the women in attendance, but at the same time projects further clashes with men not only as counterparts or as people who are no longer in touch with these women, but more importantly as controlled beings whose destinies are in the hands of the writer. To write in this context is premised on survivability (Anzaldúa (2012 [1987]:95), without making this survivability contingent on the man's presence in these women's lives, but rather as a rewriting of these women's positionalities in both their household and workplace, and in Sweden more generally.

In her poetry, the conscious conversion of the female body emerges as one way of inverting the order of things. In the first poem (p.262), the male's face returns:

سأغسل قلبكَ بنظرتي الأولى،
في الفجر،
إلى وجهكَ المهشَّم من رَكْلتَيْ البارحةَ.
كدتُ أقتلكَ.
لم أتوقف لأنني لا أريدك ميتاً،
بل لأُلقي على وجهك نظرةَ الفجر الأولى،
في سريري،
يا ابنَ كلِّ كلبةٍ تنبحُ فجراً.

I'll cleanse your heart with my first gaze,
At dawn,
On the way to your face crushed from yesterday's kicks.
I nearly killed you.
I stopped, not because I didn't want you dead,
But to grant your face the dawn's first gaze,
In my bed,

You, son of a bitch, barking at dawn.[31]

Here, the first-person strips the male – in this case the Kurdish man – of his self-conferred authority, instead granting a newer authority, one which is full and loud, to the Kurdish woman in exile. As the woman appears to be gazing down at the male, she recalibrates her newly-acquired phallic presence, with their inter-dependency now defined through the prism of whose body is being fulfilled, and how changing (or more precisely reversing) these normative roles is in itself an entry point to a body that is being reimagined in writing. In the above lines, the promises are futural where the cleansing (*ghasl)* (i.e. washing and retracing undiscovered paths), as proposed in the first line, is a conversion of the domestic into the existential and as such is a re-claiming of the male's heart (*qalb*) as both a space and time. The gaze (*naẓra*) is now reoriented and shifts towards the male body: therein is a proposed reassembling of the male body, not of any male but of the Kurdish man who is trapped within the biopolitic of exile.

The word *qalb* (heart in Arabic) is itself related to the transitory nature of affects and the impossibility of maintaining what could be seen as static emotions, and is also shared with the verbal noun *qalb* (turning upside down) which, as the common root *q-l-b* vouches, lends change and changeability to all subjects. By choosing to cleanse the male's *heart* with the first gaze of the day, Darkhu endeavours to re-instate the change that is long viewed as the essence of hearts, where the inside is inverted and turned inside out, so its new essence is no longer hidden within the body but instead made available to the discerning eye. In my view, such imageries transmit a form of violence mobilised to repel a bigger violence with reference to the historical treatment of women and the patriarchy. In the poem, the male body is reconstructed as the female wishes and orders, not as a distant body but rather as one to be feasted upon and consumed as part of Darkhu's and her female companions' weekly rituals. The rhetorical aspects underpinning this quest (i.e. the body as consumption) do not only exist with reference to the male body but also offer a powerful challenge

[31] In the original, 'son of all bitches' is used; here I have opted for the idiomatically aligned translation 'son of a bitch' (in the singular) rather than a literal translation (in the plural).

in those places where citizens who have been naturalised cannot be dissociated from their historical refugeeness, and are continuously inscribed as 'dissonant bodies' – ones whose conception and conceptualisation fall within the irregular –, as Puwar (2004:31-54) suggests with reference to the bodies of minorities and minoritised bodies. The disharmonious in those strange bodies (the argument is Puwar's) is what makes their visibility into hypervisibility (ibid.). While the model body is still the male's, as Gatens (1996) proposes, its content nonetheless belongs to Darkhu, as does its re-creation and destruction.

Darkhu's deconstructive form of writing shifts the gaze, presenting the body from the woman's point of view, as a body that urgently needs to be reassembled to fit the evolving nature of time. As noted above, Ahmed (2000) writes that strangerness is also a marker that in essence belongs to a positionality that is outside the remit of what or who is considered strange; I contend that this clarifies Darkhu's quest for the body to be reconfigured from within, instead of awaiting an external source or outside intervention. What we have here is a poem drafted by a woman for other women, where common struggles and aspirations are condensed and then shared. Since the facticity of the bodies involved is appraised through the clash underway, one body hitting and then gazing (Darkhu's) and the other receiving those blows and almost dying (the male's), these bodies become *present* in conjunction to each other and not apart. It is within '*shiʿruhā al-kurdī*' (p.15) ('her Kurdish poetry') where Kurdish people co-exist and where the national is subsumed within gender.

Resorting to cognates of the same verb (*hashama*), the crushed (*muhashsham*) face, as posited by Darkhu, is tied to the already-crushed (*hashīm*) photograph frame in Tassu's household (as discussed in Chapter 1), where memories and past figures and places, including her parents in Qamishli, are transformed to material rejects to be part of a becoming-archive which is fixated on the present and the future. Sweden, for both Tassu and Darkhu, retains a position of immediacy and suspension at the same time, whereby living there cannot be viewed without not living there. Ian Chambers powerfully ties the process of rethinking time and place within varied cultures and languages to 'rethink[ing] the purpose, direction and limits of these categories' (2005:33). Such a rethinking is

clearly at play in both Tassu's and Darkhu's treatments of objects and people where the bodies in question are simultaneously different bodies and bodies of difference (also see Ahmed 1998).

The crushed face *(al-wajh al-muhashsham)* in Darkhu's poetry is a result of the kicking that the male is subjected to: it is woman-made, a wake-up call to reassess the terms and conditions that have long defined these women's dealings with men. So the 'crushed face' is Darkhu's making and can be read as a vector through which (newer) corporeal configurations of the male body emerge. Conversely, Tassu's crushed frame (described both as *muhashsham* and *hashīm*[32]), or precisely the glass within it that both stabilises and protects the picture underneath it (p.15, 320) is what has endured the damage pushing it out of sight and making it not worthy of being seen in public.

Darkhu's image of the crushed face does not necessarily exclude the process of witnessing, nor is it viewed as a mere consequence of a male-female encounter; instead, is a restorative act where the gaze will continue in the future. In an attempt to locate bonds between the body and writing, Andzaldúa suggests that it is through (her) writing that 'creating [her] own face, [her] own heart' takes place, and that her soul (also through writing) 'is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through [her] body' ([1987]2012:95). Such articulations effectively synthesise Darkhu's poems and her poetry's influence in depicting what can be said within the novel, without compromising the autonomous values of writing. When Darkhu writes the male body into her poetry, it is ultimately written so that her body can also be reconfigured, through a specific part: the face. The face is, after all, what sees and sees through change, whilst at the same time being seen by other faces (see Levinas 1985, 1986; Butler 2006). The crushing of the face by Darkhu is ever more powerful when read in relation to the Arabic root of the word 'face' (*w-j-h*), which ushers in another dimension predicated on movement: it is the face (*wajh*) that is forced to escape, with the man's movement and directionality inherent within cognate words such as *wijha* (destination) and *jiha* (direction), as I now discuss with reference to the second poem recited by Darkhu at the same gathering.

[32] Used as an adjective on p.15, *hashīm* is used both as an adjective and a noun to describe the glass on p.320.

Protection and the matrilineal in the body

Within half an hour of reciting her first poem, whilst her friends continue to ignore her, Darkhu pulls out another scrap of paper bearing the inscription of another poem (p.262), in the hope that this will be sufficient to reorient her friends' attention:

Run away, draped in your mother's clothes If they fit. Run, draped in your sister's clothes If they fit. I'm descending to your town at the crack of dawn You, son of a bitch.	اهْربْ متخفّياً في ثياب أمكَ، إن كانت ثيابها على مقاسك. اهربْ متخفياً في ثياب اختكَ، إنْ كانت ثيابها على مقاسك. أنا قادمة إلى مدينتكَ فجراً، يا ابن كلِّ كلبةٍ.

Space, as imagined in Darkhu's second poem, is neither expansive, nor reducible to the known in places: instead, it resembles a battleground. Hers is not an invitation, but a strict order uttered to counter a masculinity that is born out of monopolising fixity, i.e. driving women out of their legal spaces while claiming the fixed in place. To reverse the order of things, Darkhu employs the imperative verb 'run away' (*uhrub*, masc. sing.) so that the male's retreat is ordered, viewed and inscribed through the female's eyes and pen. Importantly, Darkhu's poems are shared immediately after news of the disappearance of one of the women, Rawat, who has, it transpires, left for the North of Sweden to escape her abusive husband (p.260).[33] Although expected, Rawat's departure is unseen by the group (and the reader), with the details of her safety and location reported to them by Salam, in whom Rawat has confided. While the group knows that Rawat is now safe because she is far away, 'staying in spirit with us even if her body is no longer present' (p.260), Darkhu's poems embody an inverted position: the female poet powerfully orders the abusive man to flee, threatening to descend 'to your town' where she will, it is inferred, inflict violence upon him if he remains; just as in the first poem she both recalled the violence she had inflicted on the abusive man 'yesterday', and

[33] Rawat's first reference to her plans to leave her husband and children (p.83-84) includes the same verb used by Darkhu in her poem, although in the future tense: '*Saʾahrub. Qultu saʾahrub*…' (p.84) – 'I will escape. I said I will escape…'.

invoked the future violence she would subject him to at dawn 'in my bed'. In her poems, Darkhu insists on the *woman* chasing after him to ensure that she can remain in safety in her own home, while it is the *man* who must flee both *her* place ('my bed') and *his* place ('your town'). This is a thematic that also appears earlier in the novel, when Rihani forces her violent husband *out* in order for her to remain *in* her apartment with her two daughters. While acknowledging the home as a site of violence (as has long been theorised by feminist scholars – ie. MacKinnon 1989; Nash 2004-2005), Darkhu and Rihani alike re-configure the domestic sphere as a space from which violence should be ejected in order for women to be able to remain *there* in safety. In contrast, by deciding to flee her home, Rawat's departure is a means of starting anew in a different place (notably, she does this whilst concurrently asking her son to instruct his father *to move his things out* of her flat, whose keys she has returned to the agency – p.260).

In effect, in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, both matrilineal lines and garments play a central role in the quest for safety. Throughout Darkhu's poem, the matrilineal line is predominant, starting as it does with the female poet setting up her line of argumentation, so to speak, not through the male Kurd but through a clear reference to his mother first, followed by the sister. The clothes are not his, but rather his mother's and sister's respectively, which have the potential to ensure his safe passage. His escape, the poet announces, will only be successful if the size of his mother's and sister's clothes match his, thereby requiring him to somehow correspond to the contours of his mother's and sister's bodies. This is an intriguing double bind: to run away successfully he cannot do so *as himself* but must instead adopt the figure of either his mother or his sister, being shrouded by *their* protective layer through what could also be read as an act of transgression. In such a proposition, the female body itself can arguably be interpreted as being transformed into a garment that can be worn at a time when the male body is seeking a place beyond violence, which is itself an ironic proposition given the very context which is being inverted in Darkhu's poem. This masking (not of the face as such but of the body) would in effect re-create him as other, this time as the female other who is normatively assumed to be subjected to violence; in so doing, this new positionality is posited as

enabling (or requiring) him to contemplate the implications of crossing over into a woman's space and body.

Should we tie Darkhu's two poems together, there appears to be no place for the man's battered body (in the first poem) to go to (in the second poem). Despite conveying urgency, alternative realities are nonetheless pondered in this writing – indeed, in light of the limited options in the real world, I would argue that the poem becomes an alternative land where rules still apply in order for specific people to be admitted and allowed to remain therein. As such, returning to Anzaldúa, this writing can be conceptualised not only as self-preservation, but also as a quest for desirable forms of self-autonomy ([1980] 2009:30). Importantly, however, while Darkhu envisages a space and a future free of men and insists on reading her poem to the group as they note Rawat's absence, the group did *not* listen to the first poem, and, when the second poem is acknowledged by Tassu, she does so as follows (p.262-263):

> لكنني لا أفهم، يا درخو، كيف تأمرين رجلاً بالهرب. تشبَّثي به. لو كنتُ في قصيدتك لتشبَّثت به، وبأمه، وبأخته، وبمدينته. في المرة القادمة، حين تكتبين شِعراً عن رجل، أوجدي لي مكاناً في القصيدة. أدْخليني إليها. دحرجيني إليها. اقذفي بي، بكل قواك، إليها.

> But I don't understand, Darkhu, how you're ordering a man to escape. Grab onto him. If I were in your poem I would grab onto him, onto his mother, his sister and his city. Next time, when you write poetry about a man, find me a place in the poem. Admit me into it. Roll me in to it. Throw me into it, with all of your might.

Responding to Tassu's critique and request, Darkhu herself proposes the need for an alternative starting point: '*khaffifī shaḥmaki qalīlan, yā Tāsū, kay astaṭīʿ al-qadhfa biki ilā qaṣīdatī al-qādima'* (p. 263 – 'slim down a bit, Tassu, so I can throw you into the next poem'). On the one hand, the poem is no longer a text but rather a shared space, and admission to it is overseen by the poet: it is only Darkhu who can 'permit' Tassu into it.[34] Importantly, Tassu herself does not wish to write the poem herself, but instead instructs Darkhu (who remains the subject) to write her into literature to

[34] Although Darkhu's suggestion that Tassu would need to slim down to be thrown into the poem may be made in jest, in so doing she is hinting that not all bodies can fit and be included in this writing, and also, perhaps, that co-existence with the man could be contingent on her body fitting specific norms and molds pertaining to attractiveness and desirability.

ensure that the man can stay, and moreover instructs Darkhu to not only 'find a place' for her, but to ensure that she does so with 'all of [her] might' so that Tassu's body can play an active role in this projected setting. While premised on critique, this exchange thus emphasises the writer's authority, as the one who is in charge of the parameters of her writing and under what conditions such parameters would shift.

On the other hand, the poem is also clearly a space for contestation and debate. Throughout, Tassu is not only objecting to the thematic and trajectory of Darkhu's poem but is also positioning herself as having an alternative narrative, where she stresses her desire to co-exist and share with the Kurdish man. Throughout her interjection, the imperative tone in Tassu's request mirrors the overarching tone of Darkhu's poem and her usage of the imperative *uhrub* (run, masc. sing) therein, with all of the verbs used by Tassu having corporeal elements and connotations: *tashabbathī* (grab on to),[35] *awjidī* (find), *adkhilī* (admit), *daḥrijī* (roll) and *iqẓifī* (throw) (all in fem. sing.). Through her requests, Tassu attempts to bridge a temporal and spatial gap between her body and that of the man – whether by being thrown, rolled or being admitted into the future poem. Darkhu's response – revolving around another corporeal imperative – *khaffifī* (slim down) – in turn raises the question of whether, with a different (in this case, slimmer) body, Tassu would ever be written into literature. Concurrently, and perhaps provocatively, this exchange also prompts the reader to contemplate what Tassu would in fact 'do' if she were to be rolled in, thrown in with force, to share space with the man, and indeed how Darkhu would respond to this eventuality through her writing.

Should we read the writing in both *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and *The Container* together, I contend that we would see writing as being intrinsically linked with imagining, and constituting alternative futures for refugees, old and new. These encompass, in *The Container*, futures scripted by others (Asha's letter) and the potential of writing and crafting one's own path (Mariam's invitation to Asha); and in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, Darkhu both writing alternative lands and predicting the disbanding of the group as

[35] Idiomatically, this verb is often invoked with regards to holding onto one's territory and principles.

both a poet and a visionary, and Tassu asking to be written into literature by the poet to reconfigure the gendered trajectories of such work. Where Asha bears a letter which can act as a 'pass' to grant her access to work in the host country (with the quest for employment superseding the request for protection from persecution) and is directed specifically to the supra-citizen (the Queen), Darkhu's poetry is a gateway to an alternative land where Kurdish women are in charge and free from violence. In turn, where Mariam encourages Asha to write afresh, in Darkhu's and Tassu's case, writing as a process has the potential to be reconfigured and reassembled through re-writing. Both forms of writings thus seek to admit women into new spaces and roles, and to varying degrees reaffirm the interconnectedness between writing and accessing rights (also see Stonebridge 2020). Equally, both texts powerfully raise the broader question of whose body is allowed in, both through spatial admission in relation to asylum, but also who is included and excluded from the refugee narrative.

Conclusion

Together, *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* demonstrate that confronting mainstream representations of refugees is not, and should not be, solely dependent upon 'humanising' the individual refugee through processes of idealisation or essentialisation. Instead, I have argued that both texts offer a 'different writing of embodiment' (Ahmed 1998:64) through writing the complexity of displacement and containment into literature, as demonstrated through my investigation of how corporeal tropes of illness, the mutating body, violence against women and employment are variously resisted *and* reproduced by the protagonists, including through processes of self-representation.

In both texts, the female refugee body is often depicted as a body subjected to violence (thereby reproducing a key trope pertaining to refugee women) and, in particular in the case of *The Container*, as a means through which prices and disputes are settled – a body which is repeatedly (ab)used, de-historicised and disembodied; and yet in both texts, the female refugee body is more than a mere object, instead embodying the resistance of a 'willful subject' (Ahmed 2014). The agency of refugee

women is thus acknowledged through their resistance to violence and the patriarchy, but also through their active negotiations and competing narratives with regards to the changing position, nature and purpose of refugee women's bodies: their own and others'. Importantly, far from idealising refugees' agency, the texts equally trace the ways that certain refugees' actions and inactions render them complicit in processes of exclusion and discrimination.

In effect, the treatment of the refugee body in these texts highlights that refugees must be viewed relationally, stressing that refugee-refugee relationality can be characterised by solidarity, companionship and care, but also by violence (ranging from the epistemic to the physical). Throughout both texts, it is refugee women themselves who initiate care, and resist sexual- and gender-based violence, thus disrupting the assumption that it is the citizen who responds to meet refugees' needs. However, rather than assuming that shared identities or experiences will necessarily lead to a shared vision, both texts interrogate the complex relationships that exist between the individual and the collective. For example, while national markers are obvious in both works, they equally propose that allegiances and sorority, as well as tensions and animosity, can and do exist both within and across national boundaries. In *The Container* relationalities and relationships are not all formed and reconfigured in consonance with national and linguistic loyalties: instead, some relationships have not just arisen in lieu of such loyalties but rather in clear resistance to them, ushering in bodies in sync, grounded in solidary and intercorporeal correspondence. In turn, what could be viewed as 'a new tribalism' (Anzaldúa 2009:245) between the Kurdish women translators in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, not only offers the protagonists the opportunity to dwell *on* history and the body-politic but more so to dwell *in* history and forge their own spaces within a male-dominated fabric; nonetheless, the narrative exposes the fragility of the women's alliance, and the potential for the community's dissolution in spite of a shared point of origin, gender and profession.

Simultaneously, the protagonists' encounters in *The Container* problematise the borders between care and abuse, and raise uncomfortable questions as per certain refugees' complicity in the bodily and material consumption and exploitation of the other, as committed by refugees and citizens alike.

In turn, fear and the rejection of refugees underpin both texts – whether a fear of illness, or of being detained and deported in *The Container,* or of being substituted by other refugee women in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* – highlighting the insecurity and uncertain futures projected by all. As the protagonists of *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* simultaneously seek to protect themselves and one another from domestic violence, they nonetheless also voice racist statements and assertions about new arrivals, a form of racism that is shared with many members of the mainstream citizenry of the host state.

While these and other tropes investigated in this chapter have long been critiqued as Eurocentric modes of xenophobia, the inclusion of such perceptions as articulated by refugees themselves in these texts raises important questions about, and destabilises, the very notion of 'mainstream' representations of refugees. Through an analysis of *The Container* and *Hiyāj al-Iwazz,* written as they are within the context of different linguistic and cultural settings, I have shown that both texts engage with such 'common' tropes in ways that demonstrate that these are not limited to one geography or geopolitical setting, while at the same time illustrating that how, why, and with what effect such xenophobia is expressed, is contextually-situated, rather than homogenous in nature. In centralising xenophobia and militating against idealising refugees, both texts equally highlight the diverse ways in which refugee writing can and does engage with tensions and animosity, drawing the reader into the more complex crisis of responses to displacement through the recognition that not all refugees are 'likeable' or comply with standard assumptions of who is believed to 'deserve' asylum.

The centrality of refugee-refugee relationality as well as refugee-refugee dialogue also raises broader questions pertaining to whose gaze is, should or could, be prioritised in writings pertaining to refugees. As is most powerfully exemplified through the intertextual instances investigated in the preceding pages, and an analysis of the roles of refugees as writers, carriers and consumers of the written, these texts evoke a reconfiguration of our understanding of such writings. Challenging the assumption that it is the citizen who is the main consumer of such narratives, which I would argue potentially reinscribes neo-imperial relationships, both texts draw critical attention to how

refugees are not only represented (and consumed) by (non-refugee) others, but also how refugees represent and respond to their own predicaments and the presence of other refugees, including through writing.

Ultimately, whether enabling or resisting the inscription of the body into servitude, or seeking to redefine women's positions and spaces of safety, the contours and content of the writing is determined and debated between and by refugee protagonists themselves, with the possibility of writing anew and/or re-writing emerging in both texts. While these female protagonists are themselves arguably engaging in processes of refugee writing, in addition to holding, drawing upon and reciting these texts, whether this writing is owned by these women remains suspended, since both the protagonists and these intertextual elements have of course been written by Bayley and Barakat. Nonetheless, while the question of possession and ownership may be suspended, in the Conclusion to this thesis I extend this line of argumentation to propose a shift in literary studies by arguing that, in addition to critical engagement vis-à-vis the nature of the relationship between the refugee-*writer* and refugee-*writing*, it is also imperative that literary criticism recognise the refugee as more-than-writer, including the refugee as the reader and as the critic. In effect, although scholars such as Rickel (2018:98) powerfully posit that 'narrative structures that put refugees in dialogue with each other' disrupt the refugee-reader dialectic and its neo-imperialist underpinnings, I go further by highlighting the epistemic violence inherent in the assumption that 'the refugee' and 'the reader' are two distinct categories of people to begin with, and in particular the assumption that while the refugee may be the writer or the written, the reader is, a priori, the citizen.

Conclusion:

Refugee Writing and Refugee Reading

My intervention in this 'new field in literary studies' (Potter and Stonebridge 2014:1) takes place against the backdrop of increasing attention to refugee writing, including analyses which view such writing as having the potential to enhance the reader's understanding of the refugee experience on the one hand, and to catalyse their compassion and empathy for refugees on the other, through what Rickel denominates a form of 'literary humanitarian' impulse (2018:97). In line with expanding critiques of trauma-centric accounts of displacement, and contra the narrative imperative for refugees to be written into literature as suffering victims, the texts underpinning this study – which themselves embody different configurations of what has been defined, and more recently examined as 'refugee writing' – push against the positioning of refugees as passive victims, without denying the structural inequalities and systems of violence and exploitation that characterise displacement. By carefully contextualising the refugee protagonists' experiences both historically and geopolitically, I have read the texts as simultaneously acknowledging refugees' agency (including through their enactment of archival practices in both the public and private sphere, and as not only time-seekers but also as time-makers, as argued in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively), and also demonstrating the extent to which their lives are neither defined nor absorbed by displacement. In effect, the importance of remembering the past – in ways that are not limited to the events which have led to displacement – is conjoined in these texts with the protagonists' quest to create a future of their own making. In so doing, the texts resist 'readerly expectations' (Dawson 2017:14) on multiple fronts, rejecting the assumption that the protagonists' (or the authors') identities or existential concerns can be reduced to that of 'the refugee,' and shifting the focus from the refugee-citizen dyad (as the source of tension or resolution) to instead pivot around refugee-refugee relationalities. Without homogenising or reifying them, by dwelling on the protagonists' acts of solidarity and support, *and* of animosity and epistemic violence towards other refugees, refugees are positioned as neither the (total) victim nor the (absolute) hero. Instead, they are agentic subjects interacting with differently-positioned people and systems of exclusion – including across intersecting axes of gender, nationality and race – as they navigate their

journeys; at times, they seek to overcome and reject the effects of such systems, whilst at other times they perpetuate these, as posited with regards both to the contested nature of archival practices and representations of the refugee body in Chapters 1 and 3 respectively.

Importantly, the texts articulate the position of refugees not merely as active agents who have experienced displacement or who are pursuing their quest for survival, but as producers of *knowledge*: including as writers, interlocutors and interpreters. Indeed, what emerges most conspicuously when reading *Rijāl fī al-Shams, Hiyāj al-Iwazz, By the Sea* and *The Container* in relation to one another is that all of the authors – Kanafani, Barakat, Gurnah and Bayley – inscribe both refugees as writers and refugee writings within their texts, with such instances having been produced, kept and at times recited in different spaces of containment, spanning detention and immigration centres, containers, hostels, and apartments. Tracing the ways that writings by protagonists who are/were refugees emerge therein, alongside the tensions between narration and enunciation on the one hand, and silence and silencing on the other, points us clearly towards another powerful disruption embodied in these texts: that the refugee and the writer can be one and the same (as has by now been well established), but so too can the refugee be the reader and critic. By means of conclusion, I thus turn to the writing that emerges in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, returning to the novella which I positioned in the Introduction as a point of departure for the other narratives under study, and reading this instance of writing in relation to Asha's letter in *The Container*, Darkhu's poetry in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* and both Alfonso's book and Elleke's memoir in *By the Sea*, but also with reference to the *readings* that arise throughout those texts. Indeed, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, I view these texts and the writing supplements therein as not only markers of the '*linguistic* plurality (multilingualism)' in which refugee writing is produced, but also as embodying '*literary* plurality' itself (Omri 2015:25 – emphasis in the original): not merely writings produced in different languages, but different configurations of both writing and reading *per se.*

Writing Against the Grain

As he waits to cross the Iraq-Kuwait border, Marwan embarks on writing a letter for and directed to his mother who has remained in the refugee camp, venting his anger at his father who deserted his family for a second wife. Where his father declares, with regards to his second marriage, that '*hādhā shayʾ maktūb lanā mundhu bidʾ al-khalīqa*' (p.48, emphasis added) ('[i]t is something that has been *decreed* for us since the beginning of creation' – p.44, emphasis added), Marwan's 'long letter' ('*risāla ṭawīla'* – p.40) powerfully rebuts his father's unidimensional depiction of the *maktūb* (p.48): literally 'the written' or 'the decreed,' Qur'anically the *maktūb* invokes that which is pre-written by Allah for his subjects in *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* (the protected tablet), as the ultimate archive which is not susceptible to change or corruption in any way. In essence, the writing as enacted by Marwan seeks to reconfigure the *maktūb*: it offers an alternative way of looking at *the written*. In viewing the letter through intergenerational optics, Kanafani powerfully juxtaposes the expectation of accepting one's fate, inherent in the word *maktūb* as used by the father, with the written that is projected by the son in the shape of a letter drafted in his hotel room in Basra.[1] Where the father asserts that he 'had no choice in the matter' (p.44), Marwan *does* have the choice, and the writing of the letter pushes against the *maktūb* that has resulted in the father leaving the family for another woman: resisting the assumption that people must simply follow and accept their fate, his writing is thus a post-scriptus, against the preordained path that he must follow. Rather than being 'condemned' (to return to Trinh Minh-ha's words, cited in the Introduction) to this fate, Marwan's writing thus follows a different trajectory: rather than rejecting the *maktūb* by name, it is through initiating writing that Marwan both envisions and enacts a response, thereby placing the subject and their agency at the core of both writing and the written. In so doing, Marwan's letter also complicates the position of both the writer and the intended recipient.

[1] Kanafani's resistance to *al-maktūb* and *al-qadar* (fate) emerges throughout his works, including in his short story *Arḍ al-Burtuqāl al-Ḥazīn* ('The Land of Sad Oranges') whose narrator recalls 'I was sure that the God we had known in Palestine had left it too, and was a refugee in some place that I did not know, unable to find a solution to his own problems. And we, human refugees, sitting on the pavement waiting for a new Fate to bring some solution, were responsible for providing a roof under which to spend the night' (1999:77).

As depicted by Kanafani, prior to Marwan's departure from the camp, it was as he handed over ten dinars to enable Marwan's travels, that the father originally enjoined him to write, using the imperative tense twice: 'Take this. It is ten dinars; you may need them. You will write to us, won't you?' (p.44). With the Arabic original – '*Uktub lanā dā'iman*' ('Write to us always', p.48) – posed as an injunction, or perhaps imploration, rather than a question as in the English translation – 'You will write to us, won't you?' –, the father implores a *continuity* of connection between the undefined 'us' (who we can assume refers to the father/family) and son *via* writing. However, for Marwan's writing to 'always' (*dā'iman*) take place does not necessarily mean that this writing will comply with patriarchal expectations. Indeed, contra the father's instruction to 'write to *us always'*, Marwan's letter is directed to the mother, and through its juxtaposition with the father's *maktūb*, demonstrates the potentiality for writing to challenge the status quo.

Marwan's 'long letter' reaffirms his connection to his mother, whom he intends to continue caring for from a distance, in direct contrast with the '*risāla ṣaghīra'* (p.47) (literally a 'small letter' but contextually translated in English as a 'short letter' – p.43) sent by Marwan's older brother, Zakaria who, Marwan tells us, is now settled in Kuwait and is no longer willing to continue providing for his family in the refugee camp. The differences between Marwan's and Zakaria's letters are notable: the former 'long' and a means of connection and continuity,[2] and the latter 'small'/'short' and marking a rupture, as the elder son continues to 'flee' from the family nucleus (like his father – p.43). Furthermore, while Zakaria's letter had a clear objective and is invoked by Marwan precisely because it was received and read by him, Marwan's letter is not fixated on sharing new revelations with the mother, instead reinforcing a repetition of details that the mother *already knows*, even if she does not receive or read it.

[2] While Marwan's aim may be to tell his story from the perspective of a caring, and yet somewhat naïve son, within the parameters of his letter, the entire family, including the younger siblings, is brought together: in other words, alongside Marwan, they have become co-sharers of this textual space which ultimately reaffirms their continuing dispersal.

Indeed, the narrator poses three intersecting rhetorical questions for the reader, which are pivotal in this regard:

> ما هو الخارق في الأمر؟ أيحسب أن أمه لا تعرف القصة كلها؟ ماذا كان يريد أن يقول؟
> (p.47)

> What was so extraordinary about it? Did he think his mother didn't know *the whole story*? What did he want to say?
>
> (p.43, emphasis added)

As Marwan reveals, the letter does not provide a platform for him to inform his mother of anything she does not already know about '*al-qiṣṣa kullahā*' ('the whole story'), or to convince the mother of anything in particular. Far from being 'extraordinary,' the letter is described by its writer as '*sakhīfa'* (p.47), which goes beyond the adjective 'silly' opted by the translator, Hilary Kilpatrick, to instead connote something that is trivial or insignificant. The *letter* is mundane and yet, as Marwan repeats in different iterations, the *writing of it* was wonderful, not merely enabling Marwan to 'spend some time with his mother' (as per the translation), but constituting a common space with which to 'co-live' with her, as the Arabic '*an ya'īsh*', vouches:

> كان أول شيء فعله ذلك الصباح الباكر هو كتابة رسالة طويلة إلى أمه .. وإنه يشعر الآن بمزيد من الارتياح لأنه كتب تلك الرسالة قبل أن تخيب آماله كلها في دكان الرجل السمين فيضيع صفاء الفرح الذي صبه في تلك الرسالة .. لقد كان بديعاً أن يعيش بعض ساعة مع أمه.
> (p.40)

> The first thing that he had done that morning, early, had been to write a long letter to his mother. Now he felt all the more relief because he had written that letter before seeing all his hopes dashed in the fat man's shop, and losing the pure joy that he had poured into the letter. It had been wonderful to spend some time with his mother.
>
> (p.39)

This returns us specifically to the *act and process of writing* that exists in its own right, rather than dwelling on its content, or indeed even the question of the recipient's reaction or response to this writing.

The invocation of the letter only *after* his encounter with the Iraqi smuggler (which resulted in him being slapped for questioning the smuggler's high fee and for threatening to report him to the police),

followed by his first meeting with Abul Khaizuran (who will eventually facilitate Marwan's fateful journey towards Kuwait), even though the drafting of the letter was completed in his hotel room prior to those encounters, constitutes the letter as a presence through which both the past and the future are seen. The contrast is striking between the disappointment of the potential smuggler rejecting him and slapping him *after* writing the letter and the abrasive and bitter rejection of the father's behaviour *within* the letter, and the act of writing itself, which filled Marwan with 'pure joy' (a joy which he 'poured into the letter', as it is both a product of and bearer of emotions) and 'wonderful sensations.' Even the recollection of having *written* the letter allows 'marvellous feeling[s]' to linger *post-writing*. Most importantly in this regard, it is *the writing* rather *the written* that fills him with joy:

> ... كل تلك المشاعر الرائعة التي كانت تغسله، من الداخل، طوال الصباح .. بل انه استغرب كيف تكون تلك الرسالة التي كتبها لأمه قد أعطته الشعور الرائق الذي جعل خيبة أمله تبدو أقل قيمة مما هي في الواقع .. (p.47)

> those wonderful sensations which had purified him inside throughout the morning. In fact it surprised him that the letter he had written to his mother could give him that marvellous feeling which made his disappointment appear less important than it really was.
>
> (p.43)

Throughout, the narrator dwells on writing as a process, capturing its material dimensions and prerequisites – 'He stretched out his hand to the small case under the bed, took out the notebook and pen, and proceeded to write to his mother as he lay there' (p.39) –, with his having embarked on his journey with the necessary writing tools in his suitcase suggesting that Marwan's *intention* to write preceded writing as an *occurrence* or the written as the *product*.

In spite of its thematic, describing and denouncing his father as a 'depraved beast,' Marwan's writing is positioned as the 'best thing he'd done for months. He was not obliged to do it, but he did it quite willingly. He was in an excellent mood, and the letter reflected the tranquillity of the sky above him'

(p.39).[3] While he still loves him and 'didn't know how he had allowed himself to describe his father' in such disparaging terms (ibid), Marwan reasserts his commitment to that process of writing on his own terms: irrespective of how his words might be read (by his mother), he refuses even the prospect of editing (or censoring) his words:

> ... ولكنه لم يشأ أن يشطب ذلك بعد أن كتبه، لم يكن يريد أن يشطب أي كلمة في الرسالة كلها .. ليس لأن أمه تتشاءم من الكلمات المشطوبة فقط، بل لأنه كان لا يريد ذلك أيضاً، وببساطة.
> (p.41)

> he was unwilling to cross the words out once he'd written them; he didn't want to cross out anything in the whole letter – not because his mother would see the crossed-out words as a bad omen, but also, quite simply, because he didn't want to.
> (p.39)

Rather than being concerned about how his words might be read, and whether they would be met by readerly approval, it is his authorial preserve that is centralised throughout this process. The act of writing unequivocally *reaffirms* that which the mother already knows ('*al-qiṣṣa kullahā*', 'the whole story'), even if exposed in terms that might have been unthinkable; yet I maintain that the content is ultimately superfluous, and certainly less significant than writing itself. While there may be an underlying intention for the letter to be read by the (m)other – an intention that may never materialise since the whereabouts of the letter remain unknown after its introduction –, what lingers is precisely his urge to write on his own terms. In this way, Marwan's letter is arguably a form of writing both against *al-maktūb and* beyond the remit of the singular *qiṣṣa:* the story is only one part of writing but not everything. Marwan's retelling of *al-qiṣṣa* is thus another way of asserting his ability to write willingly and with desire, without assuming that writing is a social requirement that he has to fulfil.

[3] The original (p.41) reads:

> كان ذلك أحسن ما فعله خلال شهور، لم يكن مجبراً على فعله، ولكنه كان يريد ذلك بملء رغبته وإرادته .. كان مزاجه رائقاً، وكانت الرسالة تشبه صفاء تلك السماء فوقه .

The Refugee *as* the Reader

Just as I read Marwan's letter as an *alternative* to the father's invocation of the *maktūb* in *Rijāl Fī al-Shams,* I equally view the writings embedded in the works under study as essential supplements to the main texts. Read together, Marwan's letter, Alfonso's book and Elleke's memoir, Darkhu's poetry and Asha's letter all emerge as instances which situate the past as a point of reference within a broader set of spatio-temporal junctures, within which displacement plays only one part: in the case of Marwan, his letter shifts attention from refugeedom per se to the bigger picture – one where the writer's current situation is only part of a series of events that speak to multiple states of being. In so doing, the writings – variously produced in a hotel room, in detention, in apartments or in the camp – seek to re-engage the reader with a future that is yet to be determined and that, in direct contrast to the *maktūb*, is yet to be written. Whether written by or for the protagonists, the writings *within* these texts both depart from and arrive in their main texts by inviting the reader to imagine the protagonists' lives with and without that which is written and in so doing pondering alternative eventualities. The varied, multi-genre and multi-functional nature of such writings powerfully engages the visible and invisible aspects of writing, reminding us that writing is not always complete but can instead exist in traces.

By treating writing within these texts as an event in itself, where the main text and the supplementary writing are co-constituted, I also draw attention to the concomitant writing into literature of the refugee as the actual or potential *reader*. In this regard it is *By the Sea* which most explicitly visibilises the protagonists' engagements with both writing and reading, ranging from Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud's times in colonial libraries in Zanzibar and their invocations of and critical engagement with Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to' in England, and Latif Mahmud himself being a writer and scholar (see Chapters 1 and 2). Together, these instances position the protagonists as readers from two generations whose engagement with multiple literary canons continues throughout their journeys to and in the UK. The remaining texts paint a more complex, and ultimately incomplete picture of the relationship between writing and reading. In *The Container*, Asha is the *bearer* of the letter*,* not its author (as it was written on her behalf by the King of her tribe in the

camp), and, where Marwan's letter is addressed to his mother in the camp to sustain a connection, Asha's letter is directed to the Queen in an attempt to re-write her destiny (see Chapter 3). Poignantly, neither letter is likely to ever reach or be read by their intended addressees, be it a refugee or the supra-citizen. Furthermore, the content of Asha's letter is only known through mediated accounts, as she is not (yet) able to read it herself. Indeed, when Mariam encourages Asha to have higher expectations and to see her future in the UK as enabling her to 'learn to write [her] own letters' (p.18), it is also, I would suggest, for her to be able to *read* such writings herself.

In effect, it is not the reception or reading of the letters that is at the core of either of those instances; nor is it central to the case of either Alfonso's book – whose content and thematics remain entirely unknown, and whose completion remains pending – or Elleke's colonial memoir – which is referred to by her son without specific details. Instead, throughout those instances, it is the process of writing and the written-in-relation that is centralised, in conjunction with a reassertion of the incomplete nature of both writing and reading: ultimately, it is unknown who, if anyone, will read these texts. It is only in the case of Darkhu's poetry in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz* that a text is both written by, and recited to, people with refugee backgrounds, as part of the complex dynamics of refugee-refugee relationality arising in all of the texts under study. Even then, as part of the broader processes of contestation and debate between refugees explored throughout, Darkhu's friends did not listen to her first poem, and Tassu's critical engagement with the second leads to a request for the poem to be *re-written* to accommodate her body (see Chapter 3). Across these texts, the ownership of these writings ultimately remains *suspended*, as does, indeed, the reading and readership of such writings. In essence, while not all of these writings *are* read by refugees, the framing of these writings within the main texts nonetheless disrupts, rather than reproduces, the assumption that the reader is *necessarily* the citizen.

Together, these texts thus embody different configurations of both 'refugee writing' and 'refugee reading,' simultaneously problematising and rendering impossible and undesirable any attempts to delineate fixed parameters or definitions of either 'refugee writing' or 'refugee reading'. Indeed,

even if the authors or protagonists of these texts are or were legally and politically refugees, I have sought to escape the determinism through which people have often been forcibly categorised as refugees by, for instance, drawing attention to the significance of displacement as only one part of their lives, and by centralising the protagonists' engagements in different forms of knowledge production and critical engagement with their own lives and the lives of others.

Rather than denying the *refugeeness* of people who have experienced persecution and displacement, in this process I have posited that these texts resist the reduction of people's lives, narratives and identities to refugee-dom; and yet, paradoxically perhaps, especially in light of my own resistance to being labelled a 'refugee writer' (as outlined in the Introduction), I have insisted on uncovering writings enacted by refugees, alongside the actual or potential *reading* of such texts *by* refugees. This insistence, I argued at the end of the previous chapter, is urgent to overcome the epistemic violence inherent within the assumption that 'the refugee' and 'the reader' are necessarily two separate categories of people, or that 'refugee writing' is important in order to activate the 'literary humanitarian' impulse of *citizens* (Rickel 2018; Bernard 2020:77; Olubas 2019:n.p.).

In line with my focus on 'refugee writings' rather than 'the refugee writer' (Introduction), and on 'rhythms of *refuge'* rather than 'the rhythms of the *refugee'* (Chapter 2), here I continue to advocate moving away from the reification of the figure of the refugee *per se*, either as the figure which needs to be 'saved' by the active (Western) citizen (following Abu-Lughod 2002) or as the 'category of being' who is the creator or subject of this work. Such an approach includes recognising and examining the refugee-refugee dialogues and exchanges that characterise all of these writings, and also critically interrogating the very nature and implications of the assumption that it is the *non-refugee* who necessarily consumes these dialogues and responds to them accordingly. Ultimately, through this intervention, I contend that recognising people with refugee backgrounds as writers, readers and critics, without reducing their identities to that of 'the refugee' or restricting their claims to expertise to their refugeedom (as discussed in the Introduction), prompts an epistemological shift: people who are and have been refugees are producers of knowledge, as much as they are readers and

critics of existing knowledge systems, enacting multiple ways of being in, knowing and responding to the world, not merely being described or documented as part of it. Through shifting the gaze to the critical *readings* of refugees and to processes of refugee reading, this pushes for a new direction in literary studies. It proposes the importance both of analysing texts afresh without *assuming* the identity or position of the reader and analyst, but also of *acknowledging* the broader effects and implications that the reader's multiple identities and positionalities may have on their analyses of such texts. Given that the burgeoning literary field of 'refugee writing' has largely been constituted as being intimately conjoined with the injunction to catalyse the reader-qua-citizen's solidarity and compassion for refugees, this opens up space for new and more inclusive theorisations to emerge.

The reading of 'refugee writings' as texts that set out to prompt the understanding or solidarity of the 'non-refugee' is a reading which starts from the premise and gaze of the citizen, and which has, in turn, rendered the refugee *hypervisible as a topic* and yet *invisible as a critic.* In contrast, an inclusive analytical frame guided by refugee reading – which can be undertaken by all readers (citizens and refugee alike) – allows for a multiperspectival and multidirectional mode of analysis which both contextualises and goes beyond refugeedom per se. Far from suspending critical judgements in favour of the 'reductive characterisations of refugee literature' (Birns and Allahyari 2023:1) which have primarily read the refugee through humanitarian optics, my reading of these texts has shed light on both the solidarities and the tensions emerging between and within refugee groups, and the ways that the protagonists confront the expectations of citizens and other refugees alike. As I opened with Marwan's writing and his insistence on rejecting the already-written (the *maktūb*) in *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, and noting the potentialities of writing anew and/or re-writing as they emerge in the cases both of Asha and Mariam in *The Container* and of Tassu and Darkhu in *Hiyāj al-Iwazz*, I here conclude with Saleh Omar's promise, in *By the Sea,* of a *future* reading and the possibilities that such critical engagements hold.

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