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Unearthing Literature: The Case of Hussein Barghouti

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Citation

Omari, H. (2019, October 29). *Unearthing Literature: The Case of Hussein Barghouti*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/79998>

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Issue Date: 2019-10-29

Introduction

In its 2018 Spring volume, the *Journal of Palestine Studies* (*Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyya*) dedicated a section to the life and works of the Palestinian author and thinker Hussein Barghouti¹ (1954-2002), which included entries from Palestinian academics, authors, and friends of the thinker. The aim, as expressed in the opening statement, is to “motivate academics and students to study this momentous literary experiment, and to situate it within its cultural, intellectual, and political context.”² This dissertation, which was started in 2014, is in line with the necessity of studying Barghouti’s works and serves as an investigation of his literary contributions. The dissertation presents some of Barghouti’s thoughts on writing that were shaped by his personal experiences and his literary standing in Palestinian society. Barghouti’s project, it will be argued, is based on acts of change and movement that lead to personal and literary transformation (*taḥawwul*). By exploring the case of Barghouti, this study complicates the tripartite interactions between the personal, the national, and the literary. It adopts the body as a thematic trope and a methodological framework for conceptualizing Barghouti’s calls for innovative modes of writing and cross-generic experimentations.

My first encounter with Barghouti was in the summer of 2010 when I read one of his most celebrated books *al-Ḍaw’ al-azraq* (*The Blue Light*) (2001).³ In 2009, I had taken a course on Medieval Literature during my BA studies at the American University in Cairo, and I was introduced to the vast realm of Sufi writings. Barghouti’s text surprised me as a

¹ In the dissertation, I spell Barghouti’s name as Hussein Barghouti instead of the transliterated name Ḥussayn Barghūṭī. In the sources that mention him, I kept the spelling that is adopted by the author. For Arabic sources that mention Barghouti, I used the transliterated name. The reader of the dissertation can notice that I kept the different spellings in the bibliography, however, I have listed them chronologically in the same section (see the primary sources in the bibliography).

² "...ودور هذا الملف الصغير هو تحفيز الأكاديميين والطلاب على دراسة هذه التجربة الأدبية الكبرى، ووضعها في سياقها الثقافي والفكري والسياسي."

Akram Musallam, ed. “Taḥiyya ilā Ḥusayn al-Barghūṭhī,” *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyya* 114 (Spring 2018): 86.

³ After giving the English title of each of Barghouti’s works in the first citation, the Arabic titles will be used in the dissertation. Except for *The Blue Light* and Barghouti’s PhD title, all other titles are my translation.

modern-day rendition of the notions of journey, experience, and self-discovery that are central to the works of famous medieval Sufi writers such as Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), Rūmī (d. 1273), and ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1221). When choosing a topic for my PhD, I knew that I wanted to take modern Palestinian literature as my focal field, and because of my interest in Sufism, Barghouti’s *al-Ḍaw’* was the combination of the two. I initially wanted to study the deployment of Sufism in the works of Barghouti in order to explore how he uses narrative elements such as the journey, exile, and return, and what this tells us about his worldview and the role that the local (in relation to the universal) plays in shaping literary expressions. In the larger context, the aim of the project was similarly to highlight the link between the secular and the religious, the modern and the traditional. Thematically, I started to categorize Barghouti’s use of elements of light, taste, sound, and space in relation to Sufi thought. After gathering these notes, I decided to write a chapter on Barghouti’s deployment of the senses. While Sufism’s influence on Barghouti’s writing is evident, I realized that using it as the main prism would confine a larger interpretation of Barghouti’s work. After exploring the centrality of the senses to Barghouti’s thought, I opted to use a different reading lens: the body. Doing so has revealed Sufism to be one of many influences. The body, on the other hand, provided a richer and more complex framework for reading notions of intertextuality, influence, and innovation in his writing.

Barghouti’s literary output is characterized by a deep external and internal awareness of self and other and exemplifies acts of literary departures and innovation that demand to be noticed and studied. What is proposed here is a contextual approach that attempts to read the body anew; i.e. as a producer of experiences rather than a reflection of them. The body, as a site of reading, brings together the personal, the national, and the literary. At the same time, the body is used to rethink the reading process of literature beyond the usually imposed one of ‘representation’ and towards the literary as a space of transformation. I argue that

Barghouti portrays a vision of Palestinian literature as an ever-changing and self-questioning field. His works exemplify a disruption of familiar expressions regarding notions of political engagement, illness and death, and literary innovation. The aim is not to position Barghouti as a sole voice outside of the Palestinian canon but rather to read his works as an extending force of the literary body, which accentuates the complexity and variety of Palestinian literature.

The link between the body and literature – or reading literature through the body – is evident. One technical and academic example is how we often speak of literature in bodily terms: the *body* of Arabic literature/the literary *corpus* of Hussein Barghouti, for example. In this study, the body is understood as the physical body of the author, the body of the land, as well as the body of the text. The dissertation does not propose that Barghouti's literary productions should only be read corporeally or in a sensuous way. However, it does put forth the argument that reading them through the lens of the bodily can reveal significant commentaries regarding issues of engagement, commitment, and artistic innovation.

Adopting the body as the methodological tool for this dissertation should be understood in light of the context of and the circumstances surrounding the case study. Barghouti's works, as will be further explained, have often been labelled as abstract, detached to the political and social reality in Palestine, and surrealist. This is in fact how I also first understood his style of writing in his autobiography *al-Daw'*. The book was complex, abstract, and philosophical. It reminded me of a Sufi text that moves beyond the expectations of an autobiographical writing and detaches itself from the quotidian and communal in social and political life. The more I read Barghouti's works, however, the more I realized his attunement to material objects and engagement with sensuous experiences. Some examples included the use of light and its relation to notions of power and knowledge, his connection to the land and its reflection of political atrocities but also emancipation, and

his own body as a medium of discovering the world but also of its suffering and eventual decay. This realization drove me to ask the question: what would a divergent reading of Barghouti's works reveal about his engagement and literary innovation? The reading, which is rooted in the bodily, is not chosen as a way of replacing the philosophical, abstract, or surrealist. Rather, it is presented as an exercise beyond what is known about his critical and literary works.

The body is a suitable tool for framing the reading of Barghouti's productions for several reasons. Personally, the body, with its development from childhood to adulthood, and more importantly in its confrontation with notions of pain, illness, and impending death is constituent in Barghouti's writing – particularly after being diagnosed with Lymphoma at a young age. However, this deployment of the body is not limited to his post-diagnosis works. Thematically, the body constitutes a central source of inspiration in the writings of Barghouti.⁴ Conceptually, the body is seen here as a stage upon which Barghouti's critical commentaries on the need to challenge the common and preconceived themes, styles, and literary genres are played out. This challenge of the preconceived is evident by viewing the body as an entity that is in a state of discovery and formation. When we look at the body in terms of movement and change, we are also looking at literary texts as bodies that pose critical questions about the rules that regulate the writing of these texts, such as notions of genre and the canon. The body, thus, allows for a comprehensive understanding of Barghouti's project as it conjoins the physical, the fictional, the historical, and the imaginative in a process of formation, as will be seen in the coming chapters.

⁴ One clear example is his PhD dissertation: Husain Jameel Barghouti, "The Other Voice: an Introduction to the Phenomenology of Metamorphosis," (PhD diss. University of Washington, 1992).

Modern Palestinian literature: The general context

The term modern Arabic literature is used here to signify the writings composed after the Arab renaissance (*nahḍa*) of the late nineteenth century, which are often studied in terms of the engagement with the West, the relation with tradition, and literary and linguistic innovations.⁵ Such a use of the term ‘modern Arabic literature’ does not overlook the complexities of this ‘temporal’ demarcation. The word ‘modern’ entails multiple notions of engagement with the past, literary innovations, and spatial and temporal movements. For example, when defining the ‘modern’ – and its derivatives modernity and modernism in the context of Arabic literature – one has to distinguish between two main notions: first, the modern as indicative of a specific time period and place, and the other as a processual change, modulation, and thus movement that can take place in different spaces and times.⁶

This dissertation makes references to several scholars and theorists whose works are concerned with issues related to ‘modernity,’ for example Jean-François Lyotard in chapter 2 and Marc Augé in chapter 3. While Barghouti’s works can be situated temporally as part of the ‘modern’ in Arabic literature, some of his works point to post-modernist tendencies (for example his text *Hajar al-ward* and his poetry collection *Marāyā sā’ila*) that complicate the style of writing and modes of expressions, as well as the relations between time and space. But instead of dividing his works along the theoretical and historical debates of modernity and post-modernity, I would like to read them as two modes of expression. The postmodern for Barghouti does not come as a reaction to modernity but rather as a simultaneously existing method for reading the shifts in politics, society, and literature. The modern and the

⁵ For more on the history and development of modern Arabic literature, see: Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1977). Muhsin al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (Oxen: Routledge, 2006).

⁶ As Ouyang notes, modernity in poetry in the Islamic period in the 8th, 9th, and 10th centuries “used to characterize poetry that violated the ancient poetic principles.” Wen-Chin Ouyang. *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 13.

postmodern here represent different modalities of reading rather than merely being epochs that precede or supersede one another.⁷

On the one hand, Barghouti talks about modernity in the vein of innovation and taking the past as a referential tool. One example of this is his commentaries on the modern Palestinian poet Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān (1905-1941). Barghouti's notion of the 'modern' is centered around the need to return to the lived, the sensed, and the experienced. Thus, instead of the form (*qālib*) that is stable and inherited, the modernist works at insuring the heart (*qalb*) as a source of inspiration, where "the bare senses have to return to the initial sense of wonder."⁸ The modern for Barghouti is that which is focused on the present, while still retaining a vision for the future. On the other hand, as will be further discussed in chapter 2, Barghouti's conceptions of literature align more with post-modernist thinking and attests to the ability of post-modernism to investigate the past not just as a reference but also as an undiscovered territory, where the referential becomes unknown, uncertain, and opaque. The modern in "modern Arabic/Palestinian literature" is thus used in this dissertation to indicate a time period. Although a study of Barghouti's conceptualization of the modern and the post-modern is not fully investigated in this dissertation, some references to the two terms are made throughout.

Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, calls for social, political, and literary changes were motivated by the anti-colonialist movements in the Arab world and the effects that the *Nakba* (the Palestinian 1948 Catastrophe) have had on Arab authors and nations in general.⁹ The theme of political commitment has haunted the artistic and critical

⁷ One example of the distinctions that Barghouti makes between the two terms is in his reading of the spatial changes that have befallen the city of Ramallah. He argues that a 'modernist' lens would read the shifts in regards to the sequence in time (i.e. history). A post-modernist lens looks at history as 'adjacent' rather than sequential. Hussein Barghouti, "An al-makān al-munqariḍ," in *al-Farāgh al-ladhī ra'a al-tafāṣīl*, ed. Murād al-Sūdānī (Ramallah: Dār al-Bayraq al-'Arabī, 2006): 94. See section 1.3.

⁸ "على الحواس المتحفية أن ترجع للدهشة الأولى."

Hussein Barghouti, "al-Ḥadātha fī tajrubat al-shā'ir," in *al-Shu'arā'*, no. 1 (1998): 89.

⁹ Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West encounters in Arabic Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 6.

productions of many Arab and Palestinian writers.¹⁰ Although 1948 is a seminal year that marks change in all aspects of political and personal life in Palestine and is often considered to be a formative year of modern Palestinian literature, “the cultural scene in Palestine” before 1948 and especially during the Mandate period was also “heavily charged with questions like nationhood and self-determination, communal reform and justice among other, equally ‘passionate,’ questions.”¹¹ As Bashir Abu-Manneh observes, Palestinian poets during the period before 1948 “broke from the social and ideological hold of the politically compromised notables and joined the popular struggle.”¹² This meant a struggle against colonial powers, but equally against social authoritativeness.

The topic of commitment (*Iltizām*) has received much attention from critics and writers of modern Arabic literature. The definition of commitment and the debates surrounding it are constantly addressed in scholarship on modern Arabic literature.¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre’s¹⁴ understanding of the term commitment in *What is Literature? (Qu’est ce que la littérature?)* is the most influential definition of the concept.¹⁵ Sartre writes that “a writer

¹⁰ ‘Ādil al-Uṣṭā, *Adab al-Muqāwama: min tafā’ul al-bidayāt ilā khaybat al-nihāyāt* (Damascus: Mu’assasat Filasṭīn li al-Thaqāfa, 2008), 14-21.

¹¹ Tarif Khalidi, “Palestinian Historiography: 1900-1948,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 61.

¹² Bashir Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 18. Abu-Manneh mainly focuses on the 1936 revolt and its repercussions.

¹³ See Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, “Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature,” *Journal of World History* 14, I ss. 1 (January 1972): 858-879. Verena Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment (Iltizām) and Committed Literature (al-adab al-multazim) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq,” *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literature* 3, no. 1 (2000): 51- 62. Pannewick, Friederike, Georges Khalil, and Yvonne Albers, eds. *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015).

¹⁴ Sartre’s conceptions of engaged literature were influenced by his views on the economic and political issues in France (particularly his opposition to French colonialism in Algeria). For a detailed discussion of Sartre’s relation to Middle Eastern intellectuals and his influence on the understanding of notions of existentialism and commitment, see: Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

¹⁵ While the concept of commitment was mainly developed during the second half of the twentieth century, the discussion of Arabic literature and its link to society had already started during the first half of the century, with the introduction of socialism. Some of the pioneers include Shiblī Shumayyil, Farah Anṭūn, and Salāmah Mūsā (Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 403. For example, Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Barūdī (d. 1904) is seen as “the first committed poet” in the modern period (Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, “Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature,” 861). Later figures that played an essential role in the varied discussion about the meanings and

is committed when he tries to achieve the most lucid and the most complete consciousness of being embarked, that is, when he causes the commitment of immediate spontaneity to advance, for himself and others, to the reflective.”¹⁶ The two most important ideas here are that the writer has to be conscious of what he/she writes, and that this consciousness should lead both the writer and the reader to a state of awareness and reflection. Despite calls for innovation and experimentation in modern Arabic literature, there has been “constant reference...to the necessity or inevitability of orientation in literature and art, or to the social, moral, and political function of literature.”¹⁷ Commitment is discussed here because it constitutes one major part of understanding modern Arabic literature, but also because it will open up the discussion of how Barghouti, directly and indirectly, contests the notion through his critical and fictional works (see, for example, section 1.5).

While Palestinian literature is part of a long-standing tradition of Arabic literature and heritage, it has gained specificity because of its supposed political, social, and economic uniqueness.¹⁸ This specificity is translated in Palestinian authors’ treatment of notions like time, place, and the inescapable political situation.¹⁹ Palestinian literature has been often read as a shadow of important societal and political changes and events.²⁰ One of the outcomes of the overwhelming presence of the political issue in Palestinian literature is its categorization as a body that serves one specific purpose. The limitation has resulted from political readings

position of *iltizām* in society include Suhail Idrīs, the founder of the journal *al-Ādāb*, (see Klemm, “Different Notions of Commitment,” 53-55) and the Egyptian critic Maḥmūd Amīn al-Ālim (Ibid., 56).

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 77.

¹⁷ ‘Abd al-Nabī Ṣtaif, “The Question of Freedom in Modern Arabic Literary Criticism,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26, no. 1/2 (Mar.-Jun. 1995), 167.

¹⁸ Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Vintage Books, 1992), 154-155.

¹⁹ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 2.

²⁰ As Bernard comments, the centrality of the political conflict in Palestine within the overall Arab context after 1948 has led to the popularity of Palestinian literature within the field of Arabic literature. Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration and Israel/Palestine* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 3.

that make little room for the notion of Palestinian literature as a product of the complex aesthetic, cultural, and personal engagements of life.²¹

Studies on Palestinian literature often focus on the works of major figures in the literary scene, thus emphasizing the importance of those who are known locally and internationally, and who represent nationalist expressions. While such studies are versatile and can yield new insights even regarding the works of central figures, they still abide by this notion of literary *representation*. Despite the many angles from which his work has been approached, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), for example, is first and foremost a symbol of Palestinian suffering, resistance, and poetics. Even works that attest to the agency of the Palestinian literary text to “produce its own demographic imaginary – its own mediated infinity – and so its own criteria for national citizenship and national belonging,”²² are still reliant on taking the “national landscape” as “a bounded and administered territory,”²³ and a central tool for the study of Palestinian literature. This creates the problem that those works that deviate, such as Barghouti’s, are not canonized or take a long time to be recognized as part of the literary canon.

Before moving on to Barghouti’s life and works, I must make a note on the use of the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Arabic’ in this dissertation. The word ‘Arabic’ is often used to indicate the language of the written text,²⁴ while Arab often relates to the ethnic, geographic, or cultural

²¹ Omri explains that the problem of political limitations extends to literary theories concerned with Third World literature, where historical, political, and cultural purposes have been the main reason for studying literature. Mohammad-Salah Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature: Sites of Confluence in the Writings of Maḥmūd al-Mas‘adī* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

²² Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 40.

²³ *Ibid*, 34.

²⁴ Muhammad Mustafa Badawi defines modern Arabic literature as “literature written exclusively in the Arabic language.” Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, “Introduction,” in *Modern Arabic Literature*, edited by M.M. Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

The linguistic definition is for sure the most prominent one since ‘Arabic’ is a referral to a language of writing and speaking. However, taking the social, political, and personal lives of many Arab authors into consideration, one can see that many literary works, particularly starting from the 20th century, have been written in different languages (English, French). This includes, for example, the Francophone literature written by Arab authors from North Africa (Paul Starkey, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), x.

demarcations.²⁵ Such a clear distinction between the use of the two terms is problematic and invites a myriad of other issues including who and/or what represents an Arab and how this representation is directly guided by social and political shifts and changes over time.²⁶ Since most of the literary works consulted are written in Arabic, this dissertation uses the adjective ‘Arabic’ as reference to the general field of Arabic literature and the different literary genres (i.e. Arabic autobiography, Arabic poetry, etc.). Arab is used in reference to authors (such as Mahmoud Darwish, Edward Said, etc.)

Conceptually, Barghouti alludes to the complex factors that feed into what is considered Arab culture and literature. For example, he reads *al-adab al-‘Arabī* as a continuation of what has started years before the emergence of Islam (pre-Islamic Arabia). This is particularly clear in his text “Qīṣaṣ ‘an zaman wathanī,”²⁷ which will be mentioned later. Similarly, Barghouti’s conception of what is ‘Palestinian literature’ shows his resistance to an ideological definition that does not take into account its contextual existence within a larger Arab heritage. More importantly, Barghouti is aware of the importance of perceiving what is called *adab ‘Arabī* in relation to a world criticism (*naqd ‘ālamī*) and a world civilization (*ḥaḍāra ‘ālamīyya*).²⁸ By reading his literary and critical works, one can extract

²⁵ Tahia Abdel Nasser explains in her introduction that, “I employ the term ‘Arab’ to encompass writers from the Arab world” regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Tahia Abdel Nasser, *Literary Autobiography and Arab National Struggle* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 6.

The edited book by Layla Al Maleh *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* uses ‘Anglophone’ to indicate the written language used, and ‘Arab’ to reference “Arab authors, or...authors of Arab descent.” Layla Al Maleh, “Preface,” *Arab Voices in Diaspora, Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, edited by Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), viiii.

For more on the complexities of the term ‘Arab’ in pre-modern Arab culture and literature, see: Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

²⁶ Even if Arabic is meant to refer to the language, as Petra Sijpesteijn explains, “...understanding – really understanding – even the simplest Arabic sentence requires an understanding of the customs, history, rituals and *Weltanschauung* of those that produced it.” Petra M. Sijpesteijn, “The Wisdom of the Arabs: 400 Years of Cross-Cultural Interactions,” *Wit and Wisdom in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2015), 19.

²⁷ Hussein Barghouti, *al-Sādin, al-Nāqa- Qīṣaṣ ‘an zaman wathanī* (Ramallah: al-Mu’assasa al-Filasṭīniyya li al-Irshād al-Qawmī, 2003).

²⁸ Ibid, “Min usus al-shi’r ‘ind al-‘Arab,” in Murād al-Sūdānī, “Mudawwanat Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī fī qawānīn al-shi’r al-‘Arabī” (MA diss., Birzeit University, 2012), 123.

his call to question the use of such terminologies and for the need for an awareness of the intricacies that go into their construction.

Barghouti's major literary departures are evident in his abandonment of set and known literary terminologies and political aspirations. I will show how Barghouti's engagement with Palestinian society and life was founded upon questioning the meanings of representation and upon finding modes of literary transgressions, offering, instead, a fresh perspective on notions of political struggle, land, and writing. What is studied is how Barghouti works from within and in relation to the Palestinian literary scene rather than from outside it.²⁹ This study offers new insights into Palestinian literature as it widens its critical scopes by exploring Barghouti's experience. The dissertation does not make a general claim on the status of Palestinian literature. Rather, by focusing on Barghouti and his works this dissertation takes into account his reception and studies the social, political, and literary circumstances that influenced his literary experience. In this way, how an individual (Barghouti) interacts with and influences the communal (Palestinian literature) and vice versa is explored. The notion of the body comes into play here. Barghouti overlaps his body with that of Palestinian land and literature. A singular body and its evolution – Barghouti and his work – becomes the vehicle through which the body of Palestinian literature and the forces that aim to form and reshape it can be scrutinized.

One explicit example of the importance of the physical body and its relation to conceptual, social, and political events in Barghouti's life is his practice of martial arts. Barghouti mentions a few times in *al-Farāgh al-ladhī ra'ā al-tafāṣīl* (*The Void that Saw the Details*) practicing Tai chi and Karate as a force against the Israeli occupation. The

²⁹ Sabry Hafez similarly argues that studying the writings of the new literary movement of the 1990s in Egypt should not be by “[freeing] these texts from the useful conventions of reception of narrative texts, but [by demonstrating] how these conventions are modified and transformed to sharpen the text's ability to embrace an ever-changing reality.” Sabry Hafez, “Urban Change and Literary Transformation: The Egyptian Novel in the 1990s”, in *Sensibilities of the Islamic Mediterranean: Self-Expression in a Muslim Culture from Post-Classical Times to the Present Day*, edited by Robin Ostle (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 346.

occupation's aim was to "precipitate in the soul the feeling of its defect."³⁰ What further asserts the central role played by martial arts on Barghouti's philosophical and literary thinking is that the foreword to his second book of criticism *Suqūt* is written by Ḥasan Ḥalawānī, Barghouti's Karate trainer. In the foreword, we read about the friendship that developed between Barghouti and Ḥalawānī, and about the efforts Barghouti put in introducing Karate to Birzeit University students. The foreword positions Karate as part and parcel of the main arguments in Barghouti's book, which investigates the ways in which the individual attempts at consolidating one's inner confusions with the external circumstances. Furthermore, Barghouti's interest in martial arts is not solely personal or literary. It is also indicative of his engagement in the educational development in Palestine. Martial arts function as a pedagogical tool for teaching students the art of "flowing" (*insiyāb*)³¹ that can help in escaping the feelings of defeat. This idea corresponds to Barghouti's notion of agility as a way of transcending conformism in the acts of reading and writing as discussed below in this introduction.

Hussein Barghouti's life, work, and influences

Hussein Barghouti was born in the village of Kobar, near Ramallah, in 1954. After finishing high school, Barghouti moved to Budapest to study political science and economics, but returned to Palestine after a few years. In 1983, he obtained his BA in English Literature from Birzeit University. Subsequently, Barghouti moved to the US to receive both his MA and PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Washington. In 1992, Barghouti returned to Palestine to work as a teacher and researcher in different Palestinian universities. Furthermore, he was the managing editor of the journal *al-Shu'arā'* and was a co-founder of

³⁰ "كان الاحتلال يرسخ في الروح الشعور بعجزها." "

Hussein Barghouti, "Dhākira 'ādiyya fī zaman ghayr 'ādī," in *al-Farāgh al-ladhī ra'a al-tafāṣīl*, ed. Murād al-Sūdānī (Ramallah: Dār al-Bayraq al-'Arabī, 2006), 46.

³¹ Ibid.

Bayt al-Shi'r (The House of Poetry) in Ramallah.³² During the last few years of his battle with Lymphoma, Barghouti decided to return with his wife Petra and son Āthar to the village where he grew up, Kobar, to spend his remaining days. Barghouti passed away in 2002 and is buried, following his request, under the almond trees of his village.³³



Figure 1: Barghouti's grave in Kobar (Source: by author, Palestine, March 2019)

Barghouti incorporates, in his literary corpus, different literary influences. He was born in Palestine, yet still lived in Europe and the US for a long time, and wrote in English and Arabic (although his main writings were in Arabic). His literary corpus is vast and

³² Hussein Barghouti, *al-Āthār al-shi'riyya* (Ramallah: Bayt al-Shi'r, 2008), 349.

³³ I took the following picture of Barghouti's grave and the one in chapter 3 of the area of *al-dayr al-juwwānī* during my visit to Kobar on 15 March 2019.

includes four poetry collections: *al-Ru'yā* (*The Vision*) (1988), *Laylā wa Tawba* (*Laylā and Tawba*) (1996), *Tūjad alfāz awḥash min hādhihi* (*There are More Unfamiliar Formulations than These*) (1998), and *Marāyā sā'ila* (*Liquid Mirrors*) (2000). His other works include a post-modern text called *Ḥajar al-ward* (*The Rosetta Stone*) (2002), a novel entitled *Al-Diffa al-thālitha li nahr al-Urdunn* (*The Third Bank of the Jordan River*) (1984), and his autobiographical works *al-Ḍaw' al-azraq* (2001), *Sa'akūn bayn al-lawz* (*I Will be Among the Almond Trees*) (2004). His critical studies include *Azmat al-shi'r al-maḥallī* (*The Crisis of Local Literature*) (1979), and *Suqūt al-jidār al-sābi': al-Ṣirā' al-nafsī fī al-adab* (*The Fall of the Seventh Wall: Inner Conflict in Literature*) (1981), his PhD dissertation "The Other Voice: an Introduction to the Phenomenology of Metamorphosis" (1992), and *al-Sādin, al-Nāqa, Qiṣaṣ 'an zaman wathanī* (*The Ka'ba Custodian, The Female Camel, Tales of a Pagan Time*) (2003). He has also given many lectures on the rules of Arabic poetics and wrote (published and unpublished) studies and articles on literature and philosophy. Furthermore, Barghouti worked on more than five plays, edited and/or advised the production of four films, and wrote many songs for Palestinian bands.³⁴

Barghouti's many travels and studies in different places (Palestine, Hungary, the US), and interest in different disciplines and fields of study, such as literature, history, philosophy, and political economy assert the varied sources and figures of influence on his thought and writing. With such an avid reader and an author whose writing style resides upon inviting a web of sources and jumping between them, it is difficult to provide a detailed analysis of the intertextual engagement and inspirations in Barghouti's works. This is particularly due to the large number of influences, the differences in the level of inspiration, and Barghouti's aim at overflowing the different channels of inspiration. The influences include direct and explicit references to certain philosophers, authors, and theories, as well as implicit references in the

³⁴ For more, see al-Shaikh who gives a detailed account of Barghouti's personal life as well as an overview of his critical and fictional works. Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh. "Beyond the Last Twilight: an Annotated Translation of Barghūthī's Autobiography *al-Ḍaw' al-azraq* (*The Blue Light*)" (PhD diss., The University of Utah, 2004).

form of intertextual relations or general lines of inspirations, which cannot be ascertained for sure (See, for example, footnote 118). Some appear sporadically, while others are recurrent. Some are used as frameworks for certain texts, and are criticized in other texts.

Such an act of exploring the complex issue of inspirations, intertextualities, and literary relations is beyond the scope of the dissertation, and requires further research by deeply investigating specific channels of influence. I have followed these endeavours in several of the conference presentations that I gave during the time of my PhD. For example, I gave a presentation about Barghouti's engagement with pre-Islamic Arabian mythology as part of the NISIS spring school in Istanbul in 2015, and a presentation on the influence of Mahmoud Darwish and Muzaffar al-Nawwab on Barghouti's writing as part of the ACLA conference in Utrecht in 2017.

The list of influences on Barghouti's writings and thought includes authors, critics, historical figures, literary figures, philosophical theories, films, painters, and martial arts. However, there are a few figures, theories, and schools of thought that are central to Barghouti's conception. The main influences can be extracted from Barghouti's own declarations, from the works of scholars who have written about Barghouti, from the literary works of Barghouti, or from the bibliographical entries in his critical and literary works.

This dissertation provides a discussion of a few influences in the course of the analysis in the different chapters. These include Arab literary figures such as Mahmoud Darwish, Adonis, al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240), Laylā al-Akhyaliyya, Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896). It is important to note that the chosen examples function to support the arguments in the dissertation, and provide context to the discussion rather than present an overview of the nature or extent of the influence. The reader of the dissertation will notice that some influences are discussed more than others, such as Marx and Lukács (see section 1.4), and Laylā al-Akhyaliyya (see section 2.8). This is in a large part due to the thematic

discussion that dictates the focus of the analysis, and it is influenced by the choice of passages. This is in no way comprehensive, and the influence of many important figures such as al-Mutanabbī and Nietzsche is central to Barghouti's writing and can be further investigated.³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche is a recurrent name in Barghouti's writings. Barghouti explains in the introduction to his PhD dissertation that the understanding and definition of 'fiction' in regards to the outside universe that he puts forth is greatly inspired by Nietzsche.³⁶ A future study could thus focus on reading the two authors comparatively to note lines of influence and inspiration, but also aspects of departure on Barghouti's side.

Some of the influences are not surprising or unusual. T.S. Eliot, for example, is one of the most influential Western authors on modern Arab authors.³⁷ There are some seminal works of inspiration that Barghouti mentions. These include the Torah, the New Testament, the Quran, and the *Thousand and one nights*. Mahmoud Darwish is also a central figure whom Arab, and particularly Palestinian authors and poets, credit as inspirational. It is, however, the way in which Barghouti manages to tie the different sources and jump between one and the other that colour his style of writing. In one article entitled "al-Baḥṭh 'an lugha ukhrā," Barghouti explores the malleable nature of the 'I' and its relation to language and literature by taking the reader through a discussion of different literary excerpts that belong to sources from different time periods and places such as Muzaffar al-Nawwab, Rimbaud, Darwish, Barghouti's own poetry, and a song by the Lebanese singer Fairuz. The article is written as a series of aphorisms. The mix of sources alludes to Barghouti's way of thinking and writing, which is constructed by bringing together diverse inspirations. Furthermore, it stresses the centrality of certain themes in life and art such as the role of the subject, the 'I',

³⁵ See al-Shaikh, "Beyond the Last Twilight," 33.

³⁶ Barghouti, "The Other Voice," 11.

³⁷ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 2 (1971): 76-91.

in participating in the acts of reading and writing. This participation is contingent upon the ability to ‘transform’, i.e. to imagine one’s self as something or someone different.³⁸

As will be noted in some footnotes, Barghouti engaged with the writings of many contemporary Arab scholars and used them as means of support to his arguments. Firās al-Sawwāḥ and Nasr Hamid abu Zayd are two examples. Similarly, he was in direct contact with many of the contemporary Palestinian authors and critics of his time; these include As‘ad al-As‘ad, Ibrāhīm Jawhar,³⁹ ‘Abdul-Laṭīf ‘Aql, and Ṣubḥī al-Shaḥrūrī.⁴⁰ Despite his criticism of al-As‘ad, who was the editor-in-chief of the journal *al-Katib*, Barghouti still published many of his writings there. Barghouti was the managing editor of the journal *al-Shu‘arā’*, which published works by many influential contemporary Palestinian and Arab poets. These included, for example, the Bahraini poet Qāsim Ḥaddād, Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian scholar Izz al-Din Manasra, and the poet As‘ad al-As‘ad. This quick survey shows how Barghouti was exposed to different channels of inspiration and was in direct contact with different contemporary poets and scholars.

Barghouti as subject of study

Barghouti’s works are often judged (negatively and positively) as philosophical endeavours that revolve around the incomprehensible and the marginal. The marginalization of Barghouti provides a fresh intake on his works that are undisturbed by any expectations of representation nor of a previously set ‘Palestinian’ check-list. Instead of a direct use of

³⁸ Hussein Barghouti, “al-Baḥth ‘an lugha ukhrā,” *‘Aštār*, no. 2-3 (January 1994).

³⁹ For example, Barghouti narrates how he attempted to experiment with poetic rhythms by mixing different rhythmic feet together in his first published poetry collection *al-Ru‘yā*. He then explains how the Palestinian critic Ibrāhīm Jawhar did not see any “vision” (*ru‘ya*) in what Barghouti was hoping to achieve. This did not deter Barghouti who continued to experiment with Arabic prosody beyond the rules set by the philologist al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 791). *Ibid.*, “Min usūs,” 122.

⁴⁰ The contact was in the form of criticism, where, for example, Barghouti criticizes the works of al-As‘ad and ‘Aql in his first book of criticism *Azmat al-shi‘r*, or criticism towards Barghouti’s writing. Al-Shaḥrūrī, as Barghouti writes, helped Barghouti conceptualize his ideas on the concept of estrangement. Barghouti’s relation to the contemporary literary scene and his reception were nuanced. ‘Aql became one of Barghouti’s closest friends with whom he had many debates over philosophical issues. Before this friendship, however, the two had an unamicable relationship because of Barghouti’s criticism of ‘Aql’s poetry in *Azmat al-shi‘r*. Barghouti, 118-119.

political language, or a clear juxtaposition between the personal and the collective, Barghouti's distinct voice presents itself through a heavy reliance on *movement* in space and time and a stream-of-consciousness style of writing. These acts of innovation and experimentations can be delineated, as I will show, "through various accidents and encounters entered on the body."⁴¹

Barghouti's reception has been tumultuous, with different opinions on the aims and the position of his literary works within the Palestinian literary canon. While risking oversimplification, we can mark distinctly different reactions to his work during his life and after his death. During his lifetime, reception of his work was mainly characterized by "a lack of knowledge of what Barghouti has hazarded, or a total disregard which led many people to misunderstand him."⁴² This, in return, meant that many of Barghouti's works were not published or recognized as a seminal contribution to Palestinian literature. Al-Shaikh gives an example regarding the reception of *al-Daw'*. He writes that, while some Palestinian critics found in it a successful departure from "the semilegendary archetypal protagonist found in tradition, Palestinian fictional, and autobiographical writings," others found the autobiography to be tackling "marginal concerns" that are not relevant to the reality of Palestinian society and politics.⁴³

In a kind of eulogy, Murid Barghouti reflects in his autobiography *Wulidt hunāk wulidt hunā* on Hussein Barghouti's positions in the literary scene. He writes:

هكذا وجدته أعيد كتابة موته في مقدمتي لطبعة مصرية من كتابه ولم أذكر فيها أن الموجع في حكاية حسين البرغوثي أن بعض أفراد العائلة لم يعترفوا بقيمته حياً، البعض كان يسخر من شعره "النسائي" ومن ارتدائه

⁴¹ Tarek el-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2.

⁴² "عدم المعرفة لما اجترحه البرغوثي، أو التجاهل الذي حاق به جعل الكثيرين يفعلون في سوء الفهم"

Murād Al-Sūdānī. "Mudawwanat Hussayn al-Barghūthī fī qawānīn al-shi'r al-'Arabī," (MA diss., Birzeit University, 2012): 5.

Note: al-Sūdānī provides in an appendix to his MA dissertation 17 published and unpublished texts by Barghouti. Many of these texts were consulted and quoted in this dissertation.

⁴³ Al-Shaikh, "Beyond the Last Twilight," 2.

للبرمودة الكاكي وإلقائه المحاضرات حافياً، الشاعر ينتزع مكانته بين أهله بموته. حتى الكتاب الذين أكلتهم الغيرة من سطوته تنافسوا في "حبه ميتاً".

I thus found myself re-writing his death in my introduction to an Egyptian edition of his book [*Sa'akūn*]. I did not mention that the painful part of Hussayn al-Barghūthī's story, is that some of his family members did not acknowledge his value while he was alive. Some used to make fun of his 'feminine' hair, and of his Khaki Bermuda shorts, and of him giving lectures barefoot. The poet wrestles his position amongst his acquaintances only through his death. Even the authors, whose jealousy of his gravitational pull ate at them, competed to show their postmortem love.⁴⁴

This reception of Hussein Barghouti's work corresponds to a running theme of his life – lived as an act of marginalization. Barghouti writes in *al-Daw'* "It does not matter whether I was 'stupid'...or a 'genius', but what matters is the fact that I am always out of context; not belonging to anyone, odd, and weird, and on the margins of life."⁴⁵ However, one should not write off Barghouti's whole life and career as marginalized. Although Barghouti's works do not feature in most anthologies and literary overviews until a few years after his death, a closer look at his position in the Palestinian scene presents a more varied image. During his life, Barghouti was in direct contact with most of the well-known contemporary authors, particularly Mahmoud Darwish. He was also involved in the academic and cultural scene in Palestine, one important example being his extracurricular lectures and discussions that he gave at Birzeit University, particularly on the rules and techniques of poetry (delivered in the year 1995).⁴⁶ Barghouti's position within and in relation to the literary scene in Palestine should thus not be read as plain and simple ostracism. Rather, he occupied a more nuanced position that oscillated between thematic and stylistic expectation and innovation.

⁴⁴ Mourid Barghouti, *Wulidt hunāk wulidt hunā* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2009), 167-168. First published in 2009.

⁴⁵ "ليس المهم أنني كنت... "أهبل"... أو "عبقرياً"، بل كوني دائماً خارج السياق، لا أنتمي إلى أحد، شاذاً، وغريباً، وعلى هامش الدنيا". Barghouti, *al-Daw'*, 126.

⁴⁶ al-Sūdānī, "Mudawwanat," 2-3. These lectures, which al-Sūdānī adds as an appendix to his MA thesis, will be frequently referenced in this dissertation. As he explains, al-Sūdānī had to rely on the original texts of the lectures as well as the recordings that he made (3).

Barghouti's reception has witnessed a posthumous change, particularly in the past few years. A 2016 blog on Barghouti describes the sudden infatuation of young Palestinian readers with the writer's work, which has become kind of a "trend."⁴⁷ Many pieces give an overview of his life and work and provide some highly positive notes on the author's stylistic, critical, philosophical, and artistic insights. Of late, Barghouti has been described as "the poet, the novelist, the contemplative one, who transcends absence,"⁴⁸ with headlines such as "Hussein Barghouti is the Adūnīs of Palestine"⁴⁹ summing up the current appraisal of his work.⁵⁰ The importance of these new takes on Barghouti is their critical and personal nature. On the one hand, they are motivated by the personal connection to Barghouti and his writings, and his influence on the author; on the other, they attest to the need for a serious critical investigation of his literary production and his philosophical standings and influence.

The prominent Palestinian literary critic Faisal Darraj considers Barghouti to be the last and most important author to take up the Palestinian novel after the novelists of the

⁴⁷ Eslam al-Saqqā, "Kayf Nata'āmal ma' Mawrūth Hussayn Barghūthī al-'adabī," *Sharīf Cinema*, accessed 29 July 2017, <https://eslamsq.wordpress.com/2016/04/01/hussain/>.

⁴⁸ Aḥmad Daḥbūr, "Dam'at al-Arbi'ā': al-Shā'ir Hussayn al-Barghūthī fī Dhikrāh al-Ḥādiya 'ashr," *al-Ḥayāt al-Jadīda*, accessed April, 18, 2016 http://www.alhaya.ps/arch_page.php?nid=204778.

"...الشاعر، الروائي، المتأمل، المتعالي على الغياب، لا يزال يواصل حضوره الابداعي، بتواضع من لا يعنيه انه يجترح معجزة." "..."the poet, the novelist, the meditative, and the transcendentalist of absence. He still continues his creative existence with the humility of someone who does not care to craft a miracle."

⁴⁹ Al-Sudanī, "Mudawwanat," 6.

⁵⁰ The entries on Barghouti after his death are many, and include personal and critical commentaries in journals, newspapers, and online blogs and forums. Some examples include: 'Alā' al-Dīn Kātiba, a Palestinian poet and critic, who, writing in *Mashārif* in the summer of 2002, predicts the growing interest in Barghouti's literary experience, which he calls a "case of misunderstanding" within the Palestinian cultural scene. 'Alā' al-Dīn Kātiba. "al-Barghūthī: Ḥālat sū' fahm." *Mashārif* 17 (summer 2002): 189-193. See also from the same journal: Kifāh Fannī, "Qadar akīd 'alā dīfāf ghayr akīda," *Mashārif* 17 (summer 2002): 194-202. This entry is significant as it exemplifies Barghouti's influence on the author. He ends his piece with a poem that he heard from Barghouti in a dream (this can be seen as an echo of Barghouti's own commentary about the 'dream poetry' in his poetry collection *Tūjad*). See also a section entitled "Raḥīl" in an exclusive edition of the 17th issue of *al-Shu'arā'* magazine including obituaries written by different Palestinian writers and thinkers. Murād Al-Sūdānī, and Aḥmad Daḥbūr et al. "Raḥīl: Fī wadā' zamīlina Hussayn al-Barghūthī," in *al-Shu'arā'*, no. 17 (2002): 337-394. An example of a book review is that of the Jordanian critic Ibrāhīm Khalīl who argues that Barghouti's text, *al-Daw'*, falls at the intersection of autobiographical writing and novelistic writing. Ibrāhīm Khalīl, "al-Barghūthī wa *al-Daw'* al-azraq: Naṣṣ murtabik bayn al-riwāya wa al-sīra," *Qāb Qawsayn*, accessed 10 May 2017, <http://www.qabaqaosayn.com/node/4215>.

In the past few years, Barghouti has been featured in more academic works and biographies, such as: "Husayn al-Barghūthī," in *Mu'jam al-Babtain li-shu'arā' al-'Arabīyya fī al-qarnayn al-tāsī' 'ashar wa al-'ishrīn*, http://www.almoajam.org/poet_details.php?id=2079. 'Awad abū Zaynah, *Aṣwāt min al-ḥiṣār: Riwāyat al-Dīffa al-Gharbiyya wa Qiṭā' Ghazza 1993-2005* (London: E-Kutub Ltd., 2011).

sixties (Ghassan Kanafani, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and Emile Habiby).⁵¹ As Darraj explains, instead of the imagined land of Palestine in the writings of Ghassan Kanafani and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Barghouti's return to Palestine, and particularly to his village Kobar after his diagnosis, witnesses "a place whose features have left, and was transformed by its departing features to destruction and a hostage at once."⁵² Writing in 2005, Mardam-Bey notes the emergence of a new style of writing in Palestinian literature that takes the individual and the personal as its starting point rather than "une littérature engagée à l'ancienne."⁵³ Barghouti's *al-Daw'* is seen as "un livre culte" and an example of this new style.⁵⁴ Barghouti, as Mahmoud Darwish comments in the foreword to the French edition of *al-Daw'*, smartly abandons the "expected discourse" of political commitment that has become a stamp of modern Palestinian literature.⁵⁵ Instead, he obscures the political to give a more prominent place to other aspects of life within his work. Darwish attributes the obscurity of Barghouti's name to the latter's occupation with writing poetry that was weighed down by a heavy reliance on an "intellectual burden" that was influenced by his work as an academic, and which did not suit the general artistic taste in Palestine.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Faisal Darraj, "al-Riwāya al-'Arabiyya ta'īsh zaman manqūsh...wa lā wujūd li 'qāri' mujtama'ī fī thaqāfatinā," Interview by Niḍāl al-Qāsim, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 29 December, 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=271324>.

It would be interesting to read Barghouti's last autobiography *Sa'akūn* in conversation with Murid Barghouti's two memoirs: Mourid Barghouti, *Ra'ayt Rāmallāh* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā': al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2014). First published in 1997, and Barghouti, *Wulidṭ Hunāk*, 2009. The works portray a return narrative after long years of exile, and explore the relations between father and son in regards to memory, language, and views. One major difference between Murid's and Hussein's works is that while both authors contextualize the personal within the historical, political, and communal, Murid's memories are guided by the poet's enforced exile, while Hussein's exile was self-inflicted.

For more on Murid Barghouti's "poetic autobiography" (63) and the exploration of the notion of 'solitude' see: Abdel Nasser, *Literary Autobiography*, 80-85.

⁵² Faisal Darraj, *Riwāyat al-taqaddum wa ihtirāb al-mustaqbal: Tahawwulāt al-Ru'yā fī al-riwāya al-'Arabiyya*, (Beirut: Dar al-Adāb, 2010), 246.

⁵³ "A literature engaged with the ancient."

Farouk Mardam-Bey, "Le piège des différences," *La pensée de midi* 14 (2005/1): 15.

⁵⁴ "A book [that represents] a trend."

Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mahmoud Darwish, "al-Daw' al-azraq li Ḥusayn al-Bargūthī fī Ṭab'a Faransiyya Qaddamahā Maḥmūd Darwīsh," *Al-Ayyam* (May 4 2004), http://www.al-ayyam.com/ar_page.php?id=33dcd4y3398874Y33dcd4

⁵⁶ "...حمولة معرفية..."

Ibid.

Sabry Hafez points out that “[f]requently exceptional texts will appear before their time and announce a break with prevalent aesthetics without however, meriting the term ‘literary phenomenon’.”⁵⁷ The change in reception and the booming appreciation of Barghouti’s works mark a shift in the literary scene in Palestine. Barghouti is not representative of a writing movement nor is he the “literary phenomenon” of the time when he was writing. He is, however, a precursor of literary conceptions and convictions that have become more accepted in the last few years, particularly after his death. It is thus indeed time to seriously study his work as a force that carves the way for literary expressions that are “indicative of major cultural change”⁵⁸ (see section 1.2).

While many local Palestinian writers and journalists have written about Barghouti’s works, a comprehensive study of Barghouti is still lacking. The focus has often been limited to a specific genre, and therefore a small number of selected works, rather than a thematic reading of his diverse writing that better position his work within the modern Palestinian and Arabic literary canons.

Barghouti and prior research

Having authored many texts, Barghouti has been gaining more attention from experts as well as the general reading public in Palestine since his death in 2002. Despite this growing interest, Barghouti’s works are still understudied. Despite his prolific writing across multiple genres, Barghouti’s name and texts still do not feature in most of the studies on different genres of Palestinian literature and art. This general absence in scholarly studies has, of course, its exceptions. Two main studies (one MA and one PhD dissertation) by two of Barghouti’s students and friends solely focus on his works. In his MA dissertation “Mudawwanat Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī fī qawānīn al-shi‘r al-‘Arabī,” (2012), which is written

⁵⁷ Hafez, “Urban Change and Literary Transformation,” 344.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

in Arabic, Murād al-Sūdānī highlights Barghouti's critical propositions on poetry in Arabic literature. Al-Sūdānī bases his study on the collection of extracurricular lectures that Barghouti delivered to his students in 1995 (many of which are unpublished manuscripts), as well as his poetry collections. Al-Sūdānī's dissertation presents Barghouti's philosophy of poetics by focusing on some literary notions in Barghouti's doctrine of poetics such as the role of the "I" (*anā*), place, myths, Arabic meters, and the overlapping influence of different art forms on his literature.

Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, lecturer of Philosophy in the Cultural Studies program at Birzeit University, has also written extensively on the works of Barghouti.⁵⁹ His PhD dissertation (2004) is entitled "Beyond the Last Twilight: an Annotated Translation of Barghouti's Autobiography *Al-Ḍaw' al-azraq* (The Blue Light)." In the first half of the dissertation, al-Shaikh gives an overview of Barghouti's personal life as well as his literary works. Besides the wonderful insights one gets from reading this background, al-Shaikh gives some details regarding Barghouti's own thoughts on his own work and how the Palestinian readership has received Barghouti's works. Al-Shaikh's translation comes in very handy for those who want to read Barghouti's most famous work *The Blue Light*, since it is the only one of Barghouti's text to be completely translated into English.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Al-Shaikh has also worked on a translation of Barghouti's PhD dissertation into Arabic (forthcoming, 2019). He has published a few articles in which he discusses some of Barghouti's themes and conceptions. Some of these articles will be referred to in the course of the dissertation.

⁶⁰ A French translation exists of the same book under the title *Lumière bleue* by Marianne Weiss. Hussein Barghouti, *Lumière bleue*, trans. Marianne Weiss, (Arles: Actes Sud Sindbad, 2004). Read a book review of the French translation here: Mustapha Harzoune, "Lumière bleue. Hussein Al-Barghouti traduit de l'arabe (Palestine) par Marianne Weiss, préface de Mahmoud Darwich Sindbad, 2004," *Homme & Migrations*, 2004: 123-124. https://www.persee.fr/doc/homig_1142-852x_2004_num_1250_1_5541_t1_0123_0000_4 Amal Equeiq, assistant professor of Arabic Studies and Comparative Literature at Williams College, has also translated a few of Barghouti's poems into English. Hussein al-Barghouti, "Poems by Hussein al-Barghouti," trans. Amal Equeiq, *Jadaliyya* (11 November 2011). <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24607/Poems-by-Hussein-Al-Barghouti>. An excerpt from Barghouti *Sa'akūn* is also provided in English in a special issue on Palestinian literature. "Hussein al-Barghouti- I'll be among the Almonds," trans. Mona Zaki, *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature - Feature on Palestinian Literature*, 15-16 (Autumn 2002-Spring 2003): 107-111. See also a French translation of Sa'akūn: Hussein al-Barghouti, *Je serai parmi les amandiers*, trans. Marianne Weiss (Arles: Actes Sud Sindbad, 2008).

Another seminal study is that of the Egyptian poet and scholar Iman Mersal. In her 2012 article “Blue Light: Reality as the Trap of Memory,”⁶¹ Mersal offers a reading of Barghouti’s autobiography *al-Daw’*, taking cues from Jacques Derrida’s ideas on ‘hospitality.’⁶² What Mersal shows is how Barghouti’s autobiography represents a departure from Arabic autobiographical writings which describe a journey to another (usually Western) country and the effects of being in a foreign place on one’s identity. While most Arabic autobiographies dwell on the difficulties of travelling and the dealings with border controls and day-to-day difficulties,⁶³ Barghouti’s moves these issues to the background and instead makes the reader part of his interactions with people who are considered by their own societies as marginal and different. Barghouti thus repositions the definition of estrangement from a feeling that is inflicted by the move to a different place to one that is more internal, borderless, and universal.

One of the most important works that feature Barghouti is Khaled Furani’s exciting ethnographic study of Palestinian poetry, *Silencing the Sea: Secular Rhythms in Palestinian Poetry*.⁶⁴ In his book, Furani builds upon Talal Asad’s understanding of the secular in order to present the changes in poetic form of modern Arabic poetry. Furani dedicates the first part of the tenth chapter in the book to an interview with Barghouti. This work is especially helpful because it gives direct insights into Barghouti’s view on literature and his relation to his contemporaries in the Arabic literary scene. One of the questions that Furani poses to

⁶¹ Iman Mersal, “*al-Daw’ al-azraq: al-Waqā’i’ maşyadat al-dhākira*,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 21 (2012): 108-132.

⁶² Mersal makes reference to Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, translated by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), particularly in regards to the ‘welcoming’ of the foreigner by asking/not asking for their name (see “Foreigner Question,” 3- 75).

⁶³ Mersal, “*al-Daw’ al-azraq*,” 110.

⁶⁴ Khaled Furani, *Silencing the Sea: Secular Rhythms in Palestinian Poetry* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Barghouti is about the need to write poetry.⁶⁵ Barghouti's answer constitutes the threshold of this dissertation. He replies:

Why poetry? Perhaps there is no answer today for this kind of question. It is like asking, Why music? Not that this is general, but it is in the nature of the human... Why do we have *eyes*?... Frankly, I don't know, but maybe this is what brings satisfaction, the satisfaction derived from creating new things... To create something is to *transform* something or many things. Whether material or mental, you transform many things, the least of which is yourself. When you create something new, there is something new in you. You see things in new ways; you articulate them in new ways. (*italics mine*)

As Furani explains, it seems that for Barghouti, “[n]o *telos* other than biological datum can furnish a story for poetry.”⁶⁶ Barghouti equates the existence of poetry to the existence of eyes. The literary and the corporeal are understood within the scheme of creation in which new levels of artistic and visual perceptions are achieved. It is thus this biological and corporeal nature of poetry, and literature in general, that is taken as the premise for reading his work in this dissertation.

Being one of the few authors to approach Barghouti's literary works and general philosophies, Esmail Nashif uncovers Barghouti's thoughts on the problems surrounding Palestinian politics and society and their inability to provide strong “forms of knowledge.”⁶⁷ Both writers question what constructs the Palestinian self (*al-dhāt al-filasṭīniyya*) and its place in relation to modernity and change. Equally, they both interrogate the methodological approaches in the study of society and literature, and the academic hegemony that the seeker of knowledge has to confront.⁶⁸ For example, they both assert agility (*al-rashāqa*)⁶⁹ as the

⁶⁵ Furani explains how his “... most simple questions, so readily answered by other poets, appeared very dull, lazy, trite, and superficial when I put them to al-Barghouti.” (Ibid, 177).

⁶⁶ Ibid, 178.

⁶⁷ Esmail Nashif, *al-‘Ataba fī fath al-episteme* (Ramallah: Muwāṭin. al-Mu‘assasa al- Filasṭīniyya li Dirāsāt al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya, 2010), 12.

"هناك فجوة تتسع باطراد بين عمق المأساة الفلسطينية، بأنيتها كما بتكراريتها، وأشكال معرفتها الفلسطينية والغربية على حد سواء."

⁶⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁹ See Hussein Barghouti, “al-Rashāqa al-dihniyya,” in Murād al-Sūdānī, “Mudawwanat Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī fī qawānīn al-shi‘r al-‘Arabī,” MA diss., Birzeit University (2012), 102-105.

trait that students and readers should acquire in order to move beyond set forms of criticism, teaching, and methodologies and engage with multiple disciplines.⁷⁰

The aforementioned studies chart aspects of the peculiarity of Barghouti's experience, and focus primarily on his poetry or his first autobiography. This dissertation, on the other hand, provides a study to more of his works, focusing particularly on the intersections between his critical and literary productions. Barghouti's corpus is rich because it combines theory and practice. Being both a critic and an author, Barghouti occupies a two-faceted position. On the one hand, he provides his readers with literary analysis and commentaries on cultural life in Palestine, and, on the other hand, he presents his own conception of poetry and literature. These are then tested out in his artistic productions.

Methodology

Barghouti conceptualises literature as that which is experiential, changing, and positional. The body, thus, lends itself as an appropriate medium, as it moves between the fixed and the fluid, the formative and the forming. The value of a monographic study, such as this dissertation, is its ability to capture the interaction between the micro and the macro, and register streams of poetic, social, and personal inspirations. Barghouti's work was concerned with literary investigation and border-crossing. In other words, he is involved in rethinking what makes the bodies of the poetic and the literary.

Although the focus of this study is on the literary productions of one author, not all of Barghouti's works were selected. There are multiple reasons for this. Despite his short life, Barghouti was able to contribute to different literary and artistic genres from poetry to prose, criticism to socio-economic readings, and songs to theatre. To cover all of these works would result in an intellectual biography, which is not the goal of this study. Although such a

⁷⁰ Nashif, *al-'Ataba*, 15.

biography is needed, the goal here is to identify specific literary tropes that connect body and literature together. A *mélange* of some famous and lesser-known works is chosen to elucidate some pivotal notions in relation to Palestinian literature and literary criticism in general. As for the non-textual genres (film, and *performed* theatre), it was decided that their inclusion would too greatly widen the literature-focussed discipline of this study.⁷¹ It would also have required an in-depth analysis of other methods like performance studies, media, and audience reception. This study certainly understands the link between different art forms and the ideals they share (a belief that characterizes Barghouti's concept of writing and artistic production, as will be shown in the coming chapters). Nevertheless, as a starting point for delving into Barghouti's contributions, literary texts – in which issues related to performativity and reception are still evident – were chosen. A short treatment of Barghouti's songs is provided in chapter 1 as a way of demonstrating his engagement with society. The songs are primarily approached as texts that reside in the realm of performativity.

This dissertation utilizes the fact that Barghouti wrote both literary and critical works and looks at his critical commentaries and metapoetic productions. The texts are used both to set up a theoretical discussion and to highlight some of Barghouti's theoretical notions and serve as exemplary to these general notions. Thus, the texts complement each other and link theory and practice, which are part and parcel of his literary experience. Below is a list of the main texts that will be discussed:

1. Poetry excerpts from all of Barghouti's published poetry collections:

a) *al-Ru'yā*

b) *Laylā wa Tawba- Qaşā'id min al-manfā ilā Laylā al-Akhyaliyya*

⁷¹ These works include a compilation of folkloric stories: *Rīshat al-dhahab- qīṣaṣ min al-turāth al-Filasṭīnī* (1998), Plays, which included translations of Romeo and Juliet (1994), and original works such as *Haflā 'alā ghaflā* (2001), and *Lā lam yamut* (2002). In cinema, Barghouti has written the scenarios of, worked on the concept of, or worked as an artistic consultant to many films including: *al-Ma'şara* (1998), and *Ḥurriyyatī al-mafqūda* (2001). For an overview of some of these works, see al-Shaikh, "Beyond the Last Twilight," 44-48. For the full list see: Barghouti, *al-Āthār al-shi'riyya*, 349-352.

- c) *Tūjad alfāz awḥash min hādhihi*⁷²
- d) *Marāyā sā'ila*⁷³
2. *Ḥajar al-ward*⁷⁴
 3. *al-Diffa al-thālitha li nahr al-Urdun*⁷⁵
 4. *al-Ḍaw' al-azraq*⁷⁶
 5. *Sa'akūn bayn al-lawz*⁷⁷
 6. *al-Farāgh al-ladhī ra'a al-tafāṣīl*⁷⁸
 7. *Azmat al-shi'r al-maḥallī*⁷⁹
 8. *Suqūṭ al-jidār al-sābi': al-Ṣirā' al-naḥsī fī al-adab*⁸⁰
 9. *al-Sādin, al-Nāqa, Qiṣaṣ 'an zaman wathanī*
 10. "The Other Voice: an Introduction to the Phenomenology of Metamorphosis"⁸¹
 11. Besides the three main theoretical texts above (*al-Farāgh, Azmat al-shi'r, Suqūṭ*), some of Barghouti's unpublished lectures to his students will be consulted (appended in al-Sudānī's MA thesis). Other texts were published by Barghouti in different Palestinian literary magazines such as *al-Karmel* (Haifa), *al-Kātib* (Jerusalem), and *al-Shu'arā'* (Ramallah).

The list above spans an extensive body of literary, poetic, and critical writings. Since selectivity resides at the heart of any academic endeavour, some works, as will be noticed, feature more than others. Barghouti's last autobiography, *Sa'akūn*, for example, is relevant to more than one chapter. It features in chapter 2, which discusses notions of childhood, language, and beginnings, as well as chapter 3, which revolves around the notions of illness and death. The autobiography is thus useful as it narrates Barghouti's return to his childhood village after his cancer diagnosis. The book consists of conversations between his child-hood

⁷² The first three collections will be quoted from: Hussein Barghouti, *al-Āthār al-shi'riyya*.

⁷³ Hussein Barghouti, *Marāyā sā'ila* (Jerusalem: Manshūrāt Itihād al-Kuttāb al-Filasṭīnī, 2000).

⁷⁴ Hussein Barghouti, *Ḥajar al-Ward* (al-Bīra: Maṭba'at Abū-Ghoush, 2002).

⁷⁵ Hussein Barghouti, *al-Diffa al-thālitha li nahr al-Urdunn* (Jerusalem: Manshūrāt Dār al-Kātib, 1984).

⁷⁶ Ibid, *al-Ḍaw' al-azraq* (Ramallah: al-Ru'ā li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 2007).

⁷⁷ Hussein Barghouti, *Sa'akūn bayn al-lawz* (Ramallah: PING, 2004).

⁷⁸ Hussein Barghouti, *al-Farāgh al-ladhī ra'a al-tafāṣīl*, ed. Murād al-Sūdānī (Ramallah: Dār al-Bayraq al-'Arabī, 2006).

⁷⁹ Hussein Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r al-maḥallī* (Jerusalem: Manshūrāt Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, 1979).

⁸⁰ Hussein Barghouti, *Suqūṭ al-jidār al-sābi': al-Ṣirā' al-naḥsī fī al-adab* (Ramallah: Bayt al-Shi'r, 2012).

⁸¹ The name is cited in the bibliography according to Barghouti's own spelling of his name in his dissertation: Husain Jameel Barghouti.

self and his presently ill self. Barghouti's *al-Farāgh* is a collection of entries that are mainly concerned with the notion of space. The entries are sometimes more philosophical and meditative, such as the last one on the role of space in relation to religions and ancient mythologies, while others are more personal and reflective. From the philosophical and the personal, theoretical conceptions on Barghouti's perception on space can be extracted. In short, it is difficult to separate the literary from the critical.

The episodes used as case studies are not contingent on the chronology of Barghouti's life. For example, Barghouti's poem "Inānnā," published in 1988, will be analysed in the final chapter that discusses the technique of reversals in relation to mythic visitation. This is to say that this study, while aware of how social, historical, and political changes influence literary productions, approaches Barghouti's literary corpus as a whole, tying ideas across different genres and time periods. It will become clear that this kind of analysis, although seemingly chaotic, rather falls within the lines of Barghouti's conception of life and literature. Everything is connected, and time and space are "embroidered."⁸² This way of constructing the literary work challenges the reader to actively engage with the text, as will be further demonstrated in chapter 1.

In order to grasp the interaction between the critical and the literary, the body is dynamically employed to put forth questions regarding content and form, physicality and meta-physicality, and invites the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete. Whether it is the image of the rebelling female body, or that of the illness-infested one, the body in modern Arabic literature functions as a reflection⁸³ of female suffering and emancipation,⁸⁴ national

⁸² See section 1.6.

⁸³ By reflection I mean an interaction between the body and female aspirations. As Ahlam Mustafa argues, Radwa Ashour's writings bypass discussions of the female body to focus more on the voice of the woman and her position in life as a human being. See Ahlam Mustafa, "Raḍwa 'Ashour wa turāth al-maw'ūda: ba'īdan 'an kitābat al-jasad," *Meem Magazine* (16 November 2017) <https://meemmagazine.net/2017/11/16>.

struggle, and, in short, personal and collective representations.⁸⁵ Writing about the traces and emergence of sexual representations in modern Arabic autobiographies, Valerie Anishchenkova notes that there are “emerging corporeal articulations.”⁸⁶ While it might be true that explicit corporeality is a newly emergent notion in autobiographical writings, the notion of bodies being “sites of identity construction”⁸⁷ is not new to Arabic writing, and it is on this idea that this dissertation builds.

The choice of the body here has been guided by Barghouti’s works, which dictate the centrality of the body, as well as the growing theoretical interest of the different guises of the body. I hope to show how the body is not in opposition to other apparatuses like the soul/emotions, but is rather in harmony with them. The body, unlike the soul and the intellect, is well defined and yet not static.⁸⁸ A body as a living entity is in a state of continual transformation: it grows, it becomes ill and recovers, it changes shape, it engages in creation and destruction, it breaks down, and wears away. Thus, the body engages in multiple acts of formation: it can be formed, reformulated, and deformed. The body, furthermore, steps beyond its physical formation into other realms of life; particularly knowledge. In Arabic, there are two main words that can be used to describe what we call the body: *al-jism* and *al-jasad*. The Iraqi scholar Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl describes the difference between the two terms by arguing that *al-jism* describes an entity that has definite measurements, while *al-*

⁸⁴ Asmaa Mouikel, “al-Unūtha al-Sharq-Awsatiyya fī mir’āt al-sard al-nasawī,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 35 (2015): 9-39.

⁸⁵ In an article entitled “Shi’r al-jasad wa jasad al-shi’r” the prominent leftist thinker Maḥmūd Amīn al-‘Ālim contends that the discussion around the female body in Arabic thought (the examples of veil and abortion) is one example of “a larger intellectual conflict that is connected to the body of the whole life, the body of society, the body of science and the body of the intellect, and the body of literature, and the body of art in general.” In relation to all these bodies, calls for emancipation are what have shaped the representation of the body within Arabic literature. Maḥmūd Amīn al-‘Ālim, “Shi’r al-jasad wa jasad al-shi’r,” *Ibdā’*, no. 10 (October 1994): 7.

⁸⁶ Valerie Anishchenkova, *Autobiographical Identities in Contemporary Arab Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Discussions on the distinctions/connections between mind and body are ample and extend back many centuries. See, for example: *Forming the Mind: Essays on the Internal Senses and the Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna to the Medical Enlightenment*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

jasad represents the “symbolic being” (*kaynūna ramziyya*) of that *jism*.⁸⁹ This dissertation uses the term body as indicative of both definitions, where the physical body is in direct connection to the intangible self that inhabits it, and the social and political circumstances that are mirrored within it.

In the past few decades, some studies have approached the body as a fertile source for uncovering social, political, and literary issues.⁹⁰ One of the most used space metaphors in literature is that between body and nature (land). It becomes even more apparent when both body and land are being threatened, as in the Palestinian case. This situation gives rise to a new set of literary metaphors that have become commonly used in the Palestinian context. The land as a mother, a lover, the blood of martyrs watering the trees, as well as many similar images are at the centre of the Palestinian poetic construction.⁹¹ The body, though, as Abir Hamdar argues, has often been approached as a metaphor for “some prior linguistic, social, or political body – most obviously the body politic of the nation,” rather than viewed “as a feeling and suffering somatic entity.”⁹² The allegorical appropriation⁹³ of the body and its

⁸⁹ Rasūl Muḥammad Rasūl, *al-Jasad al-mutakhayyal fī al-sard al-riwāʿī* (Damascus: al-Nāyā li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2014), 19-20. For Rasūl, *al-jism* represents the body while *al-jasad* functions as a “metabody” (20).

⁹⁰ Some examples of works that look at the body in Arabic literature include Abir Hamdar, *The Female Suffering Body: Illness and Disability in Modern Arabic Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014). Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyam of Taha Husayn* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Wen-chin Ouyang, “A Hairy State of Mind: Creativity in the Arabic Literary Imaginary,” *Al-Masāq*, 30:1. (2018): 71-89.

⁹¹ See, for example, an analysis of the Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein’s poem “Ilā saḥāba”, which starts with the speaker declaring: “I am the land/ I am the land...do not deny me the rain.” In the poem, the speaker becomes “a martyr whose body serves as a place for the endangered homeland.” Stephan Milich, “Writing waṭan in Modern Arabic Poetry,” *Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2016), 123. Mahmoud Darwish is another example, whose “human vision” encapsulates all aspects of life including “the concept of love, homeland, freedom, and nature are completely blended together; they possess similar features.” *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Roger Allen (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1987), 84.

⁹² Hamdar, *The Female Suffering Body*, 2-3. Hamdar pays attention to ‘the absence’ of the body of the sick female character in Arabic literature (3), and how sickness and disabilities in female characters have been depicted by male and female authors in the Levant and Egypt (1950-2000), 4. Pickens similarly notes the often-perceived allegorical relation between one’s body and the family or nation. Therí A. Pickens, *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁹³ Frederic Jameson goes further to argue that “All third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories.” Frederic Jameson, “Third-World

illness as a metaphor for national illness has become essential to notions of political and social awareness among Arab authors. In her book *New Body Politics* Therí A. Pickins explores the relationship between “corporeality” and “socio-political position” amongst Arab Americans and African Americans.⁹⁴ It is her notion of “the quotidian flesh” that intersects with the aim of this dissertation. As she proposes, studying the everyday experiences of the body, including “breathing, touch, illness, pain, death,”⁹⁵ is central for reading how Arab and African American authors engage with socio-political issues beyond merely “the raced and gendered body.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Barghouti’s contemplation of his own decaying body, the linguistic parallel between himself and his son, and the use of stuttering as a way of composing poetry (see chapter 1-4), are examples of acts of the everyday and the quotidian. These acts, however, do not transcend communal political and social contexts but rather work with and within them.

Tarek el-Ariss’s *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* sees the body “as a site of rupture and signification...[thus shifting] the paradigm for the study of modernity in the Arab context from questions of representation and cultural exchange to an engagement with a genealogy of symptoms and affects.” By reading ‘modernity’ (*hadātha*) in Arabic as etymologically linked to the word for event (*hadath*), el-Ariss charts Arab encounters with Europe as a series of unfolding events whose affects are experienced and performed somatically.⁹⁷ The challenge is, thus, whether one can look at the body beyond its pre-determined symbolism and reflections. Can the body be approached as an experience?

Focusing on the works of the Moroccan author Mohamad Leftah, Ziad Elmarsafy highlights the importance of the corporeal body in the creation of meanings in literary texts.

Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 5, no. 3 (1986): 69. It is this notion of the inescapability of the national allegory that Barghouti’s case defies.

⁹⁴ Therí A. Pickins, *New Body Politics*, 1. Her discussion is guided by the question of embodiment, which she contends is directly related to the social conditions that one experiences tangibly and with his/her senses.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁷ El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 3-8.

In his article, “Mohamed Leftah: le corps dans l’ordre poétique” Elmarsafy argues that in Leftah’s novels “la multiplication et la destruction des corps [qui] deviennent [le] moteur de la narration”⁹⁸ are emblematic of the centrality of materiality in life and writing.⁹⁹ The events in Leftah’s novels are told through acts and images that are conducted by the body and on it.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the article draws on how the author uses the body as a material entity to reflect the lives and experiences of his characters (many of whom are prostitutes). Furthermore, the body is used as a reflection of the act of writing where there is “[un] dédoublement...entre l’art et la vie [et] entre le corps physique et le corps esthétique.”¹⁰¹ Leftah, as Elmarsafy shows, relies heavily on the use of intertextuality. In this way, the text, like a physical body, grows out of the author’s conversations with multiple sources that belong to different literary and artistic corpuses (both Eastern and Western). This active participation of the body in the literary act (both the human body and the text), and the weaving of different references and allusions are also foundational characteristics of Barghouti’s works as will be discussed in this dissertation.

More and more scholars in different fields ranging from neuroscience to the many disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and performance studies have been investigating how “the body might speak to us – not beyond but *through* cultural frames.”¹⁰² This study makes reference to an ample number of theories that cover the body in its concrete form from Deleuze’s ‘stutter’ to Foucault’s biopolitics, to its abstraction (the body as an allegory/symbol). The centrality of time and space is evident in the theories of the body that include investigations of time and being, memory (Bergson), and the body as a space for perception (Merleau-Ponty). Thus, links will be made to different phenomenological aspects

⁹⁸ “...the multiplication [change] and destruction of the bodies become the engine of the narration.” Ziad Elmarsafy, “Mohamed Leftah: le corps dans l’ordre poétique,” *Itinéraires* 2011-3 | 2011 (November 2011): 76.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ For example, through violent acts on the female body (such as rape and mutilation) (*ibid.*, 77-78; 86-87), or through the tattoos on it (*ibid.*, 78).

¹⁰¹ “a duplication...between art and life...between the physical body and the aesthetical body” (*ibid.*, 82).

¹⁰² Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 11.

regarding embodiment, existence, time, and space. Barghouti sees embodiment and existence as two distinct entities; however, he recognizes that existence cannot occur if there is no embodiment. The body comes *a priori*, as Barghouti explains in his PhD dissertation, and existence is one's (self)-consciousness, which forms through this body.¹⁰³ One of the underlying questions that the following chapters tease out, particularly chapters 3 and 4, is what happens when this embodiment is threatened by illness and then death? What these chapters highlight is that Barghouti, contrary to what is assumed, does not propose to transcend the centrality of the body and rely on meta-physical entities. He rather ensures other forms of corporeal embodiment that are inspired by filial relations, spatial relations, and linguistic constructions.

Looking at the body as “the locus of a person's life”¹⁰⁴ rather than a reactionary interface for external influences and recognizing the role “kinaesthetic sensations”¹⁰⁵ play in identity formation, are not only informative to those working in the humanities, particularly in the fields of narratology and literature. Many scholars from the fields of medicine and the social sciences, such as Rita Charon and Arthur Frank, are similarly aware of how stories and narratives that are told and performed by patients are no longer considered “as secondary [to medicine] but have their own primary importance”¹⁰⁶ and can be central to notions of physical healing, “bioethics, and health law”¹⁰⁷ and to the connections between the personal and the social and collective.

¹⁰³ Barghouti, “The Other Voice,” 160- 165. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.

¹⁰⁴ Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86.

¹⁰⁵ Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7. In engaging with the links between medicine and stories, Frank distinguishes between several modes of thinking and time periods. In the ‘pre-modern’ era, stories were seen as representative of one's illness and pain. In the ‘modern period’ “the medical narrative” – that which is told by the doctor – was then accepted as the true narrative of illness. In the post-modern period, the two narratives (the personal story and the medical one) become as important to the patient's life as the healing journey (see 3-7).

¹⁰⁷ Charon, *Narrative Medicine*, 86.

It is through the interplay between the movable and the immovable (the static and the transformative, to reference Adonis' famous thesis)¹⁰⁸ that emotions and thoughts are depicted in Barghouti's texts. This interplay can thus be seen both thematically and stylistically. The negation of fixed forms and spaces does not reside in the realm of the literary and artistic spaces and bodies, but reaches towards the body of the producer (i.e. the artist).

Theoretical and analytical frameworks

This section highlights the reasons behind the choice of the main theoretical and analytical frameworks. Furthermore, it reveals the connections and structures between the different analytical notions and the links to the methodological tool of the 'body'. Below is a table that specifies the category of each of the analytical notions and their relation to the structure of the dissertation and the adopted theoretical framework in the close-reading chapters:

The body			
	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Structural	Childhood	Death	After-life
Theoretical	Beginning	Space	Myth
Thematic	Language	Land	Ritual

The concepts and theorists which make up the framework of the dissertation might seem eclectic; not belonging to one school of thought or discipline. For example, they come from phenomenology, anthropology, architecture, literary criticism, ritual studies. However, the choice of the different theoretical frameworks can be explained through three main axes: in relation to the case study, in connection to the body, and in relation to one another.

¹⁰⁸ Adonis, *al-Thābit wa al-Mutahawwil: Baḥṭh fī al-Ibdā' wa al-Itbā' 'ind al-'Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 1994), 13.

Similar to the choice of themes, Barghouti's varied sources of influence which span different time periods, places, and disciplines call for a similarly wide range of theoretical tools. In other words, understanding Barghouti's rich and complex literary works impels an approach that is intersected and at the same time multiple. While the theoretical frameworks belong to distinct disciplines and categories, they can all be read in relation to corporeal shifts and changes; albeit from different angles. Bringing them together in conversation in this dissertation, thus, forges new ties between different theoretical schools and approaches. This is an act that was supported and exercised by Barghouti – both in his literary works and his critical writings (such as his own PhD dissertation).

The three thematic notions of language, land, and ritual are chosen because they constitute focal points in Barghouti's writings, and because they intersect in his writing. For example, an excerpt that has been chosen in chapter 2 to highlight the language interactions between Barghouti and his son can also be studied in relation to space and the land of their village Kobar. Similarly, it retains mythic and ritualistic references (see section 2.7 for an analysis of the excerpt). The choice to separate these notions into different chapters is thus mainly organizational. At the same time, separating them allows for a deeper analysis of each notion as it is developed in other texts. In other word, each chapter builds a cluster around one of the notions while still retaining a sense of connection to the other notions.

This web of interconnected structures, theoretical points, and thematic notions reveal Barghouti's own conception of literature as a body that is constructed from different channels of influence. They are, thus, presented in a manner that echoes the complexity of the case study, and yet attempts at forming an organized guideline for reading some of his thoughts and literary works. The argument is that these three layers of structure, theory, and theme are understood through the prism of the body. They correlate with the aim to read the body in

relation to the physical human body, the body of the land, and the body of the text, thus, echoing the focus on illness and death, political engagement, and literary innovation.

Chapter 1 delves into the interplay between the literary and the critical in Barghouti's project. Seeing them as complimentary, the chapter is concerned with the forces that fuel Barghouti's literary project. Criticism, as Barghouti sees it, is the literary text's tool of dissection and one that leads to revelation (*kashf*). This chapter has two main functions. First, it positions some of Barghouti's main critical commentaries in relation to the politicization of Palestinian literature and its pre-ordained goals and aspirations within the contemporary scene of Palestinian criticism. Second, it asserts Barghouti's conviction of the entanglement between literary criticism and creativity. The six critical issues which are presented in the chapter are framed by the conversation between the fixed and the transformative body and its links to literature.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 constitute the close-reading sections of the dissertation and take the body as their constitutive framework and their subject of inquiry. As seen in the table, the three chapters are structured chronologically according to the lifespan of the body (life/death/after-life) and are respectively entitled: *Childhood*, *Death*, and *Myth*. Although the dissertation demonstrates Barghouti's call for breaking fixed structures, I followed a structure that would create a sense of linearity that will soon be challenged within the chapters themselves.

Chapter 2 follows Barghouti's contemplation of his own beginnings in life. The close-reading will be of some of Barghouti's autobiographical episodes about his linguistic and imaginative interactions with his son, and his views on the ever-present link between memory and imagination. I show how beginnings extrapolate literary and stylistic breakages that benefit from familial, historical, and linguistic continuities. The body in this chapter is apparent in two ways. It is elucidated through the juxtaposition of his decaying body because

of lymphoma and his growing child, Āthar. This physical comparison is further pushed towards understanding language as a body that evolves through imagination, memory, and exploration. The chapter takes cues from Edward Said's commentaries on beginnings and Jean-François Lyotard's engagement with language games. A hybrid of the propositions of these two scholars provides the crossroad between the physical and the conceptual shifts that are presented in the chapter. On a more technical note, there is clear evidence that Barghouti read the two scholars and was inspired by their ideas on writing (particularly Lyotard), and the links between literature, space, and politics (Said). The conceptions of beginnings and writing that Lyotard and Said present are related to the body, as this chapter proposes. Lyotard, for example, makes use of the difference between "homology" and "paralogy"¹⁰⁹ and subsequently language games to put forth his view of knowledge and knowledge production. Said, similarly, utilizes a corporeal image of filial ancestry and lineage to discuss changes in language use and writing. What is proposed in this coupling in this chapter is that both scholars attest the ties to an origin, but further assert the need to move beyond. This interplay between origin and beginning and the terminologies that are used by the two scholars are thus taken as a frame for reading Barghouti's commentaries on corporeality and language (see chapter 2 for more).

Chapter 3 takes death as its starting point. It is concerned with the meaning of geographic and physical movements in space and how they yield corporeal, literary, and political shifts and changes. It starts by underlying the direct juxtaposition of the ill body of Barghouti and the stricken body of the land of Palestine during the second Intifada. Cancer and occupation become acts that intrude on the body (the human body and the body of the land), changing their topologies. Suzan Sontag's exploration of how cancer relates to the body as well as Eyal Weizman's examination of the effects of the Israeli occupation on

¹⁰⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Mneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxv.

Palestinian lands are used to guide this connection. For as Sontag argues, the language used to describe cancer is often borrowed from “the language of warfare.”¹¹⁰

Besides presenting this direct link between body and land, the chapter presents other experiences with space that relate to feelings of estrangement. The chapter asserts that Barghouti’s attention to space preceded his illness. The relation between body and space is presented by arguing that one’s body constitutes a space in itself. The relation to other external spaces becomes a question of perspective; and thus, to narration. While many scholars have written about the role of space in literature and life, Marc Augé’s arguments seemed as the most suitable framework. His works pay attention to the intersection of illness, space, and literature (or the narration of space). The way that this dissertation frames the connection between Augé and Said is through the shared attention to how the experience of illness influences one’s relation to the world, but also to the ways of expressing this experience.¹¹¹

The choice of the two French scholars Lyotard and Augé might seem paradoxical, since the first defined postmodernism while the second rejected the term as a description of the state of being during the twentieth-century and rather defined it as supermodernity. However, these differences are in line with the spirit of the case study. Based on his writings, one can argue that Barghouti would view these opposing terminologies as different modalities of reading, rather than conflictive. In other words, they help in constituting a rich

¹¹⁰ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 64.

¹¹¹ Commenting on writing his autobiography after being diagnosed with cancer, Edward Said explains in one of his interviews that: “[t]he first thing I did when I discovered that I was ill, after I came back from the doctor, was to sit and write a kind of letter to my mother, who had been dead for about a year, just to put in writing feelings that I would like to have shared with her, and in a certain sense to try to revive a continuity which I felt had been somehow been (*sic*) ruptured. And then thereafter I thought it was important to *memorialize this special world*-which was not only my mother’s, but my mother’s and my father’s and my sisters’-in prose, which I’d never done before. And I did it for *no particular reason*, which was very important for me-that I wasn’t doing it to fulfil an intellectual obligation, or a commission or a political need or something of that sort. It was just an excess, somehow, something that I wanted to do.” Tariq Ali, *Conversations with Edward Said*, (London: Seagull Books, 2006), 125-126.

and much more varied forms of knowledge, against the singular and one-layered approach to society and life.

Chapter 4 takes Barghouti's posthumous reception, which is often ordained by 'mythic-related' adjectives, as a starting point for unpacking his own approach to myths. While Barghouti's interest in myths as a way of understanding past cultures and their influence on modern poetics and identity is very clear, I argue that his works are ritualistic in nature and reveal his views of literary creativity. Rituals are taken to be literary acts that Barghouti deploys to empower the corporeal and the literary body with an agency that works beyond representation and familiar modes of writing, and the structural components of myths.

As such, the chapter interrogates the complex relation between myth and ritual, which has been extensively studied. As a way of contextualizing the different ways of reading the relations between the two concepts, the chapter follows the views of scholars such as Northrop Frye, Ronald L. Grimes, and Richard van Leeuwen, Firās al-Sawwāh, and Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych to argue for a ritualistic reading. It should be noted that any comprehensive overview of the many and varied discussions about the relation of myths and rituals falls outside of the scope of the chapter. While the decision to bring together these different scholars might seem random, all of them focus on rituals in relation to narration and expression. Furthermore, the decision follows their views of the centrality of the body in the performance of rituals. Similarly, literary creativity in Barghouti's writing as will be argued, involves bodily acts that are performed through the corporeal body as well as the text.

As a way of demonstration, the chapter provides three thematic examples of rituals, reversal, transgression, and metamorphosis, which mirror the theoretical issues discussed in chapter 1. Furthermore, these rituals are directly linked to language and space through their call for appreciating what has been constructed (the form of the physical body, the land, or

the text), but push towards transgressing this construction. Once again, these rituals are highlighted in other examples from the dissertation, such as the previously indicated one in section 2.7. In other words, these rituals are not only specified for the proposed example. Rather, they form indicative signposts to a wide reading of Barghouti's writings; both literary and critical.

The three close-reading chapters exemplify moments of departure that Barghouti takes in regard to notions of political commitment, literary genres, and space/time denominators. Through championing the transgressive, the unfamiliar, and the experiential, Barghouti's 'exceptionalism' portrays a deep involvement with the literary scene, and a knowledge of poetic, social, and political Arabic and world heritage, and a conviction in the need for the destabilization of the known in the literary scene.

The variation of thoughts and ideas is nevertheless connected by the uniformity of argument. The thread that connects the aforementioned theorists and concepts is an attunement to acts of changes that rely on what has been discovered, mapped, and utilized before (i.e. an origin) but stress a need to uncover new territories, forms of expression, and capabilities. In one way or another, all concepts have the body (whether the human body, the land, or the text) at the core of their conception. Genealogies and lineages, illness and pain, and bodily performances form a cluster that spans the theoretical premises of the different frameworks as well as the structures and arguments of the chapters.

The question that remains to be answered is how can an analysis based on the body help us in understanding the literary text? By arguing that the text in Barghouti's case assumes undefined and movable abilities, I second Susan Sontag's propositions against the classical views of interpretation. In her "Against Interpretation," Sontag writes that interpretation, as an "act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain 'rules'," claims

to restore a text “by disclosing its true meaning”¹¹² and arranging it within “a mental scheme of categories.”¹¹³ Instead of this schematized hermeneutical approach, Sontag proposes to apply “an erotics of art”¹¹⁴ in which the text is looked at as it unfolds not only in content but also, and more importantly, in form (i.e. body).

At the crux of this dissertation lies the examination of how the conceptualization of the body is not only driven by historical (external) influences, or by events (experiences) occurring on/through the body, but also through an awareness of and a reaction to these occurrences. In thinking of the body as a stage of experiential, external, and internal reflections, Barghouti’s literary texts of are thus conceived of as living bodies of their own that function beyond the realms of literary representation.

¹¹² Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 6.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 14.