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Unearthing Literature: The Case of Hussein Barghouti

Omari, H.

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Author: Omari, H.

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Chapter 1: Criticism – Creativity

في لغتي سربُ قلاعٍ صامتةٍ تبعثُ ضوءَ شموعٍ نحويّ،
 خلفَ قلاعٍ صامتةٍ تبعثُ ضوءَ شموعٍ نحويّ،
 خلفَ قلاعٍ صامتةٍ تبعثُ ضوءَ شموعٍ نحويّ،
 يشبهُ أسلاكاً شائكةً، داخلَ أسلاكٍ شائكةٍ، داخلَ أسلاكٍ
 شائكةٍ، داخلَ أسلاكٍ شائكةٍ، وتحيطُ بحرفين.¹¹⁵

In my language, there is a flock of silent fortresses that send candle light towards me,
 from behind silent fortresses, they send candle light towards me,
 from behind silent fortresses, they send candle light towards me,
 It resembles barbed wires, inside of barbed wires, inside of barbed
 wires, inside of barbed wires; they surround two letters.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates six issues extracted from Barghouti's critical and literary works. The six issues relevant to the discussion of Barghouti's concept of innovation are reflected in the above excerpt. They are 1) the link between criticism and literary creativity, 2) the interplay between surface and depth, 3) the materiality of living, 4) the issue of literary engagement, 5) embroidery, and 6) artistic taste. The excerpt is, thus, a metapoetic expression that asserts the link between criticism and literary creativity. These issues will guide the thematic readings of the following chapters and provide insight into Barghouti's views on literature, the relation between criticism and literary creativity, and his engagement with the political and literary scene in Palestine. The chapter traces moments of his departure from the dominant and representative literary and cultural discourses by approaching the body as an explorative agent which moves between the fixed and the transformative.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Barghouti, "Taḥawwulāt," in *al-Āthār al-shi'riyya* (Ramallah: Bayt al-Shi'r, 2008), 60-61.

¹¹⁶ In his most acclaimed book, *Al-Thābit wa al-mutaḥawwil*, Adonis defines the static, or the fixed, in the framework of Arabic culture as "that thought that establishes itself over and above the text. It derives its stability from that of text ... [This fixed thought] forces itself as the single true meaning of the text, and as such, declares itself a cognitive authority."

"أعرّف الثابت، في إطار الثقافة العربية، بأنه الفكر الذي ينهض على النص، ويتخذ من ثباته حجة لثباته هو... ويفرض نفسه بوصفه المعنى الوحيد الصحيح لهذا النص، وبوصفه، استناداً إلى ذلك، سلطة معرفية."

Adonis, *al-Thābit wa al-mutaḥawwil*, 13.

The excerpt above is the last section in the poem “Taḥawwulāt” (“Transformations”) from Barghouti’s first published poetry collection *al-Ru’yā*. The poem was written in Ramallah and Jerusalem between 1 and 21 January 1988 and is emblematic of Barghouti’s engagement with the political and social circumstances of the first Intifada (1987-1993). Although these lines are situated within the tensions in Palestinian life at that time, they manage to highlight Barghouti’s concept of innovation, which is based on finding new depths to common elements of poetic expression and politics.

The excerpt is a spatial description of language and shows how the poet transforms himself into a bird in order to move beyond the shackles of fixed linguistic and poetic expressions. It describes how the speaker’s body is surrounded and imprisoned by a melange of architectural and linguistic barriers. The section continues:

وقلبي سجنٌ داخلَ سجنٍ داخلَ سجنٍ داخلَ سجنٍ، سربٌ سجونٍ مغلقةٍ بالشفيتين،
 فلا تلفظُ في المنطقةِ المحتلَّةِ غيرَ اللفظَاتِ المحتلَّةِ.
 وقيودي تحضرُ بالجملة:
 فأحلّقُ، سرباً من حجلٍ بريٍّ تحتَ نجومٍ تتشابكُ، لستُ أغني صوتاً منفرداً في أجنحتي،
 سأغني كلّ جناحي، كلّ جناحي، كلّ جناحي، لستُ أحرّرُ نصفَ فضائي،
 ربعَ فضائي، ثلثَ فضائي، سوف أحرّره كلّهُ.
 هل تفهمني؟ كلّهُ!
 وأعيدُ عليكِ لتفهم: كلّ جناحي، كلّ فضائي، كلّهُ.
 نحنُ أمامَ الروحِ المحتلَّةِ وهي تحلّقُ كالرخّ،
 لها اللفظةُ في أوّلِ الموج.¹¹⁷

And my heart is a prison, inside a prison, inside a prison, inside a prison;
 a flock of prisons enclosed by the lips.
 No utterance sounds in the occupied territories, but occupied utterances
 And my chains come bearing a sentence:
 So I fly, like a flock of partridges underneath intertwining stars, I am not singing a sole
 voice in my wings,
 I will sing my whole wing, my whole wing, my whole wing. I am not liberating
 Half of my sky,
 A quarter of my sky, a third of my sky, I will free it all.

The dynamic, or the transformative, on the other hand, is “the thought that also establishes itself over the text but through hermeneutical engagement that makes the text adaptable to reality and its changes” (Ibid).

"وأعرّف المتحول بأنه...الفكر الذي ينهض، هو أيضاً، على النص، لكن بتأويل يجعل النص قابلاً للتكيف مع الواقع وتجذده."

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 60-61.

All of it.
 Do you understand me? All of it!
 And I repeat so you may understand: all of my wing, all of my sky, all of it.
 We face the occupied soul as it flies like a roc.
 To it belongs the utterance at the first wave.¹¹⁸

Barghouti uses barbed wire, prisons, occupied area, and chains— words that are unavoidable in the discourse and daily life of Palestinians living under occupation. These words have truly become, as Barghouti says, “occupied utterances” that are imbedded in language and life. In the image that Barghouti creates, language is an occupying structure in the middle of which the speaker stands. The restriction of language is expressed through architectural and physical constraints. The flock of fortresses indicates the restriction put on Palestinian poetry. The speaker in the excerpt is surrounded by the languages of others. From between these architectural buildings rays of light come towards him. The light, although often seen as a sign of hope, is actually a barbed wire that traps the letters of the speaker’s language. The speaker is imprisoned, and thus, his utterances and words are occupied.

Barghouti equates the freedom of the word with the freedom of physical movement and transformation of the body. The imagery capers between the movable and that which is imprisoned and limited in its movements. He employs the imagery of birds to indicate these shifts. The word flock (*sirb*) is part of this bird imagery and alludes to the potentiality of flying. However, it is used twice to indicate opposite ideas. The first use “flock of fortresses” and “flock of prisons” indicates a state of immovability, while the second “flock of partridges” is one of movability. The interplay between the fixed and the movable is thus

¹¹⁸ Although there is no direct reference, the plot line of the poem echoes certain aspects from the story “al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya” by the Sufi philosopher Shahāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191). In this story, al-Suhrawardī narrates his escape from a prison in the West (Qayrawān) and his flight to the East (al-Mashriq). The escape includes travel through the skies and features birds as a trope of freedom (similar to Barghouti’s poem). This trip symbolizes a journey towards illumination and light (Mashriq- Ishrāq). Taking this Sufi context as a reference, the two letters that are hinted at but not directly mentioned in Barghouti’s poem can thus be interpreted as the *kāf* and the *nūn*, forming together the word *kunn* (be)- an indication of self-transformation and movement towards God and light. For the story see Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, “Qiṣṣat al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya,” *Majmū‘at muṣannafāt shaykh ishrāq*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran: Pzhushgāh ‘ulūm Insānī va Muṭāla‘āt Frīngī), 274-297. I thank Prof. Elmarsafy for bringing my attention to this possible relation.

made clear through the opposing uses of the same word. While the chains are preparing the next sentence, the speaker takes agency and transforms into a flock of partridges. The immovable is furthermore described in the “occupied soul” that is changed into the mythical bird, the roc. The last line frees the occupied soul and the occupied language, through a process of bodily transformation.

The poetic metaphor of occupation and freedom reached through transformation can be read as a critical commentary on the status of poetic language, thus reflecting the first key issue in the chapter regarding the inescapability of criticism in the creation of literature. Barghouti’s engagement with the contemporary social and political circumstances is evident in the utilized occupied images. The materiality of Palestinian living, represented by spatial occupation, is inspired by the political realities of that time and is subtly evoked. It is used as a tool for exploring other forms of occupation and freedom, namely linguistic and poetic. The engagement is similarly shown by shifting to second person, making the reader an active participant in Barghouti’s imagery by informing the reader of the determination to achieve uncompensated freedom. This invitation to the reader conveys Barghouti’s concept of artistic taste, which is discussed in this chapter. In the transformation from the imprisoned body into the free bird, Barghouti embroiders tropes from his present reality with historical allusions, such as the roc, which features in many stories from the Arab literary heritage.¹¹⁹ The freed soul, similar to the roc, allows the speaker to explore new space and initiate a new utterance. The poetic imagery plays on expressions familiar to the readers but restructures these expressions in a different context. The thematic tropes are mirrored by the conceptual aim: transformation as a means of poetic and literary innovation.

This investigation of the six critical issues will shed light on Barghouti’s awareness of and involvement in the contemporary critical scene in Palestine and, at the same time, his

¹¹⁹ For an overview of the appearance of ‘the roc’ *al-Rukhkh* in Arabic writing, such as in al-Jāhiz (d. 868), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1377), and the story of Sindbad the Sailor from *The Arabian Nights*, see Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 694.

precarious place away from canonical Palestinian positions. The issues are probed from Barghouti's two books of criticism *Azmat al-shi'r al-maḥallī* (1979) and *Suqūṭ al-jidār al-sābi': al-Ṣirā' al-naḥsī fī al-adab* (1981). I will also bring into my analysis some of Barghouti's other articles and critical commentaries from his creative writings to show how criticism and creative writing form an intertwined web in his canon.

Barghouti's two critical books *Azmat al-shi'r* and *Suqūṭ* encapsulate important theoretical notions of his approach to contemporary Palestinian literature and his views on the role of literature in political struggle. The books inform us of Barghouti's initial reception within the Palestinian literary establishment. Barghouti's first book of criticism *Azmat al-shi'r* was written after his return to Palestine from Hungary in 1977. Barghouti notes that he viewed the state of Palestinian poetry to be "tragic."¹²⁰ Thus, he set to present *Azmat al-shi'r* as a way of dissecting what he saw as elements of crisis in this poetry. The main elements of criticism that Barghouti addresses in his first book in regard to Palestinian poetry, which can also be taken as an overarching characteristic of his criticism, revolve around what he calls the superficiality (*saṭḥiyya*) of the approach,¹²¹ and "the plumeting expectations regarding the knowledge of the audience" (*inkhifāḍ mustawa al-iftirāḍ*).¹²²

As Barghouti himself explains, his first book was heavily influenced by Marxist-Hegelian and Lukácsian theories.¹²³ Such influence by the German and Hungarian thinkers is not surprising and follows the trend of that period, where a "Hegelian kind of Marxism"¹²⁴ was developing in Europe as a reaction to the Stalinist appropriation of Marxism. The key concepts that tie these philosophers and help us understand Barghouti's critical philosophy are the concern with the materiality of living and the role of dialectics in literature and life.

¹²⁰ "عندما رجعت للأراضي المحتلة العام (١٩٧٧) وجدت الشعر المحلي تراجيدياً"¹²⁰

Barghouti, "Min uss," 119.

¹²¹ Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 16.

¹²² Ibid., 25.

¹²³ Barghouti, "Min uss," 118.

¹²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), ix.

Identifying elements of crisis in contemporary Palestinian poetry that included a fixation on historical events such as the Nakba and a recycling of themes and expressions by contemporary Palestinian poets, led to the poor reception of the book by those criticized by Barghouti.¹²⁵ Barghouti attributed that reaction to a general misconception of the role and function of criticism. Most authors and critics, he postulated, insisted that “all criticism, regardless of how methodical it may be, is slander, and they [considered] praise to be better.” Furthermore, he commented that criticism in the Palestinian context was dictated by political and personal allegiances.¹²⁶

Barghouti’s initial ostracization shaped by the reception of his first book, affected the writing and production of his second book. As Barghouti narrates, he had to print and distribute *Suqūt* on his own account since neither publishing houses nor political parties agreed to endorse it.¹²⁷ The main difference between the two books (written two years apart) is the shift in focus from the Palestinian to the global. Barghouti decided, after the tremendous attack on his first book, to focus in his second book on the study of literature in general. While the first book engages directly with the contemporary productions of poets in Palestine, Barghouti builds his arguments in *Suqūt* by bringing together many authors, philosophers, and books from Lukács to Freud, Sufism, Dostoyevsky and Shakespeare. Barghouti investigates cases of psychological and personal characteristics in relation to historical and collective sensibilities that are portrayed in world literature, in order to assert the inevitability of the influence of a specific historical moment on one’s formation and

¹²⁵ As Barghouti explains:

“أثار الكتاب ضجةً أيامها: قاطعني على أثرها، على المستوى الشخصي أغلبية الشعراء المحليين الذين انتقدتهم وأعنف مواجهة، كادت تصل إلى صراع بالأيدي، كانت مع الشاعر المرحوم عبد اللطيف عقل- الذي تصادفتُ وإياه لاحقاً.”

“The book spurred a controversy which drove most local poets, whom I had criticized, to cut all ties with me. The harshest conflict, which almost turned into a fist fight, was with the late poet ‘Abdul-Laṭīf ‘Aql. We became friends later.”

Barghouti, “Min usus,” 118.

¹²⁶ “كان الشعراء والنقاد معاً مصرّين على أن كل نقد، مهما كان منهجياً، قدح، وعلى أن “المدح” أفضل.”

Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 119.

artistic production. This reflects a trend in his critical and literary writings, which cannot but be built on the *mélange* of times, languages, and spaces.

In this chapter, the movement of uncovering new forms and transforming literary expressions beyond the fixed and the known is expressed through notions of dissection, quakes, surface/depth dialectics, literary creativity, embroidery, and taste. These notions are guided by and framed within the human body, the body of the land, and the literary text, and allow for a conceptualization of Barghouti's call for literary and personal transformation (*al-taḥawwul*). The six critical issues extend in Barghouti's critical and creative writings, and one will notice how the issues presented here intersect with one another in his works. However, in order to give clarity and coherence to his thought, they have been ordered in the following manner. The reference to the different dimensions of the (physical, spatial, and literary) body in each of the issues has not been enforced onto the reading. Rather, the decision was to use the body as a way of framing and presenting these issues. For example, Barghouti's assertion of how criticism can yield new forms of literary expressions is presented through the concept of *tashrīḥ* (dissection). *Tashrīḥ* is deployed here as both a medical act that is performed on the physical body and at the same time as a cognitive process that is central to acts of writing. Another example is that of the land in section 1.3. The land is seen as a body, both literally and metaphorically. This body experiences changes and shifts that are understood within the framework of surface and depth. Thus, the body functions as a source of inspiration for framing the chapter, i.e. as a form. At the same time, it is portrayed in a state of change, in which *tashrīḥ* or the interaction between the surface and the depth disrupt both the form of the physical body as well as the known modes of writing and thinking about the political and the literary.

I start with Barghouti's thought on the interconnectedness between criticism and creativity. Barghouti uses the surgical term *tashrīḥ*, as a critical tool of resurging and

revealing new creative depths beyond the observable surface. The second key issue delves into Barghouti's utilization of the interaction between surface and depth in relation to his views on writing national literature and the formation of the canon, which is challenged by tensions between dominant and "deviational" poetics.¹²⁸ This innate tension in the construction of the canon is presented through the shifts that happen to the surfaces and depths of the land. The movement between surface and depth is further developed by scrutinizing the notion of embroidery, which is taken and developed from Barghouti's text *Ḥajar al-ward (The Rosetta Stone)*. It is through threading multiple spaces and temporalities that link past and present that the text, as a piece of fabric, can be woven.

The dialectics between the materiality of living and imagination is a central theme explored in Barghouti's writings. Although the physical land and its possessions play a central role in the case of Palestinian literature, the imagination allows one to transcend this fixed formation. Barghouti's commitment reveals itself through his awareness of the societal and political events that engulf Palestine and in his prediction of changes in Palestinian life. This will be shown through a close reading of one of his songs, which represents a *nubū'a bi al-hazza al-qādima* ("a premonition of the forthcoming quake").¹²⁹ From the *hazza* that shakes the earth, the imagery of geological formation is further taken into the final issue of *al-dhā'iqa al-fanniyya* (artistic taste). Barghouti utilizes the case of *al-tall* (the mound) to indicate the layering and formations of connected literary influences. Furthermore, the term *dhā'iqa* links back to the notion of taste as a bodily sense that echoes a level of cognitive knowledge and experience.

¹²⁸ Al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry*, 237-238.

¹²⁹ Barghouti, Hussein. "Dhākira 'ādiyya," 44.

1.2 Tashrīḥ – Anatomy and criticism

لا يوجد مبدعٌ حقيقي في الأدب والفن لا يكمن في داخله ناقدٌ، أيضاً؛ إنَّ "تشریح" ما يقوم به وما يقوم به غيرنا أساسي لصياغة رؤيانا الإبداعية ذاتها، وللتحوُّل الرؤيوي المستمر¹³⁰

There is no real creative person in literature or the arts who does not also harbour an inner critic. For 'dissecting' what one does and what others do is pivotal for forming our own creative visions, and to the latter's ongoing transformation.

The skill of criticism, which hinges upon divulging the inner workings of a literary text, is what eventually leads to the emergence of the creative word in a new form and meaning. Criticism, according to Barghouti, fragments the form and allows the emergence of the unseen and the undiscovered. In one of his lectures to a group of students at Birzeit University, Barghouti explains the interconnectedness between the creative act on the one hand and the critical act on the other. As he explains in the quote above, creation is guided by analyzing what the author and others have already constructed. Barghouti uses the word *tashrīḥ* (dissection) to define the technique of revealing new possibilities and transformations.

As Barghouti sees it, there are two types of criticism: one that provides an understanding of a work of art (academic criticism), and one that mobilizes this understanding to "craft a visionary angle that leads to the accomplishment of a revelation (*kashf*)."¹³¹ As will be demonstrated later, Barghouti criticizes Palestinian poets for their inability to apply self-criticism that would allow their creative works to move away from being a kind of imprisonment and "dead knowledge"¹³² of the political and literary heritage to becoming "a light in the dark maze of creation; a transformation."¹³³ He sees the ability of

¹³⁰ Barghouti, "min usus," 115.

¹³¹ "...الزاوية الرؤيوية التي تؤدي إلى إنجاز كشف."

Ibid.

¹³² "معرفة ميتة."

Ibid.

¹³³ "إلى إضاءة في متاهة الخلق المعتمدة، إلى "التحويل."

Ibid.

criticism to reveal and transform as an innate trait of creativity and ever-changing literary productivity.

Barghouti's criticism should be read in light of the dominance of the political in the Palestinian critical and political scene. The popular uprising of the first Intifada, for example, resulted in more interest in ethnographic studies and interviews that "[allowed] Palestinians to circumvent the lack of official state institutions, including archives that have often rendered Palestinian voices mute, when it came to the Nakba."¹³⁴ This interest in the documentation of Palestinian existence, Israeli brutality and daily Palestinian suffering, however, was viewed as a sort of socio-political emancipation of Palestinians, but it also meant that "attention to cultural production took a back seat."¹³⁵ Another example is that of *The Journal of Palestine Studies*. The journal (published already from 1971) is an example of a dominant academic interest in the area. A look at the issues (particularly the early ones) reveals a deep engagement with political, social, and economic events: from covering human rights issues,¹³⁶ to detailed discussions in the fields of economics,¹³⁷ political science, sociology,¹³⁸ and Israeli policies, periodicals, and press. Palestinian literature, however, seems to have been "eclipsed by successive historical and political events affecting the Palestinian people."¹³⁹ There were some exceptions, though. One of the most interesting early exceptions includes a review of a book on Palestinian cinema.¹⁴⁰ Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi's

¹³⁴ Joseph R. Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 140.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁶ For example: Ghassan Bishara, "The Human Rights Case against Israel: The Policy of Torture," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 4 (1979): 3-30. And Naseer H. Aruri, "Resistance and Repression: Political Prisoners in Israeli Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 4 (1978): 48-66.

¹³⁷ For example: Rosemary Sayigh, "The Struggle for Survival: The Economic Conditions of Palestinian Camp Residents in Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 2 (1978): 101-19.

¹³⁸ For example: Halim Barakat, "Social Factors Influencing Attitudes of University Students in Lebanon towards the Palestinian Resistance Movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1, no. 1 (1971): 87-112.

¹³⁹ Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ See for example: Soraya Antonius, "The Palestine Cause in the Cinema," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 2 (1978): 120-25.

much quoted article “The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation” is another example.¹⁴¹ Both appeared in 1978.

Barghouti wrote his first critical works in the late seventies and early eighties. They reflect, thus, a ‘local’ awareness of the importance to address the state of Palestinian literature in order to reveal deeper creative layers of literary expression. His attempt at addressing these issues regarding Palestinian poetry were a break-through in the Palestinian critical scene. In fact, this literary criticism can be seen as guiding the ‘new’ wave of criticism and writing starting from the late nineties of the last century (see the conclusion). This, if anything, proves that he was ahead of the literary system at play and with the different political, economic, and social tropes that influenced the literary and critical discussions in Palestine.

This is not to claim that Barghouti was the only one to address the need for a different approach to criticism of Palestinian literature (poetry specifically) during that period, but rather that he played a vital role in cultivating a comprehensive view of what he calls in his first book of criticism a *crisis* (*azma*) in the Palestinian literary scene. In fact, in her aforementioned 1978 article, Ashrawi addresses the effects that the need to assert a Palestinian identity in the face of Israeli brutality has had on the poetic productions of that time period. Ashrawi asserts the need to apply “responsible criticism” to the literature of Palestine, beyond the umbrella and apologetic excuse, of nationalist allegiances.¹⁴² On the one hand, she argues that the revival of folkloric tropes as a means to attest this identity “gave momentum to the literary movement.” On the other, she saw that the poetic language was facing “the loss of meaning and force which comes as a result of endless repetition and

¹⁴¹ Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi, “The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 3 (1978): 77-101.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 83.

formulaic constructions.”¹⁴³ While the questioning of these formulaic and thematic boundaries has become a distinctive trend for the post-Oslo era,¹⁴⁴ Barghouti had already initiated a series of questionings on the role and status of literature in Palestinian life. In other words, Barghouti’s ‘exceptionalism’ and creativity are the result of his direct involvement with and observation of the critical and literary field in Palestine, which was not recognized at the time.

In her study *In the Wake of the Poetic: Palestinian Artists After Darwish*, Najat Rahman examines the works of known and emerging Palestinian artists during the post-Oslo period and investigates traces of influence of the ‘national’ poet of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, on their works as well as their artistic engagement with his poetic productions. As Najat explains, these artists¹⁴⁵

...aim at the production of new, empowering forms of (collective) subjectivity. [They] envision and practice postidentitarian, postnational political art. They locate questions of identity elsewhere (in poetry, in various art forms, in transnational networks, in new forms of belonging) and reframe the political. They refuse to adhere to predetermined notions of aesthetics and politics, but they all claim a common historical legacy.¹⁴⁶

This passage could very well summarize both pre- and post-Oslo works by Barghouti. While he acknowledges a historical legacy that includes stopping at specific Palestinian points in time (Nakba, Naksa, Oslo), Barghouti extends his project to include other corners of history and geography that do not follow chronologically and which form a tapestry of interconnected significances, and question notions of nationhood and fixed identities. Similar to Rahman’s artists, Barghouti’s identity formation through the literary constitutes “practices

¹⁴³ Ibid., 82.

¹⁴⁴ For examples see: Hanan Touqan, “Whatever Happened to *Iltizām*? Words in Arab Art after the Cold War,” in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the political in Arabic literature since the 1940s*, eds. Friederike Pannewick and Georges Khalil (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), 333-349; and Najat Rahman, *In the Wake of the Poetic: Palestinian Artists After Darwish*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

¹⁴⁵ Names include Ghassan Zaqtan, Suhair Hammad, Mona Hatoum, Elia Suleiman, and Emily Jacir.

¹⁴⁶ Rahman, *In the Wake of the Poetic*, 2.

of dissensus.”¹⁴⁷ The argument is that Barghouti’s application of these dissenting practices had started already in the late seventies, when he showed a contestation to a fixated notion of the political, the poetic, and the homeland.¹⁴⁸

Zeina Halabi explores in her book *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual* the transformative approaches of contemporary Arab authors in the 1990s towards the figure of the past Arab intellectual as a fresh way of asking questions regarding *iltizām*, exile, and nationalism. Against the criticism of apolitical engagement, these Arab authors have reconfigured the political in writing. The political in the writing of authors such as Rabee Jaber, Rashid Daif, and Seba el-Herz “professes a contemporary subjectivity....[and] transcends canonical literary tropes and genres.”¹⁴⁹ Barghouti, similarly, brings the subjective to the foreground as it goes through a process of questioning the generic formations of previous authors, and moves beyond the prophetic propositions¹⁵⁰ of intellectual Arab figures. Taking Barghouti’s comment on *tashrīḥ* as an overarching concept in his works, one can see how he intertwines criticism with the awareness of the function of art and literary creativity. It is in this interplay between criticism and creativity that the political, social, and personal function of literature is unpacked, questioned, and reformed.

1.3 Saṭḥ – ‘Umq: Land and literature

With Barghouti’s conception of criticism through *tashrīḥ* highlighted in the previous section, this section approaches land as a body. It looks at the unearthing of the land and uses Barghouti’s call to take the surface as an invitation to uncover new depths that create new surfaces in return as the prism for investigating the meanings of the political and the national.

¹⁴⁷ Rahman follows Jacques Rancière’s theorization of “dissensus.” Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010).

¹⁴⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, whose notions on childhood and language games will be used in the following chapter, also refers to “dissension” as a way of conceiving “invention.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxv. (See chapter 2 on beginnings).

¹⁴⁹ Zeina G. Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual: Prophecy, Exile and the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 157.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

While Barghouti does not criticize the national *per se*, he aims at fragmenting the fixed, the obligatory, and the paradigm that defines what the national is. This negation of the fixed approach to writing is reconfigured through the dialectics of surface-depth. Asserting the multi-dimensionality of the national body through the interplay between the hidden and the revealed is essential for the process of creativity and is linked to the interplay between the materiality of life and literary creation in the following section.

The land, as will be shown in the dissertation and particularly in chapter 3, is projected onto Barghouti's body. The political and the communal are not subordinated to the personal in Barghouti's works. Rather, they are tested within and through the personal. Sharīf Kanā'na, the Palestinian intellectual, argues in one of his articles that identity (*al-huwiyya*) is "a certain consciousness in the individuals belonging to the group of the essence or spirit of the [certain] collectivity of symbols."¹⁵¹ One of the many characteristics that Kanā'na lists regarding this state of awareness is "the consciousness of the continuity of that *essence* through space and time from the past to the present, and through the present to the future regardless of the changes in circumstances, regimes and people; that is to say despite the changes in the material components of the community."¹⁵² This idea of an unchanging state and a continuous essence is what Barghouti's works challenge.

For example, Barghouti publishes in the Jerusalemite journal *al-Kātib* a reply to an article written in an earlier edition by Dr. Sa'īd Zaydānī. In it, Zaydānī argues that a social institution is evaluated as national when "it works at creating or strengthening or protecting

¹⁵¹ "...الهوية حالة وعي عند أفراد الجماعة بجوهر أو بروح تلك الرموز مجتمعة." 151

Sharīf Kanā'na, "Dawr al-Fuḥlūr wa al-Turāth fī Ta'zīz al-Huwiyya," *Kan'ān*, no. 21-22 (January-February 1994): 89.

¹⁵² "الوعي باستمرارية ذلك الجوهر عبر المكان والزمان من الماضي الى الحاضر ومنه الى المستقبل على الرغم من تغير الظروف والانظمة والافراد، أي على الرغم من تغير المكونات المادية للجماعة." Ibid, 90.

an individual's connection to another individual...in the homeland."¹⁵³ Barghouti voices his criticism of such a definition by arguing that:

[د. زيداني] يشترط ضمنا ان الفرد والوطن هما مفهومان لا تاريخيان، متحجران، ثابتان. بهذه الطريقة يحول التاريخ الفعلي، الواقعي، الى كلمات "مجردة".¹⁵⁴

[Dr. Zaydānī] implicitly stipulates that the individual and the homeland are ahistorical, ossified, and monolithic concepts. In that sense, he dissolves the actual and real history into 'abstract' words.

The first point that this quote asserts is that Barghouti was highly engaged with current intellectual discussions on the role of intellectual institutions in Palestine. More importantly, the above shows his engagement rather than detachment to discussions about the relation between the homeland and the individual, and the expression of this relation in writing. Barghouti's contestation is at the abstracted and monolithic appropriation of terms such as 'the individual' and 'the homeland'. On the contrary, he views them as malleable, changeable, and thus not belonging to one unified essence. Barghouti does not negate the national discussion but rather the static approach towards the definition of the national. Following this line, the actuality in Palestinian life is that which is contested and changeable, as opposed to the view of the nationalist representation as a fixed idea and ideology.

One of the ways in which Barghouti addresses the prevalent essentialist approach to the representation of the nation is through the *saṭḥ*-*umq* dialectics. As Barghouti comments, Palestinian literature, has become dominated by a fixed kind of writing that is not only political, but also superficial.¹⁵⁵ An example of superficiality (*saṭḥiyya*) in literature, for Barghouti, is the subject's easy detectability. It is in this vain that he condemns an ideological

"المقياس الذي يقترحه [د. زيداني] لتحديد وطنية الشيء هو ان هذا الشيء يكون وطنيا عندما: "يعمل على خلق او تقوية او حماية ارتباط الفرد بالفرد داخل الوطن او/وبالوطن".

Hussein Barghouti, "al-Fikr al-akādīmī al-sā'id ilā ayn?" *al-Kātib*, no. 67 (1985).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ "لا نوجه النقد لكون أدبنا سياسيا بالدرجة الاولى...ولكن لانه سياسي وسطحي معا وهذا هو مصدر الازمة." Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 64-65.

and nationalist labelling of Palestinian literature¹⁵⁶ as ‘Palestinian’ only. This is limiting, according to Barghouti, because it takes ‘Palestine’ as its main and ‘visible’ identification.¹⁵⁷ Instead, he understands this labelling as *one* way of naming, and one that should be open to dialectical negations.

This (imposed) over-politicization of Palestinian literature is another reason for Barghouti’s initial marginalization. As Joseph Farag rightly puts it, “in large part precisely *because* of Arabic literary scholarship’s preoccupation with issues such as gender, resistance, nationalism, or what can broadly be termed ‘politics’ writ large, engagement with the aesthetic forms in which Arabic (including Palestinian) authors construct their works has been almost entirely absent...Instead, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on the content and discourses of Arabic literary works, rather than their forms.”¹⁵⁸ Barghouti makes direct and indirect references to historical and political changes in Palestinian life. However, his investigation of new styles of writing, his negation of generic conformities, and his experimentation with form are all part of his aesthetic innovation. Whether direct political commentaries are there or not, Barghouti’s works are nevertheless *engagés*. Thus, I second Farag’s argument that “far from being adjacent or secondary to the politics...literary aesthetics are in fact integral to and inseparable from political events, concerns and discourses.”¹⁵⁹

Barghouti criticizes some contemporary poets’ fixation on narrating aspects of Palestinian loss and suffering in great detail:

¹⁵⁶ Although he notes the problematic of defining what constitutes Palestinian literature, the Palestinian critic Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb postulates that the identity of Palestinian literature is formed through the identity of its authors. He notes:

"...يمكن القول إن كل ما انتجه كتاب ذوو أصل فلسطيني من أدب سواء في فلسطين المحتلة أم في بلدان الشتات هو بطبيعة الحال مشمول بمصطلح الأدب الفلسطيني."

He still praises the works of non-Palestinian authors such as the British Ethel Manen (57).

Ḥusām al-Khaṭīb, *Ẓilāl Filasṭīniyya fī al-tajriba al-ʿadabiyya* (Damascus: al-Ahālī, 1990), 20.

¹⁵⁷ Hussein Barghouti. “Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī: Ujarrib an aḥlum ḥarfīyyan mā aktub,” Interview with Hussein Barghouti by ‘Āṭif Abū-Sayf, *al-Shuʿarāʾ*, no. 15 (Winter 2001): 198.

¹⁵⁸ Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

لقد عبرت المأساة الفلسطينية عن ذاتها عبر ملايين الظواهر. لجوء وفقدان أملاك وبيوت، موت وبطولات...كيف يمكن للفن ان ينقل ويصوغ كل هذه الظواهر؟
هنا تبرز أهمية الجوهر...ان تناول ظاهرة واحدة فقط وكشف أبعادها، أي تعميق ادراكنا لجوهرها، يجعلها تعكس بقية الظواهر جزئيا. من ناحية أخرى يمنحنا الاختصار على الجوهر إمكانية الفرار من الواقع بكامل تفصيلاته، وباختصار يمنحنا القدرة على التخيل لابتعد الدرجات، واستعمال قدرتنا الإبداعية حتى الحد الأقصى...وهنا ننفصل عن السطح وثرثرته، لهذا تعتبر الواقعية الاشتراكية، واقعية الجوهر، لا كما يصورها الشعراء والنقاد المبتدلون عندنا، وكأنها الالتزام بتصوير الواقع فوتوغرافيا.¹⁶⁰

The Palestinian tragedy has expressed itself through millions of phenomena: displacement, loss of possessions and homes, death, and heroisms...how can art capture and give form to all of these phenomena?

Therein lies the importance of the *essence (al-jawhar)*. Approaching a single phenomenon and disclosing its dimensions, i.e. deepening our awareness of its essence, enables it to partially refract all the other phenomena. Furthermore, focusing on the essence allows for escaping the actual (*al-wāqi*), with all of its minute details. Put briefly, it fully releases our ability to imagine, and to deploy our creative capabilities to their fullest potential. In this manner, we break away from the surface and its chatter. As such, social realism is in fact the realism of the essence. It differs from how our prosaic poets and critics represent it like it is a commitment to photographically capture reality.

Barghouti's use of the word essence (*jawhar*) here differs from the aforementioned usage. He asserts the constant need to extract the *jawhar* out of all the different phenomena in Palestinian reality. The *jawhar* is thus not known, fixed, or singular, but is rather reached through a process of discovery.¹⁶¹ The superficiality in dealing with the meaning of Palestinian loss and reality leads, following Barghouti's proposition, to a repetition of content. Many Palestinian critics were aware of the problematics of repetition and of the importance of placing Palestinian literature within the larger Arabic and humane context. However, the Palestinian critic Ḥusām Al-Khaṭīb, for example, finds in a 1980 interview, justification for the focus on the repeated themes of 'Palestinian loss, sadness, happiness, etc.' in the "pressure of the sorrowful occurrences" that punctuate any given Palestinian

¹⁶⁰ Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 15.

¹⁶¹ This discovery is achieved by putting different elements together, and it is what Barghouti calls *al-khalq* (creation) (see below).

day.¹⁶² Although he recognizes the influence of external political and social circumstances on Palestinian literature, Barghouti does not find them sufficiently justifying.

A good example is Barghouti's discussion of what poetry should be about. Barghouti argues that, since "most people know the bold lines of the Nakba, they know about the resistance and [Black] September and [what happened in] Lebanon" this should not be the essence (*jawhar*) of the newly created poem, but rather the surface and the contours of the poem on which other essences are built and discovered.¹⁶³ He argues that:

الأعماق التي اكتشفها [كاتب سابق] يجب أن تدخل [عند الكتاب الآخرين] ضمن مستوى الافتراض، ضمن ما هو معروف ومكتشف، ومن هناك يغوصون لأعماق أبعد.¹⁶⁴

The depths that [any preceding author] has discovered should be relegated [by future authors] to the level of assumption; what is already known and previously discovered. From there, they can dive into further depths.

Barghouti's stepping away from the representation of superficial and one-sided reality is in fact an appreciation and understanding of the discrepancies, complexities, and contradictions in life. Barghouti was ahead of his time and his attempts at initiating a different way of writing since the late seventies and eighties, although exposing him to much criticism at that time, follows a later stage in the development of Arabic literature, the works of which have come to be known as that of the 90s generation as mentioned in the introduction.¹⁶⁵

This new style of writing practice by the 1990s generation still received negative criticism. The line of criticism aimed at this new style of writing was that instead of the

¹⁶² al-Khaṭīb, "Ḥawl Filasṭīn wa al-tajruba al-'adabiyya," in *Zilāl*, 51.

"...لا بد من التماس العذر للتركيز على الخصوصية الفلسطينية، إذ أنه يأتي نتيجة لضغط الوقائع المؤسسية التي لا يخلو منها يوم فلسطيني واحد."

¹⁶³ This is not only referential to historical moments in Palestinian life, but is also applicable to literary techniques and used themes and symbols. For example, he gives examples of poets who re-use symbols like the cross and the mythic figure of Tammūz in adherence to known uses (see Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 34-37). One can see Barghouti's own application of the symbol of Tammūz in the first poem of his first published poetry collection *al-Ru'yā* (see section 5.4).

¹⁶⁴ Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 39.

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of this 'new writing,' see Hoda Elsadda, "The Personal is Political," in *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 145- 164.

previously held conception of national struggle, commitment, and political life, these new and controversial (male and female) authors were dwelling on the personal.¹⁶⁶ However, this shift in the direction of writing that Hoda Elsadda explains in her book *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008* can be read as a way of “foregrounding the act of writing as praxis” and consequently blurring the lines between the personal and the public.¹⁶⁷ This way of writing questions the boundaries of space as well as literature (as will be demonstrated in chapter 3).

Barghouti’s early criticism addresses the singular expression of Palestinian reality. Its fixation with one approach and its recycling of components portray the surface of this reality (see section 1.4 for an example). The act of searching for multi-dimensionality in the *expression* of reality is what deforms the surface and invites the new depths to emerge. It is important to note that by criticizing the superficiality of writing, Barghouti does not criticize the need for a surface (*sath*) in writing. It is the movement between the surface and the depth that aids the author in the creative endeavor. The surface represents the base upon which the author can build his/her departure. This is further reflected in his view of political and historical realities as references (surfaces) onto which new literary expressions can be founded.

Beyond the literary and metaphoric contextualization of surfaces and depths, surfaces serve to exemplify Barghouti’s unpacking of economic, historic, political, and architectural constructions in Palestine; and thus of the physicality of the land. For example, in a short piece entitled “‘An al-makān al-munqarid,” he provides some insightful remarks regarding the multi-dimensionality of surfaces (*suṭūḥ*) in Ramallah, starting from peasant houses, through 19th-century aristocratic buildings, to the villas and towers of modern times. This is

¹⁶⁶ The resistance against these aspects of change “is first and foremost a function of the dominant ideology among Arab literati that continues to privilege a national narrative narrowly defined to represent their particular worldview.” Hoda Elsadda, “The personal is political,” 149.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 146.

important to note since it reveals Barghouti's intellectual involvement in the day-to-day Palestinian life, and the mixture of literary writings, philosophical investigations, and economic commentaries in his work. Barghouti's observations of shifts and changes in the architectural landscape of Ramallah are particularly linked to political changes (particularly the post-Oslo environment), which brought with it new undivided wealth.¹⁶⁸ These surfaces of Ramallah represent "chronotopic intersections...in an embodied text."¹⁶⁹ Architectural changes and social life are equated, in Barghouti's eyes, to a literary text. In other words, the physical surfaces resemble signs that can be interpreted in multiple ways similar to literary motifs and themes.

The previous examples show that it is the interplay between surface and depth that highlights Barghouti's call for change in modes of writing that are still tied to previous writings and political and societal realities. The deployment of surfaces in different literary, political-economic, and spatial dimensions (see, for example, section 3.6) further elucidates his way of mixing the literary with the lived and his connection to the urgencies and changes in Palestinian life and society. Questioning the representation of land and literature is not a denial of the reality of living, but rather a heightened awareness of its true experience through dialectics and change rather than essentiality and fixation.

1.4 Materiality of living – Literary creativity

As was mentioned above, the dialectics of surface and depth has been presented through the example of the physical land and the social, architectural, and political shifts that affect its formation. Furthermore, the relation has been extended to include Barghouti's

¹⁶⁸ For more on the architectural shifts in Ramallah whose "urbanizing trajectory long predated the Oslo regime" see Lisa Taraki, "Enclave Micropolis: The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/al-Bireh," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37, no. 4 (2008): 6-20.

¹⁶⁹ "تقاطعات الزمان-والمكان...في نصّ ملموس." Barghouti, "An al-Makān", 85.

conception of creative writing, which acknowledges the productions of previous authors and the major political and social contours, but uses them as surfaces upon which new depths in expression can be uncovered. The body, as a material form, thus co-exists with the philosophical and the abstract. This relation between the material and the creative reveals the centrality of the physical and material body in Barghouti's project. Before moving forward, it is important to make a distinction in the use of the term 'material' in this dissertation. On the one hand, the material is used in relation to the bodily. The body of the human, the land, and the text are approached as such. On the other hand, the material in this section encompasses a larger description of objects or things that relate to economics, history, and politics. The reason for this inclusion of the wider use of the term 'material' is the need to show Barghouti's engagement with literary and economic theories, particularly in his early critical works and his PhD dissertation, influenced by Marx and Lukács. Thus, although the dissertation does not read every material object in life through the prism of the body, this dissertation still assumes, following Barghouti's views, the body as a basic materialist entity and reads its shifts as delineated in Barghouti's writings as commentaries on society, literature, and life in general. In the introduction to his PhD dissertation, he writes:

I stress the point that the human body is a part of material civilization, because it is fashionable to "isolate" our "bodies" from the rest of the material products of civilization as "subjects" confronting outer "objects."¹⁷⁰

The materialist approach is used as a means of explaining how Barghouti views 'the fictitious' in writing and is thus suitable for reading works that appear abstract, metaphysical, and immaterial such as *al-Daw'* and *Hajar al-ward*, for example. In short, Barghouti's critical and creative approach can be summarized as one that champions the dialectical nature of life in all its socio-economic complexities. As a result, the literary text becomes an

¹⁷⁰ Barghouti, "The Other Voice," 3-4.

exercise in dialectical engagement with the social and political elements of the reality of living rather than in its representation.¹⁷¹

One of Barghouti's main lines of criticism is the way in which capitalism has infiltrated the social, literary, and cultural conceptions of Palestinian writing. Lukács' introduction of aesthetical readings of the common Marxist appropriation of economic struggle and realism might have sounded very encouraging to Barghouti. As Bashir Abu-Manneh explains, Lukács argues that "the artistic autonomy and the social meaning of art are distinct yet relationally mediated notions, and that a historicism attuned to conjuncture and rupture"¹⁷² can be helpful in the reading of (Palestinian) novels. Similarly, Barghouti criticizes in Palestinian writing what he calls "the intellectual confusion; [which hinges on] failing to realize that the individual and history simultaneously intertwine and diverge."¹⁷³ In other words, Barghouti is attuned to temporal and societal shifts, but champions a literary portrayal that moves away from mere 'realistic' representation.

In her study of the complex relations between narratives and ideology in the late 19th and early 20th century Arabic texts Samah Selim asserts the problematics of defining realism in Arabic (and European) literature. Realism, as she argues, has been understood as a way of building the narrative elements, such as time, place, and plot, as reflections of "the particular social, cultural and political reality (*wāqi'*) of the national collectivity."¹⁷⁴ National and ideological representations have been seen as the grid onto which realist writings are scrutinized and as important tools that form the Arabic 'canon'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ As he states:

"يجب أن يكتشف الشاعر أعماقا جديدة، يجب أن يكون دياكتيكيا لا أن يقطع الواقع بمثل هذا الشكل."

Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 45.

¹⁷² Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*, 7.

¹⁷³ "...الخلط الفكري، أي عدم ادراك أن الفرد والتاريخ يرتبطان معا ويختلفان في نفس الوقت..."

Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi'r*, 55.

¹⁷⁴ Samah Selim, "The Narrative Craft: realism and fiction in the Arabic canon," *Edebiyat: Journal of M.E. Literatures*, 14:1-2, (2003): 110.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

Barghouti's argument is not to abandon the national but to rearrange the elements that construct it. To give an example: although the reality of the Palestinians is summed up by loss, its depiction in literature (and specifically poetry), in Barghouti's eyes, should not 'mirror' this with endless similar images and metaphors of loss. The material loss of possessions is only one dimension of the Palestinian experience. Thus, the depiction of this loss does not constitute a complete and full portrayal of the reality of the loss. Barghouti takes this 'material' depiction to be a case of ideological statism.

The problem with the materialist fixation, as Barghouti sees it, is that it takes material dispossession as a main and unchanging line of inquiry, thus subordinating the role of the human in the literature for the sake of the material.¹⁷⁶ This capitalist appropriation of the Palestinian representation of 'loss' follows the lines of Lukács' discussion of commodity-structure. Lukács explains that Marx's ideas about commodity-structure can only be understood if taken as the main issue regarding all angles of society, not only economics.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, this material dispossession assumes a false understanding of the realist approach in which it is "a commitment to photographically capture reality."¹⁷⁸

How, then, should reality be portrayed? In an article written in 1983, Barghouti presents his insight into the nature of literary creation. What Barghouti argues is that any literary creation, no matter how distant it seems from the actual and the material, depends on them.

¹⁷⁶ As Barghouti points out, the role of literature would be to restore the importance of the human in the artistic work. By narrating one's dispossession, the poet is imprisoned within "the sheer values of the materialist capitalist society" (*Azmat al-shi'r*, 20).

"...البقاء ضمن قيم المجتمع الرأسمالي المادية الصرفة."

¹⁷⁷ As Lukács explains "the problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects." Georg Lukács. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), 83.

¹⁷⁸ *Azmat al-shi'r*, 15-16.

عملية الخلق الادبي... ليست عملية خلق من العدم... [إن] الادب هو خلق لواقع يتميز بكونه ليس واقعا ماديا ملموسا بالمعنى الضيق للكلمة، فهو واقع موجود فقط في الوعي.¹⁷⁹

The process of literary creation is not one where something is created out of nothing. Literature is a creation of a reality that is not shackled by the constraints of the materially and tangibly actual. Rather, it offers a reality that exists solely in consciousness.

This statement points to two conditions for literature. The first is that any literary creation stems from pre-discovered entities that allow for its emergence. Creation is not an origin, but rather a process (a beginning – to reference chapter 2) that needs a foundation or basis (previous beginnings) in order to become a founding entity in itself. This also links to Barghouti's point on the need for future authors to build on the works of their predecessors in order to reach deeper literary interpretations, meanings, and experiences.¹⁸⁰ The second condition is that although the created image might not be a representation of reality, it is still considered a realist creation, since it is a projection of the reality in the consciousness.

The imagination of reality is anchored in the material and the bodily. The abstractness is brought back to the concrete through what he calls *qānūn al-khayāl al-‘ām* (“the general rule of imagination”). He writes that:

لا يمكن ان نتخيل أي شيء الا إذا كان ما نتخيله "صورة" لشيء مادي او مركبا من مجموعة صور مادية.¹⁸¹

One cannot imagine anything except if it is the ‘form’ of a material object, or if it is compounded out of a number of such forms.

The beginning of any literary creation that emerges from consciousness thus stems from the present and the material but does not result in a mere material outline. It is, thus, the representation of a specific and defined form of the real that Barghouti aims at negating and not the real itself. While elements of political and social suffering are a reality of Palestinian life, their representation should not only mirror their existence in the lives of Palestinians. For

¹⁷⁹ Hussein Barghouti, “Ṭabī‘at al-khalq al-adabī- Dirāsa fī al-dhātīyya: Mikānizmātiha wa mustaqbalihā wa ‘alāqatiha bi al-thawra,” *al-Kātib*, no. 44 (December 1983): 44.

¹⁸⁰ Barghouti, *Azmat al-shi‘r*, 39.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., “Ṭabī‘at al-khalq,” 44.

example, while Barghouti utilized an element from the lives of Palestinians, the barbed wire in the poem at the beginning of the chapter, it is used as a metaphor for the need to emancipate language from its shackles.

The process of creativity is based on three stages, choosing the elements for the imagination (*al- 'anāṣir*) that are taken from natural, social, political, and economic life. The second is the process of compounding these elements (*'amaliyyat tarkīb al- 'anāṣir*). And most importantly is the first principle (*mabda'*)¹⁸² upon which the construction of these objects is based. By “the principle of imagination” Barghouti alludes to the intentions and decisions that one takes to support this creation. In other words, what is at stake is that although materiality is at the heart of the process, it is eventually the principle of imagination that assures the acts of creativity and innovation.

This juncture between the existent objects and the way and principle in which they are combined resonate with what Barghouti calls in his PhD dissertation “‘fictitious’ transformation.”¹⁸³ In Barghouti’s understanding, this transformation entails the act of inscribing “any form of self-consciousness,” such as personification or description, to these objects.¹⁸⁴ Any object, such as a ‘machine’, as Barghouti argues, acquires its name, its ‘purposefulness’ not from itself, but from the acts of ascription (i.e. fictitiousness) that humans exert onto it.¹⁸⁵ Further asserting Barghouti’s conviction in the importance of the physical and material body in the act of (literary) creation, he argues that any “‘fictitious’ imaginings” cannot be constructed beyond the chemical interactions that happen in the human brain and body.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Barghouti, “The Other Voice,” 9.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

With this invitation to construct different fictitious transformations, Barghouti's works are a revolt against these laws governing the Palestinian canon.¹⁸⁷ Barghouti's calls for innovation are, however, not anarchical; he does not champion a situation without any rules, but rather exploration of writing rules (see section 2.1 for a discussion on writing rules). Barghouti, in fact, uses terminology that refer to laws and the mechanisms of creation. For example, when introducing what he calls "the general law of imagination," he writes

...بما ان الادب هو خيال فان هنالك قوانين لا يستطيع الخيال ان يتجاوزها.¹⁸⁸

Since literature is a form of imagination, there are as such rules that the imagination cannot surpass.

Imagination is formed by the known objects. However, the ways in which they are imagined and portrayed is what Barghouti aims at expanding. Barghouti criticizes the constitutive position of the poetic image in Palestinian literature. Instead, the multiple understandings of the poetic image and its changeability across subjects and times show how imaginative modes are inspired, rather than being prescribed, by the reality and materiality of being. Taking Barghouti's understanding of the material and its role in literary imagination is important for analysing Barghouti's approach to the demise of his physical body. Barghouti's experience with illness and with the deterioration of his body, as will be shown in the examples in the following chapters, alludes to his awareness of the centrality of the material body. At the same time, his narrations, i.e. different imaginations, of his experience asserts the ability of this deforming body to find new means of existence; and thus, to remain in a state of formation.

¹⁸⁷ The issue of canon and canonization is complex. It is one that involves a mix of power relations as well as social, political, and cultural influences. The etymology of the word is revealing for the way the canon is formalized. Canon, a Latin word coming from the Arabic word *qānūn*, refers to the laws and rules that govern a chosen body of works. Michael Allan brings together debates on the position of (Arabic) literature in relation to the 'world' and puts forth "a formulation in which literature is understood less as a canon of texts than as a disciplined manner of reading." Michael Allan, "How Adab Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institutions of World Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, Issues 2-3 (2012): 194.

¹⁸⁸ Barghouti, "Tabī'at al-khalq", 44.

1.5 Reforming commitment – Hazza as engagement

This section reads Barghouti's consciousness of and commitment to social, communal, and personal lives. The reading of Barghouti's commentaries on the status of political and social life is framed by looking at the land as a body that is shaken and changed. The name that casts the longest shadow on the notion of commitment in literature in the Palestinian scene is Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972).¹⁸⁹ In light of the exemplary link between literature and criticism that Kanafani embodies, Barghouti's project represents another example of societal and literary engagement that redefines notions of commitment, national struggle, and resistance.¹⁹⁰ Kanafani's works represent the first conscious step towards a regrouping of Palestinian intellectuals through literature and literary criticism after 1948. He contextualized the role of literature within the larger political and social resistance of the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation.¹⁹¹ Kanafani asserts that "the issue of commitment is not merely theoretical...but it is rather a deep and responsible sense of awareness of the dimensions of the fight that [the literature of resistance] has found itself in."¹⁹² He equates the role of the author to that of the freedom fighter, thus engulfing literature with notions of political participation and activism.¹⁹³

As in the works of Sartre and Kanafani, the concept of commitment (*iltizām*) is at the core of the political struggle for freedom and assumes an awareness of the intricacies of social, political, and personal lives as set within the relation between the individual and the

¹⁸⁹ Hilary Kilpatrick provides a beyond-the-political reading of Kanafani's fiction. Hilary Kilpatrick, "Tradition and Innovation in the Fiction of Ghassān Kanafānī," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 7 (1976): 53-64.

¹⁹⁰ Kanafani is mentioned in Barghouti's novel *al-Diffa*, where the protagonist finds himself in Beirut and asks if someone has seen his 'blond' friend whose name is Ghassan Kanafani. Barghouti, *al-Diffa*, 17.

¹⁹¹ Ghassan Kanafani, *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine*, trans. Sulafa Hijjawi (Baghdad: The Ministry of Culture, 2009), 55.

Kanafani was the first intellectual to define the term resistance in relation to Palestinian literature in his study *al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī al-muqāwim taḥt al-iḥtilāl 1948-1968 (Palestinian Resistance Literature Under Occupation, 1948-1968)*.

¹⁹² Kanafani, *al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī*, 61.

"قضية الالتزام ليست نظرية مجردة...ولكن وعياً عميقاً ومسؤولاً لأبعاد المعركة التي وجد [ادب المقاومة] نفسه في صميمها"

¹⁹³ For more, see Abu-Manneh, "Ghassan Kanafani's Revolutionary Ethics," in *The Palestinian Novel*, 71-95. Abu-Manneh sets the argument that it was Kanafani's commitment to literature and its role in society that led him eventually to act on a political level (see p. 72-73).

communal. This, as I conceive it, is still central to Barghouti's project, albeit in a different structure. What Barghouti diverges from is the finite and set definition of the concept of commitment. In an interview conducted by the Palestinian writer 'Āṭif Abū-Sayf, Barghouti comments that

الفن أكثر تعقيداً من أنه لا توجد عنده رسالة، بل توجد عنده رسالة، ما تكتبه من شعر إنساني موقف أخلاقي، أنت تقوم برسالة أخلاقية، ولكن يوجد فرق في النسيج الفني ذاته، وهذا بعينه هو الفن، أحياناً يأخذ شكل شعور أو شكل قصة مع أرنب مثلاً، وهذا يختلف عن القول إن الفن لا يأخذ موقفاً.¹⁹⁴

Art is more complex than simply saying that it does not possess a message. It *does* have a message. The humanist poetry you write is an ethical stance. You are performing an ethical message. Nonetheless, there is distinct work performed upon the artistic weave itself, and that is art. Sometimes it takes the form of a feeling, or the form of a narrative with a rabbit, for example. This differs from saying that art does not take a stand.

Abū-Sayf follows Barghouti's commentary with a rhetorical question:

كأنك تقدم تفسيراً جديداً لمفهوم الالتزام؟

It is as if you are presenting a new interpretation of *iltizām* (commitment)?

Barghouti:

هذا شكل من أشكال الموقف، لكنه ليس الشكل الوحيد، هل نلتزم بالجمال مثلاً، أو بدولة قومية، الالتزام ليس قصة نهائية.¹⁹⁵

This is one mode of taking a stand, but it is not the only one. Do you commit to beauty, for example, or to a nation-state? Commitment is not conclusive or self-explanatory.

Instead of declaring that commitment should be abandoned, Barghouti invites an expansion of the concept. He asserts that art has a message to deliver, and that it takes a stance based on human experiences.¹⁹⁶ However, this "ethical stance" (*mawqif akhlāqī*) expresses itself through an "artistic weave" (*nasīj fannī*) that can be more than a national

¹⁹⁴ Barghouti, "Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī," 200.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

commitment or an art-for-art's sake commitment. Barghouti's works, thus, represent a departure from 'institutionalized' bodies in Palestine, particularly political parties and sects, and fixed formations of writing.

In a way, Barghouti reverses the line of influence: instead of a definite social or political commitment which yields a certain form of writing, the artistic narrative works as a shaping force of the concept. Barghouti's attestation of the role of narratives falls in line with Kanafani's conviction of the active role of literature in society, which is based on his belief in the "sacredness of the word."¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Sartre shared this conviction when he declared that "the engaged writer knows that words are action."¹⁹⁸ For Barghouti, however, the word is sacred in its changeability and attunes not solely to actions but also to feelings. For Barghouti commitment *par excellence* is made of *multiple* weavings; i.e. multiple forms, bodies, realities and narratives.

The rabbit narrative cited earlier as an example of a committed act is not haphazard. The rabbit (*al-arnab*) is a recurrent theme in Barghouti's *al-Ḍaw'* – a book that was criticized for its lack of commitment to the political and social needs of Palestine (see section 2.3 for the discussion of the rabbit theme). Is the rabbit an intentional 'critical' reply to the misunderstanding of his literary work? At any point, it shows Barghouti's back and forth movement between the critical and the literary. Furthermore, it alludes to the significance of the construction of the narrative on top of thematic labelling, where a story about a rabbit can be as significant as a story about the homeland.

¹⁹⁷ Kanafani, *al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī*, 75. For more on Kanafani's conception of commitment see Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*. "In the heated debate over commitment (*iltizām*) in the Arab world, Kanafani is squarely in the left revolutionary camp." (75)

¹⁹⁸ Sartre, *What is Literature*, 55. While the issue of commitment in Arab thought is complex and varied, Sartre's understanding of it and his influence on Arab intellectuals cannot be denied. As Di-Capua highlights, the influence of Sartre's questions on the nature of writing has affected the way in which Arab intellectuals (particularly in 1950s and 1960s) regarded the strong relation between politics and cultural life (Di-Capua, *No Exit*, 105-106). Inspired by the realities of their present lives as well as theoretical influences from places such as Paris and Moscow, the concept of *iltizām* (commitment) in literature and culture became "a subjective expression of revolutionary commitment." (Ibid., 106).

Since the focus in this dissertation is on Barghouti's main poetry collections and prose writing, I opted to devote some attention here to Barghouti's songs, which fit into his philosophy and offer a more accessible expression of his engagement with society and politics. The short examples presented below exemplify Barghouti's understanding of tension and change in Palestinian life through transformations in spatial and linguistic bodies. These transformations portray a medium capable of capturing the instant and the personal in Palestinian life. In the 1980s, Barghouti was part of a group of young artists whose aim was to provide an art that is representative of the general atmosphere, while still looking for ways to move beyond the typical ways of representation. Barghouti wrote the lyrics to songs sung by some of the most famous music bands at that time including *al-Raḥḥāla*, *Sanābil*, and the most well-known group, *Ṣabrīn*. As Joseph Massad explains, the lyrics of *Ṣabrīn* "written by Palestinian poets Darwish, Husayn al-Barghuthi, and Samih al-Qasim, seem to be chosen for a fragmentary non-narrative structure that veers away from the ideological songs of 'Abd al-Wahhab, the sometimes lachrymose mood of the Rahbanis, or the militancy of al-Firqah al-Markaziyyah... just like their resistance to facile lyrics, their complex compositions resist the hegemony of melody so pervasive in contemporary Arab song."¹⁹⁹

The importance of the study of songs is their immediacy and exhibited awareness to the present situation in Palestine, but also to the predictability of upcoming changes. In 1985, two years before the start of the first Palestinian Intifada, Barghouti narrates how Sa'īd Murād, the composer in *Ṣabrīn*, asked him to write songs about the people (*al-sha'b*). Barghouti answers by saying

أنظر للشارع: كل الشبابيك مغلقة، لا أحد يفتح لأحد أو على أحد، ذرات خائفة في جحور خاصة! "الشعب" وهم،
كلمة تدل على جماعة متخيلة، وتجمع كل هذه العوالم المغلقة.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Massad, "Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 34.

²⁰⁰ Barghouti, "Dhākira 'ādiyya," 43.

Look at the street: all the windows are closed. No one opens for anyone or opens up to anyone. They are just scared atoms in private burrows! 'The people' is an illusion. It is a word that refers to an imagined group, and it gathers all of these self-enclosed worlds.

Barghouti's commentary on the political and social tension that was boiling up during the years preceding the first Intifada is spatially portrayed by the empty street, the closed windows, and the hiding in the burrows. From this enclosed space, Barghouti zooms out into his understanding of 'the people' as an allusion (*wahm*), a closed conceptual entity. He, thus, negates the empty political and ideological slogans referencing the national, the unified, and the communal that the word *al-sha'b* conveys. Instead, his understanding is based on what is seen and sensed as it unfolds through the enclosed and the hidden, meaning, through the prism of each individual. The illusionary and unified concept of *al-sha'b* is reconfigured by paying attention to the movements that people are making (the movements in space and their political and literary echoes are dealt with in chapter 3).

Barghouti is aware of the sense of agitation that hides beneath surfaces and outside of known political 'frames' and what is institutional. Just like the image of tension, his vision of change is spatially portrayed. Against the tension and the hiding that takes place in enclosed spaces, Barghouti predicts change coming in the form of geographic movements, where he senses a feeling of

قوة تتململ تحت السطح، خارج كل الأطر، وخارج المنظمة!²⁰¹

a power fidgeting beneath the surface, outside all existing frames, and beyond the confines of the organization.

Barghouti senses change coming from depths that do not fall within Palestinian frames nor the (political) organization, and which represent a new force that is brewing under the surface. Depth-surface interactions are at play in the vision and signify an awareness of

²⁰¹ Ibid., 44.

what is to come in Palestinian life. This force of change is captured in a song entitled “Yā Ḥalālī yā mālī” which he describes in one of his commentaries as

أغنية-نبوءة بالهزة القادمة
a song – a premonition of the forthcoming quake

هاي مدينة مثل البير
المشاوير توذي وين؟ ومقادير
مقادير وغربتين وغربتين وخفت يصير
الشارع سيل يغرق ناس!

This city is like a well
errands that lead to where? Lead to where? And fates
Fates and two exiles and two exiles and I was scared
that the street would become a torrent that drowns people!

The song ends with:

وامي صبرا قالت مرّة أفواج أفواج يهبّوا الناس.²⁰²

and my mother, Ṣabrā, once said bands upon bands the people will erupt.

Walking at night in Ramallah and witnessing these hidden winds of change, Barghouti documents a vision about a change that was powered by crowds of people (*nās*). The word *al-nās* is in reference to Palestinians who do not belong to any political party or frame. It is no longer *al-sha‘b* in its abstract and unified form that represents political rupture, nor only the eminent fighter (*fidā‘ī*), or the celebrated sense of unity, hope, and resistance that are being represented. The concept of *al-nās*, here, allows for individual experiences and variations to come across, where the lonely, the alienated, and the scared also find their voices here.²⁰³ To frame the discussion in relation to the land as a forming body, the street is taken as a spatial representative of the surface and the sense of repressiveness, sadness, and

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ In his study on the relation between the poet and authority through the case study of the Egyptian poet Fuad Haddad, Sayed Daifallah argues that *al-sha‘b* is a conceptualized and contoured form of representation of *al-nās*. This form of representation, which is used by discourse makers, distances the people *al-nās* from the reality of living into a metaphorical realm (*al-isti‘āra*). See Sayed Daifallah, *Ṣūrat al-Sha‘b bayn al-Shā‘ir wa al-Ra‘īs: Fuad Haddad* (Cairo: al-Kutub Khān li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2015).

exile, while *al-nās* come as an earthquake that splits the earth to display the structural body of political and social life. The song represents a poetic vision of the political uprising of the late 80s (the first Intifada). The Intifada came to be known as *intifādat atfāl al-ḥijāra* (“the uprising of the children of the stones”) and was predominantly led by non-party members and councils.

Barghouti’s song provides a stark portrayal of Palestinian life. Its effectiveness also comes from its linguistic dimension and the way it oscillates between *fushḥā* and colloquial Arabic. The quake that is envisioned in the lives of Palestinians is mirrored in the used language. As Issa Bolous, a Palestinian composer and friend of Barghouti’s, comments, working as part of a new intellectual group emerging from rural areas, Barghouti utilized the colloquial Palestinian dialect as a way to “literally invent a new political dialect that captured the politicized rhetoric of the street and employ it in new emerging song genres.”²⁰⁴

An engagement with the culture, an awareness of the political circumstances, and a creation of a new discourse that accommodates the lived: all these experimentations show Barghouti’s aim at creating a literature that captures the core of the (Palestinian) cause, all the while unafraid of exposing the distraught sense of alienation and disintegration in society. With an attention to feelings such as: loneliness, alienation, tension, distress, coupled with a sense of upcoming changes (earthquakes) in society, Barghouti unsettles the fixed meaning of communality and nationalism through *al-sha‘b*. He does that by subordinating songs whose aim were to infuse people with political and ideological energy to those that highlight the lived and experiential feelings and thoughts of *al-nās*. Put differently, he supplants the ideologically abstracting icon of *al-sha‘b*, with *al-nās*. Barghouti’s commitment sends a literary message shaped by bodily reformation, be it through metaphors of spatial

²⁰⁴ Issa Boulos, “Negotiating the Elements: Palestinian Freedom Songs from 1967 to 1987,” *Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance Since 1900*, eds. Moslih Kanaaneh, Stig-Magnus Thorsén, Heather Bursheh and David A. McDonald (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 64.

containment and emergence, or stylistic mixtures across different linguistic registers.

1.6 Taṭrīz – The embroidered space and time

The multiplicity of the committed expressions stems from Barghouti's belief in the existence of multi-dimensional times and spaces. This connection between space and time can be conceptualized in his project through another bodily formation, that of embroidery. Corporeally speaking, the link between textiles and the body is immediately perceived. In the Palestinian context, the traditional clothing, particularly that of embroidered dresses (*athwāb*), is central to the Palestinian body, history, and identity.²⁰⁵

The intrinsic and artistic act of textile making is used in Barghouti's text *Hajar al-ward* and will be taken as a way of framing his conception on the interconnectedness of times, spaces, and inspirations. The term that is adopted from Barghouti's literary text is embroidery (*taṭrīz*).²⁰⁶ Beyond the representative nature of embroidery in the Palestinian context, I want to focus on the technical use of the term that leads eventually to the formation of the embroidered piece and subsequently the literary text.²⁰⁷ The way this specific text is written is in itself an application of this embroidery technique.

In *Hajar al-ward*, we follow a narrator's commentary about his encounter with a mysterious person. The man is portrayed as a kind of an ostracized philosopher or prophet

²⁰⁵ See Iman Saca, *Embroidering Identities: A Century of Palestinian Clothing* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, 2007).

²⁰⁶ The etymology of the word 'text' in English is linked to the act of weaving. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word text comes from: "Latin *textus* (*u*-stem) style, tissue of a literary work (Quintilian), lit. that which is woven, web, texture, < *text-*, participial stem of *texō* to weave." "Text, n.1" OED Online. July 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/200002?rskey=4W8ovQ&result=1> (accessed November 28, 2018). This link between weaving and the literary piece has also been explored in literary theory. The word 'text' according to Barthes holds in its etymology the act of weaving. Barthes explains in his "From Work to Text" that "the Text is plural" and achieves this plurality through the "unique" interweaving of signifiers. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 159. More recently, the Centre for Material Texts at the University of Cambridge focuses on the acts and ways in which texts have been produced (https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/cmt/?page_id=102). See for example the 2012 conference "Texts and Textiles" which investigates the link between language and fabric (https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/cmt/?page_id=2630).

²⁰⁷ The connection between the written text and fabric weaving is not new and is similarly used in classical Arabic literature in relation to notions of authorship and influence. For more on this topic see: *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*, ed. Lale Behzadi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015).

who engages with the narrator in many conversations regarding the self, its ability to transform, and the web of past and present. The part that is of interest here is the conversation between the narrator and the prophet-life figure on the questions of space and time. The narrator says:

أدركت لاحقاً بأنه يرى العالم بطريقة مختلفة، فيرى العالم متزامناً، ما حدث قبل عشر آلاف سنة، ربما في زاغروس، موجود في ذاكرته كغرزة تطريز بقرب غرزة تطريز أخرى هي ما يحدث عندنا الآن في أصفهان، فالأزمنة متجاورة وليست متتابعة. التاريخ تطريز... الماضي مساحة كالغابة، قال، والآن مساحة، قال، وأنا مساح، أردف، ولا يهمني الزمن المتتابع، بل انفتاح المساحات كتطريز متجاور لا أسبقية فيه لغرزة على أخرى، ولا تتابع.²⁰⁸

I realized later that he saw the world differently. He sees the world as coeval. What happened ten thousand years ago, maybe in Zagros Mountains, exists in his memory like a stitch in an embroidery. It lies next to another stitch that takes place now in Isfahan. Times do not flow consecutively; they are adjacent. History is an embroidering act...The past is a space like the forest, he said. The now is a space, he said. And I am a surveyor, he continued. I am not interested in the consecutive time, but I trace the opening up of areas as adjacent embroidery, where no stitch precedes the other, or succeeds it.

Although these commentaries are part of the narrative line in the text, they are not only descriptive of the views of the specific character. Rather, they are indicative of Barghouti's own theoretical understandings and are representative of his other literary works. Time is described in spatial terms: where past and present are both spaces. The prophet-like figure sees himself as a land surveyor, as someone who views these temporal spaces in their multi-dimensionality. Places and times are thus placed in his mind as stitches of embroidery on the same piece of fabric. Understanding spaces and temporalities in textile terms informs the reading of acts of enjambments in memory that are imperative to Barghouti's conception of his life and literature (for example in section 2.3). The end product of the embroidered piece is never achieved. Instead, what Barghouti champions is the infinite movements between one embroidered stitch and another, and the drive to add more threads to the

²⁰⁸ Barghouti, *Hajar al-ward*, 27-28.

embroidered fabric, thus adding layers and creating more depths by changing the surface of the fabric. This infinite creative artistry allows Barghouti to think of his own body beyond the contours of its cancer diagnosis, and of the literary text apart from its recognizable features and genres. Adjacency (*tajāwur*), contra consecutiveness (*tatābu*), is a positionality that engenders equilibrium, with no ancestral privilege nor contemporary urgency.²⁰⁹

Barghouti's belief in this infinite openness of times and spaces, and above all the creative act, is guided by personal, emotional, and physical experiences and is, thus, contextual. This sartorial language is most evident in Barghouti's last poetry collection *Marāyā sā'ila*. Although the front page categorizes the text as a work of poetry, Barghouti's aim in this text was to write a new kind of poetry that does not resemble the familiar poetry. Mixing prose, rhymes, narratives, and rhythms, Barghouti's texts read, as al-Shaikh puts it, like "a creative writing workshop."²¹⁰ Again, this stresses the idea of the crafting and dynamic nature of the text that are relevant to the study of Barghouti's productions. The collection reads as one long poem, although it is divided into different sections. The sections that are relevant here are the ones entitled *Qit'at Thawb* and numbered from 1 to 9, leaving out number 8.

The text follows a poet-monteur (film editor) who falls in love with the director of a film that he is working on. She tells him that she will only love him if he manages to write the poem that is in her head. In his journey to find this poem, the poet views a poster of the opera *Carmen*²¹¹ in which the protagonist, Carmen, is wearing a:

²⁰⁹ Al-Sūdānī alludes in his MA thesis to an unpublished paper by Barghouti where the latter links embroidery to the idea of moving beyond the *saḥḥ*. See, al-Sūdānī, "Mudawwanat," 69-70.

²¹⁰ "ورشة كتابة إبداعية"

Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, "Marāyā sā'ila: Ru'yat al-ṣawt, samā' al-ṣūra," in "Taḥiyya ilā Ḥusayn al-Barghūthī," edited by Akram Musallam, *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīniyya* 114 (Spring 2018): 117.

²¹¹ Al-Shaikh notes that George Bizet's (1838-1875) opera *Carmen* is prevalent in Barghouti's collection and was used to frame his poetry collection "*marja' iyyāt ta'ḥriyya*." (ibid., 122). Al-Shaikh, furthermore, explores some of the similarities between Barghouti's text and the opera, which include the similarities in the characters (the female lover that torments the male protagonist) (ibid., 135-136).

ثوباً غجريا إسبانيا مكونا من أثواب عدة. قطعة حمراء عالقة بالخصر تحتها قطعة من البني الداكن أطول من سابقتها، تحتها قطعة صفراء أطول من سابقتها تحتها قطعة بلون آخر أطول من...هضابا، ومروجا، وتلالا، جغرافيا الأندلس مرسومة بثوب! نسيج القصيدة التي في ذهنها كثوب كارمن، جغرافيا من قماش الكلام.²¹²

a Spanish Gypsy dress made of multiple cloths. There is a red piece hanging down the waist, under which there is a longer dark brown one, under which there is a longer yellow one, under which there is another coloured piece...Highlands, meadows, and mounds; it is as if the geography of *al-Andalus* is sketched in a dress! The fabric of the poem in her head is like Carmen's dress: a geography woven from the cloth of words.

As in *Hajar al-ward*, Barghouti draws the link between the multiple layers of the dress and the interconnection between space and time. The placement of the different pieces of fabric echoes the *weaving* of the poem that is inside the director's head. How can the poet then create this multidimensional poem? He continues by asking:

هل يوجد معنى لثوب بدون تاريخ الجسد، لقطع الثوب بدون جغرافيا الأندلس والغجر...لا! وكذلك القصيدة التي في ذهنها لا معنى لها بدون "سياقها". ما أكتبه من تعليقات، هوامش، مقدمات...هو "سياق القصيدة"، جزء من معناها وليس خارجها.²¹³

Does a dress have a meaning outside the history of the body? Do the pieces of the dress have a meaning without the geography of al-Andalus and the gypsies? No. Similarly, the poem inside her head does not have a meaning without its 'context.' The comments, marginal notes, and introductions which I write are 'the context of the poem.' They are an integral part of the meaning and not superfluous.

These questions and his statement on the context as being part and parcel of the meaning of the text elucidate how the body (as a symbol for the literary text) gains meaning through what covers and surrounds it. The acts of moving from one place to another and one narration to another are not simple haphazard stiches. The emotional and physical experiences in the act of writing guide the creation of the fabric and are themselves part of its meaning. Barghouti's project alludes to the openness of times and spaces and the movement

²¹² Barghouti, *Marāyā sā'ila*, 55.

²¹³ Ibid.

between them, while at the same time anchors this movement in the realm of the personal, the lived, and the surroundings.

The examples above taken from Barghouti's critical and literary works constitute the principles on which his poetics rest and elucidate the interconnectedness between criticism and literary writing. The overlapping stitches are Barghouti's own way of justifying the capricious movements and nonlinearity of his writing where one episode, memory, or even word can generate other feelings and thoughts, and thus yield new narratives. In a way, the apparent difficulty in categorically pinning the thematic and stylistic conceptions in his works is an inherent way of his writing, where different times and spaces contribute simultaneously to the creative act.

1.7 al-Dhawq – Taste, land, and literature

خذ، مثلاً، ظاهرة أركيولوجية معروفة. التل... التلّ عبارة عن طبقات ومستويات متراكمة الواحدة فوق الأخرى. الذوق هنا مثل التلّ الذي تتراكم فيه الطبقات، وهنا أعني بالطبقات الذائقة السابقة. هذه الصورة بين التلّ والذائقة لا تمنع أننا نبني طبقات جديدة، ولكن لا نبنيها على عدم. وفي اللحظة التي تدرك أنه لم تبُنْ طبقات جديدة فهذا يعني أن المكان هُجر، وإلى الأبد.²¹⁴

Take, for example, a well-known archaeological phenomenon, the mound. The mound is comprised of accumulated layers and levels, one on top of the other. *Al-dhawq* (taste) is similar to this cumulative mound. I use layers here to denote the preceding *taste*. This analogy between the mound on the one hand and *taste* on the other does not prohibit the construction of new layers. However, they are not built against a void. The moment one realizes that no new layers have been built means that the place has been abandoned forever.

Barghouti's emphasis on the multi-layered, as opposed to superficial and linear modes of literary creativity draws him to engage with the environment and context within which such literary creativity takes place. His awareness of the surrounding social and literary settings includes a knowledge of the political, economic, and social parameters of life in Palestine, but also an attention to the literary scene and reception. His writing, despite its

²¹⁴ Barghouti, "Hussayn al-Barghūthī," 196.

apparent alienness and desire to present the unfamiliar, is in fact firmly embedded within the realm of reciprocity and readability. In other words, Barghouti's disruption of canon takes place explicitly within and not beyond the relationship with the reader. This section looks at Barghouti's critical conceptions of creativity as it is embedded within the social and literary concerns, and is outlined through the body.

Following his commentaries, *al-dhā'iqa al-fanniyya* (the artistic taste)²¹⁵ is an experiential term that is in a constant state of formation. The terminology used in uncovering its meaning is positioned at the juncture between the human body and senses, and the formation of the earth. *Dhawq* (taste) at the same time can be thought of in terms of senses as well as knowledge.²¹⁶

Barghouti's commitment on the one hand and call for innovation on the other crystalized thanks to his awareness of the literary shifts in society. The change in artistic taste represents for Barghouti an indication of development and movement. These shifts in production and reception are explored through another bodily example. In the quote above, land and literature are approached as bodies that build upon older forms but have the ability

²¹⁵ Al-dhā'iqa is used here to signify the general term of taste. A more specific translation would be: the faculty of tasting.

²¹⁶ The term *dhawq* (taste) signifies a series of experiences that include the physical act of tasting, creation through speaking, and knowledge. The sensory converges, leads to, and constructs the cognitive. To put it differently, knowledge does not exist outside the body, but is rather constructed through/by it. This link between knowledge and the senses is beautifully described in Kilito's *The Tongue of Adam*. In this collection of essays, Kilito embarks on analyzing notions of originality in language through utilizing initiation vocabulary taken from stories of beginnings like that of Adam and of Babel. Kilito points out the similarity in French between *savoir* (to know) and *saveur* (savor) and argues that the tongue enjoys a double function - the act of tasting and the act of speaking (as an expression of knowledge). Abdelfattah Kilito, "Babblings," in *The Tongue of Adam*, trans. Robyn Creswell (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2016), 3.

This same sentiment on the link between the senses and knowledge is also echoed in Sufi texts (For example Ibn al-'Arabī's conception of *dhawq*). In his *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-'Arabī distinguishes between knowledge without *dhawq* and knowledge with *dhawq*. The latter, for him, is a higher form of recognition (*idrāk*). By acquiring *dhawq* and becoming an integral part of it "صاحب علم الذوق" the person is able to recognize things "just as the observer can recognize [more] things by using a mirror than he could without using it." *Dhawq*, thus, becomes the apparatus for the revelation of things beyond that which is seen.

"...كما يدرك الرائي بالنظر في المرأة الأشياء التي لا يدركها في تلك الحالة إلا بالمرأة."

Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. Ahmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, vol.1, 1999), 335.

See also the overview of the emergence and development of the term *taste* in Britain: James Noggle, "Literature and Taste, 1700–1800," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed 21 Jan. 2018.

<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-108>.

to transform and change. The mound, as a geographical formation captures the past through the different geological layers. Similarly, literary innovation is built upon the historical and the familiar in literary writing, which includes the works of literary predecessors. The body (geographic and literary), thus, is not constructed in a void, but is rather in a process of formation. Building of similar layers, i.e. recycling literary works that attune to the same *dhā'iqa*, is for Barghouti an abandonment of the mound, and in a way an abandonment of literature. How, then, does an author add to the mound? Based on his awareness of societal shifts in Palestine, where arguments that “committed art provides final non-negotiable answers”²¹⁷ are no longer satisfactory, Barghouti argues that the author can build up new artistic taste by “breaking with the familiar and domesticating.”²¹⁸ Similar to the first point about dissection and the links between criticism and literary creativity, the relation between reception and creativity is based on the author’s ability to reveal new depths that are also hidden from himself.²¹⁹

Consequently, the transformative act does not solely happen on the side of the author, but equally on the side of the reader. Barghouti distinguishes between a reader and an observer and says:

من يقرأ يتحول، ومن لا يتحول، أي لا "يتخيل" نفسه في "مكان" الشاعر، ليس قارئاً جيداً بل مراقباً، هناك فرق بين من يدخل النار ومن يتفرج عليها من بعيد، محافظاً على "مسافة"... فالأنا إذاً، زاوية نظر، والشعر إعادة صياغة للأنا... صيرورة الأنا إلى آخر، هنا، عمل سحري مغرق في الطقوسية.²²⁰

A person who reads transforms herself, and the one who does not transform or ‘imagine’ herself in the *place* of the poet, is not a good reader but an observer. There is a difference between the one who steps into the fire and the one who watches it from afar, thus preserving a ‘distance.’ The ‘I’ then is an angle of perception. Poetry

²¹⁷ "...إنَّ الفنَّ الملتزم يقدِّم إجابات غير قابلة للجدل" "

Barghouti, "Hussayn al-Barghūthī, 194.

²¹⁸ "...الخروج عما استألفه واستأنس به" "

Ibid., 195.

²¹⁹ Al-Shaikh links Barghouti’s development of the artistic taste to the collage technique in writing, where different art forms (music, architecture, theatre, and visual arts) are intertwined (al-Shaikh, “Beyond the Last Twilight,” 40-41).

²²⁰ Barghouti, “al-Baḥṭh ‘an lugha ukhrā,” 29-30.

is a reformulation of the 'I' (i.e. of the angle of perception). The process of transforming the 'I' into the other is a work of magic entrenched in ritualism.

Reading, as opposed to observation, requires the reader not only to comprehend the reading material and the position of the author (poet) in it. Barghouti asserts the need for the 'I' as a representation of the self-consciousness to adopt a different position. Connecting with the fictitious creation, the reader goes from being an onlooker on the imaginative act to becoming a creator in his/her own right. Barghouti, for example, directly involves the reader in his *al-Daw'* by challenging him/her to step beyond his/her logical conception of life. Barghouti tells his readers that only a seer or someone who has the abilities of a *jinn* will be able to grasp the meaning of his text. In this proposition, Barghouti is presenting the act of transformation and one's acceptance of transformability as the path for understanding his writing (see section 2.2).

In his 1988 poetry collection *al-Ru'yā* we find critical commentary on the need for transformation. Barghouti starts his poem "Taḥawwulāt" ("Transformations") with a poetic declaration:

صياغةً أخرى قصدتُ،
عنيتُ غيرَ صياغتي الأولى، وغيرَ صياغتي الأخرى،
وما سأصيغُ،

....

وما كنتُ استسغْتُ وما أستسيغُ،
وغيرَ هذا النَّفسِ المألوفِ، غيرَ الشَّعرِ والشُّعراءِ،

....

وغيرَ الخطوةِ الأولى،
وغيرَ الخطوةِ الأخرى.
أسمِّيهِ: التَّحوُّل.²²¹

I sought another formulation,
I intended one different from my first formulation, and different from my other
formulation,
And from what I will still formulate,
...

²²¹ Barghouti, "Taḥawwulāt," in *al-Āthār*, 36.

and from what I had enjoyed [found palatable] and from what I still enjoy
something other than this familiar breath, different from poetry and poets,

...
different from the first step,
And the other step
I call it: transformation.

The speaker declares that his poetic method is not only to steer beyond the known methods of presentation, but also from his own ways of expression. The word *ghayr* (different from) becomes a refrain word and stands at the centre of his poetic declaration.²²² The repeated desire to find new expressions becomes the constitutive block of the expression (the poem) itself, where the intention and aim of the poet become part and parcel of the poem. The poetic innovation of finding new forms of expression is equated here to new steps taken by the body. This step can be in reference to the musicality of the poem that is defined through the rhythms and rhymes in the poem (see also section 4.6 for another example). The body is also evoked in the reading of the poem itself and the link in the consonant sounds between the *ṣād* and the *sīn* that link the word *aṣīgh* (“I formulate”) with the word *astasīgh* (“I find palatable”). The relation between body and word allows Barghouti to present an act of constant transformation that defies a definite form of writing.

This metapoetic commentary on the need to search for different formulations, styles, and content is also the topic of Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “Ightiyāl” (2008). Darwish writes:

يغتالني النقاد أحياناً:
يريدون القصيدة ذاتها
والاستعارة ذاتها...
فأذا مشيت على طريق جانبي شاردًا
قالوا: لقد خان الطريق
وإن عثرت على بلاغة عشية
قالوا: تخلى عن عناد السنديان.²²³

Sometimes, the critics assassinate me:

²²² Omar Shabāna, “15 ‘ām ‘ala Raḥīlih: Hussein Barghouti wa Mughāmarat al-Tajrīb,” *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* (11 May 2017), <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/diffah/books/>.

²²³ Mahmoud Darwish, “Ightiyāl,” in *Athar al-farāsha*, (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 2008), 109.

they want the same poem
 and the same metaphor...
 If I walked inattentively on a side road
 They say: he betrayed the road
 And if I find eloquence still raw and green
 They say: he abandoned the stubbornness of the oak.

Darwish criticizes the critics' 'assassination' (the title of his poem) of his attempts at writing poetry that does not adhere to known and recognizably 'Palestinian' expectations. When investigating other aspects and themes in life, the 'national poet' of Palestine is accused of "betraying" the road (i.e. the Palestinian cause). At the end of the poem, Darwish declares that he survives these assassinations and continues to look for his "new poem."²²⁴ Significantly, Darwish's open declaration comes in one of his last published works (published in 2008); Barghouti's comes in his first published collection (published in 1988). This is indicative of Barghouti's awareness of the lack of poetic formations in the literary and cultural scene and his attempts at highlighting his personal convictions on poetic writing. His goal from the start was ahead of the literary curve.

1.8 Conclusion

Framed by the body as referenced in the human body, the land, and the text, that chapter charted some major critical issues that guide readings of Barghouti's writings. The aforementioned points about the links between criticism and literary creativity, the interplay between surface and depth, the materiality of living, literary engagement, embroidery, and the artistic taste infuse all of Barghouti's works and encompass his critical and literary approach. These notions should be read as a cluster rather than a linear development of ideas. The six notions have been framed by the links of the literary poetics to bodily and physical formations and transformations such as dissection, shifts in land, and taste. Barghouti's

²²⁴ Ibid, 110.

critical writings, particularly the early ones, argue against the view that he was not aware of the political and social shifts in Palestinian life. Furthermore, Barghouti's writings allude to a wide range of influences that include Western and Eastern philosophies, such as the influences of Marx and Lukács, and Sufism, as well as different artistic genres and disciplines such as opera, political-economy theories, and philosophy.

The importance of criticism in relation to artistic innovation resides, in Barghouti's understanding, in its ability to dissect the works of oneself as well as others. Dissecting a work, both in relation to content and structure, reveals repetitions and static formulations that ultimately unearth new forms of expression. Questioning established modes of Palestinian expressions inspired by the collective national identity is representative of post-Oslo Palestinian productions. Barghouti's notions on the power of criticism come at an earlier time and envision shifts in writing. The issue of dissection relates to Barghouti's call for uncovering new depths beyond the known ones. This is particularly relevant in regards to the ways in which the political and the historical are referenced in Palestinian literature. Barghouti does not disregard concepts of national representation, realism, or 'Palestinian' literature, but situates them as part of a reference (a surface) upon which other ways of expression can be discovered, such as the blurred line between the personal and the public. Although Barghouti criticizes a fixation on material loss and a 'realist' representation of Palestinian life and literature, he argues for the centrality of the material and the bodily in the creative endeavour. Imagination, innovation, and fictitiousness, which underline literary creation, are inspired by the author's ability to create connections between the different objects in life.

This connection to the 'real' and the material in life is clear through the fifth notion of commitment. The national commitment or the commitment to 'art for art's sake' represent two of many possible stances (*mawāqif*) in Barghouti's conception. His awareness of the

socio-political shifts in Palestinian life are clear, for example, in the discussed song. The song shows Barghouti's attention to the unforeseen power that is building up under the surface, a reference to both the civil power of Palestinians as well as the literary concept of eruptions from the depths onto the surfaces. It is no longer the political leaders nor the fighters that are in charge of these eruptions, but rather the people (*al-nās*) who are varied in character, and thus, different from the characteristic Palestinian fighter.

The last two notions of embroidery and artistic taste are centered around the malleability of times and spaces. The concept of *taṭrīz* is easily detectable in Barghouti's writings (as will be seen in the coming chapters). Literary inspiration is opened up to spaces beyond the current or historical contexts, beyond the known genres of writing, and where memories and imaginations overlap. Artistic taste is similarly constructed upon previously discovered artistic and literary tastes and transforming them. Barghouti's declaration for the need for transformation beyond known poetic expressions is constructed through bodily (taste, walking) and geological experiences (the mound).

These six notions intersect and show that there is no negation of pre-set political, literary, social views. However, it is the act of formation and creation through transformation that is championed in Barghouti's mind. By looking at these notions, we return to one of the main observations of this dissertation: Barghouti was an initiator who helped carve an evolving artistic taste. This was done through an awareness of the surrounding literary and political influences. Furthermore, Barghouti engenders a way of using these influences as referential to deeper literary discoveries that move beyond the national and the known in poetic writing. The following three chapters represent a thematic application of the aforementioned key issues and are guided by the relation between body and literature. Childhood (chapter 2), death (chapter 3), and myth (chapter 4) are points in time that are reshaped and reformed in the course of each chapter. By focusing on the personal and

analysing specific episodes and passages, Barghouti offers commentaries on language, space, exile, and the literary canon.