Unearthing Literature: The Case of Hussein Barghouti

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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 الاقتصار على الجوهر إمكانية الفرار من الواقع بكامل تفصيلاته، وباختصار يمنحنا القدرة على التخيل لابعد الدرجات، واستعمال قدرتنا الإبداعية حتى الحد الأقصى...وهنا ننفصل عن السطح وثرثرته، لهذا تعتبر الواقعية الاشتراكية، واقعية الجوهر، لا كما يصورها الشعراء والنقاد المبتذلون 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-wāqiʿ*), 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-shiʿr*, 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 لاعماق ابعد.[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

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[162] al-Khaṭīb, "Ḥawl Filasṭīn wa al-tajruba al-ʿadabiyya," in *Ẓilāl,* 51.
"...لا بد من التماس العذر للتركيز على الخصوصية الفلسطينية، إذ أنه يأتي نتيجة لضغط الوقائع المؤسية 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-shiʿr*, 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-Ruʾyā* (see section 5.4).

[164] Barghouti, *Azmat al-shiʿr*, 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 (*saṭḥ*) 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 "ʿAn al-makān al-munqariḍ," 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

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[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 نصٍّ ملموس."
Barghouti, "ʿAn 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-Ḍawʾ* and *Ḥajar 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 (*wāqiʿ*) 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]

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[171] As he states:

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

Barghouti, *Azmat al-shiʿr*, 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-shiʿr,* 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.

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[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 dispossessions, the poet is imprisoned within "the sheer values of the materialist capitalist society" (*Azmat al-shiʿr,* 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-shiʿr*, 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-ʿām* ("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

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[179] Hussein Barghouti, "Ṭabīʿat al-khalq al-adabī- Dirāsa fī al-dhātiyya: Mikānizmātiha wa mustaqbalihā wa ʿalāqatiha bi al-thawra," *al-Kātib,* no. 44 (December 1983): 44.
[180] Barghouti, *Azmat al-shiʿr*, 39.
[181] Ibid., "Ṭabīʿat 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-ʿanāṣir*) that are taken from natural, social, political, and economic life. The second is the process of compounding these elements (*ʿamaliyyat tarkīb al-ʿanāṣir*). And most importantly is the first principle (*mabdaʾ*)[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.

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[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, "Ṭabīʿat 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

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

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

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[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 ʻAbd 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 Saʿīd Murād, the composer in *Ṣabrīn,* asked him to write songs about the people (*al-shaʿb*). 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 ʿādiyya," 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-shaʿb* 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-shaʿb* 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 تودّي 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 افواج أفواج يهبّوا الناس.[202]

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

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-shaʿb* in its abstract and unified form that represents political rupture, nor only the eminent fighter (*fidāʾī*), 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-shaʿb* 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-istiʿāra*). See Sayed Daifallah, *Ṣūrat al-Shaʿb bayn al-Shāʿir wa al-Raʾīs: Fuad Haddad* (Cairo: al-Kutub Khān li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 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 *intifāḍat aṭfāl 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 *fuṣḥā* 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-shaʿb*. 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-shaʿb*, 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 *Ḥajar 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 *Ḥajar 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

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[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 in 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 *texĕre*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: Fontata 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 مسّاح، 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 stiches 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, *Ḥajar 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 (*tatābuʿ*), 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 sāʾila.* 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 *Qiṭʿat 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:

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[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 *saṭḥ*. See, al-Sūdānī, "Mudawwanat," 69-70.

[210] "ورشة كتابة إبداعية"
Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, "Marāyā sāʾila: Ruʾyat al-ṣawt, samāʿ 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 "*marjaʿiyyāt taʾṭīriyya*." (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).

ثوبا 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 *Ḥajar 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 التل والذائقة لا تمنع أننا نبني طبقات جديدة، ولكن لا نبنيها على عدم. وفي اللحظة التي تدرك أنه لم تبنَ 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, "Ḥussayn 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-dhāʾiqa 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-dhāʾiqa 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-ʿArabī's conception of *dhawq*). In his *Futūḥāt,* Ibn al-ʿArabī 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 recgonzie [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 المرآة الأشياء التي لا يدركها في تلك الحالة إلّا بالمرآة."
Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. Ahmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 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 *dhāʾiqa*, 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 اذاً، زاوية نظر، والشعر إعادة صياغة للأنا...صيرورة الأنا الى 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

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[217] "...إنَّ الفنَّ الملتزم يقدِّم إجابات غير قابلة للجدل"
Barghouti, "Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī, 194.

[218] "...الخروج عمَّا 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 Twighlight," 40-41).

[220] Barghouti, "al-Baḥth ʿan 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-Ḍawʾ* 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-Ruʾyā* 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 الأُولى، وغيرَ صياغتي الأُخرى،
وما سأصيغُ،
....
وما كنتُ استسغتُ وما أستسيغُ،
وغيرَ هذا النّفَس المألوف، غير الشّعرِ والشعراءِ،
....
وغيرَ الخطوة الأولى،
وغيرَ الخطوة الأخرى.
أُسمّيه: التحوّل.[221]

I seeked 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 ***aṣ**īgh* ("I formulate") with the word *asta**s**īgh* ("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 ذاتَها
والاستعارة ذاتها...
فأذا مشيت على طريق جانبيّ شارداً
قالوا: لقد خان الطريق
وإن عثرت على بلاغة عشبة
قالوا: تخلَّى عن عناد السنديان.[223]

Sometimes, the critics assassinate me:

[222] Omar Shabāna, "15 ʿām ʿala Raḥīlih: Hussein Barghouti wa Mughāmarat al-Tajrīb," *al-ʿArabī 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.

Chapter 2: Childhood – Beginnings and language

"بداياتي" ليست نقطة، بل نجمة مشعّة.[225]

My 'beginnings' are not a single point, but a shining star.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the juxtaposition of the human body (dying father-growing son), to highlight Barghouti's conception of language as a body that utilizes known expressions but also disrupts familiarity. Childhood and language are, thus, tackled as entities at the junction between change and permanence. The chapter explores this slippage through the concept of beginning. Similar to the argument presented in the previous chapter that beginnings mark both a break and a continuation, the concept of beginnings in Barghouti's work is seen as the start of literary and stylistic breaks, i.e. literary innovation, that benefit from familial, historical, and linguistic continuities. As such, the close-readings in the chapter also reveal Barghouti's aim at challenging ways of writing autobiographies.

The event that has had most impact on 'the body' in Barghouti's life and writing is certainly his diagnosis with cancer. Experiencing illness and confronting the possibility of death confirmed Barghouti's need to revisit the past and discover new relations in it; i.e. find new depths to the entities that have shaped him as a person. He writes in the opening of his *Saʾakūn* that he is "one of those who master 'beginnings,' but not 'ends'."[226] His return to his childhood village near the end of his life is as such "an unmastered 'end'."[227] Or rather, it is a form of discovering a new beginning that continues after his death. The linguistic interplays between himself and his son illustrate his desire to explore known places and discover new social and literary interactions. They, furthermore, allude to his engagement with the political

[225] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn,* 140.
[226] Ibid., 35. See also section 2.2.
[227] Ibid.

and societal realities around him, and stress the ties between one's childhood experiences and past memories with present and future imaginations.

The engagement with the body, at its later stages (post-diagnosis), yielded for Barghouti two kinds of literary works: first, his two autobiographies *al-Ḍawʾ* and *Saʾakūn*, and second, the short piece "Qiṣaṣ ʿan zaman wathanī" to accompany his two previously-written studies, "al-Sādin" and "al-Nāqa," which investigated pre-Islamic culture, identity, and literature. A common thread in these texts is a focus on beginnings through bodily transformations. Whether it is through a return to childhood (in the autobiographies) or a figurative transformation into a pre-Islamic persona, Barghouti's dying body proves to be still able to manipulate its form through literature. Thus, instead of following the body-soul binary[228] and championing the soul over the decaying body, this chapter argues that Barghouti utilizes the transformative abilities of the body to negate corporeal mortality, thus rendering the body victorious over its own decay.[229]

This chapter focuses mainly on Barghouti's two autobiographical texts: *al-Ḍawʾ* and *Saʾakūn*. Not limiting the reading to Barghouti's autobiographical works, the chapter also examines writings that discuss self-expression through the body, childhood, and language.[230] By scrutinizing the body in its relation to childhood, I demonstrate how Barghouti's autobiographical writings are based on experiences rather than observations and commentaries. They, furthermore, highlight the explorative as well as the exclusionary powers of language. These works clearly exhibit Barghouti's destabilization of social and literary boundaries. The chapter starts by introducing the main used theoretical frameworks and how they relate to each other and to Barghouti's own conceptions. Then, stylistic and

[228] In introducing the role of the body in modern Arabic autobiographies, Anishchenkova highlights the dominant soul-body relationship in Western scholarship. Seminal figures, including Rousseau and Descartes, viewed the subject as an entity that surpasses its embodiment. For more see Anishchenkova, *Autobiographical Identities,* 78-79.

[229] Anishchenova notes how bodies, in their sexuality and corporeality, have been utilized (with an increase use in recent Arab autobiographical writings) as "sites of identity construction." Ibid., 77.

[230] For example, Barghouti's second poetry collection *Laylā wa Tawba*.

literary beginnings are presented and contextualized within the frame of autobiographical writing, the relation to memory and imagination, and the interactions with readers. Finally, I explore ways in which language reveals its multi-dimensionality (across pre-language, language, and post-language) in Barghouti's writings.

Barghouti's reconfiguration of the human body and language will be explored through a hybrid of Jean-François Lyotard's "incredulity toward metanarratives"[231] and Edward Said's understanding of beginning as it exists through the "interplay between the new and the customary."[232] There are a few common points that bind Lyotard and Barghouti in relation to the concept of writing – the role of the 'child' figure, and the link between origin and beginning. An unpublished manuscript by Barghouti evokes Lyotard's call for postmodernist knowledge.[233] In the short manuscript,[234] Barghouti refers to Lyotard's understanding of the postmodern as "writing in *search* of rules"[235] as opposed to the modernist view of "writing in accordance with rules."[236] Lyotard, thus, understands the modern as the way of establishing legitimacy to modes of knowledge by asserting a lineage to a preconceived, grand narrative. The postmodern, on the other hand, allows one to question this established legitimacy, the discourse that it is based on, as well as the institution that conceives of it.[237] Barghouti asserts that the pursuit of new rules does not negate the original ones. In other words, uncovering new depths does not discredit the *status quo*, but rather acknowledges them and moves beyond them. Indirectness in a narrative and its transformation leads "all the rules of the

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[231] Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, xxiv.
[232] Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1975), xiii.
[233] I am grateful to Dr. al-Shaikh for providing me with the unpublished text. As he mentions in his PhD dissertation, the manuscript was found in Barghouti's office at *Bayt al-Shiʿr* ("Beyond the Last Twilight", 40).
[234] Hussein Barghouti, "Bayn al-shiʿr wa al-falsafa," *Unpublished manuscript.*
For more on this see al-Shaikh, "Beyond the Last Twilight," 40.
[235] "الكتابة بحثاً عن قواعد."
Barghouti, "Bayn al-shiʿr." Italics mine.
[236] "الكتابة بناءً على قواعد."
Ibid.
[237] Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, xxiii-xxiv.

game to be overturned sometimes."[238] It is this unwillingness to reach a definition in critical thought or literary practice and the possibility of creating shifts in knowledge, writing rules, and language that I find most emblematic of the way in which the views of Lyotard and Barghouti coincide.

On a more specific thematic matter, Lyotard's works attest to an interest in the figure of 'the child' as a potent stage in life. On the one hand, Lyotard directly addresses children, for example in his collection of essays *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, *The Postmodern Explained to Children*. Later the "to Children" was dropped from the English title. Although the child here is the addressee:

> the promise of the French title to "explain to children" what adults find obscure is surely ironic and not to be taken literally. It will not have explained the postmodern. Rather, it will have shown why it is necessary to approach the philosophical questions raised by postmodernity with patience and with the mind of the child. For childhood is the season of the mind's possibilities and of the possibility of philosophy.[239]

Here we see how childhood is not solely perceived of as a chronological phase in life, but as a *methodological* way of reading and conceptualizing by going beyond known articulations and rules of society.

Lyotard and Said share a similar conception of beginnings. While Said's use is more technical and involves the initiation of writing, Lyotard's is more conceptual. But for the two scholars the interplay between the 'origin' and breaking away from it is what defines beginnings. For Lyotard, beginnings are at the centre of what he conceives of as "Postmodern knowledge."[240] In *The Postmodern Condition* he defines this knowledge as a condition that takes difference and dissension as its fore. What is fundamental for the postmodern is not

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[238] "تنقلب قواعد اللعبة كلها احياناً."
Barghouti, "Bayn al-shiʿr."
[239] Jean-François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, trans. Don Barry, Bernadette Maher, et. al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
[240] Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition,* xxv.

"the expert's homology" but rather the "inventor's paralogy."[241] The difference between the two is understood here as the separation between origin and beginning. Beginning, as seen through "paralogy,"[242] is not entirely dissimilar to its ancestral lineage (origin) and thus retains homologous attributes. However, it moves beyond shared similarities to assume new functions. The expert, being the source of origin, is subordinate to the inventor, whose aim it is to discover things anew, leading to a beginning. Although Said and Lyotard do not engage directly with issues related to the body, their conceptions on language and beginnings are read here through the frame of the body. As mentioned in the introduction, both theorists present their arguments, which as utilized in this chapter, through bodily terminologies and relations. Forging such a reading lens, which reads both case study and theories through the proposed methodology (the body), allows for an appreciation for the ability to test connections between theories and new ways of framing them.

The concept of beginnings as used in this chapter also draws from some of Said's commentaries on the subject in his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. Said understands a beginning as "an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment…"[243] This spiral relation (through return and repetition as opposed to linearity) marks a beginning as "*the first step in the intentional production of meaning*."[244] The beginnings of any literary work, as Said conceives it, are based on the intention and method used by the author to produce the text and its meanings. Looking beyond the "mimetic representation"[245] and into a new beginning, intention confines the literary work within the act of writing. Although a single act, writing is a search for endless possibilities

[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Said, *Beginnings*, xiii.
[244] Ibid., 5. Italics his. "By *intention* I mean an appetite at the beginning intellectually to do something in a characteristic way-either consciously or unconsciously, but at any rate in a language that always (or nearly always) shows signs of the beginning intention in some form and is always engaged purposefully in the production of meaning" (Ibid, 12).
[245] Ibid., 11.

that include the production of meanings, different techniques of writing, mistakes, and inconsistencies.[246] This understanding of meaning production can be extended to include Barghouti's written works as well as his dialogues with his son. Barghouti's goal of writing a poem that does not look like a poem is intentional, to invite new modes and methods of writing where bodily experiences, such as stuttering, and repetitions, afterthoughts, and footnotes become part and parcel of the poem itself (see section 4.7). As will be seen in the examples, the writing intention that Said speaks of is also applicable to Barghouti's dialogues with his son. The dialogues, as will be argued, do not only represent memories whose emotional and personal significance Barghouti aimed to capture. They are also linguistic exercises that reveal Barghouti's methods of literary innovation and highlight his need to discover new modes of expression. In other words, writing about these interactions represents both a registration of personal experiences and a critique of writing.

An early distinction that Said makes in his book is between the two oft-confused concepts of beginning and origin.[247] While the latter entails a sense of passivity, beginning, on the other hand, suggests a movement, i.e. an active process. According to Said, this beginning thus reverts to earlier phases, echoing Lyotard's continuous interplay between origin and rupture from origin to form a beginning.

The link between the body, origin, and beginning is portrayed in Barghouti's contemplation of a Palestinian saying: "The olives continue to live in their oil."[248] Barghouti writes:

> أحبُّ هذا التعبير: "مدّ الزيتون في الزيت." سمعته، أوَّل مرَّة، في الانتفاضة الأولى، في رام الله، في شارع خال، بعد انتهاء "جنازة" طفل استشهد. لا أحد في الشارع، وكنت عائداً إلى البيت، فرأيت عجوزاً تلبس ثوباً فلاحياً مطرَّزاً، يشبه لوحة مرسومة بالخيوط والإبر...بدأت تغنِّي:
>
> "يخليلك الله حجر رخام
> لا ينزاح ولا ينقام

[246] Ibid., 11-12.
[247] "As consistently as possible I use *beginnings* as having the more active meaning, and *origin* the more passive one: thus "X *is the origin of* Y," while "The beginning A *leads to* B."" (Ibid., 6).
[248] Barghouti, *Sa'akūn*, 62-63.

لا برغبة الحسَّاد ولا بنيّة الحكام
يخليلك الله حجر البيت
ويمدّ سنين طويلة في عمرك،
مدّ الزيتون في الزيت."[249]

> I admire this expression: 'the olives continue to live in their oil.' I heard it for the first time on the street in Ramallah during the first Intifada. The street was empty. A 'funeral' of a martyred child had just ended. There was no one in the street, and I was going back home. I saw an old lady wearing a traditional embroidered dress (*thawb*), which resembles a painting drawn with threads and needles. She started to sing:
> "May God grant you a marble rock
> That does not get moved or tumbled
> Neither by the desire of jealous people nor by the intention of tyrants
> May God grant you the rock of the house (May God keep your house safe)
> And add long years to your age,
> Like how the life of olives is extended in their oil."

The above passage conveys ideas and themes that are characteristic of Barghouti's writing, such as the figure of the child, the political-historical setting of the first Intifada, the empty street, the embroidered dress, and the song as a mode of expression – all addressed in the previous chapter. What is relevant to the discussion at hand is the link between the reference to the death of the child, the last line of the song, and Barghouti's conceptualization of death after his own diagnosis with Lymphoma – the three are emblematic of the origin-beginning proposition.

This incident triggers both beginnings and ends. The abrupt end of the child's young life, the prayers of the old lady who is nearing her end, and her prayers for Barghouti's prolonged life juxtapose the reality of death and an absolute end. Through her prayers, the woman calls for continuation. She prays for the elongation of Barghouti's life just as the existence of the olive (the origin) is extended through that of the olive oil (the beginning).

Years later, and after his diagnosis with cancer and return to his village, Barghouti recalls this incident and utilizes it to frame his own relation to death. While his life is being cut short because of his illness, Barghouti manages to extend his existence onto new entities

[249] Ibid.

and bodies. The first parallel that he creates to the olive-olive oil relation from the women's song is that of the mountain-olive oil:

وإذا كان الزيتون يمتدُّ في زيته، فإنّ الجبل يمتدُّ في زيتونه.[250]

And if the olives live on in their oil, then the mountain lives on in its olives.

Barghouti stands between origins and beginnings. Olives are 'the origins' of olive oil, and the oil represents a paralogous entity that resembles its origin but takes on a new shape. This origin, however, is in itself the beginning to another origin, that of the mountain. In order for trees to exist, the mountain needs to exist. In asserting this intrinsic relation between origins and beginnings, Barghouti disturbs any initial starting point (i.e. origin). Instead, every origin is conceived of as an initiation, thus a beginning, and no beginning can start without an origin.

Continuing this line of thought, which he calls *khurrīfiyya jabaliyya*[251] "a mountainous fable," Barghouti turns his attention from the natural bodies of mountains and trees to the human bodies of himself and his son. He concludes:

...ستمتد خريفيتي في "زيتي"، أعني، مثلاً، في ابني الصغير، آثر.[252]

…my fable will live on in 'my oil.' I mean, for example, in my small son, Āthar.

Looking at the narration stylistically, one can notice a circularity that starts with the figure of the martyred child whose early demise initiates a narrative. The narrative in itself takes on another conceptual form in Barghouti's second narration of his experience in the mountain after his return to his village. Nature is portrayed as a generator of beginnings, and eventually the narration leads to the figure of another child, Āthar, whose present and future life is a beginning that was generated by Barghouti's origin. Barghouti does not call this thinking a *khurāfa*, but rather uses the diminutive form, a *khurrīfiyya*. Instead of a "grand

[250] Ibid., 63.
[251] Ibid., 64.
[252] Ibid.

narrative" that holds within itself a grandiose understanding of life and a link between the dying body of Barghouti and the larger body of nature, Barghouti establishes this connection through a small and personal narration, or to use Lyotardian vocabulary, a "petit récit" (little narrative).[253] This narration is not pre-conceived and takes shape through the process of thinking, and over a period of time (first Intifada – Post-diagnosis). It, furthermore, includes different participants: the children, the old lady, nature, and Barghouti himself.

The extension is, according to Barghouti, a process and a movement. For example, the oil retains an essentiality that overlaps with and is traced back to the olive, but it also propagates a change in form and characteristics. Taken separately, the olive tree, the father (Hussein), and the mountain represent sites of origins to their respective forms of life. However, the link between origins and beginnings is one of continuation and transformation. This extension means that the beginnings (the oil, Āthar, and Barghouti) that are attached to their 'origins' share many characteristics with them but retain their specificities. The bottom line is that in beginnings, there is a continuation that incorporates a break.

2.2 Beginnings and autobiographical writings

The following sections explore Barghouti's ideas on beginnings in his autobiographies. Starting with the stylistic beginnings of the actual texts, I explore the use of 'language games' as a way of linking memory and imagination in the narratives. I end with the reader-writer relation that Barghouti initiates, as exemplary of a language game that reconfigures the autobiographic as an 'act' rather than a 'pact.' Beginnings can be read in Barghouti's autobiographical writings as a stylistic technique as well as a literary leitmotif,

[253] Lyotard argues that these little narratives are in direct conflict with the grand narratives which assume a sense of pre-conceived knowledge and are based on the notion of consensus. Through using the concept of 'language games' Lyotard further argues that little narratives are shaped through the performativity of language-thus, attributing a sense of innovation and change to these narratives (see, Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 60-67). For more on the Lyotardian meaning of "little narrative," see: Tony Purvis, "Little Narrative," in *The Lyotard Dictionary,* ed. Stuart Sim (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 133-135.

which negotiate the roles of language, time, and the body in the creation of the narrative. Looking at beginnings as a technique, one sees that the two opening sentences in Barghouti's autobiographies introduce the two central events in the books. *al-Ḍawʾ*, which revolves around Barghouti's on-going conversations with a Sufi figure called Barry, starts with:

التقيت به: صوفي من قونية، تركيا، من طائفة "الدراويش الدوَّارين"، من أتباع، مولانا جلال الدين الرومي الذي سنَّ الرقص لهم وله.[254]

> I met him: A Sufi from Konya, Turkey, from the confession of 'the whirling dervishes,' the followers of our Master Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, for whom (he and them) dancing was decreed.

The second autobiography, *Saʾakūn,* which narrates his return to his childhood village, opens with:

بعد ثلاثين عاماً أعود إلى السكن في ريف رام الله...نفيت نفسي، طوعاً، عن "بدايتي" فيه، واخترت المنفى، وأنا ممن يتقنون "البدايات"، وليس "النهايات"، وعودتي، بالتالي، "نهاية" غير متقنة.[255]

> After thirty years, I return to live in the countryside of Ramallah. I have voluntarily exiled myself from my 'beginning' in it, and I chose exile. For I am one of those who master 'beginnings,' but not 'ends.' My return is, thus, an unmastered 'end'.

While Barghouti begins stylistically with the two central themes in his books, meeting the Sufi and returning to the village, the two sentences portray events and actions that start *in medias res*. The verbs 'met' and 'return' drop the reader in the midst of the events, without any background information. The preamble and post-amble narratives of these 'beginnings' are gradually added, by embroidering multiple layers during the course of reading. These techniques of situating the reader in an unfamiliar narration and the enjambment between times, memories, and episodes are revealing of Barghouti's disapproval of a linear and fixed narrative that organizes one's life and memories in a chronological order.[256] Beginnings here

[254] Baroughti, *al- Ḍawʾ*, 5.
[255] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn,* 35.
[256] Barghouti exemplifies in his literary works what he argued for in his criticism. As was explained in the previous chapter, the interplay between the familiar and the unfamiliar is a way of carving a new artistic taste for the author himself as well as the readers (see section 1.7).

are chronological, spatial, emotive, and are, most importantly, anchored by the body: the growing child (Āthar) and the dying adult (Hussein) fuel these movements between spaces and across times in the two texts.

2.3 Language – Memory

Besides stylistic beginnings, literary beginnings are traced in Barghouti's works by highlighting episodes that add complexities to the chronological movement of time, and investigate the relations between memory and language. In short, it is through language that relations between past and present, memory and imagination, and father and son are charted in Barghouti's autobiographies. In her article on Palestinian memoires, Terri Deyoung asks a crucial question regarding the link between memory and language:[257] "can memories exist without the act of verbal witness?"[258] The question emerges from the root *dh-k-r*, the root of the word for *memory* in Arabic (*dhākira*) as well as the verbs to remember (*yatadhakkar*) and to utter and mention (*yadhkur*). The idea of looking at autobiographical works as a "testimonial"[259] (utterings) is interesting, particularly in the sense of using these literary works as validated sources of history and societal commentary.

This act of expressing memories through language (autobiographical writing) bridges the gap between the personal and the collective, making an individual's specific experience available to a wider audience. It also situates the literary in relation to other political, religious, and social aspects of life, as the author connects his/her personal story to that of the world he/she lives in. This double meaning of the root *dh-k-r* provides the key to understanding the interactions between father and son in Barghouti's writings. This relation encompasses past remembrance through the father and linguistic creation through the son.

[257] Terri Deyoung explains in the beginning of her article on Palestinian memoires that many scholars have often overlooked the complex role that memory plays on notions like identity, nostalgia, and the self. Terri DeYoung, "The Disguises of the Mind: Recent Palestinian Memoirs." *Review of Middle East Studies* (2017): 1-17.
[258] Ibid, 3.
[259] Ibid.

Barghouti uses language as a tool to rebuild past memories, whereas the son's 'future' memories are captured as they are being shaped by his language formation during his childhood. Through his son's utterances, the father's memory lives on.

In remembering childhood, Barghouti does not only use language as a medium for transporting memories. Language is also used to create a space for imagination. The reality of living, which is also portrayed through memories, is reconfigured through imagination (see section 1.4). This interplay between memories and imagination, which is channelled through language, unsettles, on its part, the linearity of time and space. Imagination created out of memories functions as a beginning and a departure that gets inspired by the past, but does not merely mirror it. In the last section of *al-Ḍaw'*, and after taking the reader past many anecdotes and philosophical imageries, Barghouti presents what can be dubbed his commentary on autobiographical writing in relation to memory, time, and space. He explains that while historicity affects the flow of life, its representation in writing blurs its chronological unfolding. Barghouti asks:

...فالزمن لكلِّ من يمتلك "معرفة مرتَّبة"، متى حدث هذا الحدث أو ذاك؟ لا أدري، أعني، عندما أتأمَّل ذاكرتي، بأنَّ الأشياء تحدث "بعد بعضها"، في تسلسل زمني ما، ولكل هذا التسلسل "ملفٌّ" محفوظ في الذاكرة، لكن القلب له "ترتيب" آخر...فالقلب برتِّب "أثاثه" حسب مدى أهميَّة أي حدث بالنسبة إليه، ضارباً بعرض الحائط كلَّ "نظام الزمن السائد."[260]

> Is time, for anyone who has 'organized knowledge,' reducible to enquiring when this or that event took place? I don't know, I mean…when I reflect on my memory, things happen 'one after the other,' in a certain temporal sequence. But this sequence is a 'file' that is saved in memory. But the heart, however, has a different 'arrangement.'…The heart arranges its 'furniture' according to the importance it ascribes to any given event, forcefully sidelining the entirety of the 'prevalent temporal system.'

Instead of providing his views on time and space in relation to memory at the beginning of his book, Barghouti presents this 'methodological' approach as an epilogue to his work. Moreover, in the act of literary creation, it too comes at the end, namely as a

[260] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 175.

thought that is reached through the act of writing. For Barghouti, the heart, which forms the source of narration, is the organ that plays with time by jumping from one episode to another, as well as being in charge of space. It arranges its "furniture" according to relevance, giving importance not to chronological sequence. It is narration that charts the understanding of how memory operates, how time unfolds, and how experiences are shaped through language and writing.

In order to highlight how language influences memory and narration, the following section will trace an object of memory in Barghouti's first autobiography: the rabbit (*al-arnab*). The rabbit here is taken as a simple linguistic unit (a word) that denotes a specific shape and reference (an animal). The rabbit features at several points in Barghouti's life, as evident in his writings, and its recurrence highlights the pertinence of how a word can trigger memories from multiple times and spaces.

The first instance is when Barghouti meets Barry, the Sufi from Konya. Barry says:

"كتبت قصة صغيرة...ولو كنت مكانك لأحببت الاستماع لها." ضحك، وفتَّش في جيب معطفه وأخرج ورقة مبتلَّة ممزقة. "وأنا عائد اليوم إلى بيتي التقيت صديقاً قديماً: أرنباً، قلت له: تعال معي، عندي هدية فخمة تليق بك: جزرة."[261]

> 'I wrote a little story… and If I were you, I would have loved to listen to it.' He laughed, and searched in the pockets of his coat, and took out a wet and torn piece of paper. 'While on my way home today, I met an old friend: a rabbit. I told him: come with me, I have a luxurious gift that suits you: a carrot.'

Instead of simply narrating to his readers what Barry was like, Barghouti invites them to enter the Sufi's world to get to know him through his story. Barry's short story about the rabbit reveals his way of thinking and the effects that his simple story had on people like Barghouti. Listening to Barry's story awakens in Barghouti two memories about rabbits. The first takes the reader back to Barghouti's childhood when he lived with his family in Beirut. Although his father was always scared for him to go to the beach and the cinema, Barghouti

[261] Ibid., 33-34.

would sneak out to the cinema after his father went to bed. In front of the cinema, the child (Barghouti) used to find a Shiite fortune-teller sitting with a wooden box that had two small rabbits on it. One was black and brought bad fortune, while the white one brought good fortune.[262] Barghouti recounts another memory of the rabbit from when he was working in Amman. His officemate, whom people called 'the Minister,' used to tell a story about a rabbit that lived on top of the mountain and threw rocks at 'the Minister's' house.[263]

These narrations and memories emerge as a consequence of listening to Barry's story. This movement between the story of Barry and triggered memories of Beirut and Amman defy sequential time that is rearranged by the heart. It furthermore elucidates the power of language – exemplified by the word 'rabbit' – to weave a web of narration and memories. Barghouti's acceptance to engage with Barry's 'unusual' language is what allows him to decipher the Sufi's intention. Barghouti concludes that one word has multiple meanings for different people:

كلمة "أرنب" تعني عند "بري": "صديقاً قديماً" ... وعندي تعني أرنبين هنديين عند قارئة بخت شيعية، وعند "معالي الوزير" تعني أرنباً يسكن ليلاً في رأس الجبل ويدحرج حجارة على بيت معاليه. ونتيجة لتعدُّد عوالم المعنى، لا يمكن لأحد أن يفهم أحداً، سوء فهم شامل..فاللغة موهوبة في قدرتها على سوء التفاهم.[264]

> The word 'rabbit' denotes for Barry: 'an old friend'…and for me, it means two Indian rabbits by the Shiite fortune-teller. And to 'his highness the Minister', it means a rabbit that lives on top of the mountain at night and rolls rocks towards the house of his highness. Due to the multitude worlds of meaning, no one can understand anyone. It is a case of a total misunderstanding…Language is gifted with the ability to induce misunderstandings.

By taking one word as a metonym, Barghouti shows how language has many meanings that are achieved through memory. One word creates "worlds of meaning" that are based on the memories, imaginations, and language of different people. Barghouti similarly notes that these diverse meanings lead to misunderstandings. Instead of reading this passage

[262] Ibid., 38.
[263] Ibid., 40-41.
[264] Ibid, 44-45.

as a declaration of defeat, one should approach it as encouragement to explore beyond preconceptions. It is, in other words, an invitation to conceive of language as a game in which different levels unlock new meaning. The rabbit, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, is Barghouti's way of calling for a multiple reading of political and literary commitment.

Language and childhood share a playful essence. A child masters language by first assembling parts of speech in ungrammatical ways, without perceived or fixed wisdoms. The way I would like to approach these utterances is to look at them in action and see how language and memories are bodily performances and represent moments of beginnings. The main feature of childhood is acquiring knowledge through play.[265] It is in fact not only in childhood but also at all levels of education that Barghouti considers play imperative. Playing, in education and knowledge acquisition, shifts power roles between teacher-student, since it posits, against the seriousness of classrooms and the power position that the teacher claims in delivering a "lifeless, pre-made, dictated, boring, and monotonous, knowledge,"[266] an ability to improvise and come up with different and indefinite moulds of knowledge.

The ability to improvise and create new moulds of knowledge is in line with Ludwig Wittgenstein's conception of language game. It is in its "use"[267] that a word acquires meaning. Use, here, refers not to the way a word is utilized in the constructed sentence, but rather to how language is performed.[268] Lyotard frames the concept within postmodernist

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[265] Jean Piaget utilizes in his seminal work *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* 'beginnings' to describe language and knowledge acquisitions in children through imitations and play. The usefulness of play, as Piaget understands it, is that it "proceeds by relaxation of the effort at adaptation and by maintenance or exercise of activities for the mere pleasure of mastering them and acquiring thereby a feeling of virtuosity or power." Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood,* trans. C. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson (London: Routledge, 1951), 89.

[266] "...[معرفة] "مينة"، "جاهزة"، ملقّنة"، مملّة"، وروتينية."
Barghouti, "al-Rashāqa al-dhihniyya," 105. For a reading of Barghouti's article along a Foucault/Baudelairian/Kantian reading of enlightenment and modernity, see Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, "A Palestinian Tale of Enlightenment: Towards a Foucault-Kantian Geography of Meaning," *Third Text* 20, issue 3-4, (May/ July 2006).

[267] "For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Basil: Blackwell, 1958), 20.

[268] As Peter Redding explains in his reading of Wittgenstein's 'language games': "If one thematizes the contextually located *act* of saying something rather than the abstracted *sentential text* of what is said, then one

thinking, where language games become part and parcel of the production[269] of knowledge. Language games are linked to social, economic, and technological concerns. For Lyotard, "the social bond" is imperative for any game to take place, since it implies the players' understanding of the rules of the game. "Every utterance" thus becomes "a 'move' in a game."[270] It is through language games that power is negotiated and one's position in society is assumed.[271] In other words, Lyotard asserts the social 'reality' of these games, which will be read in Barghouti's works through his relation to his society, son, and his illness. Barghouti's linguistic interactions thus reveal insights on individual-societal relations, political tensions, and his deployment of play as a way of creating new modes of literary expressions, as in the example of Laylā and Tawba (see section 2.8).

2.4 Reader – Writer: From 'pact' to 'act'

This shift from language observation by Wittgenstein to Lyotard's general use of language as being part of social and economic modern interactions informs Barghouti's use of these games in the author-reader relationship in his autobiographical writings. Beyond the classical adoption of Phillipe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact,"[272] I read Barghouti's

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sees the making of assertions as a kind of *social practice* which can be done properly or wrongly. But this now lifts the restrictions which the representationalist view of language typically places on the sorts of sentences which can be true or which can embody and convey knowledge." Peter Redding "Habermas, Lyotard, Wittgenstein: Philosophy at the Limits of Modernity." *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 14, issue 1 (1986): 11.

[269] The word *produce* refers to Lyotard's argument that knowledge in the age of technology has become a commensurable entity and not an aim in itself. Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, 4-5.

[270] Ibid., 10.

[271] "I am not claiming that the *entirety* of social relations is of this nature… But there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist," Ibid., 15.

[272] Lejeune's autobiographical pact refers to the authenticity of the narration that the author declares to the reader. The author underlines this truthfulness by a link in identity between himself and the 'I' in the text. The pact is fully asserted by what Lejeune calls the "I, the undersigned" (8) whose identity as the author and the narrator is claimed by the signature (11). See Phillipe Lejeune, "Autobiographical Pact." in *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). A reading of Phillipe Lejeune's autobiographical pact is technically not possible in regard to Barghouti's second autobiographical work. Barghouti's autobiography did not exist in a book format until after his death. The first two chapters were published instead in two issues of *al-Karmel* journal, and the third was published posthumously. The title of the last chapter was chosen by one of Barghouti's students. Mersal makes a similar argument regarding *al-Ḍaw'*. Mentioning the name of the author and a subtext that declares the book to be an autobiography does not particularly make it autobiographical (108). Such comments suggest that technical

autobiographical writing in light of Wittgenstein and Lyotard's placement of knowledge and language in the realm of interaction. Instead of a 'pact,' it is thus an 'autobiographical *act*'[273] where the reader is invited to participate in the literary production and reception of Barghouti's texts. *al-Ḍawʾ* is thus an endeavour to recount personal encounters with marginal figures and to regard philosophical and psychological issues. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, the Palestinian literary scholar, identifies the lack of psychological exploration and the focus on external movements in society as weak points in Arabic self-writing.[274] More specifically, Mersal notes in her article on *al-Ḍawʾ* that Barghouti's autobiography diverts from the common expectations in Arabic autobiographies that revolve around the figure of the Arab who travels to the West to pursue an education.[275] In the same light, one can read Barghouti's *Saʾakūn* as an atypical 'return narrative' as it opens post-journey (in contrast with Murid Barghouti's return in *I Saw Ramallah*, which opens with his crossing of the Jordan River and then moves on to narrating other memories).[276] Barghouti's text, in this sense, establishes a beginning in

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autobiographical traits (such as recording and travel narration) do not always point towards an automatic acceptance of a pact on the side of the author.

[273] The term used here does not necessarily follow Elizabeth W. Bruss' use of the term in her book *Autobiographical Acts*. Bruss' understanding of the term situates it within the general knowledge of the readers and author about the 'rules' of writing autobiographies (as a genre). The acts happen when the writer breaks some of these rules. Subsequently, these shifts in the rules represent an act that invites the reader to participate. As Bruss explains, "a reader of autobiography has the right to try to fit the text to his expectations or to complain when he finds something that seems pragmatically unintelligible" (11). The way the use of the term in this section diverts from Bruss' use, is that the latter's proposed rules are not the basis of Barghouti's autobiography. For example, rule 3 asserts that "Whether or not what is reported can be discredited…the autobiographer purports to believe in what he asserts" (Ibid). Barghouti's first autobiography is based on this sense of ambiguity, uncertainty, and inexplicability that prevails to the end of the text. Barghouti does not purport to believe what he is presenting, and invites the reader to experiment for him/herself if they can understand/believe what is being said (see below for an example). Elizabeth W. Bruss. *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[274] See Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Fann al-sīra* (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996), 113-114.

[275] Mersal gives examples that include Hishām Sharābī, Abdul-Wahhāb al-Misīrī, and Raḍwā ʿAshūr. At the backdrop of portraying the external struggles of moving to another place, including difficulties with visa, obtaining a scholarship, the journey to the new place, or descriptions and complaints about America, the narrator has from the start "a split identity" (*huwiyya munfaṣima*). The analysis of text follows this question of what will happen to this fragmentation throughout Barghouti's encounters with the Sufi, Barry. Mersal, "Blue Light," 110.

[276] The first chapter of Mourid Barghouti's autobiography is entitled 'The bridge'. Barghouti, "al-Jisr," in *Raʾayt Rāmallāh*, 5-41.

Arabic autobiographical writing that sheds light on the relation between the self and society and its effects on the psychological and internal state of the 'I.'[277]

Barghouti seems to be aware of the 'strangeness' of the characters in his work, and particularly Barry's often-incomprehensible analogies and thoughts. The last few pages of the book represent Barghouti's vignettes vis-à-vis those that might not understand or accept his work.[278] It is as if he predicted the critique of the text as too personal, philosophical, and inattentive to the required literary discourse. The following excerpt elucidates the need for an 'autobiographical *act'* and an engagement on the side of the reader in the game of narration using the body and word. Barghouti asks Barry to explain to him what the meaning of 'the blue light' is:

قلت: "قل لي بوضوح: ما الضوء الأزرق؟"
قال: "ستصله بطريقتين: إمّا بالرقص أو بالعقل"
....
"...تجاوز نفسك، إما أن تتجاوزها بالوجود أو بالمفاهيم".
-"كيف أتجاوز نفسي بالوجود؟"
قال: "عندما تنفجر كطاقة زرقاء في الكون وتعيد الضوء الأزرق عارياً نحو بيته".
-"بالرقص، مثلاً؟"
-"نعم".
-"وكيف أصله بالمفاهيم؟"
-"بكلام يفيض منِّي عليك ومنك عليَّ، حتى تتعلَّم أن تفيض من نفسك على نفسك"
...
هذا نموذج على "كلامه"، ومن العبث محاولة إيصاله لمن لا يلتقط المعنى بقدرة عرّاف أو جنِّ.[279]

'Tell me clearly: what is the blue light?'
[Barry] said: 'you will reach it in one of two ways: either through dancing or via the intellect [ʿ*aql*]'

[277] Beginnings can be studied through the content of the autobiography, as well as stylistically by examining the form a 'beginning' takes in the text. An example of a stylistic approach to beginning is Stefan Wild's chapter in *Writing the Self*: *Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*. By beginnings, Wild refers to the physical, concrete starting of the text. Wild identifies three types of beginnings in autobiographies. The three types are: 1) the "metatextual" text that precedes the actual autobiography, 2) the starting part of the "autobiographical text proper" (83), and 3) the first memory which implements a duality between the present state and that of childhood. See Stefan Wild, "Searching for Beginnings in Modern Arabic Autobiography," in *Writing the Self*: *Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1998).

[278] This section can be most closely defined as the first type of beginning in Wild's chapter. Some differences are at play here though. First of all, this 'explanation' does not come at the beginning of the text as a separate section. Second, Barghouti's writing is not necessarily directed towards an equal kind of reading. One needs to have more than literary reading skills to grasp the meaning of the writing.

[279] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw',* 174.

…

‘transcend yourself, either through existence [*wujūd*] or through concepts.’

- ‘How do I transcend myself through *wujūd*?’

he said: “when you burst like blue energy in the universe and restore the blue light, naked, to its home.’[280]

- ‘by dancing, for example?’
- ‘yes’
- ‘and how can I reach it through concepts?’
- ‘through speech [*kalām*] that overflows from me onto you and from you onto me, until you learn to overflow from yourself onto yourself.’

This is just a sample of ‘his speech,’ and it is futile to attempt delivering it to someone who does not capture meaning with the ability of a seer or *jinn*.

Using words such as *wujūd* and *kalām*, Barry explains the ways in which the blue light can be reached through body and word. First, it is through exploring the limits of *wujūd* and the explosion of the human body beyond its formation, such as through dancing.[281] The second way is through *kalām*, in which the body of language is challenged and explored beyond the limits of its speaker. Meaning is dissected into multiple pieces that can then be rearranged to arrive at new meanings. The ‘blue light’ is reached through the conversation between the two speakers, once the speakers manage to rise above their own language.

Barghouti[282] recognizes the difficulty of explaining what Barry means by the blue light, since “his speech is undecipherable.”[283] Barghouti’s ambiguity here shifts the

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[280] Barghouti uses this sentence in an article on the vertical and the horizontal in al-Mutanabbī’s poetry. While analyzing al-Mutanabbi’s take on living in danger and having to leave different places, Barghouti writes:

"عندما يتحول "المكان" إلى قوة طاردة، ويصل الطرد مداه، "أفقيا"، تتجه الروح نحو "الأعلى"، وتحلق، نحو طريق التبانات، فيرجع النور الأزرق عاريا نحو بيته الذي جاء منه"

This comment, though an explanation of al-Mutanabbi’s case, summarizes Barghouti’s relation to space and body. From the movement on the surface; i.e. the horizontal movement and existence in space, one can achieve a ‘higher’ movement that enlarges the physicality of space. Earth and sky become another layer of the surface-depth relation. The ability of the body to transform into a flying object that extends the confinements of actual geographical contours decorates Barghouti’s literary works.

Hussein Barghouti. “Taʾammulāt fī rūḥ al-asad: ʿAn jadaliyyat al-ufuqī wa al-ʿamūdī fī shiʿr al-Mutanabbī,” *al-Shuʿarāʾ*, no. 2 (Autumn 1998), 140.

[281] Following al-ṭarīqa al-mawlawiyya, dancing is central to Barry’s life and conception of life. The whirling movements are used as a medium of reaching the metaphysical (God).

[282] It is not only difficult to understand the meaning behind what Barry says and what Barghouti experiences, but also to translate. In his translation of the text, al-Shaikh points out certain words, phrases, and names that are tricky to render in English. Barghouti plays with both signification and form (for examples see al-Shaikh, “Beyond the Last Twilight”, 210-215).

[283] "كلامه طلسم"

autobiography from the realm of representation to the realm of participation. The reader is an interlocutor; he/she is an active participant in the act of reading "the metamorphoses of an idea called, *al-Ḍaw' al-Azraq*."[284] In order to be a participant, one has to be open to surpassing one's own body, to explode and reassemble, and join this call of transformation that Barry is proposing. Only those who approach these words with the abilities of a seer or *jinn* can understand them.

The elaborate and mutli-dimensional discussion of the different rabbits returns at the end of the autobiography and is emblematic of the meaning of the text. Barghouti writes:

سألني أخي، فادي، وأنا أكتب هذا النص: "ماذا يربط أرنباً عند قارئة بخت شيعية، بأرنب في ذهن مصاب بعقدة العظمة في عمَّان، بأرنب في قصَّة لصوفي في "سياتل"، بنصٍّ عن الأرانب تكتبه الآن؟"، قلت: "يمكنك أن تسمِّي ما يربط كلَّ هذه الأشياء معاً بالضوء الأزرق."[285]

> As I was writing this text, my brother Fadi asked me: "what connects a Shiite fortune teller's rabbit to a rabbit in the mind of someone struck with a superiority complex in Amman, with another in the narrative of a Sufi in 'Seattle,' with the text that you are writing now about rabbits?" I said: 'you can call what ties all of these things together the blue light.'

The different rabbits are not simply part of a narration, they are key to deciphering Barghouti's difficult text. The word 'rabbit' highlights Barghouti's critical view on language and the way it allows us to move between spaces, times, and people. The misunderstanding that Barghouti alludes to in regard to the multiple meanings and associations of words in language is how one can explore new meanings, i.e. language games. Understanding the meaning of the text and its title (*The Blue Light*) is contingent on participating in language games.

Al-Ḍaw', however, ends on a note that seems to challenge this call for reader participation. In order to preserve his core and drive people away from his centre, Barghouti

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Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw',* 174.
[284] Al-Shaikh, "Beyond the Last Twilight," 214.
[285] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 175.

the individual puts on a mask. The mask is thus Barghouti's pretend participation in a game that is directed, constructed, and forced on him by society. Barghouti ends by saying:

...ولكن لا، لا أقصد شيئاً، لا أعني، أسحب الآن كلامي، أعطني من فضلك...قناعاً، قناعاً سابعاً، وإلى "دون"، و"سوزان"، و"بري"، أهدي هذه الكلمات عن "الضوء الأزرق".[286]

> But no, I don't mean anything, I retract my words now, please give me…a mask, a seventh mask. To Don, Suzan, and Barry, I dedicate these words about 'the blue light.'

At first, this declaration might read as a retraction from the reader-writer game. Barghouti, however, is using again an unexpected turn in his writing to confuse the reader and bring along an unforeseen ending. The mask is utilized in Arabic literature as a means by which the poet, or the author in general, takes on a second persona that allows him/her to "speak while it eludes identification."[287] Against this backdrop of poetic freedom that the mask gives, Barghouti alludes to the forcefulness of his surroundings to adopt certain masks beyond his acceptance. The masks here are a symbol of distancing oneself from the past rather than connecting the past with the present. By declaring that he will wear the masks, Barghouti is sarcastically indicating his faux acceptance of society's rules. The dedication to his friends juxtaposes this playacting, since only these people understand him beyond the masks.

This ending should not, however, be viewed as Barghouti's break from 'the social bond.' Instead, Barghouti teases his readers by pulling and pushing the invitation to the language game, a tactic Lyotard calls "displacement." As a participant in the language game in *al-Ḍaw'*, the reader "undergoes a 'displacement,' an alteration of some kind…These 'moves' necessarily provoke 'countermoves'—and everyone knows that a countermove that is merely reactional is not a 'good' move…That is why it is important to increase displacement in the games, and even to disorient it, in such a way as to make an unexpected

[286] Ibid., 178.
[287] Muhsin al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry*, 32.

"move" eventually leading to a new statement."[288] This capering regarding the invitation is Barghouti's way of creating displacement and disorientation so that the reader's countermove is not simply reactionary to Barghouti's discourse. The reader is now given a chance to make an unexpected 'move' by willingly deciding to take part in a game that requires him/her to move away from the ordinary. What we have here, henceforth, is an autobiographical 'act' that tests the boundaries of autobiographical writing, by challenging the participation of readers and highlighting their agency.

The previous sections provided an overview of Barghouti's stylistic and literary beginnings. Through 'language games' Barghouti challenges the expectations of autobiographical writing and invites the readers to become participants in the literary act. Furthermore, the example of the 'rabbit' shows how language is central to Barghouti's conception of memory and imagination. The following sections look closer at Barghouti's approach to language particularly in relation to the body. They chart three linguistic moments in Barghouti's texts – labelled as pre-language, language, and post-language. The three layers of language here are understood as zones that develop over time and move towards different modes of thinking. They show his emphasis on the multiplicity of linguistic meanings, the relation between bodily expressions such as crying and the initiation of speaking, the ability of language to surpass its own expression, where, for example, silence becomes a technique of questioning linguistic expression. The versatility of the corporeal experience yields different and dynamic deployments of language, and subsequently of knowledge production.

2.5 Pre-language

Gestures, unaccompanied by words, play an active role in Barghouti's narration and are essential for the construction of an expressive body. The psychoanalyst Adam Philips writes in his book *The Beast in the Nursery* that children in their phase of pre-language

[288] Lyotard, *The Postmodern,* 16.

acquisition (or in their non-verbal expressions) "teach us what it is like not to be able to speak properly; and by showing us this they remind us not only of our inarticulate and virtually inarticulate selves, but also of our internal relationship with these buried, vestigial versions of ourselves."[289] Lyotard also addresses this trace of the child in the adult. The child's importance resides precisely in his or her inability to articulate, determine, and calculate, thus falling outside of the rules that are enforced on adults in society.[290] In *The Inhuman,* Lyotard proposes that "the inhumanity of the system"[291] which is disguised by the mask of development and technology is trying to render the human inhuman. Calling for a defence, Lyotard presents the child, who represents a "delay in humanity" and a delay in entering the realm of adulthood, as "eminently the human because its distress heralds and promotes things possible."[292] It is along this line of thought, which empowers the child with an emotive ability to entice a change, that the following 'crying child' excerpts from Barghouti's writing will be read.

In one of his short pieces "Dhākira ʿādiyya fī zaman ghayr ʿādī," Barghouti presents snippets from his life during the '70s and '80s in Palestine; a tense time that led to the first Intifada in 1987. Barghouti starts his piece by zooming in on a specific remembrance of a personally and collectively tense time. He writes:

(1977): مرحلة الطفل الباكي. شعري على كتفي، صندل جلد. رام الله صيفاً..حيث أنظر [الى] لوحة رخيصة لطفل أشقر، على عنقه منديل أحمر مربوط على طريقة "رعاة البقر"، شعره مسترسل ومفروق إلى الجانب، يبكي. تطلّ اللوحة ليلاً من الشبابيك، معلَّقة في البيوت والصالونات، تباع في الشوارع. تكتب المخابرات عن هذه الروح المنكسرة لشعب. مفتاح الروح هو التحوُّل من الحزن إلى الغضب، ومن الخوف إلى "إرادة الهجوم."[293]

(1977): the phase of the crying child. My hair is on my shoulders, I wear leather sandals. Ramallah in the summer… I look at a cheap painting of a blond child, with a

[289] Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (London: Faber, 1998), 47.
[290] Kirsten Locke, "Shadows of Sound: Music Pedagogy and Writing the Inaudible." (PhD diss., The University of Auckland, 2011), 99.
[291] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 2.
[292] Ibid., 4.
[293] Barghouti, "Dhākira ʿādiyya," 41.

> red scarf tied around his neck in 'cow-boy' style. His hair is loose with a side parting. He is crying. The painting peeps through windows at night. It is hung up in houses and salons, and sold on the streets. The intelligence services write about the broken soul of a population. The key of the soul is the transformation from sadness to anger, and from fear to possessing the 'will to attack.'

The first thing that one can notice in the short paragraph is the parallelism in the physical description of the twenty-three-year-old Barghouti and the child in the picture. The second is the popularity of the painting among the members of a community that is broken. While the painting does not have any financial value (it is cheap), one can stipulate that it is the child – the subject of the painting – and the emotion that he conveys that gave it value and led to its popularity. It is the power of the child to express an emotion, which the people are unable to do, that makes the painting so important.

The painting as a visual art form, an image, is a reminder of a beginning. It is both an actual beginning of life through the subject matter of the crying child, and a political and societal beginning towards emancipation, since a child crying is an openly expressed sign of "distress"[294] that signals new possibilities. An action against the occupation can happen through the emotive transformation (*al-taḥawwul*) from sadness to anger, and from fear to 'the will to attack.' Although the picture is immovable, the emotion that is portrayed through the body of the child represents what is missing and hoped to be achieved by the people. The image becomes the people's way of expressing the inexpressible.

This phenomenological relation between the being (the self) and the perceived (the matter) is addressed by Henri Bergson through the concept of images in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. One's body represents the central image through which all other images, what Bergson terms "the universe", are perceived. Although an image (an object/a matter) can exist without being perceived, transforming "presence" into "representation" signifies the

[294] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 4.

placing of oneself in relation to the object in order "to coincide with that which is unique in it as consequently inexpressible."[295] What the body is unable to express, namely the ability to cry, is compensated by the ubiquitous presence of an image that represents this form of expression.

However, Barghouti does not stop at this presence-representation level but alludes to the child's expressive body to channel the representation into an act of resistance.[296] In the same text, Barghouti shows the child's emotive power in an incident that took place years later, during the first Intifada. He recounts:

أخرج بلا نوم. شمس في محطة البنزين، فتاة أعرفها من الجامعة، صحفية تبكي، جميلة جداً وباردة، الآن عيونها حمراء: وعرفت لماذا: على مسافة قصيرة من بيتنا دماغ شاب منثور على الحائط، بقرب الجامع: لحقوه، حاصروه في الزاوية، وعن بعد متر، على الرأس! أبكي: رجع إلي الطفل الباكي! سابقاً، في الثمانينيات...اكتشفت بأن في داخلي طفلاً، في كل بشر طفل. وقفت أمام مكتبة رام الله ليلاً وقلت له، للطفل، وكنت أبكي: متأسف! لازم أقتلك! إذا بتظل عايش أنا لازم أموت! ومددت يدي في الهواء مودعاً، وانتهت قدرتي على البكاء. ها هو نفس الطفل بعينيه الحادتين يقول كيفك، وصعدنا معاً في الشمس، كنت أضحك وأبكي معاً.[297]

> I go out with no sleep. Sun in the gas station, a girl I know from university, a crying journalist, very pretty and cold. Now her eyes are red. I know why: a short distance from our home a young man's brains are splashed on the wall near the mosque. They followed him, cornered him, and from just one meter away. In the head! I cry: the crying child has returned to me! Before, in the eighties…I discovered that I have a child in me. In every human, there is a child. I stood in front of the Ramallah public library and I told him, the child, while I was crying: I am sorry! I have to kill you! If you continue to live, I have to die! And I extended my hand in the air as a goodbye, and I lost my ability to cry. Here he is, the same child with his piercing eyes saying: how are you? We ascended together in the sun. I was both laughing and crying.

In this passage, Barghouti crosses two time periods: the present where he is walking the streets of Ramallah past the murdered young man, with his brains splattered on the wall; and the past, in the early eighties, when he confronted the crying child within himself and decided to kill him to be able to continue living with the general feeling of despair and the

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[295] Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme (London, 1913), 6-7.
[296] This is similar to Lyotard's argument that technology will not be able to take over the human, since a *body* is needed in order to go through the process of thinking, resistance, and questioning of the systems (Stuart Sim, "Inhuman," in *The Lyotard Dictionary*, ed. Stuart Sim (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 105.
[297] Barghouti, "Dhākira ʿādiyya," 52.

inability to express one's emotions that overtook Palestinian life. Walking the streets in Ramallah in the present time, Barghouti is still emotionally and physically incapable of expression. As he explains in a previous passage, he and others have lost their ability to cry. However, the horrific image of the shot young man and the crying young woman awakens in him an inarticulate and yet expressive echo. Instead of running away from this primitive body,[298] Barghouti embraces its existence. He allows his inner child to appear again, which leads him to show his emotions unrestrained through crying and laughing. In other words, he gains an emotionally expressive body, represented by the inner child that remerges at the sight of the murdered young man's body.

The restoration of the laughing and crying represents a beginning of the body anew in the present. As Lyotard explains, despite the seeming delay of the child's entrance into the "adult community [the child] is also what manifests to this community the lack of humanity it is suffering from, and which calls it to be more human."[299] The adult community, as Barghouti explains, has been stripped of its ability to cry and thus to sympathize with each other and the rest of humanity.[300] In their confrontation with the actuality of living (the splattered brains of the young man), it is the child in them that provides them with the appropriate expressive language, and thus presents them with a reminder of their humanity. Barghouti is confronted with the crying young woman, and he realizes that the reason behind the crying is the splattered brains of the young man. The return to this childhood ability is gradual. The emotional expressiveness breaks through the young woman's cold features.

Crying is a primitive form of language that communicates when words are

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[298] See below for more on this primitiveness.
[299] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 4.
[300] As Barghouti explains, in the early 1980s:
"كنا بدأنا نفقد القدرة على البكاء...وفقدنا بالتدريج التعاطف."
"We had started to lose the ability to cry…and we lost incrementally [the feeling of] empathy."
Barghouti, "Dhākira ʿādiyya," 41.

insufficient. Crying in adults becomes an intrinsic characteristic that links them to this initial stage in life. Barghouti approaches the figure of the child as a figure that entices 'the human' in the form of resistance and transformation. The communicative abilities of the child are not verbal – as in the "adult community"[301] – but rather emotive, unrestrained, and incompatible with the rules of society.

2.6 Language

It is noteworthy in this passage that while the child expresses himself by crying, verbal expression starts to take shape when the child asks *kīfak* "how are you?" In this section, I will discuss this entry into the realm of speech by contrasting Barghouti's childhood with that of his son Āthar's. In doing so I will highlight the role of language as a tool for exploration and a marker for exclusion. In addition to that, the links drawn between beginnings and language games, through the examples of father-son interaction, exemplify a destabilizing act of personal and literary boundaries that forms the core of Barghouti's literary project.

It thus follows that language is not a child's first attempt at perceiving, exploring, or engaging with the world, but rather represents a different method of being in the world. The movement towards language acquisition, however, does not automatically go from pre-language to language as a pre-established system. On the contrary, language is a plane onto which one gradually treads and which one discovers. Language is both a child's way of exploring and acquiring knowledge but is in itself the object of exploration.[302] Barghouti demonstrates how these linguistic explorations are examples of beginnings:

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[301] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 4.

[302] These statements are, in the language of child development, posing a question regarding the connection between cognition and language. Research has shown that some cognitive abilities precede linguistic ones, and as Jonas Langer argues "the predominant potential influence would therefore be from cognition to language. Since language lags behind ontogenetically during most of infancy, it is less possible for it to affect cognition." ("The mosaic evolution of cognitive and linguistic ontogeny," 37). However, instead of it being simply one of "symbolic processes [which] express or represent meaning based upon the knowledge generated by cognitive

الطفل، بطبيعته الأولى، والبدئية، يرى الدنيا بطريقة "ملتوية". هذا فنٌّ. كان لوركا يقول: إنَّ الفن "تجنُّب"، كما في مصارعة الثيران.[303]

A child, through his first and instinctive nature, sees life in a 'serpentine' way. That is art. Lorca used to say: art is 'aversion,' just like in bull fighting.

Primitiveness here is synonymous with beginnings.[304] The child's intrinsically different approach is stretched to encompass the field of artistic expression. The 'serpentine way' and avoidance are movements that take child and artist away from the socially pre-set path of perception and artistic expression. They are in line with Barghouti's call for discovering new ways of reading and writing and with his aspiration to uncover the unfamiliar for himself and his readers. In the following examples, language is presented as a serpentine entity that is constructed anew by finding innovative meanings and word usage. While in the previous example the adult was required to recover his inner child, here the discovery comes through the interaction with a child. The first example concerns Āthar's construction of a narrative that is based on reconfiguring the meanings of certain words. Barghouti writes that one night:

رأى [آثر] غمّازة طائرة حمراء، تضيء وتخبو، من هذا النوع الذي يستعمله الإسرائيليون الآن لتصفيات نشطاء الانتفاضة. كانت مارقة قرب القمر...سألني: "حسين، هذه الطائرة من شو؟". "من حديد". "وهل يخاف القمر من الحديد؟". "نعم، نعم. يخاف القمر من الحديد"...من "طائرة"، و"حديد"، و"خوف"، تناسلت أسطورة "القمر الذي يخاف من الحديد." [305]

[Āthar] saw the flickering light of a red plane, shining then fading away. It is the kind [of planes] that Israelis use now to assassinate Intifada activists. It was passing by the moon…he asked me, "Hussein, this plane is made out of what?"
"Of steel."
"And is the moon afraid of steel?"

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processes," (ibid., 36) language is taken as a way of conceiving of the world, and thus as a cognitive medium in itself. Jonas Langer, "The Mosaic Evolution of Cognitive and Linguistic Ontogeny" in *Language Acquisition and Conceptual Development*, ed. Melissa Bowerman and Stephen Levinson, 19- 44 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[303] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn*, 124.

[304] "كلّ طفل ساحر بدائي"
"Every child is a primitive magician." Ibid., 118.
The word *bidʾiyya* in Arabic comes from the root b-d-' (to begin). Thus, primitiveness should be read as interconnected to the act of initiating and beginning. Therefore, I have opted to translate the word as primitive but it can also be translated as initial.

[305] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn*, 118.

> "Yes. Yes. The moon is afraid of steel."
> …From "plane," "steel," and "fear," the myth of 'the moon that fears steel' was propagated."

In another example, Barghouti writes:

> ...زارنا فرانسوا...وجد في الجبل سنبلة يابسة، أعطاها لآثر قائلاً: "هذي شو؟". فكَّر آثر قليلاً وهو يقلِّبها بين يديه، ثم أجاب: "هذه؟ لكي نقرع بها الجرس!". "أي جرس؟" "جرس العالم". "وكيف صوت جرس العالم؟". ضحك، وقلَّد صوت سيارة إسعاف كان سمعه لما زارني في مستشفى رام الله.[306]

> François[307] visited us…he found in the mountain a dried ear of wheat. He gave it to Āthar and said, "what is this?"
> Āthar thought a bit while moving it between his hands. He answered, "This? It's to ring the bell with!"
> "Which bell?"
> "The bell of the world."
> "And how does the bell of the world sound?"
> He laughed and imitated the sound of an ambulance he had heard when he visited me in the hospital in Ramallah.

In both examples, Āthar builds a 'mythic' world that takes shape through personal, political, and imaginative faculties. Words, such as plane, steels, moon, and bell in the two examples are not understood literally but figuratively, to come to new insights. The plane represents a material reality in the lives of Palestinians. However, Āthar symbolizes a larger kind of political reality in which even the moon is frightened of the plane. Although lacking detailed knowledge of the politics of Palestinian life at that time, Āthar, restores the source of frightfulness, the plane, to the material essence it is made of (the steel). In his myth of the moon that is scared of steel, nature versus occupation is framed in a celestial context that exceeds its earthly one.

In the second example, language is similarly used to create an expanded image that extends from nature (the small ear of wheat) to the larger world (the bell of the world). Embedded in this expanded imagery is the reality of the sound of the ambulance that Āthar

[306] Ibid., 124.
[307] Referring to the Palestinian director François Abu-Salem (1951-2011).

heard while visiting his father in the hospital. The sound of the ambulance represents the dual disintegration of bodies: of the people fighting against the Israeli occupation and the body of Barghouti as it lies in the hospital. In Āthar's myth, the sound goes beyond its physical realm (materiality of living) and becomes an emblem of the world (imagination). In the first example, it is the child who questions the adult while in the second anecdote, the adult is the one who poses the questions. The central point in both revolves around *questioning* as a playful act, or a game, that turns the world upside-down.

The parallelism between father and son, portrayed through each's interplay with language, highlights how language (represented through words and their meanings) could be a vehicle for exploration. But, as Barghouti shows, language can equally be used for exclusion. In order to set up this parallelism, let us take a look at an episode from Barghouti's own childhood as narrated in *al-Ḍaw'*:[308]

كنت أمشي، في جبال رام الله، نحو الينابيع، في زرقة سماء الصيف، وغبار الظهيرة، فأكتب اسمي: "حسين" في الزرقة، بأصابعي، ثمَّ أبتعد مسافة ما، وأنظر نحوه من بعيد، فيبدو لي، أحياناً، مائلاً، مثل لوحة على جدار، فأعود إليه وأعدِّله، أحياناً، أو أعدِّل البقعة الزرقاء نفسها، أحياناً، أو أتركه مختلَّ التوازن، هكذا، وأمضي. أمشي وأهمس بأحرف اسمي لنفسي، كأنَّني كنت أعرف قول شيخ الصوفية محيي الدين بن عربي: إنَّ الأحرف أمم، وبكلِّ حرف نستحضر أمَّة من أمم الجنِّ. كنت أسمع صفير جنّ في الحاء والسين والياء والنون. حيَّرتني الكلمات، هذه البلورات الزجاجية من هواء ملوَّن.[309]

> I used to walk, in the mountains of Ramallah, towards the springs, in the blueness of the summer sky, and the dust of noontime, and write my name *"Hussein"*[310] in the blueness, with my fingers. Then, I used to step back a certain distance, and look at it from afar. It would appear to me, sometimes, slant, like a portrait on a wall, so I would return to it and fix it. Sometimes, I used to fix the blue spot itself, or just leave it like that, out of balance, and go. I would walk and whisper to myself the letters of my name, as if I had known the saying of Shaykh of Sufism, Muḥyyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī that the letters are nations, with each letter we summon a nation from the jinns.

[308] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn,* 117. It is important to note that, despite the multiple and important linguistic shifts that take place throughout the chronological development of children, the focus here is on the use and process of language in its general sense. In other words, language is not read here in relation to chronology but rather as a process of thinking. This is for example the case in the two excerpts in this section. The first is about Āthar (age almost 4) (p.117), the second is about Barghouti when he was older than 4 (he knew how to write).

[309] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 120.

[310] 'Names' is another topic that Barghouti investigates in his autobiographies. He shows the distinction between his name and Āthar's name. He received Āthar's name in a dream. The name is always misunderstood to be an Arabization of the Western name (Arthur). A misunderstanding of language (the name) leads to a distortion of contextual and historical relations between past and present. See Barghouti, *Saʾakūn,* 104-106.

> I used to hear the whistling of the jinn in the *haaʾ, and sīn, and yaaʾ, and nūn.* Words perplexed me, these glass crystals made from coloured air.

This narration delineates Barghouti's linguistic explorations through the use of his body. Writing his name on the sky using his finger, looking at it, attempting to fix its position on the blue patch, and whispering the letters of his name are physical acts that allow him to play a game with the letters of his name. It is only later in his life that Barghouti could frame his childhood game in relation to Ibn al-ʿArabī's conceptualization of letters. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophy, letters represent the impetus upon which utterances (*alfāẓ*) are constructed,[311] and each letter in the Arabic language is corresponded to a certain level of being (*Wujūd*), which includes, for example, *al-ʿaql* (the intellect), *al-nafs* (the soul), and *al-insān* (the human).[312] He, furthermore, ponders that these layers of existence are revealed in the Quran through the medium of language;[313] thus, giving letters a symbolism that goes beyond their orthographical importance. For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī makes use of the shape of the letter *nūn* which is a half circle as a way of representing the external and manifested/apparent being (*wujūd*)- (*al-wujūd al-ẓāhir*). The unseen half of the letter, which would complete the circle, is the inner or esoteric being ([*al-niṣf*] *al-bāṭin*).[314] Barghouti, although not aware of Ibn al-ʿArabī's conceptions as a child, similarly contemplates the letters that make up his name (the letter *nūn* being the last letter of his name), and wonders about the significance of their shapes in relation to the outer world (nature). Barghouti's initial experience with letters exemplifies the explorative nature of body and language that

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[311] See, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 85-132.
As he writes at the beginning of the section on letters:

"إن الحروف أئمة الألفاظ شهدت بذلك ألسن الحفاظ."

Ibid., 85.

[312] See Nasr Hamid abu Zayd, *Falsafat al-taʾwīl: Dirāsa fī taʾwīl al-Qurʾān ʿind Muḥyyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī* (al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2011), 302-303.

[313] Ibid., 299. It can be assumed that Barghouti had read abu Zayd's book since he points it out as a reference on the importance of letters in Sufism and particularly for Ibn al-ʿArabī. See Hussein Barghouti, "Handasat al-qaṣīda: Muqaddima fī mafhūm al-makān." In Murād al-Sūdānī, "Mudawwanat Ḥussayn al-Barghūthī fī qawānīn al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī" (MA diss., Birzeit University, 2012), 176.

[314] Abu Zayd, *Falsafat al-Taʾwīl*, 309.

precedes a conscious awareness of the acts. His game was thus based on playing with language through the body and an initial stage of linguistic and cognitive development.

His family's reaction to his game, however, highlights the exclusionary power of language. They called him *ahbal* 'stupid'. Barghouti explains:

لاحظ أقاربي الطفل الذي يكتب في الزرقة بإصبعه، ويكلِّم نفسه، فلقَّبوني ب"أهبل"...السلطة السحرية التي يمارسها الاسم على المسمى فظيعة. ليست المسألة أنَّ هناك "شيئاً" أو "شخصاً" يسمِّيه أقاربي "الأهبل"، لا! بالعكس، يتمُّ خلق شخص "أهبل" في داخل حسين الحقيقي، هويَّة بلهاء، يوحون لي بأنَّني "أهبل"، فأصير كما يوحون لي. الأهبل موجود في داخل الكلمة نفسها، ويدخل إلى "أذنيَّ"، ومن هناك يسري إلى قلبي، ويستيقظ فيَّ جسد ذهني دخيل، بعثه دخلاء على عالمي.[315]

> My relatives noticed the child who writes in the blueness with his finger, and talks to himself, so they nicknamed me 'stupid'. The magical power a name holds on a person is horrible. The issue is not that there is 'something' or 'someone' that my relatives call *ahbal*; no, on the contrary, an *ahbal* is created inside the actual Hussein, a stupid identity. They imply that I am *ahbal*, so I become what they insinuate to me. The *ahbal* exists inside the word itself, he enters in my 'ears,' and from there streams into my heart, and in me a conscious and intruding mental entity wakes up, that was dispatched into my world by intruders.

How does a child deal with such a form of exclusion? He explains that after being labelled "stupid," he started to divert his attention more to nature and the wilderness than people. He writes:

مرَّة عقدت محاكمة بين سنبلتي قمح، مثلاً، وحكمت على واحدة بأن تذبل.[316]

> One time, I held a trial between two wheat ears, for example, and I ruled that one had to wither.

A few years later, the label that is given to him shifts from *ahbal* to *ʿabqarī* 'genius'. Barghouti had submitted a poem that he wrote for a poetry competition during his last year of high school.

لم يصدِّق أحد أنَّني كاتبها، ولا حتى أساتذة أدب في "كلية بيرزيت"، أو في لجنة التحكيم، ولا حتى معلِّمي نفسه، واتهمت بسرقتها من "شاعر كبير" ما. وعقدوا لي محاكمة في المدرسة، وشاع الخبر، فسمَّيت "العبقري".[317]

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[315] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 120-121. The translation of al-Shaikh was consulted for this section (see "Beyond the Last Twilight," 154-155).
[316] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 127.

> No one believed that I wrote it, not even literature instructors at Birzeit College, the judging committee, nor even my own teacher. And I was accused of stealing it from a certain 'great poet.' They held a trial at school, and the news spread, so I was named 'the genius'.

Against the backdrop of the explorative experience of the child, language is used by society as an excluding force. It is, as Barghouti hints at in the above quote, not the word itself, but rather the meaning that is ascribed to it by society that imposes itself on him. While Barghouti's senses in the previous excerpt are outwardly directed towards linguistic investigations and discovery (through the acts of whispering the letters or writing them in the sky), the word *ahbal* leaps inwardly, through his ear, and then his heart, and then his cognition, and creates a foreign and invasive body within him. Despite the shift in meaning that the second label of 'genius' signifies, Barghouti stood at the outskirts of what the other players – people who saw him writing in the sky, and experts in literature – considered acceptable or possible. It was through language that they made him feel "always out of context; not belonging to anyone, odd, and weird, and on the margins of life"[318] as mentioned in the introduction. Language as exercised upon Barghouti through the use of these labels is one of forcefulness, fixed meanings, and intrusiveness.

Mirroring the writer-reader interaction discussed above, Barghouti's encounter with society here can also be registered within the pact-act opposition. Lyotard postulates that language from its beginnings has championed unpredicted and innovative moves. Barghouti's society can be read as an "institution" in the Lyotardian sense, which "always requires supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its bounds."[319] Not agreeing with the language game with which Barghouti engages implies that his society does

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[317] Ibid., 126.
[318] "...[كنت] دائماً خارج السياق لا أنتمي إلى أحد، شاذاً، وغريباً، وعلى هامش الدنيا." Ibid.
[319] Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, 17.

not approve of his use of language. This refusal forces him to withdraw from the accepted rules of language and to design new rules.

But what drives Barghouti to continue writing and engaging with this society if they do not accept his language? What drives him to continue writing falls in accordance with Lyotard's understanding that "the boundaries only stabilize when they cease to be stakes in the game."[320] Writing becomes Barghouti's way of destabilizing societal boundaries; and, thus, this challenge works as an invitation to a new language game.

When he grows older, Barghouti decides to look further into the meanings of 'stupid' and 'genius'. By uncovering new meanings for the labels of 'stupid' and 'genius', Barghouti investigates how these names belong to (pre-Islamic) time. This provides him with a literary and spiritual context to the 'empty words.' *ʿAbqarī* refers to the Valley of ʿAbqar where pre-Islamic Arabs believed that *jinns* who lived there gave inspiration to poets. *Ahbal* references the pre-Islamic god Hubal, whose name in Aramaic means "smoke."[321] Words, thus, exclude or explore according to their uses and the meaning that is ascribed to them. Barghouti reconfigures the use of the words, and in turn reconfigures his identity and his understanding of others around him. Although the labels of *ahbal* and *ʿabqarī* are used against him to mean stupid and genius, their historical contexts and references provide Barghouti with fresh meanings that go in opposition to their more common use. It is thus not necessarily the origin that remains embedded in the word, but rather the use that gives new meanings to it.

The dialectics of language (sounds/letters/adjectives/conversations) draw the path of childhood of both son and father as shown in the previous quotations. Note, for example, a similarity in the setting of both childhoods, each one mentioned in a different autobiography, and each exposes the multiplicity of linguistic 'uses'. In the case of Āthar, the ear of wheat is

[320] Ibid.
[321] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 121.

taken for a bell ringer; in Barghouti's case it was taken as someone who is being tried in court. The play is artistic, since it exposes the unlimited capacities of imagination, the serpentine-way of perceiving objects, and the attributions that go beyond the form and function of objects. There is, however, one big difference. In the example of Barghouti, the game unfolds without any involvement from anyone else, whereas in the second, Āthar is part of a dialogic conversation with his father and his friend. In a "language game," Lyotard tells us "every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game."[322] However, in order for these moves to make sense, all players should agree to the game. In this sense, Barghouti's game is incomplete since it is one-sided.

By taking part in the conversation with his son, Barghouti is, however, engaging and reacting to Āthar's moves in the game. By paying much attention to Āthar's engagement with language (first words, sounds, mythic narrative) and narrating multiple anecdotes to capture Āthar's linguistic changes, Barghouti is not merely documenting a child's linguistic and social development, nor is this solely a dying father's way of preserving the memories shared with a son. I argue that this engagement is a new opportunity for Barghouti's own failed language games.

Instead of a game between himself and society, Barghouti builds a game that is based on linguistic dialogue between himself as child and his son. For example, Barghouti notes the similarity between his first memory (*dhākira*) and his son's first enunciation (*dhikr*). Āthar's first word was "plane,"[323] and this realization is shocking for Barghouti since his first memory is of himself and his family being deported from Beirut by plane.[324] His son's budding speech becomes a form of continuation and an inexplicable bond between father and son. A mysterious bond between the two children (Barghouti as a child, and Āthar) is an expression of the intrinsic link between memory and language. While each grew separately

[322] Lyotard, *The Postmodern,* 10.
[323] Barghouti, *Sa'akūn*, 188.
[324] Barghouti, *al-Ḍaw'*, 66.

and within different temporal and spatial influences, a simple developmental/cognitive or even linguistic explanation of how memories and language develop stands short of explaining this mysterious bond.

Said reads such linguistic intersections and shifts through the framework of adoption and construction and deploys familial connections in order to express them. He writes,

> Words are the beginning sign of a method that replaces another method. The series being replaced is the set of relationships linked together by familial analogy: father and son, the image, the process of genesis, a story. In their place stands: the brother, discontinuous concepts, paragenesis, construction. The first of these series is dynastic, bound to sources and origins, mimetic. The relationships holding in the second series are complementarity and adjacency; instead of a source we have the intentional beginning, instead of a story a construction.[325]

Beginnings in language disrupt familiar meanings by creating new ones. Similarly, the examples in this chapter exemplify the shift from a "familial analogy" into one of "complementarity and adjacency."[326] Although Barghouti does not disavow the father-son relationship, which echoes his olive-oil and tree-mountain metaphor, his examples question the point of origin through the medium of 'language games.' By investigating bodily shifts between father and son, the relationship is elevated to the realm of adjacency. Just as time and space are seen as adjacent in Barghouti's conception of embroidery (section 1.6), the chronological relationship of father as the origin of the son, or what Said calls "the process of genesis" where one entity is directly related to an origin, is folded onto itself and father and son encounter interchangeable dialogic experiences. This is, for example, evident when Āthar addresses his father by his first name Hussein. Against the backdrop of dynastic hierarchy, language games assume a more vital position in forging new dimensions to the father-son relationship. Said's idea of "paragenesis"[327] and Lyotard's call for "paralogy"[328] as a way of

[325] Said, *Beginnings*, 66.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Ibid.

assuming new forms fall in line with Barghouti's understanding of body and language (words) as multi-faceted and susceptible to exploration beyond their fixed forms. This becomes evident in the following section, where language is tested beyond its verbal utterances and where the body transcends its physical form.

2.7 Post-language

If language has the ability, through its multiple formulations, to herald different beginnings, moments of silence should not be taken as instances of language disappearance. Such instances of 'post-language' (as I will refer to them) in Barghouti's writing happen when language is incapable of capturing the experience. What we have in the following from *Saʾakūn* is a three-layered structure that represents three bodily changes and shows the dynamic ability of language to detangle, disappear, regroup, and reformulate. The first fold of this change is meteorological, the second gendered, and the third physical. The three moments go through similar trajectories, starting from an accepted beginning, moving towards a change, and ending with a rediscovery of new beginnings.

This section starts with an extraordinary transformation of nature. Barghouti is sitting with his mother and his son Āthar. He writes,

"هذا مساء قياموي،" قلت لنفسي. كنت قاعداً تحت شبَّاك بيتنا العتيق...عندما بدأ طفل أبله أعرفه، يعزف على ال"هارمونيكا" لحناً بعيداً، مضطرباً، ضائعاً في الهواء، هناك، خلف جنائن اللوز. وبسبب من العزف...ربَّما، بدأ الغبار...يرتفع ويتجمَّع، فوق، ويتحوَّل إلى صفرة حادَّة...ثمَّ بدأ، من الغرب، طفح أحمر غريب يشبه سيلاً من شفق قلق يزحف شرقاً، وفي جوانبه دوَّامات سوداء وخضراء وبنية، تتقلَّب وكأنَّ السماء نفسها ستغلي، ولا شمس هناك، لا شمس أبداً...حتى أمِّي لاحظت غرابة الجو، فقلبت نظرها في أحواض النباتات التي زرعتها.[329]

> 'This is sepulchral evening,' I said to myself. I was sitting under the window of our old house when a silly boy that I know started playing a distant and disturbed tune on the harmonica. The tune was lost in the air, there, behind the almond groves. And because of the playing maybe, the dust started collecting and transforming into a sharp yellowness. And then from the west, an unusual red overflow, resembling a

[328] Lyotard, *The Postmodern*, xxv.
[329] Barghouti, *Saʾakūn*, 91-92.

> flood of worried twilight, started crawling eastward. At its corners, there were black, green, and brown vortex turning as if the sky itself was about to boil. And there was no sun there, no sun at all. Even my mother noticed the unusual weather and looked over at the seeds she had planted.

As Barghouti's mother says,

> الدنيا مقلوبة. كان يجب أن يأتي هذا المطر قبل عشرين يوماً، وليس الآن.[330]

> Life is overturned. This rain was due twenty days ago, not now.

The scene recounts an inexplicable change in the weather. Different natural phenomena such as dust, flood, vortex seem to erupt and take over the sky. The end of times starts with a reversal of natural phenomena and a beginning of a new era. This multi-coloured, celestial change automatically introduces mirroring changes in the lives of the observers.

> حتى آثر، الذي بلغ الثالثة الآن، قعد قربي خائفاً، ثم قال: "حسين، انظر إلى البحر الذي فوق!" (اسم السماء عنده). لم أجبه، كنت مذهولاً تماماً، وأراقب، فأكمل: "حسين، أريد فستاناً!". قلت: "الفساتين للبنات، أنت ولد". قال: "طيب. أريد [أن] أصير بنتاً!". شردت في رغبته في التحوّل. قلت: سيصبح أنثى لسبع سنين، مثل تايريزياس، عرّاف معبد دلفى، ثمَّ يرجع ذكراً، فتعترف به جنائن اللوز عرَّافاً لمعبدها، وأحكم من ينطق باسم الآلهة.[331]

> Even Āthar, who was three now, sat next to me scared, and then he said, "Hussein, look at the sea up there!" (the name of the sky for him). I did not answer him. I was completely dumbfounded, observing. So, he continued, "Hussein, I want a dress!" I said, "dresses are for girls, you are a boy." He said, "ok! I want to become a girl!" I thought about his desire to transform. I said [to myself]: he will become a female for seven years, like Tiresias, the priest of the Delphi temple, and then go back to being a male. The almond groves will acknowledge him as the priest of their temple and as the wisest person to speak in the name of the gods!

The second moment of change comes as suddenly as the first one in nature; the child witnessing the external changes is enticed to ask questions of internal changeability. While the first brings sky and earth in parallel positions, the second questions gender and bodily identification. Neither the reader nor Barghouti knows the reason (the thought) behind

[330] Ibid., 94.
[331] Ibid., 93.

Āthar's question; his desire to transform seems to be based on his witnessing of the turning of nature and his reaction to it. The difference in this interaction between Barghouti and Āthar is that the language game is not solely dialogic (as in the previous examples), but takes the shape of announced-hidden utterances. Barghouti is dumfounded, i.e. literally unable to speak. Both Barghouti and Āthar are overtaken by the change in nature. Āthar's statement about wanting to wear a dress is negated by Barghouti: as a boy, Āthar cannot wear a dress. Instead of succumbing to this block in the language game, Āthar asserts his desire by declaring that if one has to be a girl to wear a dress, then he wants to become a girl. The uttered 'move' is then internally accepted by Barghouti who is engulfed in the thought of this transformation. This professed desire leads Barghouti to an internal conceptualization that links the present and real (Āthar) with the past and mythical (Tiresias). Building upon the mythic story, Barghouti constructs a new beginning for Āthar by situating him within a larger historical/mythical context, as well as for Tiresias, who assumes a new role in the form of a child in the Palestinian village of Kobar.

The language game in this case here takes the form of a verbal move that invites a cognitive one. Furthermore, these meteorological and gendered changes push Barghouti to think about his own reality and his death. For Barghouti, opposing death means returning to childhood. He explains,

> من زمن وأنا أحلم أن أعود طفلاً، بعد نضوجي...فجأة قال آثر، وكأنَّه التقط هذه الفكرة من أغواري: "حسين، لم لا تصير أنت آثر، وأصير أنا حسين؟". غريب. روحي وروحه يعرفان بعضهما من حياة سابقة، حتماً، وإلَّا لما التقط ما أفكِّر فيه...وانبعثت عطور سبق وشممتها، روائح نعناع الماضي، وتشابيه مدفونة في تربة الذاكرة...وأفاقت فيَّ الكلمات المنسية منذ حياتي السابقة في دورة التناسخ الأبدي هذه، حيث يرجع كلُّ شيء، ولا شيء يرجع تماماً.[332]

> For some time, I have been dreaming about being a child again, now that I am grown up. Suddenly Āthar said, as if he had captured this idea from my core, "Hussein, why don't you become Āthar, and I become Hussein?" Weird. My soul and his definitely know each other from a previous life, otherwise he wouldn't have picked up what I was thinking about. Perfumes that I had already smelled were suddenly emitted;

[332] Ibid., 94-95.

> smells of mint from the past, and buried analogies in the earth of memory. Words frogotten since my previous life awoke in me through this eternal cycle of reincarnation, where everything returns, and nothing fully returns.

This third change of physical bodies takes on a different path to the announced-hidden utterances. It is Barghouti who starts with the thought of returning to childhood. This idea is picked up by Āthar who states it verbally by suggesting that they switch bodies. The dream to become a child is a wish to forge a new beginning in life. Just as Barghouti declares this dream, bodily and linguistic aspects from the past resurface. The past smell of mint and hidden analogies and forgotten words assert the role of body and language in employing the past as a way of initiating a beginning in the future.

The structure below brings together the three changes discussed in this section. The three instances share a pattern that involves a disruption of the current state from normal weather, boy, adulthood into sepulchral weather, girl, and child. These beginnings assert themselves as new and surprising, but, at the same time keep a connection to the past. The sombre weather represents a belated event which should have started twenty days ago, Āthar's call for change mirrors Tiresias' gender transformation, and Barghouti's dream about childhood is accompanied by linguistic and sensory remembrances from the past. Barghouti's last comment: "يرجع كلُّ شيء، ولا شيء يرجع تماماً." - "everything returns, and nothing fully returns"[333] encapsulates the paralogous nature of *beginnings*, which retain some aspects from the past, but reveal new possibilities and forms in the present.

	Past	**Current state**	**Transformation (beginnings)**
Nature	20 days ago	Normal weather	Sepulchral weather
Gender	Tiresias	Boy	Girl

[333] Ibid., 95.

Physical body	Forgotten words	Death	Child

As the examples show, language games extend beyond dialogic expressions that become insufficient to express or explain these sites of change. Language is still apparent and reveals itself not only verbally, but becomes post-language, where aspects of silence, internal monologue, allusions, and the interplay between past, present, and future become part and parcel of the game.

2.8 Conclusion

Language games and beginnings provide an appropriate theoretical framework for mapping Barghouti's unsettling of the borders of language. Lyotard's and Said's notions on language and beginnings, although they seem unconnected, intersect in their interest in genealogical influences and continuous breakages. The physical body and the linguistic body (as investigated in the pre-language, language, and post-language sections) are charted in this chapter upon acts of continuation of, and divergence from preceding events.

The example of the rabbit elucidates the connection between past memories and interactions, and literary imaginations. Language games, such as those between Barghouti and his son, explore the slips between origins and beginnings, as was shown in the example of the nature, gender, and bodily shifts. The chapter constitutes a thematic reading of continuations and ruptures, upon which beginnings are construed. These linguistic and filial beginnings mirror Barghouti's advocation for literary innovation. As a frame, the chapter on childhood represents an initial stage in Barghouti's life. At the same time, the chapter works at complicating the relation between life and death by reading it as beginnings. By doing this, Barghouti's confrontation with death becomes a way of reconfiguring the decay of his body as will be seen in the following chapter. Childhood for Barghouti becomes a space of past memories, which is susceptible to transformations through imagination. Returning to

memories and registering his conversations with his son reposition Barghouti and his life within new imaginations and narratives. It is important to add that these close-reading examples mirror Barghouti's larger criticism of the state of Palestinian literature and his thoughts on writing and reading which are based on pushing the limits of language and going beyond known modes of expression and engagement.

As a way of bringing the discussed tropes of childhood, language, and the body together, and highlighting Barghouti's exercise of literary creativity, this chapter will conclude with excerpts from his second poetry collection *Laylā wa Tawba* (1996). The collection consists of one long poem that is divided into different stanzas and sections. As in many of his other writings, this collection takes cues from historical and literary subject matter. Its subject matter follows the story of Laylā al-Akhyaliyya, a famous Umayyad poet and her lover Tawba ibn Ḥumayyir.[334] Although the two never eventually marry, they remain in love. Tawba tells Laylā that if he dies and she comes to visit his grave, he will always greet her back. After his death, his words still resonate with Laylā, who visits his grave, greets him, and awaits his reply. Laylā resents him for not fulfilling what he promised in his poetry. This section will focus on two intertwined points: the first concerns the inspiration behind Barghouti's selection of the story of Laylā, which resorts back to his childhood. The second revolves around Barghouti's utilization of Tawba's experience, which investigates the dimensions of language in its relation to the body. The two points, thus, weave together

[334] It is a classical Arabic love story where two lovers are not able to fulfill their union because of societal interjections. Laylā is married off to another man, while both she and Tawba continue loving each other. It is said that Tawba was threatened with death. After his death, Laylā goes to visit his grave and greets him. She reprimands him for not greeting her back following his promise. While standing in front of his grave, an animal jumps in front of her mule and she falls off it and dies. For more on Laylā and her poetry see Dana Sajdi, "Revisiting Layla al-Akhyaliya's Trespass," in *Transforming Loss into Beauty: Essays on Arabic Literature and Culture in Honor of Magda Al-Nowaihi*, ed. Marlé Hammond and Dana Sajdi. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 185-227. The years of death for both poets cannot be determined, see: Aram M. Shahin, "Reflections on the Lives and Deaths of Two Umayyad Poets: Laylā al-Akhyaliyya and Tawba b. al-Ḥumayyir," in *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 398-443.

issues of language, childhood, and body through stylistic and thematic beginnings that construct the collection.

Barghouti informs his readers in the prose preface "Muqaddima mumkina"[335] that he had heard the story of Laylā al-Akhyaliyya in his childhood. The story remained with him as he grew up, particularly when he was living in exile and feeling estranged.[336] For him,

تحوَّلت ليلى الأخيليَّةُ إلى هاجس في روحي، إلى وهم أو منفىً أو شبحٍ أو أسطورةً، ولم أعد أميِّزُ بين الأخيليّةِ والخيال.[337]

> Laylā al-Akhyaliyya was transformed into an obsession in my soul, an illusion or an exile or an apparition or a myth, and I was no longer able to distinguish between al-Akhyaliyya and imagination.

Barghouti shows how a narrative from his childhood has had an immense role in inspiring feelings of alienation in his adulthood. The story of Laylā does not accompany Barghouti without a change; its role is not referential but rather experimental. The narrative takes on a different beginning as it leaves its initial story line towards the realm of imagination. Barghouti plays on the last name of Laylā *al-Akhyaliyya* which resembles in sound the word *khayāl* (imagination). The poem, thus, represents a familiarity that is taken from childhood, but similarly investigates new zones and beginnings that go beyond the known into the imagined. Examples such as Tawba's silence and metapoetic commentaries are beginnings that provide new thematic and critical additions to the storyline.

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[335] This introduction is a form of "self-referential and metatextual" beginning to an autobiography (Wild, "Searching for Beginnings," 83). Barghouti's preface is personal, autobiographical, and relates to earlier memories. In other words, he provides his readers with an explanation for how he was inspired by literary figures, how they intertwined throughout historical moments in his life, and what literary tropes they provided him with. The fact that he starts with an intro in prose is significant to Barghouti's belief in the connection between theoretical and creative productions. In her book *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*, Huda J. Fakhreddine gives the example of Nazik al-Malaikah's poem "Train ride" and focuses on the poet's prose paragraph at the end of the poem. She notes that "the major contribution of this phase of Arab modernism is precisely [the] consciousness, which appears when poets reveal their thoughts about the poetic process. The poem itself is only an illustration. This is not to say that the poetry has no value in itself, but that it seems rather inadequate when compared to the ambitious theoretical ideal proposed by the poets of the movement. Throughout the movement's history, from the beginning of the twentieth century to this day, it seems as if the poetic achievements of modernism in Arabic are constantly striving to catch up with its theoretical propositions." Huda J. Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition: From Modernists to Muḥdathūn* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 31.

[336] Barghouti, *al-Āthār,* 96.

[337] Ibid.

Tawba's silence and unreturned greetings inspire Barghouti to think about the meanings and possibilities of language beyond its expected verbal utterances. He writes

واللفظُ بيضٌ كسَّرتْهُ لتخرجَ منهُ فراخُ الحمامْ
واللفظُ رحمٌ غادرتهُ التجربةْ
فارغاً – كالكهفِ – بعد خروجِ النعامْ
سمِّهِ: "عجزُ اللغةْ"
أو حيرةَ الأشياءِ من سرِّ الولادةِ بالعذابِ وبالسلامْ.[338]

Utterance is like eggs that were broken so that squabs can come out
Utterance is a womb that was deserted by the experience
It is empty – like a cave – after the ostriches have left it
You can call it 'language's impotence'
Or the objects' bewilderment by the secret of birth through torment and peace.

The passage represents, through birth metaphors, Barghouti's commentaries on the *utterances* in language. The utterance (*al-lafẓ*)[339] here represents the already-made and accepted moves in language. For Barghouti, these utterances portray life-giving spaces that are now left empty; broken eggs, bare womb, vacant cave. The initiation of life (that of animals and humans) is linked to the existence of these spaces. However, the fixation on these spaces as origins, when their beginnings have already left (the baby from the womb and squabs from the egg), is what Barghouti calls "language's impotence." It is the act of giving birth and the emergence of the pigeons and ostriches from the nest that give *meaning* to the utterances, which are otherwise left empty without these experiences. This is not a call to abandon the utterance, but to reinvestigate its possible meanings that can be exerted through *ḥīra* (bewilderment), questioning, and suffering. The detail in the original narrative about Tawba's silence provides Barghouti with a space to give his metapoetic commentary on the dynamics of language. Tawba's silence is not seen as a failed promise to Laylā. Rather, Barghouti deploys this silence as an emblem of revolt against the known and overused

[338] Ibid, 100.
[339] As Geert Jan van Gelder points out, *lafẓ* is more than just words and represents "the way a thought, an idea, or a motif is put into words". It, thus, represents the "surface structure of the sentence". Geert Jan van Gelder, *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 3.

utterances and an invitation to find new ways of expression.

Barghouti employs another incident from the story of Laylā and Tawba to delineate a connection between past and present through the connection between the physical body and language. He takes Tawba's death as symbolic of the revolt against the Israeli occupation, where Tawba becomes a personification of a (Palestinian) fighter. For example, Barghouti writes about Tawba:

...شنقوهُ على تينةٍ في ليلةٍ في حبلةٍ مُحكَمَةْ.
تركوا في فمهِ طلقتينْ:
طلقةً في مَحَلِّ الرغيفِ،
وأُخرى في مَحَلِّ الكلمةْ.[340]

…one night, they hung him on a fig tree with a tight rope
they left two bullets in his mouth
a bullet in place of the bread loaf
and another in place of the word.

Tawba here becomes representative not only of his story, but also that of others. While Barghouti does not specify that Tawba is mirroring a Palestinian figure, words like earth, grave, bomb, bird, lynched on a fig tree, bullets, etc. have become standard in the Palestinian life of revolt and struggle.[341] Tawba, who assumes a new role of a revolutionary, is lynched and shot in the mouth. The two bullets attack the physical body, with the metonym "the bread," and the literary body, as signified by "the word."

The poem can be linked to Barghouti's relation with his son. Reading references to Barghouti's childhood in his works elucidates how relationships (familial, linguistic, or temporal) defy borders and notions of origins if looked at as beginnings. The relation

[340] Ibid., 166.

[341] As al-Dīk argues, this link between the story of Laylā and her suffering and that of martyrs represents a poetic way of writing that is common to many Arab poets including Barghouti, al-Bayati, and al-Sayyab, who highlight the arch of suffering between past and present.
"الذي يرى القصيدة يجدها تعجّ بالهموم المعاصرة، وبالذات ما يصيب المجتمع الفلسطيني والأرض الفلسطينية من هموم وقضايا يحاول الشاعر خلقها في نسيج شعري تتداخل عناصره مع القيم التراثية."
"Reading the poem, one can see how it is inflicted with modern concerns, particularly those that affect the Palestinian land and society. The poet tries to weave these concerns with traditional values." Nādī Sārī al-Dīk, *Ukhwat al-turāb wa humūm al-makān: Dirāsa taʾṣīliyya fī al-shiʿr al-Filasṭīnī al-muʿāṣir* (Jerusalem: Jāmiʿat al-Quds al-Maftūḥa, 2010), 92.

between Barghouti and Āthar is multi-faceted. The first layer shows Barghouti as the origin of Āthar (filial relation). However, instead of experiencing the suppression that Barghouti, as a child, experienced, his father welcomes Āthar's exploration of life through language and play. In fact, by agreeing to engage in Āthar's linguistic games, Barghouti learns how to take linguistic and cognitive departures that help him reach beginnings in his writing as well as in his experience with illness and diagnosis.

Besides the linguistic exploration, the departure towards new beginnings can be approached spatially in Barghouti's works. The next chapter, thus, moves from the temporal moment of childhood into that of death, which takes the ill body as the medium for exploring Barghouti's conception of space. In one passage from *Laylā wa Tawba*, Barghouti writes (through the voice of Tawba):

إنَّ المسافةَ بين الفروعِ وبينَ الجذورِ تسمَّى:
"نضوجُ الشجرْ "
سَمِّها بُعْدَنا عن تربةِ الأصلِ،
أو قربَنا من غموضِ القمرْ.[342]

The distance between the branches and the roots is called:
'the ripeness of trees'
call it our distance from the soil of origin,
or our closeness to the mystery of the moon.

The branches and roots are used to depict two spaces that are distanced and separated. It is, however, the distance between these two entities that constitutes the crux of the imagery. Although the distance represents a movement away from the roots, and thus a separation from the origin, it can also be revered as a space that brings one closer to discovering new things (the mystery of the moon) and thus a beginning. It is this reaching out to different 'branches' while retaining a connection to the roots that represents what Barghouti calls "the ripeness of trees." Movement is thus taken in the next chapter as a

[342] Ibid., 100.

synonym of this chapter's beginning. Just as language games reveal linguistic, social, and power relations, so do the different spatial confrontations between body, land, and literature.