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Dynamics of Belonging in *Bidun* Literature

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Abstract
Dynamics of Belonging in *Bidun* Literature

This thesis explores the literary production of *Bidun* (stateless) writers in Kuwait and abroad, covering works between 1976-2015. As the *Bidun* have historically been denied all forms of official legal documentation, scholars have tended to approach *Bidun* literature as yet another form of ‘documentation’, a functional approach that tends to conceive of literary production in terms of reflecting a stateless condition or an experience. While acknowledging the legitimacy of the historical, sociological, and anthropological approaches, the thesis systematically argues the need for a literary critical and theoretical approach, the better to understand the aesthetic impulse behind this unique body of literature as a literary phenomenon.

The first part of the thesis establishes the contextual groundwork and the theoretical concerns regarding the general study of *Bidun* literature. Chapter 1 traces the dominant modes of knowledge production on the *Bidun*, which have so far been formed mainly from the perspective of ‘Area Studies’. The chapter argues for the need to go beyond the descriptive and objectifying representations of the *Bidun* by engaging critically the cultural and literary production of *Bidun* writers. Chapter 2 provides the necessary contextual background concerning the materialities of cultural production in which *Bidun* writers operate. It highlights the ways in which *Bidun* writers create affiliative cultural networks and spaces of representation beyond the exclusionary forces of state sanctioned cultural institutions. Chapter 3 explores how major theories of statelessness in political philosophy, offering possibilities for both an ontological and a relational understanding, influence readings of *Bidun* literature. The thesis adopts Jacques Rancière’s relational understanding of the politics of statelessness which allows the literary production of stateless writers to be approached as acts of enacting an aesthetic subjectivity that have the capacity to impact reality rather than a mere expression of an ontological condition.

The second part of the thesis explores the ways in which *Bidun* writers, through complex modes of affiliation, articulate notions of belonging beyond official categorizations. Chapter 4 examines how *Bidun* writers negotiate their placement within national literary history. Chapter 5 explores how *Bidun* writers utilise the desert

space poetically as a pre-national site of historicizing modern statelessness. Chapter 6 analyses the ways in which *Bidun* writers contest the reductive representations of *Bidun* characters prevalent in the Kuwaiti novel.

By introducing *Bidūn* literature critically and analytically, the thesis aims to contribute positively to the ways in which literatures of marginalised communities are read. At the same time, a literary approach stemming from the critical paradigms and inquiries existing within the discipline of comparative literature aims to renegotiate the fixities in which the rubric of ‘Area Studies’ is structured, particularly in the context of the Arab Gulf.

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Introduction

In 2009, the poet Muhammad al-Nabhān was invited to the annual Nichita Stănescu international poetry festival in Romania to celebrate the Romanian translation of his poetry collection titled *Loneliness Under the Shade of Palm Trees: Translations from Kuwaiti Poetry* (2009).¹ On the final day of the festival, al-Nabhān was awarded the festival's special prize and considered by Prahova County's Department of Culture as "the most important contemporary Arab poet" (Maxim 2009). While celebrated as a Kuwaiti poet in Romania, news of al-Nabhān's award of an international prize received minimal attention in Kuwaiti media.

The news of al-Nabhān's award was overlooked by the Kuwaiti press (which is never short of praise for Kuwaiti citizens who achieve any kind of international award) due to his unofficial and unrecognized status. Born in 1971 in Kuwait, al-Nabhān was part of a stateless community, approximately a tenth of the Kuwaiti population, commonly referred to as the *Bidun*. The term, which translates to "without", has been commonly used as an administrative umbrella term to categorize the stateless population in Kuwait. Al-Nabhān remained stateless until his migration to Canada in 1995, where he sought asylum and gained Canadian citizenship.

While al-Nabhān's accomplishment in Romania was officially overlooked in both his country of citizenship (Canada) and his country of birth (Kuwait), it was acknowledged and celebrated in Kuwait by an event organised by the 'Tuesday Gathering', a local cultural collective operating outside of state sanctioned cultural institutions. The event brought together the poet's friends and colleagues, many of whom share a similar position as *Bidun*. Unlike *Bidun* writers residing in Kuwait, who cannot travel because they do not carry travel documents, al-Nabhān was able to do so because of his Canadian passport.

¹ The original title of the translation is *Singurătatea din Umbra Palmierului: traduceri din poezia kuweitiană* (2009) translated and introduced by Dumitru Chican.

Al-Nabhān is part of a wider literary phenomenon of *Bidun* writers,² both residing in Kuwait and abroad, which has been highly visible and influential within national, Arab, and more recently, international cultural contexts. Since 1979, the date of the publication of the first work by a *Bidun* poet Sulayman al-Flayyih, *Bidun* writers have been relatively prolific, publishing more than fifty works including poetry collections, which constitute the majority of these works, and to a lesser extent short stories and novels.

Bidun writers have also been highly active within the publishing scene with the establishment of the publishing houses *Dār Mas'ā*, headed by Muhammad al-Nabhān, and *Dār Masārāt*, headed by *Bidun* writers Jasim al-Shimmiri, Dikhīl Khalīfa and Sa'ad Karīm in 2008 and 2015 respectively. *Bidun* writers have participated in creating notable cultural gatherings beyond the state sanctioned cultural institutions. The aforementioned Tuesday Gathering, established in 1996 is one example. With the stagnancy of the official cultural institutions, the Tuesday Gathering has enriched the local cultural scene and has contributed in reinstating Kuwait on the Arab cultural map. In addition, *Bidun* writers were highly involved in journalistic circles. Prior to 2006, when only five daily Arabic newspapers were allowed in Kuwait, *Bidun* writers were involved in each of the newspapers' cultural pages.

On the international level, the *Bidun* poet Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ was chosen as a representative of Kuwaiti poetry in the BBC and Scottish Poetry Library project titled *The Written World* in 2012.³ In addition to al-Nabhān's aforementioned participation in Nichita Stănescu poetry festival in Romania he had previously participated, as a poet from Kuwait, in the Medellin International Poetry Festival in Colombia in 2006 and the Curtea De Argeş Poetry Nights in Romania in 2008.

² The discussion of the validity of the term '*Bidun* writer' will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

³ The *Written World* 2012 project broadcasted poems from different parts of the world daily during the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Given the historical and ongoing influence of *Bidun* writers, the literary phenomenon, which this thesis calls ‘*Bidun* literature’ has not received much attention within academic scholarship. *Bidun* writers have been singled out in works of literary criticism but have not yet been approached in a comprehensive manner as part of a wider literary phenomenon which we can call *Bidun* literature.⁴

While there has been limited academic scholarship on *Bidun* literature, scholarly interest on the *Bidun* issue has received much attention. The *Bidun* issue has been studied, both directly and indirectly, mainly from Area Studies and the different academic disciplines in the social sciences, including International Relations (Beaugrand 2010), Anthropology (Longva 1997; Longva 2000; Longva 2006), Political Science (al-Wuqayyān 2007; al-Aradi 2008; al-Wuqayyān. 2009; al-Nakib 2010; al-Nakib 2014), Social Geography (al-Moosa 1976), History (al-Hajeri 2014), Sociology (al-Fahad 1989) and Law (al-Anezi 1989; al-Anezi 1994; Khalīfa 2007). The majority of the literature on the *Bidun* is comprised of descriptive reports and briefings related to human rights issues (Human Rights Watch 1992; Human Rights Watch 1995; al-Najjar 2003; Refugees International 2007; Bencomo 2000; Human Rights Watch 2011; Shiblak 2011; The Home Office 2014).

Knowledge produced on the *Bidun*, so far, has been dominated by a descriptive approach and limited to the considerations of Area Studies and the Social Sciences. Of the studies referenced above, none refer to the literary and cultural output of the community. One exception is Faris al-Wuqayyān’s historical and legal study titled “ ‘*Adīmū al-Jinsiyya fī al-Kuwait: al-’azma wa-l-tadā’īyāt*” (The Stateless in Kuwait: the crisis and consequences) (2009). In highlighting the *Bidun*’s dire conditions, al-Wuqayyān briefly mentions the literary production of *Bidun* writers as characterised by “the prevalence of a melancholic tone and a tragic use of language that almost always revolves around the loss of rights and the dispossession of identity” (al-Wuqayyān 2009). In this characterisation, the literary voice of the *Bidun* is conceived in terms of

⁴ These works, which will be reviewed in detail in chapter two, approach *Bidun* writers from different perspectives such as gender, thematic expressions, affinities with literary schools and generational association.

reflecting a stateless condition or an experience; another form of anthropological ‘documentation’ that would reveal the community’s dire conditions.

Similarly, in casual references to the works of *Bidun* writers in newspaper articles (al-Faysal 2011; al-Wushayhi 2011; al-Ḥarbi 2009; Idris 2009), the literature is often treated as a ‘legitimising document’ to advocate the *Bidun*’s rights for citizenship and to demonstrate their cultural contribution to the nation. Both this approach and al-Wuqayyān’s elicit the voice of *Bidun* writers to speak in a certain way that either corresponds to an anthropological condition or to further an activist position. These dominant approaches highlight one of the main issues at stake in approaching a highly politicized ‘stateless literature’: the tendency to highlight the former term over the latter. Although certainly informed by the political and anthropological view of statelessness, an approach to *Bidun* literature must equally consider the aesthetic and literary capacity of *Bidun* works to transcend that condition. This thesis is primarily motivated by this insight, and more specifically, the following question: how can the aesthetic impulse behind this unique body of literature be approached in a literary critical and theoretical manner?

To begin to answer this question, there is a need to briefly highlight the theoretical framework, which would allow the aesthetic production of stateless writers to be approached beyond ontological modalities. In an ontological understanding of the stateless condition, which will be discussed in chapter three, the voice of stateless writers is confined to expressions of a stateless condition. In contrast, the thesis adopts Jacques Rancière’s relational understanding of statelessness which allows the literary production of stateless writers to be approached as acts of enacting an aesthetic subjectivity that have the capacity to impact reality rather than passive reflections of an ontological condition.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to situate the study within the field of comparative literature since its unit of focus is writers who exist within the interstices of established borders and national literatures. As Emily Apter puts it, comparative literature is a

discipline with an inherent “sense of marginalisation” characterised by “a relentlessly distancing mode of criticality” (Apter 1995:87). Since its inception, the field has helped shape the critical paradigms of the discipline especially through the work of key figures such as Auerbach, Spitzer and Said among others and their experiences of exile (86). There has also been an increasing emphasis on questions of mobility and crossing borders (both geographical and disciplinary) that are evident in postcolonial interventions, an increased emphasis on the ethics of translation and, more recently, in debates on world literature. These debates allow new theorisations of categories beyond the geopolitical world literary systems and national canons such as the global (Pratt 1995; Suassy 2006), the planetary⁵ (Spivak 2003), the translational⁶ (Apter 2013), the postcolonial (Hassan and Saunders 2003; Bassnett 2003) and the vernacular⁷ (Shankar 2012) among many others.

One of the important critical tools utilized in this study is Edward Said’s distinction between the notions of filiation, an extrinsic association such as “birth, nationality, profession” that constitutes a category such as national literature, and affiliation, a self-

⁵ In *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Spivak invokes a rather vague, in my view, planetary outlook which refers to a “collective responsibility” towards the planet as a space of alterity whose “determining experience is mysterious and discontinuous” rather than a space to master. The planetary approach is suggested as an alternative to other approaches in comparative literature such as the continental, the global and the worldly (72). As Theo D’haen puts it:

Instead of “world,” which as we have seen always implies someone’s world, or “globe,” which is *tainted with the economic power imbalances of globalization*, “planet” infers a view from the outside, in which all is equal in its alterity. (Dhaen 2013:146)

⁶ In *Translation Zone: a new comparative literature* (2006), Emily Apter calls for a move away from transnational approaches towards a translational approach for a ‘new comparative literature’. Apter argues in another article for the need for a translational humanities that is “responsive to fluctuations in geopolitics, and which intersects with but is not confined to national language frontiers” (Apter 2008: 597). In *Against World Literature: the politics of Untranslatability* (2013), Apter further argues against the translatability assumption embedded in the formation of world literature as both an academic field and a commercial market. Instead, Apter calls for an acknowledgment of untranslatability as an alternative ‘world literary system’ and “an epistemological fulcrum for rethinking philosophical concepts and discourses of the humanities,” which ultimately allows the humanities to coalesce around “hubs of singularity” (Apter 2013:31).

⁷ In *Flesh and Fish Blood: postcolonialism, translation, and the vernacular* (2012), Subramanian Shankar highlights a general inattentiveness in postcolonial studies and comparative literature to “vernacular knowledges... those oriented away from the transnational, the modern, and the hybrid and toward the local, the traditional, and the culturally autonomous” (xv). Shankar analyses the implied dangers of translating the varni-jati complex within Indian society to caste as it inevitably takes away from the term’s the vernacular resonance. The vernacular then “names a domain that tends to resist abstraction and systemization” when transposed into a wider national or transnational contexts (34).

identification through acquiring new allegiances in culture “by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation” (Said 1983:24-5). The second part of this thesis explores the different ways in which *Bidun* writers’ contest official filiative links advanced by Area Studies and the social sciences, by forging affiliative networks that exist within a literary tradition and a cultural memory. The critical modes of comparative literature allow *Bidun* literature to be approached outside of a nationalising act of literatures.

Methodologically, this thesis’ inquiries are enriched by the interdisciplinary nature of comparative literature. Within the discipline, there have been calls for “broadening the cultural scope of comparative literature offerings” by engaging with other “allied disciplines” to take account “of the ideological, cultural, and institutional contexts in which their meanings are produced” (Bernheimer 1993). The increasingly decentred and interdisciplinary nature of comparative literature allows for literary texts to be read in dialogue with other related fields such as Post-colonial Studies, Cultural Studies, Translation Studies, Area Studies, Anthropology, Politics and History. As will be demonstrated in the thesis outline below, this thesis espouses this increasingly interdisciplinary nature of the discipline.

The thesis is written in two parts. The first part establishes the contextual groundwork and theoretical framework for the study while the second part analyses the different modes of affiliation in the literary works of *Bidun* writers. The first chapter aims to address the following questions: Who are the *Bidun*? What are the discursive practices that have produced the *Bidun* as a socio-political category? The chapter brings to light the shortcomings of the dominant modes of knowledge production, driven mainly by the considerations of Area Studies and the social sciences, in which the *Bidun* have been approached. The chapter then argues for the need to go beyond the descriptive representations of the *Bidun* by engaging critically with the cultural and literary production of *Bidun* writers.

The second chapter addresses the following questions: What is *Bidun* literature and how can it be approached as a literary collectivity? The chapter aims to highlight the

dangers and the ensuing debates surrounding the study of *Bidun* writers as a literary collectivity. It offers a justification for the study of *Bidun* writers as a collective through an understanding of the intrinsic binding forces that connect the writers at the intra-*Bidun* literary and cultural levels. *Bidun* writers are approached through the lens of a shared struggle for presence articulated in literary production. The death of the *Bidun* poet Ali al-Ṣāfi and the consequent acts of remembrance (public mourning, elegies, dedications, intertextual engagements) by *Bidun* writers are read as instances of bringing together a literary community revolving around a poetics of presence. In approaching the above questions, the chapter provides the necessary contextual background concerning the materialities of cultural production in which *Bidun* writers operate. Finally, the chapter highlights how *Bidun* writers actively negotiate their presence within the exclusionary forces of state sanctioned cultural institutions by creating their own affiliative cultural networks and spaces of representation.

Chapter three engages with the philosophical discourse relating to statelessness and questions of agency and visibility. The first part of the chapter addresses a key question pertaining to the *Bidun* condition: in light of exclusion from citizenship rights and official belonging to a political entity, how can the political agency of stateless people be fully appreciated? It aims to foreground the main representations of statelessness, between an ontological and a relational understanding, from the perspective of three major political philosophers, namely, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière. Particular emphasis is placed on the reciprocal relationship between the political and the aesthetic. The thesis adopts Rancière's entangled understanding of politics and aesthetics, which offers an entry point to reading the works of *Bidun* writers as acts of enacting an aesthetic subjectivity. Informed by this view, the second part of the chapter offers a critical review of existing works addressing the writings of *Bidun* authors, albeit few and far between. The chapter ends with a close reading of Dikhil Khalīfa and Mona Kareem's poem titled *Myth of the Nest: where the innocent flee* (2007) as an illustration of how the works of *Bidun* writers will be read in the thesis.

Having set out the contextual groundwork and the theoretical concerns in the first three chapters, the second part of the thesis examines *Bidun* writers' intrinsic articulations of belonging, presence and self-positionality through complex modes of cultural affiliation

and identification. Chapter four deals with the placement of *Bidun* writers within national literary history. It addresses two main questions: how have *Bidun* writers been placed within narratives of Kuwaiti national literary history? How do *Bidun* writers renegotiate their placement? To do so, the chapter first offers an overview of the modalities in which national literary history have been initially conceived particularly with respect to questions of national beginnings and periodization. The main text that will be analyzed is the *Bidun* poet Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ's account of Kuwaiti national literary history titled *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* (2007). In this work, Mufarriḥ places *Bidun* writers as a natural and organic extension of the national literary narrative. This is accomplished by her emphasis on the inclusivity of a literary belonging over the exclusivity of official national belonging. Specifically, Mufarriḥ affiliates with a particular notion of modernist transgressive poetics within national literary history.

Chapter five explores how *Bidun* writers utilise the desert space poetically as a pre-national site of historicizing modern statelessness and contesting notions of uprootedness. The central poet whose works are analyzed in the chapter is Sulayman al-Flayyih (1951-2013). The chapter begins with an analysis of the reception of al-Flayyih within the national literary circle. In the poet's reception, the desert space, to which al-Flayyih belongs, is imagined and represented as an ahistoric site of timelessness, purity, innocence and authenticity. The chapter then examines how both al-Flayyih's autobiographical reflections and poems contest ahistoric representations of the desert. The desert space as presented by al-Flayyih is a site to reclaim a sense of uncontested origin and belonging and a site where pre-national conceptions of territoriality, sovereignty and belonging are legitimated. The second part of the chapter explores al-Flayyih's affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets in the Arabic literary tradition. The utilization of the literary mask of the *Ṣa'ālīk* is read as an act of self-positionality that situates the poet within a wider Arabic literary tradition beyond the national canon.

Chapter six explores the representations of the spatial metaphor of the *'Ashīsh*, the shanty towns where many of the *Bidun* reside, as a unique space of *Bidun* experience and exclusion, especially in novels featuring *Bidun* characters. The chapter analyses

five novels that characterise the *Bidun* community. The analysis of these novels distinguishes between two modes of representing the ‘*Ashīsh*’: the ontological and the relational. In novels depicting the ‘*Ashīsh*’ in ontological terms, including Buthayna al-’Isa’s *Unheard Collision* (2004), Fawziyya al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day* (2011) and Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013), the *Bidun* characters’ voice is often restricted to mere expressions of a stateless condition and narratives of victimization. On the other hand, al-Zāfiri’s novels, *Upturned Sky* (1995) and *Scorched Heat* (2014) contest the reductive representations of the *Bidun* characters prevalent in the Kuwaiti novel. Al-Zāfiri’s novels emphasize the relational aspects of the ‘*Ashīsh*’, or ‘*Bidun* experience’ both spatially and temporally. The space of the ‘*Ashīsh*’ is always represented in relation to national, exilic and diasporic spaces. Temporally, the history of the ‘*Ashīsh*’ is understood in relation to national historiography and wider narratives of displacement in a post-colonial context.

The thesis outline highlights how this study utilizes diverse tools from different disciplines grounded in a comparative literary approach. Chapter one engages with the discursive practices situated within Area Studies. Chapter three grounds the theoretical framework of the thesis within the field of political philosophy in relation to questions of agency, citizenship rights and the interplay between politics and aesthetics. The inquiries in chapter four, on literary history, intersect with the field of historiography, particularly within the context of the Arab Gulf. Chapter five on the *Ṣa‘ālīk* movement in Arabic poetry engages with Arabic literary studies. Chapter six makes use of Cultural Studies and Post-colonial Studies’ critiques of the hegemonic discourses of representation when discussing the representations of *Bidun* characters in the Kuwaiti novel. The multidisciplinary nature of the discipline enables the thesis’ ambitious scope of inquiries.

Thesis Scope and Sources

Proposing a ‘*Bidun* literary community,’ as will be discussed in much detail in chapter two, does not necessarily constrict the community to an isolated and bounded poetic terrain. Rather, it naturally is situated within wider fluid, multileveled terrains and

textualities; overlapping with wider topographies, namely, national literature, regional (i.e. Gulf literature), a wider Arabic literature, and a broader thematic categories of exilic, diasporic, migrant and minority literatures.⁸ While encompassing such categories, *Bidun* literature as Muhsin al-Ramli put it:

“has not been studied as it should be, even though it is much harsher than exile, alienation or migrant literatures, which have been studied thoroughly and still are... it is even wider and more complex because issues of exile, migration and alienation are only parts of statelessness. (al-Nabhān 2005:7)

Within the contours of the national, *Bidun* writers perhaps share a wider space of marginality within the Kuwaiti geography allowing others residing in Kuwait such as the Palestinian population⁹ (especially before the Iraqi invasion) and other Arab expatriate workers from Arab countries to be in an overlapping space of marginality.¹⁰

⁸ The *Bidun* literary community intersects with other stateless communities elsewhere. One anecdote provided by Muhammad al-Nabhān attests to that affinity. In 2006, Muhammad al-Nabhān participated in the 16th International Poetry Festival of Medellín in Columbia. After an unusually long introduction in Spanish by the Iraqi poet Muhsin al-Ramli explaining al-Nabhān's background, al-Nabhān recalls the audience's exceptional reception and applause. The organizers of the festival later informed him that the specific city in which the event was held, Quibdó, had a majority of stateless people.

⁹ The *Bidun*-Palestinian cultural connection is substantial and extensive and can be approached as its own comparative study. The most influential interaction between Palestinian and *Bidun* writers was in local journalism. In his series of newspapers articles *Memoirs of the Northern Bird*, Sulayman al-Flayyih tells of his relationship with Palestinian caricaturist Naji al-Ali who was his colleague in *al-Siyāsa* newspaper. Al-Flayyih recalls how al-Ali was infuriated after another Palestinian colleague bent down to kiss the hands of an affluent Kuwaiti patron. Al-Flayyih recalls, “he [Naji al-Ali] turned to me and said: Listen to me you Bedouin man, in this country everyone has a boss (*‘Am*). What do you think if I become your boss (*‘Am*) and you become mine?” (al-Flayyih 2009a). Later in his memoirs al-Flayyih expatiates on his relationship with al-Ali writing “I felt that I belong in my poetry and political stance to Palestine because of my relationship with Naji al-Ali” (al-Flayyih 2009a).

The *Bidun*-Palestinian cultural connection is also evident in the works of *Bidun* writers. In her introduction to her anthology of Palestinian poets titled *Memory's Pain*, Sa‘diyya Mufarrih’s writes:

the task [of editing the anthology]... wasn’t difficult. I know the chosen poets quite well. I have grown up, in the poetic sense, under the shadow of their writings... many of them have helped in shaping my Arab national consciousness in an early age. (Mufarrih 2010b)

Similarly, in her poetry collection titled *A Woman Lying Down*, Mufarrih dedicates five poems to the Palestinian poets Fadwa Tuqan, Muhmud Darwish, Ibrahim Nasrallah, Murid Barghouthi and a final poem “to her alone,” (i.e. Palestine). In addition, this shared space of marginality is expressed in novels featuring Palestinian and *Bidun* characters such as Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013) and Nasir al-Zafiri’s *Scorched Heat* (2014), which will be analyzed in chapter six.

¹⁰ On the figurative level, *Bidun*, as a state of unrecognized existence, can be an all-inclusive category for all marginalized individuals, particularly within the Arab world as the Lebanese writer Shawqi Buzai’ suggests. In a TV interview, Buzai comments: “if the *Bidun* have taken their name from not being recognized as full citizens, then I believe we are all *Bidun* in this Arab World” (demagtech 2012b). Similarly, Taher Ben Jalloun, the Moroccan novelist, identifies with the metaphorical aspect of becoming *Bidun* in his novel *The Hotel of the Poor* (2000). He writes:

The issue of language makes it difficult for other marginalized individuals from non-Arab speaking countries to share such a marginalized space in terms of literary expression.

The primary literature (*Bidun* Literature) that is of interest to this thesis is literature published by writers who are currently *Bidun* or who were *Bidun* at one point in their life regardless of their current citizenship status or current place of residence. Born *Bidun*, many writers have been compelled to leave Kuwait's borders in pursuit of citizenship elsewhere. Thus, the *Bidun* literary community is not limited to those who are currently stateless within Kuwait's borders as many *Bidun* writers have become citizens of other countries, but covers a wide geography from the United States to Australia. Some important examples include Nasir al- Zafiri and Muhammad al-Nabhān who have gained Canadian citizenship, Fahad 'Afet and Sulayman al-Flayyih who have become Saudi citizens and Sa'ad Al-Dūsari who is a Swiss citizen. The initial body of literature is comprised of published novels, poetry collections, short stories and articles in literary journals and newspapers (both analog and digital). All works considered in this thesis are written in *Fuṣḥa* Arabic.¹¹ The historical range of works that will be

I am of the type of people who endure pain silently. I called myself '*Bidun*' as a result of a memory of an uneasy travel experience in the autumn of 1975 to Kuwait. There, I discovered, 15 kilometres from the capital a camp where the Kuwaiti government would keep distanced illegal immigrants who are without '*(Bidun)*' citizenship. These are men who have destroyed their identity papers to avoid expulsion. They call them *Bidun*, creatures from no-space. They are shadows of men who work in daylight and disappear at night in caves or worn-out tents. (Jalloun 2000:5)

Statelessness can also be a sentiment resulting from state sanctioned racism. As Mari Matsuda puts it, "when hundreds of police officers are called out to protect racist marchers, when the courts refuse to redress for racial insult, ... the victim becomes a stateless person" (Matsuda 1989, cited in Walters 2005:xvii).

¹¹ Given the wide range of works and genres already published in *Fuṣḥa*, including the domain of *Sha 'bi* poetry requires its own methodological approach. While acknowledging the political and aesthetic valence of *Sha 'bi* poetry, a study of *Sha 'bi* poetry is fraught with a different set of challenges. The first challenge relates to the difficulty of accessing sources and poems. These sources include *Safahat al-Adab al-Sha 'bi* (pages concerned with *Sha 'bi* poetry) in newspaper archives in Kuwait and the Gulf, contributions to online cultural forums, participations in TV programmes concerned with *Adab al-Sha 'bi*. A number of poems remain within the realm of oral transmission, which requires another, more anthropological, approach. Secondly, analysing works written in *Sha 'bi* requires mapping out the generally unfamiliar cultural scene of *Sha 'bi* poetry in Arabia, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. In addition, there is a lack of scholarly sources dealing with a general phenomenon of *Sha 'bi* poetry Arabia. Some notable sources include Saad al-Sowayan's *Nabati poetry: the oral poetry of Arabia* (1985), *Al-Shi 'r al-Naba'i: dhā 'iqat al-sha 'b wa ṣulṭat al-naṣ* (Nabati Poetry: public taste and the authority of the text) (2008), and Marcel Kurpershoek's *Oral Poetry and Narrative from Central Arabia*

analyzed will be between 1979 and 2015. Works published after September 2015, the submission date of the thesis draft, are not included. This initial pool encompasses a variety and wide range of *Bidun* writers, texts and genres. The selection of particular writers and texts I examine in this work is based on the relevant themes discussed in the thesis outline.

The selected texts do not by any means intend to be fully representative of the wide range of themes, literary styles, genres and articulations of belonging prevalent in the works of *Bidun* writers. Rather, the selected texts are treated as case studies illustrative of the different manifestations of belonging in the works of *Bidun* writers.

The thesis relies heavily on previously untranslated sources. The first category of sources is the collection of the literary works published by *Bidun* writers between 1979 and 2015. Access to such material proved to be a challenge in the initial phase of the research as most of the works, especially between 1979 and 2010, have had limited circulation and are out of print. While recent publications are available in bookshops, many of the older literary works consulted in this thesis have been copied from private libraries or, with respect to works of writers residing outside of Kuwait, have been sent to me by the authors. Other literary works have been accessed through the al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry in Kuwait, which has been instrumental to the research.

The second category of sources is local and Arabic literary scholarship that relate to the general analysis of the works of *Bidun* writers. One of the aims of this thesis is to engage with literary criticism and scholarship produced in Arabic while putting it in dialogue with other scholarly works in the Western academy within Arabic literary

(1994) and Moneera al-Ghadeer's *Desert voices: Bedouin women's poetry in Saudi Arabia* (2009).

For the interested researcher, the works of Misfir al-Dūsari, Fahad 'Afet, Fahad Dūḥan and Sulayman al-Mane' are particularly notable in the *Sha'bi* tradition. I hope that some other scholar, who is more equipped with the tools required to approach *Sha'bi* poetry, would study this phenomenon.

studies and comparative literature. Chapter four on literary history brings to light the debates within the local scene relating to Kuwaiti literary history. In the treatment of the *Ṣa'ālīk* tradition in chapter five, the thesis utilises a range of Arabic scholarship on the issue. In addition to the aforementioned al-Babtain Central Library for Arabic Poetry, the SOAS main library and the library of the Kuwaiti Writers' Association have been useful in accessing such sources. In addition, the Kuwaiti Writers' Association's monthly periodical *Majallat al-Bayan* has been an important source, especially in the discussion of the reception of the *Bidun* poet Sulayman al-Flayyih in chapter five.

The third category of untranslated sources is internet material whether it be online archives of newspapers, contributions in online cultural forums, publications in cultural e-zines and debates in social media and interviews with *Bidun* writers on Youtube. Internet sources have provided vital material especially in discussing the materialities of cultural production in which *Bidun* writers operate, tracking the ongoing debates surrounding the general phenomenon of *Bidun* literature and providing contextual notes on different *Bidun* writers, which are threaded throughout the chapters of the thesis. One of the major challenges in accessing internet sources is the ephemerality of online sources. One example of the vulnerability of such sources is the total disappearance, sometime in 2013, of the archive of the cultural e-zine *Ufouq.com* established by Muhammad al-Nabhān in 2000. To avoid broken links in the bibliography, I have since 2013, created an online blog (<http://bidunliterature.blogspot.com>) as backup for most of the Internet sources that have been used in the thesis. These alternative links are included in the bibliography.

In addition to the untranslated sources, the research involved conducting interviews with the following *Bidun* writers: Dikhīl Khalīfa in Kuwait, Muhammad al-Nabhān in Bahrain, Jassim al-Shimmiri in Kuwait and Mona Kareem via Skype from the US. Unfortunately, Sulayman al-Flayyih, who is the central poet of interest in chapter five, passed away in August, 2013. Thus, I have relied on his autobiographical reflections published in a series published in *al-Jarīda* newspaper titled *Memoirs of the Northern Bird*. The primary purpose of these interviews was to investigate paratextual insights related to questions of publication, circulation and reception of their respective

works. The information obtained in these interviews has been mainly utilized in chapter two discussing the materialities of cultural production. Other writers, such as Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ and Nasir al-Zafīri have had a significant number of published interviews that address the issues of interest mentioned above. Mufarriḥ, for example, published a book titled *Seen*, which is a compilation of her interviews published in online forums and newspapers.

It is also important to stress that this thesis explores a contemporary phenomenon. Since beginning my research in 2011, I have been constantly trying to catch up with the on-going political events, new publications by *Bidun* writers and the debates surrounding the general phenomenon of *Bidun* literature in different media outlets. Throughout the process of writing the thesis, the *Bidun* issue has seen a drastic shift in terms of the community’s social, political and cultural visibility. In February 2011 many in the *Bidun* community started a series of public protests against the government’s lack of initiative in dealing with the issue. These protests, which were partly driven by energies released in the events of the ‘Arab Spring’, shifted the political discourses on the representation of the *Bidun* and generated an increased interest in the issue on both the national and international levels.

Concomitant with the rise of national and international interest was an increased sensitivity, within the national context, towards any public political debate regarding the *Bidun*. The increased sensitivity towards the issue can be read within a general trend of consolidation of political power within the executive branch in the post-‘Arab Spring’ political ambience. The government introduced stringent measures to contain the political upheaval. A number of *Bidun* activists have been arrested and prosecuted for their involvement in public talks and protests. On May of 2016, the Court of Cassation upheld a one-year prison sentence for six *Bidun* activist over charges including calling and participating in an unlicensed demonstration and assaulting the security forces (Front Line Defenders 2016).

The increased visibility of the *Bidun* was reflected in cultural production within the national cultural context. Prior to 2011, there were two novels featuring *Bidun* characters: *Upturned Sky* (1995) by the *Bidun* novelist Nasir al-Zafiri and *A Collision Never Heard* (2004) by the Kuwaiti novelist Buthayna Al-'Isa. Since then, and concomitant with the increased attention on the form of the novel in Arabic literature, there has been a surge in the depiction of *Bidun* characters in novels. These novels include Fawziyya al-Salim's *Staircases of Day* (2011); Saud al-San'ūsi' *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012); Ismail Fahad's *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013); Nasir al-Zafiri's *Al-Sahd* (2013) and *Kaliska* (2015); Basma al-'Inizi's *A Black Shoe on the Pavement* (2013); Abdullah al-Buṣayyis's *Stray Memories* (2014); and Hanadi al-Shemmiri's novella *A House Made of Tin* (2015). Short story collections featuring *Bidun* characters include Abdullah al-'Utaybi's *'Ik 'aybar* (2011) and Muna al-Shimmiri's *The Rain Falls, the Princess Dies* (2012). Thus, the focus of the chapters in the thesis had to attend to such shifts. Chapter six considers this surge of interest by analysing five novels featuring *Bidun* characters. Given the on-going publication of novels featuring *Bidun* characters during the process of researching and writing, I have stopped reviewing works dated after September 2015, which is the date of the submission of the initial draft.

* * *

Finally, one of the constant challenges faced in researching the thesis relates to my positioning as a researcher. As a researcher working on the literature of a marginalized community, I am assumed to have an expertise on the community's legal, historical, social background and validity of their citizenship claims. Throughout my journey in the Ph.D. process I have been approached by consultancy firms asking for a freelance interviewer to assess nationality claims for *Biduns* arriving in the UK, by local London police officers who require help with growing number of *Bidun* asylum seekers in their area of work and by personnel from other governmental offices expressing "interest on the *Bidun* issue in Kuwait." It suffices to say that I have refused any cooperation with all of the above entities for a number of reasons. As a student of literature, I do not see myself, and do not wish to be, competent in the tasks they require from me, such as assessing nationality claims. The area where I aspire to have competence in is that of literary criticism. The 'area expertise' assumption signals one of the constant challenges of pigeonholing the researcher, especially with access to local circles, into

the role of the ‘native informant’ on a community. At the same time, my lack of cooperation is a blatant refusal to participate in the ‘corporate academia’ industry and its ethical conundrums. Indeed, this thesis maintains a reflective distance from the prevalent, often policy-driven, studies on societies and people of the Arab Gulf. The thesis does not offer any normative insight into policy related issues. Such issues are beyond the scope of this thesis’ literary insights.

Whenever I have been asked about my research topic, particularly within a local context familiar with the *Bidun* issue, the discussion almost immediately turns into a discussion on the politics of citizenship and the validity of the *Bidun*’s claim for citizenship rights. The discussion seldom reaches the second word of the thesis title: ‘Literature.’ Within a wider academic context, where knowledge on the issue is minimal, the challenge of arriving at the second word of the title is greater. In my experiences in presenting my work, the emphasis on the ‘Area Studies’ element of my work is often regarded more valuable than any literary insight offered. Feedback, almost always, tends to veer towards an elaboration on the issue itself rather than the impact of the literature. These experiences have pressed me to constantly refocus the presentation and framing of my work to emphasise the critical and literary insight while negotiating it with the Area Studies component. The structure of this thesis reenacts my research experiences as it begins with chapter one, which is dedicated wholly to the *Bidun* issue from an Area Studies perspective. Yet later in the chapter, and throughout the second part of the thesis, the focus shifts towards the critical and analytical aspects of the literary production of *Bidun* writers and how a literary approach offers novel insights that go beyond the considerations of Area Studies.

Chapter 1: On the Term '*Bidun*'

A study of *Bidun* literature requires firstly a discussion of the unsettled term *Bidun* that this study is built on. The following chapter first aims to qualify the usage of the term. Secondly, it aims to provide a historical context of the *Bidun* issue mostly from the perspective of 'Area Studies' to highlight the discursive practices through which the issue and its people, the *Bidun*, have been studied. The chapter will then address the shortcomings of restricting knowledge production on the *Bidun* as a people to the considerations of 'Area Studies,' arguing rather for an approach that goes beyond the descriptive and into a critical engagement with the literary and cultural production of *Bidun* writers.

What's in a name? The '*Bidun*'

This research adopts the common term *Bidun* to refer to the stateless community in Kuwait. As Dr. Ghanim al-Najjar puts it "there is nothing stable about the *Bidun* issue" (Human Rights Watch 2011:3). This instability is manifest in the very nature of the term *Bidun*. Since the advent of the modern Kuwaiti state in 1961, the *Bidun*'s legal denomination has been changed six times in response to the state's legal necessities at different times. To begin with, Sālih al-Faḍāla, the current chairman of the Central Committee for Illegal Residents,¹ claims that *Bidun* is a "false term" (Ḥadath al-Yawm 2011). As he puts it, "nobody is *Bidun*; everyone must have a place to where he belongs. Their true officially recognized name in the state of Kuwait is 'illegal residents' " (Ḥadath al-Yawm 2011). This denomination used by al-Faḍāla is the latest official administrative term adopted by the Kuwaiti government to categorize the stateless community in Kuwait.²

¹ The Central Committee for Illegal Residents was established by the Amiri Decree 467/2010 on November 9, 2010, "which granted benefits and civil, social, and humanitarian facilities to illegal residents who are registered with the Central System pursuant to Decree 409/2011" (Human Rights Watch no date).

² Al-Faḍāla's use of the term is in line with the official standpoint previously articulated by government officials. The term "illegal resident" was officially adopted by the state in 1993. (Human Rights Watch 1995:17). In an interview with Human Rights Watch in 1991, the undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, at the time, Sulayman al-Shāhīn said that there is no such thing as people "Bedoon jensiya [sic] (without citizenship)" because everybody must have come from somewhere (55). Similarly, in 1993, Saud al-Nasir al-Ṣabāḥ who was the minister of information and official spokesman for the government said in an

Throughout the years, the *Bidun* have been subject to a series of name calling practiced by the government. They were officially labeled respectively as: *Abnā' al-Bādiya* (sons of the desert), *Bidun Jinsiyya* (those without citizenship), *Ghayr Kuwaiti* (non-Kuwaitis), *Ghayr Muḥaddad al-Jinsiyya* (those with undetermined citizenship), *Majhūl al-Hawiyya* (those whose identities are unknown) and lately *Muqīmūn bi Ṣūra Ghayr Qānūniyya* (illegal residents) (al-Wuqayyān 2009). The final denomination, “illegal residents,” is seen by some as a manipulative tool used by the Kuwaiti government to reduce the *Bidun* issue to a standard migratory issue dismissing its complex historical particularity (Beaugrand 2010).

On the other side of the spectrum, human rights' discourse drives international agencies and activists to adopt the legal denomination “*'Adīmī al-Jinsiyya*” (those without citizenship) to refer to the *Bidun*. This adoption is a tactical necessity to recognize a legal status protected under UN conventions concerned with the stateless.³ Although this adoption aims to offer a legal cover, it inevitably takes away from the historical weight of the term *Bidun* and the very nature of its complexity.⁴ Both the official state and human rights discourses, in effect, universalize the *Bidun* issue to fit their specific aims. Thus, using the term *Bidun* in this study is a mark of resistance to such universalization, as it is a term that carries its distinct historical weight, which will be highlighted later.

The term *Bidun* is also adopted because it attests to the unsettled belonging and positioning of the *Bidun* within society. As Claire Beaugrand puts it:

interview: “[t]here is no such people as Bedoons [sic]. Everybody has an origin; no one comes from a vacuum. Every person has a father and a grandfather and comes from a specific family. This Bedoon [sic] phenomenon started in Kuwait many years ago when some people were smuggled here from outside. They would throw away their documents- passports and foreign identity cards and live in Kuwait, claiming that they were without any documents, or Bedoon [sic]” (55-56). ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Thuwaini, who headed of the government’s central committee on the *Bidun*, said in 1994 “ [t]here are no Bedoons [sic] in Kuwait, but rather thousands of people who are residing in the country illegally” (56).

³ The government of Kuwait is not yet a signatory to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

⁴ The *Bidun* activist ‘Abd al-Hakīm al-Faḍlī rejects internalizing the term, stating in a seminar organized by the Kuwaiti Democratic Forum in November 2014: “*lasnā 'adīmī al-jinsīyya, naḥnu sukkān aṣlīyūn*” (We are not stateless, we are native residents) (Abdulhalim 2014).

The ambiguity of the term precisely captures the extremely eclectic character of the group's composition. '*Bidun*' is a non-identity, yet an administrative identity attributed to people as a result of state policies with zero coherence: in spite of some broadly attested characteristics such as their overwhelming presence in the military, the variety of *Bidun*'s situations in socio-economic terms, networks and rights enjoyed, reflect the heterogeneous composition of the Kuwaiti citizenry itself, albeit in a poverty-magnifying mirror, rather than the sheer segregated group that years of discriminatory policies have contributed towards fashioning them into. (Beaugrand 2010:20)

Even though the term *Bidun* is adopted in this project, it is adopted while acknowledging the capacity of the term to carry new meanings.⁵ Italicising the term *Bidun*, throughout the thesis, materializes its tentative use while at the same time, aims to preserve the trace of inherent instability in the term and prevent a sociological-anthropological imprint on this thesis' literary considerations.

Used initially for administrative purposes, the term *Bidun* has acquired through time connotations that go beyond the administrative. To better understand how the *Bidun* as a term has developed to refer to a socio-political category, the *Bidun* will be situated firstly within the general global phenomenon of statelessness and secondly within the local socio-political dynamics such as the *Badu/Haqdar* and citizen/non-citizen dichotomies within the Kuwaiti social construct.

Situating the *Bidun* from the Perspective of Area Studies

Statelessness is a phenomenon concomitant with the rise of the modern nation-state. One of the reasons behind the creation of the now 12 million stateless people in the world is state succession, during which individuals fail to register for citizenship under

⁵ It is also important to acknowledge the derogatory connotations of the word *Bidun* (Beaugrand 2010; al-Wugayyan 2009). Even though the term might carry derogatory connotations, it is a term that is open-ended. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes:

the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin 1981: 293).

This applies to the usage of the term *Bidun* as it is made "one's own" from within the *Bidun* themselves as the *Bidun* issue develops. It is a term that is constantly being refigured as *Bidun* activists utilise new avenues of expression via new media. *Bidun* activists have recently insisted on adopting the term the *Bidun* Kuwaitis (al-Kuwaitiyyūn al-Bidūn) to affirm the possibility of being Kuwaiti and *Bidun* at the same time. Refer to The Kuwaiti Bedoons Movement website at: <http://www.kuwbedmov.org/>.

new legislation or new administrative procedures. The more prevalent reason, however, is the arbitrary deprivation of nationality and discrimination against certain target groups based on ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences (Blitz and Lynch 2011:6). Stateless populations such as the Crimean Tatar in Ukraine, or the Nubian community in Kenya, or people of Russian descent in post-independent Slovenia and Estonia, are examples of statelessness induced by ethnic differences. The Bihari Urdu-speaking stateless people in Bangladesh are often accused of maintaining an allegiance to the country adopting their mother-tongue Pakistan and are discriminated against on linguistic basis. While each stateless population has its own particular history, not belonging to the adopted conception of 'the national' is a major factor behind their stateless condition. Yet all three traditionally assumed factors of ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences do not necessarily apply to the case of the *Bidun* in Kuwait. The *Bidun* are not historically defined as belonging to a distinct ethnic, religious, or linguistic group. As defined by 1995 Human Rights Watch report, the *Bidun* are:

a heterogeneous group which includes a substantial number of people-perhaps the majority of the Bedoons [sic]- who were born in Kuwait and have lived there all their lives... Sometimes they lack citizenship because a male ancestor neglected to apply for it when citizenship regulation were first introduced in 1948 and later in 1959, in anticipation of independence in 1961.... Members of tribes whose territory once extended between Kuwait and its neighbours, and whose allegiance was traditionally to the tribe were denied citizenship and classified as Bedoons [sic], although large numbers of them have long been settled in urban areas in Kuwait. (Human Rights Watch 1995:10)

The heterogeneous makeup of the *Bidun* in Kuwait is not much different from the makeup of the wider Kuwaiti society: Arabic speaking Muslims, a majority of which come mainly from northern tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and a minority of Persian descent (al-Wuqayyān 2009). It is common for a *Bidun* to have an uncle, a mother, or even a brother who holds Kuwaiti citizenship (Beaugrand 2010:126; Human Rights Watch 1995:15).⁶

⁶ It is important to understand that the *Bidun* in Kuwait consist of two main categories. The first category consists of the *de jure* stateless individuals who have never obtained citizenship from any other country. The second category consists of the *de facto* stateless individuals, who may have once been citizens of neighboring countries but are now effectively stateless. After being treated as quasi-nationals until 1986 and under the prospects of future naturalisation through service in the army, many have cut off any

Some argue that even though the *Bidun* are historically not an ethnic group, they have been effectively “ethnicized” (Beaugrand 2010; al-Najjar 2001; al-Wuqayyān 2009). This “ethnicization” is both a result of social and economic discrimination. Socially, the *Bidun* are viewed by a large part of the Kuwaiti society as “latecomers,” “coming to milk” the newly established welfare state (Human Rights Watch 1995:56). This depiction has been advanced by official state discourse. In 1993, Saud al-Nasir al-Ṣabāḥ, who was the spokesman of the Kuwaiti government at the time, said: “if they had to pay income taxes and if there was no free medical care or education in Kuwait there would be no more Bedoon [sic]” (Human Rights Watch 1995:56). Years of denial of citizenship rights has also further “ethnicized” the *Bidun* into a social underclass because of the economic consequences of lacking citizenship rights.

In her dissertation titled “Statelessness and Transnationalism in Northern Arabia: *Biduns* and State Building in Kuwait, 1959-2009,” Claire Beaugrand argues that contending understandings of pre-state sovereignty, territoriality, and loyalty are the main reasons behind the continual denial of the *Bidun* from citizenship rights. The “stalemate in the decade-long conflict that has set the Kuwaiti state in opposition to its stateless population claiming nationality entitlements illustrates the confusion in the understanding of transnationalism that needs to be better historicized” (Beaugrand 2010:29). This contention between the transnational and the national understandings of the history of the region is better understood in light of the *Badu/Haḍar* dichotomy present in the Kuwaiti social construct.

The *Badu/Haḍar*⁷ discourse that Anh Nga Longva discusses in her study titled “Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on *Haḍar* and *Badu* in Kuwait,” is a relevant factor in understanding the prevailing sentiments depicting the *Bidun* as ethnic outsiders undeserving of citizenship rights. Even though the study discusses two citizen

links or affiliations elsewhere and have lost the claim for citizenship for their children (al-Anezi 1994:1). In addition, stateless people who once resided in Kuwait include many of the Gazan Palestinians who hold Egyptian documents, but are not considered as part of the *Bidun* category (8).

⁷ *Badu*, is the term commonly used to denote Kuwaiti citizens from Bedouin origins mostly living outside the 1920 town wall, and *Haḍar*, denotes the townspeople residing within the wall.

communities, the *Ḥaḍar* and the *Badu*, its analysis pertains to the social status of the *Bidun* because of the shared common Bedouin origin of *Badu* citizens and the majority of the *Bidun*. In Longva's analysis, the benefits of the welfare state become a deciding factor in rejecting 'newcomers' from naturalization. *Ḥadari* discourse depicts the *Badu* as newcomers wanting to reap the benefits of the newly established welfare state, where education, healthcare and housing are practically free. The *Badu* are also viewed as people who will not assimilate to 'Kuwaiti Culture' by holding on to their tribal traditions (Longva 2006:172). Thus, naturalization of many of the *Badu* was considered as a "widening of the nation," in terms of the community of citizens, which "means - at least in the people's imagination - a reduction or even the end of the welfare state" (183). This view in turn "sets in motion the process of 'ethnicization' of the *Badu* community, "whereby differences between host population and newcomers are systematically emphasized, even invented when need be" (172).

This 'ethnicization' is also a result of the government's direct measures relating to housing policies that have kept *Badu* and *Ḥaḍar* segregated; "fixing them as socio-spatially distinct categories" (al-Nakib 2014:15). Three housing schemes were implemented by the government to house its population as decisions were made to demolish the old town quarters and develop a new housing strategy. The first scheme pertained to the *Ḥaḍar* (townspeople), whose homes were relocated from the old town quarters to newly developed *manāṭiq namūdhajīyya* (model areas) not far from the old town. Relocation was made possible through the government's land acquisition scheme, whereby land was appraised and purchased by the government at inflated rates (15). The second scheme applied to residents of peripheral villages such as Salmiyya, al-Jahra and Farwaniyya. Their properties were similarly acquired by the government and were given new housing in their respective areas. The third housing scheme was concerned with the *Badu* who had started to settle in what is commonly referred to as '*Ashīsh*, or ad-hoc shanty dwellings originally established around oil company work sites that offered jobs for many *Badu* (al-Moosa 1976:3).⁸ Due to their lack of land ownership, many of the *Badu* missed out on the economic opportunity of the government's land acquisitions. As the government was planning to rehouse the shanty dwellers in the 1970's, it built temporary housing commonly referred to as *sha 'biyyāt*,

⁸ The development of the '*Ashīsh* will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

or *al-masākin al-sha'biyya* (popular housing) in areas such as Jahra, Mīna' 'Abd Allah, 'Arḍiyya, Jlib al-Shyūkh, Dawḥa and Ṣulaybiyya (al-Moosa 1976:294; al-Nakib 2014). The *sha'biyyāt* are “constructed very cheaply, using locally made grey concrete bricks without any plastering, painting, or other finishing applied, and the settlement areas contained no paved roads” (al-Nakib 1976:18-19). Compared to the 400-1000 square meters range of houses in the *manātiq namūdhajīyya*, a *sha'biyyat* house was 150 square meters despite the larger *Badu* family's average size (294). The majority of *Badu* who gained citizenship moved out from the *sha'biyyāt* and into the Low Income Housing projects developed by the government in areas such as Riqqa, al-Jahra, Khayṭan, and Ṣubahiyya (290). Those *Badu* who did not gain citizenship, i.e. the *Bidun*, were excluded from these housing projects and instead moved into the *sha'biyyāt*, and many are still living there.

While geographically excluded, the *Badu* who had gained citizenship rights have been exercising their constitutional and political rights, renegotiating the social and political reality of Kuwait, while the *Bidun* have been further distanced from Kuwaiti society due to their lack of citizenship rights. The citizenship-based economic, social and spatial divide between *Bidun* and Kuwaiti citizens can be better elucidated by contrasting the rights of Kuwaiti citizens with the rights of non-Kuwaitis including the *Bidun* residing in Kuwait.

In another study titled “Neither Autocracy nor Democracy but Ethnocracy,” Longva argues that Kuwait's political system is neither a democracy nor an autocracy but a form of civic ethnocracy; “a political system based on kinship, real or presumed” (Longva 2005:119). The defining feature of this kinship is “not racial, linguistic, or religious, but is defined by citizenship conceived in terms of shared descent” (Longva 2005:119). Instead of traditionally-assumed unifying factors of race, religion, and language creating ethnic identity, the major distinguishing factor of ethnicity in Kuwait is citizenship rights and the economic privileges associated with it.

In comparison with non-Kuwaiti residents, Kuwaiti nationals enjoy a generous welfare system guaranteeing its citizens free education, healthcare and subsidized housing among other benefits. In addition, the Kuwaiti government provides economic

incentives for Kuwaitis in the public and private sector, which inflates their salaries significantly in comparison with non-Kuwaitis. Such citizenship privileges create economic disparities between Kuwaitis on the one side as a definite social cluster, and non-Kuwaitis including the *Bidun* in another.

However, the *Bidun* also suffer from unique forms of citizenship-based discrimination due to their lack of *any* citizenship. The *Bidun* have enjoyed a special status of “quasi nationals” (al-Anezi 1989:257) in-between nationals and expatriates, primarily due to their historical exemption from the 1959 Law on the Residence of Aliens and their employment in the Kuwaiti military and police (al-Anezi 1989:260; al-Anezi 1994:9).

Further discrimination materialized after a post-1986 governmental decree, which introduced legal, political, economic and psychological measures to make life in Kuwait increasingly intolerable for the *Bidun*. A brief historical overview of the development of the issue is important to better understand the relevance of the 1986 drastic shift for the *Bidun*.

Historical Development of the *Bidun* Issue

In his study titled “The Stateless in Kuwait: the Crisis and Consequences,” Faris al-Wuqayyān presents the development of the *Bidun* issue in Kuwait in three main historical phases: recognition, denial and accusation. The first phase, “phase of recognition” (1959-1986), stretches from the establishment of the Kuwait Nationality Law No. 15 of 1959 and the Law on the Residence of Aliens No. 17 of 1959 to the year 1986. During that period, the lack of documentation of the *Bidun* community was not considered as an impediment to daily life. The *Bidun* enjoyed access to many of the privileges that were later denied such as public education, public health and government employment. The *Bidun* were officially, included as Kuwaitis in the national census up until 1989 (al-Najjar 2003).

The recognition manifest itself legally through the *Bidun*’s historical exemption from the 1959 Law on the Residence of Aliens which exempts *afrād al-‘ashā’ir* (tribesmen) “entering Kuwait by usual land routes for the purposes of carrying out their usual

business” (al-Anezi 1989:260).⁹ In addition, the Kuwaiti military and police in its early stages heavily recruited the *Bidun* (al-Anezi 1994:9). In June 1985, the *Bidun*, or those who were legally identified as non-citizen “Kuwaiti birth certificate holders”, constituted 32.7 % of the overall Kuwaiti police force (al-Fahad 1989:308).

Recognition of the *Bidun* as a constitutive group within the bureaucracy was overturned in the second phase “phase of denial” (1986-1991) where life for the *Bidun* in Kuwait took a drastic turn. Due to domestic and regional upheavals, the unsettled position of the *Bidun* was viewed by the state as a ‘ticking time bomb’ that needed immediate action (Human Rights Watch 1995; al-Wuqayyān 2009). Regionally, the intensification of the Iraq-Iran war exerted pressures on the government to drastically change its security measures towards its stateless population. The presence of undocumented individuals in Kuwait was seen as a pressing security threat in light of increased migration, regional sectarian polarisation and the alleged infiltration of the Kuwaiti army by a group of *Bidun* officers (al-Najjar 2003; al-Wuqayyān 2009) brought about by the war. On the local level, the issue of mass naturalisation has developed into a highly sensitive issue within Kuwaiti political discourse. This was primarily due to what is commonly referred to as *al-tajnīs al-siyāsī*, or politically motivated extra-legal naturalization. In the period after 1966, the ruling family naturalised many from the *Badu* tribes to counter political opposition (Human Rights Watch 1995:62; al-Ghabra 1995:55; al-Hajeri 2014:8). Thus, any attempt at mass naturalisation was viewed as an alteration of the electoral body that would ultimately destabilise the ‘political balance’ (al-Hajeri 2014: 8). On the economic level, naturalising the *Bidun* was and is still presented to the public as an economic burden that would exert significant pressures on the welfare system. Debarring *Bidun* from citizenship rights was also purported to protect the social fabric of society from ‘outsiders.’ The increased presence of expatriates also exerted pressures on the formation of a Kuwaiti national identity. For the culmination of a Kuwaiti national identity, the ‘grey area’ that the *Bidun* historically occupy had to be eliminated (Crystal 2005:176).

⁹ The “usual business” stated in Article 25 relates to the Bedouins’ trading engagements in the city, commonly referred to as *Musābala*, where Bedouins traded dried milk, oil and wool in exchange for manufactured commodities (al-Anezi 1989: 260).

1986 marks the year of extreme transition in the government's dealing with the *Bidun* issue. After being recognized as part of the Kuwaiti population in the national census since 1959, a new government strategy aiming to tighten the living conditions on the *Bidun* denied their right of existence as part of the resident population and deemed them illegal residents. On the 20th of September, 2003, *al-Ṭalī'a* weekly newspaper published the minutes¹⁰ of a confidential ministerial committee held in September 1988 outlining measures that aimed to make life extremely precarious for the *Bidun*.¹¹

At the legal level, the 1986 measurements dubbed the *Bidun* "illegal residents." This meant that they were denied travel documents (driving licenses, passports,¹² and birth, death, marriage, and divorce certificates). Their only formal ID is what is known as the green card issued by the ministry of interior affairs.¹³ These obstacles have had a great impact on the daily life of the *Bidun*.¹⁴ This legal positioning, as unrecognized outsiders, does not allow the *Bidun* to contest their rights to citizenship according to Kuwaiti citizenship law in the judicial system. Citizenship is considered a matter of sovereignty and is a prerogative of the executive branch. This leaves the *Bidun* with limited formal channels to voice their discontent.

Politically, the *Bidun* lack any officially approved political rights and are denied the right to protest their existing conditions. Recently, starting with a protest in February 2011, the *Bidun* have been involved in public protests to advocate their rights and to express their frustration towards the government's lack of initiative and sincerity in finding a solution for their conditions. These protests have been suppressed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs's Special Forces and a number of *Bidun* activists have been detained (Kareem 2011; Human Rights Watch 2011b). Another informal channel to

¹⁰ Refer to <http://www.bedoon.org/ar/news-action-show-id-123.htm> for the complete minutes.

¹¹ The shift in the governmental committee's policies is corroborated by the Human Rights Watch Report in 1995 titled: *Bedoons in Kuwait "Citizens without Citizenship"* which cites excerpts from an interview with the then minister of Interior Affairs Salim Subah al-Salim in the Emirati journal *al-Azmina al-Arabiyya* where he outlined the policy shift.

¹² An exception would be the issuance of temporary Article 17 grey passports that were originally issued for special governmental missions.

¹³ In 2012, the Central Committee for Illegal Residents proposed a three colour ID scheme to distinguish between the *Bidun*'s different legal statuses (al-Turki 2012).

¹⁴ Refer to Refugees International report entitled "About Being Without: Stories of Stateless in Kuwait" for more on the day-to-day hardships that the *Bidun* experience. Available at: <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/policy/in-depth-report/about-being-without-stories-stateless-kuwait>.

advocate *Bidun* rights is through increasing international pressure from organizations headed by the *Bidun* residing outside of Kuwait such as The Kuwaiti Bedoon Movement led by Muhammad Wālī al-’Inizi in Harrow, London and Bedoonrights.com led by Mona Kareem in New York. Locally, the *Bidun* pressure members of parliament whose constituencies include Kuwaiti relatives of the *Bidun* to raise the issue of their rights.

The economic consequences of the lack of citizenship rights have left the *Bidun* in the lower stratum of Kuwaiti society. The *Bidun* are barred from employment in the public sector and restricted from employment in the private sector (al-Wuqayyān 2009). This leaves the *Bidun* with minimal employment options such as illegal street vending and low wage minor jobs (al-Wuqayyān 2009; Beaugrand 2010). These restrictions are coupled with the denial of welfare benefits and access to public education and public healthcare, which increases the economic burden on the *Bidun*.

The *Bidun*’s dire conditions are further reiterated by psychological measures, which Beaugrand refers to as “administrative violence”. She defines it as the “use of all possible administrative means to delegitimize the claims to citizenship by anybody feeling some sense of entitlement” (Beaugrand 2010:144). This administrative violence manifests itself in four ways: (1) the imposition of an identity rejected by the concerned persons, (2) a de facto pauperisation of this category of the population, (3) a symbolic process of stigmatization, (4) a nerve-wracking absence of transparency (Beaugrand 2010:144).

One important instance embodying these acts of administrative violence is the government’s proposal, as revealed in November 2014 by Māzin al-Jarrah, an official in the Ministry of Interior Affairs, to offer the *Bidun* an ‘economic citizenship’ granted by the Union of the Comoros in return for Kuwait’s investments. With this new ‘economic citizenship,’ the *Bidun* would then receive residence permits in Kuwait as Comorians with the added value of enjoying free education and healthcare (BBC 2014). These government tactics intensify the psychological stress on the *Bidun*, ultimately making life more precarious for the community. All of the above measures are materializations of the second phase of denial as described by al-Wuqayyān.

The third phase after the 1986 decree is the “phase of accusation” (starting from 1991), which came as an aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Many of the *Bidun* were accused by the state of holding or hiding their original passports, mainly Iraqi and Syrian, because of their northern tribal origins. The Iraqi invasion exacerbated the *Bidun*’s already vulnerable position in Kuwaiti social structure. During the invasion, the Iraqi army in some cases encouraged non-Kuwaitis to join *al-Jaysh al-Sha‘bi* (the Popular Army), a ‘local’ militia under the supervision of the Iraqi forces (Human Rights Watch 1995:23). While many of the *Bidun* were forced to join under military or economic pressures, there were those who joined voluntarily as a reaction to the unfavorable treatment they had received prior to the invasion (23). After the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the *Bidun* were immediately stigmatized en masse for mere suspicion of joining the popular army, while at the same time many of the sacrifices of the *Bidun* in the Kuwaiti military were overlooked.¹⁵ This stigmatization would then be legally materialized in the form of *al-qayd al-amnī* (a security hold), which is a legal barrier against naturalization.

Phase of Visibility

Al-Wuqayyān’s presentation of the historical development of the *Bidun* issue emphasises the extrinsic local and regional forces that have shaped the historical experience of the *Bidun*. While these forces are essential in understanding the historical development of the issue, it nevertheless overlooks important questions relating to the *Bidun*’s agency and their capacity to negotiate their position in society in spite of such forces. If one is to extend al-Wuqayyān’s historical narrative, then the *Bidun* are perhaps now witnessing a ‘new’ phase, since 2011, that can be termed ‘the phase of visibility’. While all other phases emphasize the external forces that have shaped the *Bidun* experience as a passive collectivity and receivers of governmental policies, this phase is defined by the *Bidun*’s visible assertion of their own agency. This visibility is most clearly materialised in the *Bidun* activists’ claim for their rights through public demonstrations. February 2011 witnessed the first *Bidun* public demonstration, which

¹⁵ The Human Rights Watch 1995 report mentions that almost one-third of native inhabitants killed by the Iraqi forces during the invasion were *Bidun* (Human Rights Watch 1995: 23).

was later followed by a series of public protests between 2011 and 2013. Whereas the *Bidun* issue was historically approached from outside the *Bidun* community by local Kuwaiti activists or local ‘middle-men’ and representatives of international human rights agencies, in this phase, *Bidun* activists went to the front lines. It is telling that the first public lecture on the *Bidun* issue co-organised by *Bidun* activists in the Kuwaiti Association for Human Rights in November of 2006 was titled *al-Bidūn Yataḥadathūn* (the *Bidun* Speak). This title highlights a departure from a previously patient and passive stance. Yet, to reduce the *Bidun*’s visibility to their engagement in mass public demonstrations, starting in 2011 is problematic and goes against this thesis’ thrust. *It is the contention of this thesis, that in each of the aforementioned phases, visibility and agency were ever-present, taking different cultural forms, particularly literary production, but were often overlooked.* In other words, the *Bidun* have been speaking for a long time, but who was listening?

An approach which limits knowledge of the *Bidun* to the external political and socio-economic factors subjects the *Bidun* to the very exclusionary forces that have been denying them their rights. It is an approach that presents the *Bidun* as a social collectivity that can be understood, contained and controlled solely in terms of legal, sociological or anthropological considerations.

In the scarce studies where agency has been approached, the emphasis is on the collective agency of the *Bidun* as social and political interlocutors within Kuwaiti society creating “networks of solidarity,” or as “transnational actors” historically influencing the region’s geopolitical structure (Beaugrand 2010). Such an approach might also be complicit in what Spivak calls just another “desire for totality” in controlling knowledge production “even as they restore versions of causality and self-determination to him [the subaltern]” (Spivak 1987:201). What is left out in the limited knowledge production on agency is the personal and singular narratives articulated in cultural production, which often operate within different spheres than the human rights, anthropological, international relations or legal discourses. Thus, it becomes a question of accessibility, readership, and interpretation; who reads works by *Bidun* writers? What works are read? And how are they read? These questions will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Beyond the Descriptive: the need for a literary approach

Often, when the sphere of literary production and the social sciences intersect, conclusions regarding questions of the cultural identity of marginalised groups, which require a different set of tools than those offered by the social sciences, are formulated with a social-anthropological imprint. An obvious example is Faris al-Wuqayyān's characterisation of what he terms a distinct "*Bidun* Culture," which arose out of the causal relationship between the *Bidun* and their political and socio-economic positioning (al-Wuqayyān 2009). In "The Stateless in Kuwait: the Crisis and Consequences," al-Wuqayyān writes:

These government policies, conflicting outlooks in dealing with the stateless, the many enforced changes in the group's label, the increased restrictions to their civil rights, along with the rejection of their historical presence in spite of contrary evidence has created a present identity crisis for stateless individuals. The crisis is accompanied with psychological symptoms such as restlessness, pessimism, lack of confidence, anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders and an aggressive demeanor among other things. (al-Wuqayyān 2009)

Bidun culture is then defined as "a culture of deep feelings of exclusion and loss of the main components of cultural identity," which in turn induces defiant reactions such as "drawing graffiti, misuse of public space, burglary, crime, brawling and a general sense of cynicism" (al-Wuqayyān 2009). As a way to cement this characterization of *Bidun* culture, al-Wuqayyān refers to the literary production of the *Bidun* as a literature necessarily reflecting those conditions. He adds, "what characterizes the poetry and prose works of *Bidun* writers is the prevalence of a melancholic tone and a tragic use of language that almost always revolves around the loss of rights and the dispossession of identity" (al-Wuqayyān 2009).

Through such unscrutinised characterisations of '*Bidun* culture,' the term culture is used as a substantial feature of the community that, as Arjun Appadurai argues, brings "culture back into the discursive space of race" (Appadurai 1996:12). At the same time, as Appadurai suggests, this substantialisation of culture appears to "discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated" (12). Thus,

such totalizing characterisations further ethnicise the community while subjecting them to the very exclusionary forces that keep them entirely containable and perceivable.¹⁶

The approach to *Bidun* literature as a means of extrapolating certain notions of cultural identity poses a question that is central to this thesis, namely, the interplay or tension between an approach advanced by the demands and concerns of ‘Area Studies,’ and one suggested by a critical engagement with the literary works. Indeed, what has been explicated in this chapter is mainly an approach to the *Bidun* issue from the perspectives of Area Studies and the Social Sciences. The *Bidun* have been approached from an international relations perspective as transnational stateless tribal agents (Beaugrand 2010), a socio-political and anthropological perspective as anthropological subjects (Longva 2006; al-Nakib 2014; Human Rights Watch 1995) and a legal perspective as dispossessed stateless individuals in relation to international Human Rights Law and conventions (al-Anezi 1989; al-Anezi 1994; al-Wuqayyān 2009; Blitz and Lynch 2011). While these descriptive approaches are essential, even imperative, to understand and address any issue related to the *Bidun*, they simply do not suffice. The descriptive is currently what constitutes the production of knowledge on the *Bidun* issue and consequently on the *Bidun* as people. Yet, there exists a gap in knowledge production, which this thesis aims to bring to light.

When approaching literary texts, an ‘Area Studies’ approach may be useful in informing the text’s context, or its ‘worldliness.’ As put forth by Edward Said:

[T]exts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. (Said 1983:4)

This chapter, so far, aimed to bring the worldliness and context of the literary production into light. Yet this is but a first step, as literary texts do not necessarily

¹⁶ It is important to mention that the same reductive tools and forces that often depict the *Bidun* as an easily and entirely knowable collective are also used in the analysis of Kuwaiti social structure as a whole as was highlighted earlier, and societies in the Gulf in general. It is as if these societies can be measured with a grid, with facile divisions of sociological classifications of *Badu-Hadhar* and Sunni-Shi‘i among others without attention to subtle nuance after nuance that becomes in many cases the rule and not the exception. The production of the *Bidun* as a category is only symptomatic of a wider pathology that requires its own study.

operate within the parameters imposed by the considerations of ‘Area Studies’. Literary production works through negotiating its position within those parameters and often reconsidering the fixities on which the rubric of ‘Area Studies’ is structured.

In light of calls in the discipline for a ‘new comparative literature,’ this thesis aspires to find a common ground between the rigour of ‘Area Studies,’ and Comparative Literature’s capacity to closely read texts “with literary depth rather than only social scientific fluency” (Spivak 106). Closely reading the texts requires knowledge of the language, not as “a ‘field’ language,” (9) but as one with the conceptual aptitude that suggests its own ways of reading, understanding and theorising. This is most evident in the untranslatability of some of the key terms advanced throughout the thesis such as *ša’laka* discussed in chapter 5. Untranslatability emphasises the “irreducible singularity” (Apter 2008:584) that exists within linguistic and cultural traditions. Acknowledging untranslatability provides alternate points of categorisation and theorisation, or “new cartographies of the present,” beyond national literary borders or the geopolitics of world literary systems (597).

In summary, to understand the intricacies of the local and the interstices that exist within established categories, an ‘Area Studies’ approach does not suffice. It is rather necessary to admit to the significance of a critical strand. Whereas Area Studies emphasizes the filiative categories in which the Bidun are traditionally understood, a literary approach offers novel insight into the intrinsic affiliative links forged by Bidun writers. While acknowledging the legitimacy of the historical, legal, sociological or anthropological approaches, situating the study within the discipline of comparative literature allows the thesis to present the body of literature analytically and critically.

The *Bidun*’s unique social positioning has indeed allowed for a unique literature to arise within the *Bidun* community, but the term ‘*Bidun* literature’ cannot be freely used in a reductive sense without carefully considering its limiting effects. The next chapter will focus on the term “*Bidun* literature,” and a *Bidun* literary community discussing the problematics involved in the use of the term and making a case for its usage.

Chapter 2: Bidun Literature and Literary Community

The chapter is mainly concerned with contextualising the literary production of *Bidun* writers. It begins with a discussion of the limitations and dangers of approaching *Bidun* writers as a literary collectivity. The chapter then makes a case for the study of *Bidun* writers as a collectivity through an analysis of the intrinsic binding forces that bring together the writers at the cultural and literary levels. Namely, it examines the materialities of cultural production in which *Bidun* writers operate. *Bidun* writers will be approached through the lens of a shared struggle for presence, manifest in literary production, against official acts of absencing. The chapter highlights how *Bidun* writers develop their own affiliative cultural networks and spaces of representation beyond the exclusionary forces of the official cultural institution. The chapter concludes with the case of the death of the *Bidun* poet Ali al-Şāfi, and the ensuing acts of remembrance (public mourning, elegies, dedications, intertextual engagements) by *Bidun* writers. These acts will be read as instances of bringing together a literary community revolving around a poetics of presence.

On ‘*Bidun* Literature’: Limitations and Problematics

Comprehensive studies addressing the general phenomenon of *Bidun* literature as a literary collectivity have been few and far between. *Bidun* writers have regularly been mentioned in literary criticism and comparative studies but not under the nomenclature of “*Bidun* literature”¹ (al-‘Abwīni 1982; Adam 2009; ‘Ali 2010; al-Bazei 2001; al-Fārsī 2004; al-Juwayyir 2006; al-Maqaliḥ 2011). As a term, “*Bidun* literature” was first coined by the Kuwaiti novelist Walid al-Rujayb in *al-Watan* newspaper in an article dated 1994 (Salām Ya Kuwait 2011). Generally, it has been casually used to refer to the works of *Bidun* writers. Yet this offhand usage is problematic if its dangers are not acknowledged. The following section aims to qualify the use of “*Bidun* literature” as a literary collectivity and unpack its limitations before proceeding further into an analysis of its corpus.

¹ A detailed critical review of the cited studies and sources will be discussed in chapter three under the section titled ‘Approaches to Bidun literature’.

One of the obvious limitations of approaching *Bidun* literature as a collectivity is that it is based solely on a legal condition without regard to basic differences in the writers' gender, age, style or affinities with literary schools. *Bidun* writers have been studied in a number of ways but seldom as *Bidun* writers. Sulayman al-Flayyih, who in 1976 was the first *Bidun* poet ever to publish a poetry collection, has been approached as part of a phenomenon of Bedouin poets writing modern Arabic poetry in *Fuṣḥa* (al-'Abwīni 1982). Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ and Mona Kareem have been analysed in relation to issues of gender and estrangement (al-Fārsī 2004). Other *Bidun* writers have been approached in terms of their thematic expression² and others according to their generational association.³ The diversity of approaches highlights how the literary collective is anything but self-evident.

Within the circle of *Bidun* writers, usage of the term itself is not yet settled. When asked about being a *Bidun* writer, Muhammad al-Nabhān responds "I belong to poetry alone and far from names and terms" (al-Zuhairi 2007). Al-Nabhān finds that such a categorization has the potential to emphasize the ideological at the expense of the aesthetic. As al-Nabhān puts it, "I am not in favor of such a categorization as it may burden the poet to direct his poem towards purely intellectual, political or social issues without necessary attention to the poetic aspects" (al-Zuhairi 2007).

Similarly, Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ does not necessarily identify with this term, flatly rejecting "*Bidun* writer" as it is "void of meaning" (Mufarriḥ 2011:109). For Mufarriḥ, individual creativity is not directly related to her statelessness. At the same time, the *Bidun* issue in her view is not a "cause to fight for," rather it is "a problem" that needs to be solved (Mufarriḥ 2011:109).

Mufarriḥ also worries that asserting a *Bidun* literary identity implies an exclusion from national literature, an idea which reiterates the general official exclusion of the *Bidun* based on their lack of citizenship rights. Rather, Mufarriḥ emphasises the emotive notions of belonging. To her, being a Kuwaiti is not solely a matter of official

² See Adam Yusif's *Qaṣīdat al-Tafāṣīl al-Yawmiyya fī al-Shi'r al-Khalījī al-Mu'āṣir* (The Poem of Everyday Detail in Contemporary Gulf Poetry) (2009).

³ See Sa'ad al-Juwayyir's *Bawṣalat al-Jihāt al-'Ashr al-Mashhad al-Shi'rī fī al-Kuwait: al-tis'īnāt namūdhanjan*. (A Compass of the Ten Directions, the Poetic Scene in Kuwait: The Case of the 90s) (2006).

documents; it is an emotional attachment that is independent of official recognition.

She writes:

Yes, I am without citizenship, but fortunately I am not without a homeland. In my opinion, there is a difference between a homeland, which is an attachment... a sentiment... a coexistence... and before all else, a faith and a belief that is firm and true...and between citizenship, which is an official document that demonstrates to others that its holder belongs to this or that state. I exist with all my consciousness and all my belief as a Kuwaiti, and, personally, do not need a document to authenticate this feeling, even as my need for the document in facilitating my daily affairs becomes greater. In any case, I have never, in my whole life, stopped before this partial detail, and have never made it an excuse not to achieve. In life, luckily, there are many options that do not require the document in order for us to continue practicing hope. (al-Khuwayldi 2011)

On the other hand, the *Bidun* poet Dikhīl Khalīfa insists on emphasizing *Bidun* literature as a valid literary collectivity *within* national literature. To Khalīfa, being *Bidun* is a mark of an epistemic privilege that allows *Bidun* writers to enjoy a distinct poetic identity unique in its themes and styles of expression (Salām Ya Kuwait 2011). At the same time, *Bidun* writers are “more creative” within national literary circles and are effectively “leading the poetic scene” in Kuwait (Mufarriḥ 2011:109; al-Jaffāl 2011). Thus, *Bidun* literature is presented as a literary collectivity that is inclusive of Kuwaiti literature and a main component contributing to the Kuwaiti literary scene.

In both views, there seem to be an emphasis on rejecting any form of inclusion/exclusion binary that limits *Bidun* writers’ choices of self-definition. It is seldom that a *Bidun* writer refers to himself as either a “*Bidun* writer” or a “Kuwaiti writer” in his or her printed works.⁴ Instead, many *Bidun* writers are commonly referred to in their published works as “a writer or poet from Kuwait”, thus emphasizing an emotive belonging that goes beyond the enforced binaries. This rejection of the Kuwaiti vs. *Bidun* binary is based on intrinsic notions of belonging that resist official delineation. At the same time, it acknowledges both terms to emphasize emotive belonging to a country of residence while still acknowledging an experience of

⁴ One exception is Mona Kareem’s publication *A Manifesto Against Women* in ikhtyar.com where she is described as “a ‘Bidun’ poet residing in New York” (Kareem 2015).

exclusion from it. In political discourse, this is reflected in the *Bidun* activists' adoption of the term "the *Bidun* Kuwaitis" to acknowledge both conditions simultaneously marking the *Bidun*'s insistence on creating intrinsic spaces of self-definition.

A case for '*Bidun* literature': the struggle for presence

While acknowledging the limitations of the term *Bidun* literature as a collectivity, there is a case to be made for its usage. *Bidun* writers are not united by gender, age or affiliation to a literary school, but rather by a specific and powerful shared historical experience. This is a unifying influence because it keeps the *Bidun* at a reflective distance from mainstream notions of belonging. In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said asserts that "people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (Said 2001:186). Similarly, and perhaps more acutely, *Bidun* writers are also aware of simultaneous dimensions of belonging as they are living as expelled outsiders in what they consider their home.

This distance manifests itself culturally through the *Bidun* writers' connection to the official cultural institution. The act of writing for many *Bidun* writers also carries a certain sense of urgency as it counters a state of unrecognized existence and an officially sanctioned institutional act of absencing. What is meant by institutional acts of absencing are those specific acts of exclusion related to the materialities of publishing, access to spaces of cultural exchange, and questions of inclusion and exclusion from literary histories and anthologies. This urge to defy an absencing act by engaging in literary production and cultural visibility will be examined, in the following section, as a powerful binding force bringing *Bidun* writers together.

In an article published in *al-Wasat* newspaper,⁵ the *Bidun* short story writer Karīm al-Hazzā' writes about what he terms "the poets of absence." It is a term denoting those *Bidun* poets, the likes of Ahmad al-Nabhān, Sa'ad Farḥan, Fahad al-Rudaini, and Ali al-

⁵ I have received the original article from al-Hazza' in a personal email after *al-Wasat* newspaper was shut down along with its online archive. A copy of the original article is available here: http://bidunliterature.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/blog-post_2133.html

Şāfī who have completely fallen from the cultural scene for different reasons and whose works have been “devoured by the fires of absence.” As al-Hazzā‘ puts it, Ahmad al-Nabhān “forgot how to write,” Sa‘ad Farḥan “soaked in his tragedy,” Fahad al-Rudaini “got lost in his estrangement” while Ali al-Şāfī “departed on the day of Eid” (al-Hazzā‘ 2012).

In introducing these *Bidun* poets, al-Hazzā‘ positions them within a wider generational cluster: the poets of the 90s in Kuwait. The 90s generation, writes al-Hazzā‘ was “mostly made up of the ‘*Bidun*.’ ” The *Bidun* poets, specifically, “*struggled to affirm their presence* in face of the pressures practiced by official cultural institutions” (al-Hazzā‘ 2012 emphasis added). Yet this “struggle for presence,” al-Hazzā‘ argues, was eased by the advent of digital publishing. Al-Hazzā‘ continues “the technological openness and the internet served as an excellent breathing space for some of this generation’s sons, especially the *Bidun*” (al-Hazzā‘ 2012). Yet even with this unprecedented access to these new spaces of cultural presence (i.e. digital publication), many *Bidun* poets still disappeared from the cultural scene altogether for different reasons. There is more to the “fires of absence” than matters of accessibility. Al-Hazzā‘ directly relates the poets’ disappearance to the materialities of everyday life.⁶

In mentioning the biographies of the absent poets, al-Hazzā‘ is keen to present the poets’ daily reality as *Bidun* as a default condition of absencing that they are born into. Al-Nabhān was “born in Kuwait in 1969, ...earned his high school diploma... and was unable to continue his education, despite his academic distinction, because he was *Bidun*.” When asked about why he stopped writing, Ahmad al-Nabhān replied sarcastically “now I don’t even know how to hold a pen in my hand” (al-Hazzā‘ 2012). Similarly, Fahad al-Rudaini decided to emigrate to the United States to “fix his situation”⁷ (*Ta‘dīl Wath‘*) after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

⁶ In a television interview in 2012, Muhammad al-Nabhan commented that the “suffering of the *Bidun* writer lies in the limitations set by the cultural institutions in conveying the *Bidun* writer’s voice. The cultural institution excludes *Bidun* writers from representing their homeland abroad. At the local level, being a *Bidun* writer limits the chances of participation in cultural activities organized by the institution.” (Demaghtech 2012a).

⁷ Fixing the situation, or *Ta‘dīl Wath‘*, is a euphemistic phrase used by Kuwaiti officials to encourage *Bidun* to regularise their residence. This is done either by disclosing their ‘hidden documents’ or by obtaining citizenship from other countries which sometimes entails the illegal ‘purchase’ of passports

What needs to be stressed in al-Hazzā' 's article is how the presence of *Bidun* writers by way of publication is depicted as a *struggle* against official institutionalised acts of absencing both political and cultural. In this context, for *Bidun* poets the act of publishing becomes a form substantiating, affirming and articulating a presence aesthetically.

Also apparent in the article is yet another form of struggle for presence through an act of remembrance of other absent *Bidun* poets. This act turns into another, perhaps more potent, struggle for presence. One may ask: if al-Hazzā' , a *Bidun* writer, hadn't taken on this task of keeping the memory of the absent *Bidun* poets and their works alive, then who would have? It is a dual struggle for presence: in the willful act of writing and publishing and in the act of making present other absent poets by writing about them. Thus, this idea of a 'shared struggle of presence' against the 'fires of cultural absence' will be approached as an intrinsic lens in which a *Bidun* literary community can be envisaged.

The following section will provide a descriptive overview of this shared struggle for presence as it relates to the materialities of literary production for many *Bidun* writers in Kuwait. This section aims to emphasise the visibility of *Bidun* writers and their active engagement in cultural production beyond the proscriptions of official exclusion. The section is also helpful as a contextualising tool to inform the literary analysis in the coming chapters. An exhaustive study of the political economy of publishing, or a detailed analysis of the power dynamics of the literary field in Kuwait are beyond the scope of this thesis. What will be emphasised are key instances illustrating the shared historical specificity related to the materialities of cultural absencing and how *Bidun* writers actively negotiate intrinsic affiliative cultural networks and spaces of representation.

from countries such as the Dominican Republic, Somalia, Eritrea and Liberia (Beaugrand 2011:155). This administrative phrase is satirised by the *Bidun* short story writer Laṭīfa Buṭī in her short story titled *Fix your Situation* (Buṭī 2001)

The Materialities of Cultural Production: avenues of publication

An overview of the key historical instances related to *Bidun* writers' experience with publishing cannot be fully condensed into a schematic narrative as the experiences vary and span a period of more than thirty-five years. Yet what is of particular interest are the instances of enabling collective publishing by *Bidun* writers, first by local specifically targeted initiatives and second by the establishment of publishing houses by *Bidun* writers themselves.

As highlighted earlier in the thesis, one of the main challenges involved in this study is the limited circulation of the early published works of *Bidun* writers. This is primarily due to *Bidun* writers' particular experiences with publishing outlets. Early avenues of publishing for most *Bidun* poets of the 90s generation were made possible through local journalism. *Bidun* poets have always been highly engaged with the cultural pages of local newspapers. At a time when only five newspapers were officially allowed in Kuwait, prior to the 2006 Law on Press and Publication, *Bidun* poets were involved with each of the five newspapers' cultural pages. Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ worked at *al-Waṭan* newspaper and then served as head of the cultural page of *al-Qabas* newspaper. Nasir al-Ẓafīri and Sa'ad Farhan worked as cultural editors at *al-Waṭan* newspaper, Dikhīl Khalīfa worked at *al-Anba'* newspaper and later in *Awān* newspaper, Ali al-Ṣāfi worked as a cultural editor at *al-Rai al-'Am* and Khalaf al-Aslami at *al-Siyāsa* newspaper. This active engagement presented many *Bidun* writers with access to publishing opportunities in local newspapers. Dikhīl Khalīfa and Muhammad al-Nabhān both first started publishing in the readers' pages of local newspapers (al-Nabhān 2013; Khalīfa 2013).

Early publications of works by *Bidun* writers (poetry collections, short stories, novels) were mostly privately published by the writers themselves who had limited access to local or Arab publishing houses. Examples of privately published early collections include Sulayman al-Flayyih's *al-Ghinā' fī Ṣaḥrā' al-'Alam* (Singing in the Deserts of Agony) (1979), *Aḥzān al-Badū al-Ruḥḥal* (The Sorrows of the Journeying Bedouins) (1980), *Thi'āb al-Layālī* (Night Wolves) (1993), Nasir al-Ẓafīri's *Walīmat al-Qamar* (The Feast of the Moon) (1990), which was published in Nicosia, Cyprus and Dikhīl Khalīfa's *'Uyūn 'Alā Bawwābat al-Manfa* (Eyes on the Gate of Exile) (1993).

In 1992, one of the most significant specifically targeted publishing projects for *Bidun* writers was the *Dār Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ*’s (Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ’s Publishing House) initiative run by the poet and member of the Kuwaiti ruling family Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ. The initiative was successful in giving many previously unpublished *Bidun* writers wider circulation and visibility in the local and Arab cultural scenes. The initiative was then headed by two writers who were, at the time, *Bidun*: Ali al-Masūdi (who gained Qatari citizenship) and Ahmad al-Dūsari (who gained Swiss citizenship). The project encouraged other *Bidun* writers to publish their works with an added financial incentive (Khalīfa 2013). Titles published by the project include Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ’s *Ākhir al-Ḥālimīn Kān* (The Last Dreamer) (1992), Jassim al-Shimmiri’s *Ummī, ‘Aynān wa Barīq* (The Sparkling Eyes of My Mother) (1992), Ali al-Masūdi’s *Mamlakat al-Shams* (The Kingdom of the Sun) (1992), Nassir al-Zafiri’s 2nd edition of *Walīmat al-Qamar* (The Feast of the Moon) (1992). In a personal interview, Muhammad al-Nabhān recalls refusing the opportunity to publish his work under the sponsorship of Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ. Retrospectively, he attributes his refusal to an acute sensitivity towards any form of quasi-official patronage since the publishing house was owned by a member of the ruling family. Also in retrospect, the short story writer Jassim al-Shimmiri describes the patronizing and shortsighted approach taken by the initiative as it did not truly adopt *Bidun* writers in the long term (al-Shimmiri 2014). It is also worth noting that in 2014, following the death of the Sulayman al-Fullayih (who gained Saudi citizenship), Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ’s Publishing House printed a volume of his complete works.

Other possible publishing avenues included Arab publishing houses in Beirut (*Dār al-Jadīd*, Arab Scientific Publishers), Cairo (*al-Hay’a al-Misriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb* and *Dār Sharqiyyāt*) and Damascus (*Dār al-Madā*). Yet these opportunities were mainly restricted to established and previously published *Bidun* poets such as Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ, Dikhīl Khalīfa and later Mona Kareem. It is worth noting how within an Arab context, the intricacies of the local are overpowered by a wider Arab discourse. One example is Mona Kareem’s poetry collection titled *Ghiyāb bi Aṣabi ‘ Mabtūra* (Absence with Severed Fingers) published by *Dār Sharqiyyāt* in Cairo in 2004. In the collection, the Egyptian publisher changed the title of one of the poems originally titled “1965,” a significant year relating to Kuwaiti citizenship law, to “1956,” a year relevant to a wider Arab readership (Kareem 2014b).

Another initiative at the local level was led by the publishing outlet *al-‘Ālamiya li-l-Nashr wa-l-tawzī’* (Global Publishing and Distribution), headed by Nasir al-Suba’i. The initiative published the poetry collections of the *Bidun* poets Ali al-Ṣāfi and Ahmad al-Nabhān in 1998 and 1999 respectively. Both writers received twenty copies of their work and no financial compensation (Khalīfa 2013). Despite these two collections’ influence on the local literary scene (Ali al-Ṣāfi’s work will be discussed in this context in detail later), the two poetry collections were limited in circulation and have not been reprinted since. Other local initiatives for young *Bidun* poets included *Dār Qirṭās’* Fahad al-‘Askar initiative for young creative writers which published Mona Kareem’s first poetry collection *Nahārāt Maghsūla bi Mā’ al-‘Aṭash* (Mornings Washed by Waters of Thirst) (2002).

With the advent of digital publishing, the dynamics of publishing naturally shifted. Online literary magazines and online cultural forums provided new spaces of visibility, cultural exchange and publishing for *Bidun* writers. As this was a crucial turning point, a survey of the digital publishing scene will be provided below in the discussion of spaces of cultural exchange.

Returning to print publishing, two important publishing projects have been established by *Bidun* writers to publish their works and the works of other *Bidun* poets. First was the establishment of *Dār Mas ‘ā* by Muhammad al-Nabhān in 2008. While not exclusively for *Bidun* writers, *Dār Mas ‘ā* has become their main publishing avenue. More than ten works by six *Bidun* writers were published between 2006 and 2014.⁸ In addition to publishing the works of well-established *Bidun* writers such as Muhammad al-Nabhān, Sa’diyya Mufarriḥ, Dikhīl Khalīfa and Nasir al-Ṣāfi, *Dār Mas ‘ā* became a space for young *Bidun* writers to publish their works, with examples such as Hanadi al-Shimmiri’s novella *Ṣāfiḥ* (A House Made of Tin) (2015) and Shahad al-Faḍlī’s poetry

⁸ These publications include: Muhammad al-Nabhān’s *Imra’a min Aqsā al-Madīna* (A Women from the Limit of the City) (2011) and *Hikāyat al-Rajul al-‘Ajūz* (The Old Man’s Tale) (2013), Sa’diyya Mufarriḥ’s *Layl Mashghūl bi-l-Fitna* (A Night Busy with Temptation) (2008), *Hawāmish ‘Ala Shahwat al-Sard* (Comments on the Lust of Narration) (2009), *Mashiat al-Iwizza* (The Stride of the Swan) (2010), Dikhīl Khalīfa’s *Ṣā’idan ‘Asfal al-Bi’r* (Ascending from the Pit of the Well) (2014), and Nasir al-Ṣāfi’s *Aghrar* (2008), *Samā’ Maqlūba* (Upturned Sky) (2014), *al-Ṣahd* (Scorched Heat) (2014), Hanadi al-Shimmiri’s *Safiḥ* (A House Made of Tin) (2015) and Shahad al-Faḍlī’s *Fāṣila Manqūṭa* (Semicolon) (2015).

collection titled *Fāṣila Manqūṭa* (Semicolon) (2015).

The second publishing house established by *Bidun* writers is *Dār Masārāt*, which was established in 2014 by *Bidun* writers Dikhīl Khalīfa, Jassim al-Shimmiri and Sa‘ad Karīm. While not exclusively a publishing house for *Bidun* writers, it provides an accessible space for young *Bidun* writers to publish their works. Works by *Bidun* writers published through *Dār Masārāt* include Ashwaq al-Khalīfa’s *Jahra ‘iyya* (2015) and Jassim al-Shemmiri’s *Yatasalaqun Ajlisu Munzawiyyan li Aghfu* (They Ascend..I Sit in Solitude to Sleep) (2015).

These key examples provide an understanding of the historical specificity of *Bidun* writers’ experience in publishing. Most early publications of *Bidun* writers were published collectively through specifically targeted initiatives, namely, Su‘ād al-Ṣabāḥ’s Publishing House’s initiative in 1992 and Global Publishing and Distribution’s initiative in 1999. Later, *Bidun* writers established publishing houses such as *Dār Mas‘ā* in 2008 and *Dār Masārāt* in 2015 that provided accessible avenues of publication for young and established *Bidun* writers alike.

Placement in National Literary Histories

Another debate relating to the institutional act of absencing, or forgetting in this case, is that of the placement of *Bidun* writers within national literary histories and anthologies. The following section will provide a cursory overview of how the dialectics of an extrinsic official absencing and the struggle for a presence play out. A detailed study of the question of placement of *Bidun* writers will be presented in Chapter 4.

The placement of *Bidun* writers within national literature is ambiguous, to say the least. In national literary histories and anthologies they may be both included in some and excluded from others.⁹ The *al-Babtain Glossary of Contemporary Arab Poets*

⁹ National anthologies that exclude *Bidun* writers include the following publications: *Mukhtārāt min al-Shi‘r al-‘Arabi al-Ḥadith fi-l-Khalīj wa-l-Jazīra al-‘Arabiyya* (Selections of Modern Arabic Poetry in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula) (al-Babtain 1996), *Mukhtārāt min al-Shi‘r al-‘Arabi fi-l-Qarn al-‘Ishrīn* (Selections of Arabic Poetry in the 20th Century) (al-Babtain 2001) and *The Echo of Kuwaiti Creativity: A Collection of Translated Kuwaiti Poetry* published by the Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait (al-

(1995) perhaps is an apt example of this ambiguous inclusion/exclusion status of *Bidun* writers. Profiles of the *Bidun* poets Ahmad al-Nabhān (al-Babtain 1995a:258), Dikhīl Khalīfa (al-Babtain 1995a:312), Sa'ad Farhan (al-Babtain 1995b:514), Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ (al-Babtain 1995b:522) and Sulayman al-Flayyih are included in the glossary which is arranged in alphabetical order. However, they are entirely absent from the table of contents which is organized according to nationality (al-Babtain 1995f:340). In other words, *Bidun* writers do 'exist' in the actual content of the Dictionary as published contemporary Arab poets, but are officially unrecognized by the national table of contents, which perhaps mirrors the *Bidun*'s political and social status as unrecognized residents.

As to their placement within national literary histories, it is important to mention that most national literary histories were written in, or concerned with, a period that precedes the emergence of the *Bidun* issue as a social and political phenomenon, namely, before 1985. However, the most recent comprehensive work on Kuwaiti literary history, Sulayman al-Shaṭṭi's *Poetry in Kuwait* (2007), gives a general sense of the ambiguity of the placement of *Bidun* writers within a national narrative. Al-Shaṭṭi does not omit *Bidun* writers from the national narrative, but rather places them in a separate, final, chapter under the *ad hoc* title of "*al-Adab al-Mujāwer*" (Adjacent Literature). This placement only compounds the question of belonging. The official stateless status of *Bidun* writers is transposed to a literary statelessness situated in a convoluted conception of adjacency.

Sanousi 2001).

Anthologies and general studies on national literature that include *Bidun* writers include the following publications: *Dīwān al-Shi'r al-'Arabi fī al-Rub' al-Akhīr min al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn: al-Khalīj al-'Arabi- al-Kuwait wa-l-Bahrain (Arabic Poetry in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century: the Arabian Gulf-Kuwait and Bahrain)* (Mufarriḥ and al-Ajmi 2008), *Dalīl al-Udabā' al-Mu'āṣirīn fī-l-Kuwait: al-shi'r - al-nathr (The Guide to Contemporary Writers in Kuwait: poetry-prose)* (al-Utaybi et al 2012), *Hudāt al-Ghaym wa-l-Wiḥsha (The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement)* (Mufarriḥ 2007), *'Alām al-Shi'r fī-l-Kuwait (Notable Poets in Kuwait)* (Abd al-Fattah 1996), Mirsal al-Ajmi's *al-Baḥṭh 'an Ufuq 'Arḥab: mukhtārāt min al-qīṣaṣ al-Kuwaitiyya al-mu'āṣira (A Search for Broader Horizons: a selection of Kuwaiti contemporary short stories)* (al-Ajmi 2013), *al-'Ajniḥa wa-l-Shams (The Wings and the Sun)* (Idris 1998), *Qaṣīdat al-Tafāsīl al-Yawmiyya fī-l-Shi'r al-Khalīj al-Mu'āṣir (The Poem of Everyday Detail in Contemporary Gulf Poetry)* (Yusuf 2009), and *Bawṣalat al-Jihāt al-'Ashr al-Mashhad al-Shi'rī fī-l-Kuwait: al-tis 'īnāt namūdhajan (A Compass of the Ten Directions, the Poetic Scene in Kuwait: the case of the 90s)* (al-Juwayyir 2006).

Both cases provided above attest to the particular paradoxical position of *Bidun* writers within national literary histories. They are outside and inside at the same time; inside the book but outside the national table of contents, inside the geographic space, yet outside, or ‘adjacent’ to, the national space. Such an in-between position has allowed *Bidun* poets to articulate their own presence within literary histories and anthologies, national or otherwise. One key example is Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ’s Kuwaiti literary history and anthology titled *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* (2007). In this literary history and anthology, which will be the subject of discussion in Chapter 4, Mufarriḥ dedicates her attention to the contributions of *Bidun* writers presenting them as constituents of national literature and an organic extension of the national literary history narrative.

Spaces of Cultural Exchange

Similar to *Bidun* writers’ inside/outside placement within national literary histories, their relationship with official spaces of cultural exchange is also contentious. This ambiguous relationship urges *Bidun* writers to forge alternate spaces of cultural exchange beyond the official. What is meant by spaces of cultural exchange are those spaces (both physical and virtual) where writers gather, exchange thoughts and organise cultural events. One of the main spaces, which illustrates the general attitude of the official cultural institution towards the *Bidun*, is the Writers’ Association *Rābiṭat al-Udabā’* (henceforth referred to as *Rabiṭa*), a government funded civil society. In many ways, the *Rabiṭa*’s attitude towards *Bidun* writers in Kuwait followed the general official governmental stance towards the *Bidun* in Kuwait. It is also important to note how such spaces are necessarily gendered in that women writers, in particular, confront other forms of implicit exclusion beyond the official. Surveying a number of historical markers can shed light on the relationship between *Bidun* writers and the *Rabiṭa*. This survey does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of the *Rabiṭa*.¹⁰

¹⁰ The *Rabiṭa* was first officially established in 1965 under the name of *Rābiṭat al-Udabā’ al-Kuwaytiyyin* (The Kuwaiti Writers Association). However, the founders opted to change the name to *Rābiṭat al-Udabā’ fī-l-Kuwait* (The Writers Association of Kuwait) to allow broader participation from Arab poets residing in Kuwait. (Mufarriḥ 1997a).

Prior to the Iraqi invasion and the shift in governmental policy, *Bidun* writers were actively engaged in the *Rabiʿa* and were accepted for what they were. One of the most important marks of acceptance, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter 5, is the *Rabiʿa*'s enthusiastic reception of the *Bidun* poet Sulayman al-Flayyih in 1976 when he recited his poems at the annual poetry festival. Al-Flayyih was not received as a *Bidun* poet *per se* as the *Bidun* issue did not carry much resonance at the time, but as a promising Bedouin poet writing modern Arabic poetry in *Fuṣṣḥa*. Following his first participation, al-Flayyih regularly contributed to the annual poetry festival up until 1982. In addition, al-Flayyih was a regular contributor to the *Rabiʿa*'s literary periodical *Majallat al-Bayan* between 1976 and 1982.¹¹

For many years after that, a number of *Bidun* writers such as Dikhīl Khalīfa, Karīm Hazzā' and Ahmad al-Nabhān were regular weekly attendees at the *Rabiʿa*'s events (Khalīfa 2013). Along with the weekly gatherings, *Bidun* poets Dihkil Khalīfa and Ahmad al-Nabhān participated in poetry nights organized by the *Rabiʿa* (al-Nabhān 2013). As the *Bidun* issue developed into a more visible social and political phenomenon, formalized in exclusionary official policy, the welcoming stance of the *Rabiʿa* shifted.

The *Rabiʿa*'s stance towards *Bidun* writers took a drastic shift following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Even though *Bidun* writers were never officially and explicitly denied participation in the *Rabiʿa*'s events, they were denied active membership cards, which limited their engagement. In 1992, the *Rabiʿa* held a poetry night to commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait in which *Bidun* poets participated. Yet this participation was a contentious matter within the *Rabiʿa*, as the repercussions of the Iraqi invasion complicated the *Bidun* writers' already vulnerable position. Muhammad al-Nabhān recalls that the Iraqi novelist and longtime organiser in the *Rabiʿa*, Faysal al-Sa'ad "fought for their participation" in the event. At many times, the official stance of the *Rabiʿa* towards the *Bidun* was not final and was a matter of contention counterbalanced by sympathetic influential figures within the organization, such as Khalīfa al-Wuqayyān and Sulayman al-Khulayfi (al-Nabhān 2013).

¹¹ Refer to Abdulla and al-Rumaidhi's *Fihris Kuttāb Majallat al-Bayan* (The Index of Writers in al-Bayan Magazine) (2013) for a list of contributions by *Bidun* poets.

For another generation of *Bidun* poets, the ambiguous relationship with the *Rabiʿa* persisted. One example is the *Rabiʿa*’s establishment of Layla al-Uthman’s Prize for Young Writers of Fiction in 2004. Under the auspices of the *Rabiʿa*, the organisers initially restricted the call for applications to young Kuwaiti writers. This was later overturned to include *Bidun* writers as well, after *Bidun* poets exerted pressure on the prize board (Kareem 2014b).

The general non-accepting stance of the *Rabiʿa* prompted responses from *Bidun* writers. Commenting on his relationship with the *Rabiʿa*, Dikhīl Khalīfa says “I do not recognize any institution which associates the creative act with citizenship” (al-Khuwayldi 2012). Similarly, Muhammad al-Nabhān maintains that “the *Rabiʿa* does not represent writers in Kuwait” as it is not open to diversity of literary expression and is xenophobic towards non-Kuwaiti Arab communities (al-Jaffāl 2012). Nasir al-Ẓafīri mentions his resentment towards the ineffectual role of the *Rabiʿa* as “the only breathing space for writers” which “refused to organise any cultural event related to young *Bidun* writers... the excuse of the *Rabiʿa*’s head committee was that it was a civil society abiding by the rules of the ministry of social affairs and work” (al-Hindāl 2009). Mona Kareem highlights what she calls a “double marginalization,” firstly because of their *Bidun* status and secondly because of the *Bidun* poets’ adoption of the modern form of *Qaṣīdat al-Nathr* (the prose poem), which was considered radical within the circles of the *Rabiʿa* (Kareem 2014b).

In light of such explicit and implicit distancing from the official institution, *Bidun* writers worked on establishing other spaces of cultural exchange, or “breathing spaces,” outside of the official radar. Most important of all is the establishment of *Multaqa al-Thulathā*’ (The Tuesday Gathering) in 1996.¹² The Tuesday Gathering, founded by Muhammad al-Saʿīd (a Kuwaiti writer), Dikhīl Khalīfa (a *Bidun* poet), Nadi Ḥāfidh (an Egyptian writer), Karīm Hazzā’ (a *Bidun* short story writer) and Falāḥ Dabsha (a Kuwaiti poet) boasted a diverse body of Kuwaiti, *Bidun* and Arab expatriate members who felt the need to create an alternative, sometimes oppositional, space of cultural exchange (Khalīfa 2013). It is important to mention that the Tuesday Gathering is not

¹² Other earlier attempts included the Sami Muhammad Gathering, which was left by most *Bidun* poets after the establishment of the Tuesday Gathering.

immune to exclusionary practices and internal contention between its members.¹³

The focus of the activities of the Tuesday Gathering was different in approach to that of the *Rabiʿa* as it focused on a wider audience of Kuwaiti, *Bidun* and Arab expatriate communities. Yet with time, and as Khalīfa puts it, Kuwaiti writers were slowly “lured back by the *Rabiʿa*, and we, the *Bidun*, were left with Syrian and Egyptian poets” (Khalīfa 2013). One of the Kuwaiti founders, Muhammad al-Saʿīd, attempted to persuade the members of the Tuesday Gathering to hold their events within the physical premises of the *Rabiʿa* but was unsuccessful as they were adamant about operating outside the official institution (Khalīfa 2013).

As opposed to the fixed meeting space of the *Rabiʿa* on their campus, the Tuesday Gathering’s events were held in various spaces such as cafes, the personal office of the Kuwaiti novelist Ismail Fahad and the campuses of social associations such as the Women’s Cultural Association and the Graduates’ Association. At times, the Tuesday Gathering had to stop its activities, sometimes for more than three years, primarily due to lack of funding and lack of a meeting space. As to its funding, it was initially supported by donations from the members and at times by outside funding. In 2008, the Kuwaiti merchant Anwar al-Qatami financially sponsored the Tuesday Gathering without imposing any conditions (Khalīfa 2013).

With the advent of the internet in the early 2000s, new spaces of virtual cultural exchange opened up to *Bidun* writers. As Karīm al-Hazzāʿ writes “it is as if Bill Gates and his comrades created especially tailored wings for the *Bidun* allowing them to publish their works in online cultural forums” (al-Hazzāʿ 2012). Initially, participation was concentrated in online cultural forums such as *Jasad al-Thaqāfa* (The Body of Culture) (<http://aljsad.org/forums.php>), *Madīna ʿAla Hadab Ṭifl* (A City on a Child’s Eyelids) (www.madeenah.net), *al-Shiʿr al-Muʿāṣir* (Contemporary Poetry) and *Shathāya Adabiyya* (Literary Fragments) (www.shathaaya.com). These forums were not merely publishing sites, but spaces of social and cultural exchange that could bring

¹³ A main topic of contention between members relates to debate over the true founding members of the gathering and its adherence to its ‘original’ mission. In 2009, *Awān* newspaper published an investigative article titled: “The Tuesday Gathering’s Problematics From Hawallī to al-Dajjī: Where are the Most Important Gatherings of Intellectuals Headed?” The article highlighted the very opposing narratives of the founders. As a result of the controversial article, the gathering organized a specific event to discuss its implications (al-Khatīb 2009).

together writers across geographical spaces. Later, the focus turned to publishing in online cultural magazines such as *Ufouq* (Horizons) (www.Ufouq.com) established by the *Bidun* poet Muhammad al-Nabhān, *Jihat al-Shi'r* (The Direction of Poetry) (www.Jehat.com) and *Kika* (www.Kikah.com) among others.

A significant online space of cultural exchange worth singling out was the establishment of *Ufouq* cultural e-magazine in 2000 by Muhammad al-Nabhān. Al-Nabhān founded the e-zine in Ontario, Canada along with two other *Bidun* writers: his brother Sālih and the editor-in-chief, Karīm al-Hazzā', who was based in Kuwait. Like its name, *Ufouq* was a horizon, in which al-Nabhān was able to retain a nascent literary network already established in Kuwait of *Bidun* and Arab poets gathering in coffee houses, private homes and other spaces beyond the cultural institution's radar. The new paperless online space allowed this network to develop to include "the *Bidun* of the Arab world in a wider sense" as al-Nabhān describes it, emphasising the metaphoric significance of the term.

In each of the examples relating to the materialities of cultural production above the dialectics of extrinsic official absencing and intrinsic acts of cultural presence are at play. While the earlier discussion of *Bidun* literature focused on the extrinsic binding forces that bring a literary community into view (i.e. a shared cultural struggle for presence), the following analysis will shift the focus towards the affiliative aspects that bring the community together at the intra-*Bidun* literary level. These manifest themselves most notably in the specific case of the late *Bidun* poet Ali al-Ṣāfi, whose death was emblematic of the absence of a whole community and whose remembrance was emblematic of a community's shared struggle for presence. The responses (public mourning, elegies, dedications) to al-Ṣāfi's death, particularly from within the *Bidun* community, will be examined as instances of crystallising the idea of a literary community orbiting around a poetics of presence which is expressed in the elegies to al-Ṣāfi. These instances of remembrance will be read not only as personal elegies, but more importantly as urgent public instances of affiliation and association with a wider literary community. The following analysis aims to go beyond personal and psychoanalytical approaches to elegy (as in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*), where what is stressed is the individual's coping mechanism, or a structural reading of elegies (as a relation to the development of the genre of elegy in Arabic poetry). Elegies to al-

Şāfī will be examined as instances of political urgency relating to the question of a shared struggle of presence.

This will be discussed firstly by presenting an overview of al-Şāfī's poetics from his only poetry collection *Khadīja Doesn't Move* in order to fully appreciate his symbolic resonance for the community. Secondly, what will be highlighted are the acts of remembering al-Şāfī as manifested in three forms: his inclusion in national literary anthologies and histories, the upholding of his memory through commemorative events such as the tenth anniversary of his death and his intertextual presence in the published works of other *Bidun* writers.

The Poetics of Presence: the case of Ali al-Şāfī

While the absence of other *Bidun* poets described in al-Hazzā' 's aforementioned article was merely a metaphor for disappearance from the cultural scene, al-Şāfī's absence was real. In January 2000, the then 32-year-old *Bidun* poet Ali al-Şāfī was killed in a tragic car accident. More than a year earlier, he had published his only poetry collection titled *Khadīja la Tuħarrik Sākinan* (Khadīja Doesn't Move). The orphaned collection is dedicated to his sister Khadīja, who was born with cerebral palsy leaving her immobile and mute. Al-Şāfī writes in his dedication: "to Khadīja, who sheltered me from fear and accompanied me in my estrangement" (al-Şāfī 1998:3). Al-Şāfī identifies and empathizes with Khadīja's mental and physical condition that represents an extreme manifestation of absence and silence. This empathy with Khadīja's condition highlights one of the main stimuli for his poetry collection, namely a concern with the wider issue of voicing a personal and communal silence and articulating the presence of those who are absent. The representational overtones of his poetic voice are pronounced in his often quoted two-line poem titled *I*, where he writes: "I am the thump on the chest of the oppressed, and the aggrievement of those absent" (67). Al-Şāfī's poetry, perhaps even more acutely after his death, was received by *Bidun* poets as representative of a whole community's voice. This is illustrated by Dikhīl Khalīfa's characterisation of al-Şāfī as someone who "expressed the voice of his group searching for its face in the crowded night" (Naşr 2010).

Khadīja Doesn't Move is written in three main sections titled 'the sleeping cities', 'the coastal road' and 'the confined rooms'. Two distinct spaces (the 'sleeping cities' and the 'confined rooms') are defined by the distance of the 'coastal road' between them. The distance between those two spaces can be read tentatively as that distance between an established space, perhaps national space, (sleeping cities) and the poet's fractured space of exclusion (confined rooms). The physical and psychological journey along the coastal road from one space to another is a reenactment of al-Ṣāfi's attempts to understand his own positionality between the two. Yet this tension between the two spaces is left unresolved, both metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically, al-Ṣāfi's voice is described in his poem *Fḥaiḥīl Expressway* as always "in-between two possibilities" (59). In real life, al-Ṣāfi's metaphorical in-betweenness became reality when his fatal car crash occurred on the *Fḥaiḥīl Expressway*: that physical and metaphorical space between the sleeping cities and the confined rooms.

A recurring trope in the collection is that of the poet wandering at night alone. This occurs in both the 'sleeping cities' and the 'confined rooms.' The poet is always at a reflective distance from both spaces attempting to find his personal voice. In each, the poet is burdened by a heightened sense of awareness of his estrangement amid "people who have forgotten themselves in sleep" and who have "forgotten their faces in desk jobs" (87). He addresses himself:

O noble son,
Who is for my sadness when the people are absent
In the land that has cast its fingers into the sea
So it does not point to me (30).

In the solitude of the sleeping cities, the poet's voice is most pronounced in his repetitive announcement of arrival in the city. He writes:

I came from the silver of words to expose their pitch-black...
To hurl the lightning astray in the dark
I have the path that I know well
And they have their overcrowded roads (26).

The poet expresses a multidimensional awareness and unique experience of the sleeping cities. He knows a unique path that remains unfamiliar to those dwellers who are

asleep. At the same time, the poet's multidimensional experience of the city allows him to radicalize the very meaning of that space. This is most clearly illustrated through the poet's unique engagement with the image of the sea, which is one of the main symbols of the national space. Of the image of the sea, he writes: "the sea departs if it does not find those who can cross it" (al-Şāfi 1998:33). Here, al-Şāfi inverts the image of the sea, presenting it as a place that is a means in itself to achieve human potential instead of a static end. When a human is denied any opportunity to cross that sea, the sea loses its potential and departs. Similarly, the "land that has cast its fingers into the sea" is depicted as a static site of exclusion that prevents people from fulfilling their potential. What is expressed in the sleeping cities is the announcement of a poetic voice, which is awake among sleepers, and articulating an intrinsic experience of the city. The image of the poet wandering around at night hurling thunder captures the relationship between the city's total neglect of the poet's presence and his incessant assertion of it.

The second section titled 'the coastal road,' is made up of personal moments and encounters with the everyday realities as the poet drives his car along the *Fḥaiḥīl Expressway*. The poet is neither in the "sleeping cities" nor is he in the "confined rooms." Rather, he is in that liminal space between the two. In this space, the poetic voice is most accentuated where the phrase "I am" is emphasised and repeated. The aforementioned two-line poem titled *I* stands as a clear marker of the poet's voice. What is most significant in this section is the symbolic resonance of the poems as it foretells his own death. The section includes two poems one titled *Impala '82*, the car he crashed in, and the other titled *Fḥaiḥīl Expressway*, the actual site of his death. In *Fḥaiḥīl Expressway*, he writes:

Of coal and beauty,
A Sufi in an extending night:
Aren't you tired of accidents and anticipation? ...
O guardian of anticipations, absences, and pavements:
How does life pass by like a storm?" (59).

These lines illustrate the symbolic resonance of al-Şāfi's almost prophetic expression as it anticipates his personal death while hinting at a communal absence.

In the third section, titled ‘the confined rooms’, an overarching theme is that of death and absence. In the poem titled *You Walk into my Funeral a Stranger*, the poet imagines his funeral (71). He writes “I saw the grave digger carry me in a shroud every day, while they curse me” (74). In another poem he writes: “we were killed yesterday, and will die in an appointed time” (82). Again, this metaphorical death is also a marker of a heightened sense of awareness of exclusion. He writes:

I know that people have forgotten themselves in sleep,
And I forget that which allows death to be simple in my country,
Ask the dead,
And do not ask those who survived death,
who have forgotten their faces in their occupations (87).

Those who are dead in confined rooms are juxtaposed with those who have forgotten themselves in sleep in the sleeping cities. It is as if ‘the dead’ are the ones who are truly awake. In the confined rooms, death stands as a metaphor for the experience of the confined rooms as a unique space of exclusion.

The symbolic resonance of al-Ṣāfi's death was made more acute as he was killed on the first day of Eid. Al-Hazzā‘ recalls “[his] departure ... was a shock to the cultural circles. For more than ten days, newspapers wrote about him in a rare humane contribution.” Mourning, as Freud puts it, is not only a reaction to the loss of a loved one, but also to “the loss of some abstraction which had taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (Freud 1957:243). The wider abstraction that al-Ṣāfi resembled was absence as a metaphor taken to its extremity; a literalization of absence. Almost instantly, al-Ṣāfi was turned into an icon for a generation of *Bidun* writers.

The Many Deaths of Ali al-Ṣāfi

In his poem titled, *I Hide My Eyes At Home* Ali al-Ṣāfi writes:

My soul gasps its last breath in my hands
And Khadīja does not move
Die, you last bit of my soul
We were killed yesterday, and will die in an appointed time
Many times, I was killed, many times crucified

My hands and feet were cut off, one then the other
And I was banished from the land (al-Ṣāfi 1998:82).

In the preceding excerpt, al-Ṣāfi speaks of his previous deaths in the figurative sense. He expresses a familiarity with death that is both communal and personal. It is a figurative death that can be read as a metaphor for a real condition of ‘absencing’. This condition is first mentioned in the plural (“we were killed... and will die”) as a shared communal act of murder. Within the overall condition of absencing, he then points out his singular death: “many times, I was killed, many times.” This singularity can perhaps signify the personal death and banishment of al-Ṣāfi *the poet*. It is through the poetic voice that this singularity is expressed. At the same time, this voice is the subject of another, more personalised act of absencing by the cultural institution.

In other words, as the *Bidun* community is made absent from the political institution, the *Bidun* poet is also repeatedly killed, muted, banished and made absent from the cultural institution. The absence of official documentation of the *Bidun* pushes official cultural institutions to ‘make absent’ the voices of *Bidun* writers. One way in which al-Ṣāfi’s “repetitive murder” and “banishment” can be interpreted is in his total absence from what can be termed the official national cultural memory propagated by state sanctioned cultural institution.

In the particular case of al-Ṣāfi, he is absent from *all* national literary histories or anthologies written by non-*Bidun* writers. One exception would be the quasi-presence of al-Ṣāfi in *al-Babtain’s Glossary of Contemporary Arab Poets* (1995). While an entry on al-Ṣāfi is provided in the glossary, he is absent from the table of contents that categorises writers according to their nationality as mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Al-Ṣāfi is also omitted from official commemorative literary publications such as the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature annual series titled *Manarat*. This series celebrates the memory of deceased national poets. More than a decade and a half after his death, al-Ṣāfi has not been considered for the Council’s *Manārāt* series. His influential impact on his generation as a poet who lived and died in Kuwait would make

him at least eligible for such an inclusion. Yet it seems he is perceived as being located beyond the official radar.

Again, similarly to al-Hazzā' 's article mentioned earlier, the onus of conserving and upholding the memory of al-Ṣāfi has fallen solely on other *Bidun* poets. Al-Ṣāfi is only included in national anthologies and literary histories produced by *Bidun* writers. At work in this inclusion is the shared struggle for presence against a backdrop of cultural absencing. Firstly it is manifested in the insistence of some *Bidun* writers on producing and compiling national literary histories and anthologies to defy an officially imposed narrative. Secondly, the act of inclusion of *Bidun* writers such as al-Ṣāfi makes present these otherwise muted voices. This is evident in the works of *Bidun* poets Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ and Dikhīl Khalīfa concerning literary history and anthologies.

Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ's *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* (2007) is an anthology of Kuwaiti poetry preceded by a long introduction offering an overview of Kuwaiti literary history for the uninitiated reader. In the introduction, a specific section is devoted to the works of *Bidun* poets who are presented as an essential component of Kuwaiti literature. Mufarriḥ comments that the *Bidun* issue "has been totally absent from the *Diwan* of Kuwaiti Poetry" until the 90s generation made it present when they responded poetically to their own conditions of daily life. Within this 90s generation, al-Ṣāfi stands out as an influential figure. The act of inclusion by Mufarriḥ is not to be read simply as a struggle for mere presence, or simply as a strategic act of solidarity, but as testament to his aesthetic resonance for a generation. Mufarriḥ comments:

Al-Ṣāfi, who was gone before his experiment reached its artistic apex, formed a significant mark in the history of the generation that he so strongly belonged to.... It wasn't only the experimentation that he immersed himself in, whether this was conscious.... but also his sudden departure, which acted as a symbol for the absence that had enveloped his contemporaries. (Mufarriḥ 2007)

Here yet again "the insistence of producing literary works" is read against a backdrop of the "cloak" of absence that enveloped a generation. This insistence on writing can be reworded as a struggle for presence against an act of absencing. Al-Ṣāfi's iconic status is informed by his representation and literalization of the overarching generational metaphor of absence.

Al-Ṣāfi is also included in the UNESCO-sponsored anthology titled *The Diwan of Arabic Poetry in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century: The Arabian Gulf (Kuwait and Bahrain)* compiled by Sa'diyya Muffariḥ. Out of a total of fourteen poets in the Kuwait section three *Bidun* poets (Ali al-Ṣāfi, Dikhīl Khalīfa, and Sa'diyya Muffariḥ) are included (Muffariḥ 2008). This insistence on the inclusion of al-Ṣāfi and other *Bidun* poets further affirms the political urgency of cultural presence.

Similarly, Dikhīl Khalīfa's online contribution, published in the cultural forum *Jasad al-Thaqāfa*, titled *A Portfolio of the New Kuwaiti Poem* highlights the role of the 90s generation in innovating and introducing new poetics to Kuwaiti literature. In this work, Khalīfa presents an online anthology of 12 poets from the 90s generation, out of which 6 are *Bidun*. It is an attempt to first cement a subcategory within Kuwaiti literature, (i.e. the 90s generation), and to present their works as a distinctive voice within Kuwaiti literature. The emphasis on the 90s generation is perhaps driven by how little attention this generation has received from the cultural institution, especially as its majority is formed of *Bidun* poets. Thus, the burden of writing about this generation is on one of its sons. As for al-Ṣāfi, he is included in the anthology and introduced in these words: "he is the wound of poetry, we lost him when we weren't looking... he was adored by all...the unpolluted, charming, kind, loyal, talented young man.... everyone expected him to become an illustrious knight of poetry" (Khalīfa 2003). Again, Khalīfa hints at al-Ṣāfi's centrality to the generation both in terms of his literary persona and in terms of his poetic talent.

In such works, the inclusion of *Bidun* poets is a marker of a communal struggle for presence against an act of absencing in which al-Ṣāfi is a central iconic figure. The struggle for the presence of al-Ṣāfi in national anthologies and literary histories is at the same time representative of a struggle for the presence of a whole literary community.

The Tenth Anniversary of al-Ṣāfi's Death

In January 2010, the Tuesday Gathering, one of the unofficial cultural circles discussed earlier, held a commemorative event celebrating the tenth anniversary of Ali al-Şāfi's death. In his coverage of the event, Yusuf Adam, the Kuwait-based Mauritanian literary critic, lamented the cultural institution's total neglect of al-Şāfi. Al-Şāfi's distance from the cultural institution is seen by Adam as a direct result of al-Şāfi's status as a *Bidun*. Al-Şāfi "was never a member of the cultural institution nor was he a member of any civil society in Kuwait because his paperless condition prevented him from being one" (Yusuf 2010). Thus, al-Şāfi is only remembered by his friends, "those who sing to a different tune than that of the institution" (Yusuf 2010).

Celebrating the memory of a writer ten years after his death immediately forces one to reflect on the symbolic significance of holding such an event. Muhab Naşr, an Egyptian poet residing in Kuwait and an active member of the Tuesday Gathering, writes in his coverage of the event in *al-Qabas* newspaper:

The poet, who is regarded by some as an icon, was finally celebrated the 10th anniversary of his death this Tuesday. Companions, peers and those who consider his life a symbol of an era, all remembered him as a friend whose blood has not dried yet, who only exited their gathering an hour earlier with his shadow lingering at the doorstep. After that, the conversation was closer to a personal memorial of a friend than a search for his singularity as a poet. The conversation hid behind a mask of rebellion that was used as testimony to condemn this present that is not present. (Naşr 2010)

Informed by Naşr's comment, the event seems to transcend the memory of al-Şāfi to be representative of a political and cultural urgency of a literary community. This urgency is related to a condemnation of a "present that is not present". What is at work primarily in this event is a literary community affirming its presence through the use of al-Şāfi as a mask.

When speaking of presence and absence in the light of such an event, both terms become physically manifested in a space of communal gathering. This space of cultural exchange is situated beyond the official radar and consists of the members of the

Tuesday Gathering. What emerges is a physical manifestation of the idea of a *Bidun* literary community with al-Ṣāfi's absence as its focal point. Attending and participating in such an event can be read as a form of claiming membership in, and association with, a wider literary community.

In the event, al-Ṣāfi's poetry collection and life were presented in allegorical terms. In his opening speech, the *Bidun* poet Muhammad al-Nabhān directed his speech to al-Ṣāfi, asking him, "what absence is this Ali?" ('Allām 2010). In his contemplation of al-Ṣāfi's absence, al-Nabhān spoke of it with a shared sense of familiarity, "it hunts us while we hunt it, it pursues us while we pursue it. It enters our homes while we enter its cold confined houses," alluding to al-Ṣāfi's poem titled *Confined Rooms* (ibid). This condition of absence is not sudden or momentary, but depicted as a familiar ongoing encounter of a community expressed in a collective voice.

Al-Nabhān then turned to al-Ṣāfi's poetry collection and reads it as semi-autobiographical:

Ali, when you were absented by death, it didn't know that it took away a handsome poet....a poet who stirred the cultural scene with an orphaned collection of poetry.... honest and genuine... that resembles you like an autobiography of what has been and what will come, and disguised, resembling us also." (Allam 2010)

Al-Ṣāfi's life and poetic voice is both retrospectively personal and prospectively collective. It is about "what has been" and "what will later happen" to a whole community facing an absencing act.

It is important to mention that al-Nabhān's words and most elegies recited at the event never explicitly mention the term *Bidun* or mentioned al-Ṣāfi's status as *Bidun*. The condition is rather expressed in metaphor and framed within the general theme of absence. This however is not the case with other Arab poets who participated in the event. Abbas Mansour, an Egyptian poet, is quite direct in his identification of al-Ṣāfi as a *Bidun* poet, describing him as a "*Bidun* of regal blood." This distinction highlights the reluctance of *Bidun* poets to directly associate themselves with the term and their reflective distance from it. To al-Nabhān, the metaphor of absence suffices not only to

describe al-Ṣāfi's death, but to self-identify as a community struggling for a presence through the mask of al-Ṣāfi.

At the end of the event, there were calls by the attendees to reprint al-Ṣāfi's out-of-print poetry collection *Khadīja Doesn't Move* (1999). This suggestion was received enthusiastically by the owner of *Dār Mas'ā* Muhammad al-Nabhān.¹⁴ These calls to reprint *Khadīja Doesn't Move* can be read as another material manifestation of making al-Ṣāfi present. Even though the collection has not yet been reprinted, *Dār Mas'ā* in 2014 announced the inauguration of 'The Ali al-Ṣāfi Fund for Poetic Creativity' which publishes works by young talents from the Arab world.

The ten year anniversary is a visible instance of a literary community emerging around the figure of al-Ṣāfi. This is best summed up in the title of one of the poems recited at the event: *Khadīja Has Finally Moved*. It is as if the memorial event is a reassertion of the presence and mobilization of a literary community.

Al-Ṣāfi Intertextual Presence

Another significant way in which al-Ṣāfi is made present is through other *Bidun* writers' intertextual engagement with al-Ṣāfi's literary works. Since his death al-Ṣāfi has been present in a number of works by other *Bidun* writers in the form of citations, direct quotes and dedications. These intertextual engagements at the intra-*Bidun* level span from the time of his death to recent works by Bidun writers. Some examples include Laṭīfa Buṭṭi's short story *al- 'Adhāb Waraqa* (Torture is a Paper) (Buṭṭi 2000), which is dedicated to the memory of Ali al-Ṣāfi, Ahmad al-Nabhān's poem titled *Ali al-Ṣāfi* in his collection titled *An Introduction to the Biography of the Father*, Muhammad al-Nabhān's poem titled *Another Estrangement* from his eponymous poetry collection in 2004 and Shahad al-Faḍlī's *Two Steps Towards Ali al-Ṣāfi* from her poetry collection *Semicolon* in 2014. The continual remembrance of al-Ṣāfi throughout the years attests to his symbolic and poetic resonance for *Bidun* writers. These intertextual works invoke the singularity of al-Ṣāfi's poetic voice which continues to influence and stir the poetic consciousness of a whole community.

¹⁴ In a personal interview, the owner of *Dār Mas'ā* Muhammad al-Nabhan mentioned that the family of al-Ṣāfi are reluctant to make the unpublished works of al-Safi public for personal reasons.

Muhammad al-Nabhān and Shahad al-Faḍlī's elegiac poems give some insight into al-Ṣāfi's purely textual presence.¹⁵ The two poets attempt to go beyond the symbolic resonance of al-Ṣāfi as a mask to emphasize and celebrate his singular voice and unique poetics. Both poems engage in an intimate poetic dialogue with al-Ṣāfi's own work through the many uses of direct quotes and images such as the "departing sea," "the sleeping cities" and "Khadija."

In Muhammad al-Nabhān's *Another Estrangement*, the poem starts off with the invocation of al-Ṣāfi's voice: "you said once, my friend: 'the thump on the chest of the oppressed.'" (al-Nabhān 2004:51) Similarly, in *Two Steps Towards Ali al-Ṣāfi*, al-Faḍlī begins the poem with the same line taken from al-Ṣāfi's poem *I*, "I am the thump on the chest of the oppressed and the aggrevement of those absent" (al-Faḍlī 2013:76). This particular line is used as an emblem of al-Ṣāfi's poetics of presence. The common use of this particular line at the beginning of the poems signifies how al-Ṣāfi's poetics become a stimulus for the poets' own works.

More importantly is the way in which al-Ṣāfi's poetics seems to offer solace and hope. Al-Nabhān describes al-Ṣāfi's words as a "green dream... still on the cross of promise, waiting" (Al-Nabhān 2004:53). To al-Faḍlī, al-Ṣāfi's poems "offer silence a prayer" (al-Faḍlī 2013:77). Al-Faḍlī further describes the personal influence of al-Ṣāfi's poetics on her:

Every morning
he opens in his innocence windows of hope
rearranges the sea so that he would smile
draws a sky and birds
offers me his purity
and teaches me how I can create a 'homeland'

He incites me to become a wheat seed that grows in the seasons
of frustration
despair
and non-belonging (78).

Al-Faḍlī emphasizes the power of al-Ṣāfi's poetics in opening up possibilities of presenting an intrinsic subjective relationship to her homeland. Al-Ṣāfi's poetics incite

¹⁵ The original poems are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

al-Faḍlī to reorder reality by images of rearranging the sea, drawing a sky and creating a ‘homeland.’ It also incites her to “become a seed” that grows in seasons of “frustration, despair and non-belonging.” This description signals the capacity of language and poetry to resist an extrinsic ‘absencing’ and to articulate a presence.

The section above aimed to envisage a *Bidun* literary community through an intrinsic lens of a shared struggle for a cultural and literary presence. This struggle manifests itself most clearly in the many instances of remembering Ali al-Ṣāfi by *Bidun* writers. Al-Ṣāfi is made present through his inclusion in literary histories and anthologies. At the same time, his literary presence is highlighted through intertextual engagement with his unique poetic voice which stirs a communal consciousness of articulating a presence.

While this chapter focused on the struggle of presence for a literary community, the next chapter will focus on the very idea of articulating a presence for *Bidun* writers. The central question that will be explored is: if writers are officially stateless and are in a state of absence in official terms, does that necessarily mean that they are also stateless and absent in literary terms? In order to address such a question, the following chapter will first explore the philosophical underpinnings of the politics of statelessness and its relation to agency, visibility and literary production. Secondly, it will provide a general theoretical framework from which the thesis will approach the different articulations of presence in the works of *Bidun* writers. Guided by the proposed framework, the chapter will then offer a critical review of the different ways in which *Bidun* literature has been approached.

Chapter 3: “A Place in the World,” The Politics of Statelessness

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework, grounded in political philosophy, from which to appreciate the political and cultural agency of stateless people. The particular case of the *Bidun* will be read in dialogue with three major theoretical positions on statelessness by Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière. The chapter will emphasise how these theoretical positions depict the stateless condition as either ontological or relational, and how these depictions influence the readings of the literary works of *Bidun* writers. Informed by the discussion, the second part of the chapter offers a critical review of how *Bidun* literary works have already been approached. The chapter will then conclude with an analysis of the poem titled *Myth of the Nest: Where the Innocent Flee* to demonstrate how this thesis will read the works of *Bidun* writers.

Arendt’s ‘Abstract Nakedness of Being Human’

A starting point for the theoretical considerations of statelessness as a modern phenomenon can be found in Hannah Arendt’s ardent reflections in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1962). Once a stateless refugee herself, Arendt sees statelessness as a direct consequence of the inescapable act of exclusion concomitant with the formation of the modern nation-state. In such a polity (nation-state), the existence of the state is dependent on a certain conception of a nation; a homogenous collective identity that is bound to exclude minorities not viewed as members of that nation. The state “derives its legitimacy from the nation, which means that those national minorities who do not qualify for ‘national belonging’ are regarded as ‘illegitimate’ inhabitants” (Butler 2007:31). With the rise of nationalism and consequently nation-states, the state is transformed from “an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation” where “the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law” (Arendt 1962: 275). The continuance of the nation-state is thus ever-dependent on reiterating that necessary act of exclusion on which the nation was initially imagined.

In this world of nation-states, the ‘rights of Man’, as Arendt puts it, are only guaranteed to those who are members of the political community of the nation-state as citizens. Without citizenship, the stateless person lacks the all-encompassing “right to have rights” exclusive to citizens (296). Entailed in the lack of “the right to have rights” are two fundamental losses: the loss of place and the loss of legality.

Firstly, statelessness is a condition of political void and “deprivation of a place in the world, which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (296). In the world of nation-states, lacking citizenship rights does not only leave a person stateless, but also placeless. This loss of place is not merely geographic (as a result of physical displacement for example), but also entails a loss of political responsibility. One has a place in the world only when belonging to some kind of organized political community as a citizen. The stateless are ultimately “deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion” (296). Arendt goes further to say that a “life without voice and without action” outside of political responsibility. . . “is *literally dead to the world*” (Arendt 1998:176 emphasis added).

Secondly, by not belonging to an organized political community, the stateless are outside of legality all together. This “loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity” (297). As a result, this state of expulsion from the polity reduces the stateless to what Arendt calls the “abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human” (297). It is also termed as a “state of innocence, in the sense of complete lack of responsibility” (295). This state to which the stateless are reduced to is further explicated:

[t]his mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love. (301)

Arendt’s separation between a life of political responsibility via citizenship rights and a life outside of the political altogether is rooted in Aristotle’s ontological distinction between the two modes of existence: *zoe* and *bios politikos*. *Zoe* is defined as mere existence or unqualified life; “the simple act of living common to all living beings” (Agamben 1998:1), whereas *bios politikos* is the political life where mere existence is qualified

and given meaning via language and community in the polis. Aristotle defines man as a “speaking animal,” whose potential is fully realized only through a participation in a political community. To put it in Arendtian terms, the stateless are reduced to a condition of *zoe*, or the “abstract nakedness of being” and can only enter into the realm of *bios politikos* through an acceptance into the polity as citizens.

The *Bidun* in light of Arendt

It is important to first remember that the question of the national in the Kuwaiti context is not clearly delineated by ethnic, religious or linguistic factors as is in Arendt’s discussion of nationalism in twentieth century Europe. The national category in Kuwait is rather more arbitrary and defined loosely in terms of citizenry, as discussed in chapter one. In other words, whoever was recognized by the “urban snap shot” conception of citizenship of the nationality committees, between 1960 and 1963 is considered a Kuwaiti national (Beaugrand 2010:126). Thus, this relationship between state and nation as discussed by Arendt is fundamentally different. Arendt argues that with the rise of nationalism and consequently nation-states, the state is transformed from “an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation” where “the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law” (Arendt 1962: 275). However, in the case of the *Bidun*, as Claire Beaugrand aptly puts it “the deprivation of rights is first and foremost the result of the process by which the state captures the nation and uses the normative language of the time, not only that of the nation” (Beaugrand 2010:44). Instead of ethnic, religious, or linguistic difference as the basis of the *Bidun*’s exclusion, “the language used to exclude them is less that of the nation, as they are from the same origin as parts of Kuwaitis, than that of the regulation of migration, which shifted the terms of the debate” (44).

Arendt’s approach to the issue of statelessness is highly informative with regards to the heightened existential dimensions associated with statelessness. However, to understand the position of the *Bidun* in merely existential terms overlooks their role as active interlocutors.

As Etienne Balibar puts it in his critique of Arendt's view of the rights of the stateless:

Arendt's idea is not that only institutions create rights, whereas, apart from institutions, humans do not have specific rights, only natural qualities. Her idea is that, apart from the institution of community . . . there simply are no humans . . . Humans simply *are* their rights. (cited in Schaap 2011:27)

If the *Bidun*, without citizenship rights, are reduced to a condition of 'mere existence', then what can be said of the *Bidun*'s political intervention and cultural production? Does it also 'exist' outside of legality, politics and humanity altogether? Is it always then limited to an existential representation of that 'mere existence'? The existential impulse is undoubtedly present and forceful, but this thesis contends that works by *Bidun* writers are not solely limited to existential representations. The question is then: *in what ways* are the stateless in general and the *Bidun* specifically existing outside of legality? And how is it expressed in their literary expressions? And from *what place in the world* are they expressed?

Agamben's Bare Life: Stateless as *Homo Sacer*

Arendt's notion of the "abstract nakedness of being human" is taken further by Giorgio Agamben in his concepts of the "bare life" of the *homo sacer*. Like Arendt, Agamben finds the roots of his political philosophy in Aristotle's distinction between *zoe* and *bios politikos*. However, Agamben focuses on the moment of the creation of *bios politikos*, or the moment of establishing a judicial-political order. This order is established through an "originary act of sovereignty;" a violent founding act of exclusion that necessarily produces two "states of exceptions" that exist out of that established order: the sovereign and at the same its other, the *homo sacer* (Agamben 2005). The sovereign, by virtue of his ability to suspend normal functioning of the law is beyond it. On the other hand, the *homo sacer* is the figure who is cast out of the polis *at that same instance* of establishing order. The *homo sacer* is outside of law; "abandoned or banned from it, yet he still maintains a connection with it" precisely as an excluded outsider (Murray 2010:62). This exclusion and abandonment of the *homo sacer* reduces him to a state of "bare life". Bare life does not equate to 'mere existence', the condition of state-

less persons in Arendt's view. Agamben reminds the reader that once *bios politikos* is achieved, there cannot be a return to a state of infancy or *zoe* (61). Bare life then is produced as a result of that split between *zoe* and *bios politikos*, or that condition in which the *homo sacer* is reduced to *after* his exclusion at the moment of the creation of *bios politikos* (61).

This supra-personal abstract figure of the *homo sacer* in Agamben's work is materialised in the modern figure of the stateless refugee. In the current world of nation-states, as Agamben puts it there is "no autonomous space in the political order of the nation-state for something like the pure man in himself" (Agamben 2000:20). At the same time, "growing sections of humankind are no longer representable inside the nation-state" (21). Thus, fundamental concepts of political philosophy of the age will have to be abandoned for a 'new coming political community' "starting from the one and only figure of the refugee" (16). The condition of the stateless refugee potentially carries a vision of that 'new coming political community' beyond the world of nation-states.

The *Bidun* and the *Homo Sacer*

One of the main critiques of Agamben's theorisations on the *homo sacer* is its purported universality and tendency towards abstraction. Liisa Malkki's points out the dangers of the universalising approaches in anthropological dealings with the "the refugee experience" (Malkki 1995:510). Such approaches depoliticise and dehistoricise the refugee condition while positing it as "single, essential, [and] transhistorical" (511). The situation of the *Bidun* upsets this schema, as the *Bidun* are stateless because of specific political and historical reasons as detailed in an earlier chapter. One example of the abstractness of Agamben's position is the notion of an 'originary act of sovereignty' that produces the figure of the *homo sacer*. The emphasis on the almost metaphysical 'originary act of sovereignty,' takes away from the urgency of understanding the historicised particularity of statelessness in the local context. There is no particular 'moment' of producing a stateless subject (*homo sacer*) outside of the law. The exclusion of many *Biduns* from Kuwaiti citizenship extends between 1959 and 1962, the years when the citizenship committees were active. Even after the end of citizenship committees, natu-

ralisation had not stopped. An obvious example would be the extra-legal naturalisations discussed in chapter one. In the same light, new stateless people have been ‘created’ in 2014, and continually so, as a result of the de-naturalisation of a number of Kuwaiti citizens by law in 2014 as they allegedly carried out “acts aiming to undermine the country’s security and stability, bringing harm to its institutions” (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Another example is Agamben’s notion of “abandonment” of the *homo sacer* by law at the moment of the ‘originary act of sovereignty’. While the *Bidun*’s “abandonment” from law holds, this abandonment is not concomitant with the deprivation of their citizenship. Up until 1985, the *Bidun* were acknowledged in the national consensus as Kuwaitis, enjoying the many benefits of citizenship. Only after the 1985 decree, as discussed in chapter one, did the *Bidun* become effectively abandoned and arguably in a “state of exception”. To view the *Bidun* as *homo sacer* takes away the extremely politicised, historic and ever-changing nature of the situation.

However, what is key in Agamben’s theorisation on statelessness is the ‘potentiality’ that he attributes to the figure of the *homo sacer*. He highlights how from such condition one is able to negotiate new relationships with the situation to arrive at novel visions and ways of being. Agamben’s approach allows the literary and cultural production of the *Bidun* to be viewed as a possible site of reading and understanding how this potentiality is expressed. Yet at the same time, one needs to be extremely cautious of romanticising the depictions of statelessness, or *the refugee* for that matter, and transforming them into depoliticised, ontological and ahistoric intellectual ‘campsites’ to brainstorm new potential visions without regard to the urgent materiality and hindering capacity at the register of the social and the everyday.

Rancière’s “the Part that has no Part”

Jacques Rancière’s theoretical stance on the condition of statelessness is fundamentally different from both Arendt and Agamben. Rancière criticises the “vicious circle”

(Rancière 2015:36) rooted in Arendt's political philosophy that inevitably denies the stateless any form of agency. For Arendt, without an active participation in a political community via citizenship rights, the stateless are left out of politics altogether. One's opinion is only significant after having "a place in the world" as a citizen. Rancière, rather, raises the following question, as Andrew Schaap aptly puts it: "[i]f statelessness corresponds not only to a situation of rightlessness but also to a life deprived of public appearance, how could those excluded from politics publicly claim the right to have rights, the right to politics?" (Schaap 27: 2011). From what platform, or "place in the world" do the stateless speak and claim their rights?

In answering this Arendtian paradox, Rancière firstly takes issue with what he calls an "ontological trap" (Rancière 2015:75); that distinction between a political life realised in the polis and a social/private life outside of it. He questions the very possibility of a depoliticised mode of existence outside of the political. A position outside of the political "enabled a way of placing them [refugees] in a sphere of exceptionality that was no longer political but of an *anthropological sacredness* situated beyond political dissensus" (72 emphasis added). Arendt's politics assumes that the political is situated and restricted within the frame of the national constitutional state and that all struggles outside of that frame are outside of the political sphere. Within this definition of politics, it is the state that decides who is counted in and who is excluded from the political sphere by allocating different people different roles and parts. Rancière calls this act a "distribution of the sensible" which "presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what is not, of what can be heard and what cannot" (44). This state allocation of roles aims ultimately at maintaining what Rancière calls "consensus." In striving for that consensus, the state absences and mutes those who are allocated no role in this distribution such as those without citizenship.

To understand the position of the stateless within such a political order, Rancière resorts to a redefinition of the conception of the political as a whole. He posits that "politics is a process, not a sphere" (78). What Arendt, and Agamben define as politics, or the political sphere, Rancière renames as "the police". His definition of "the police" is "what is usually defined as politics...generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the ag-

gregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems of legitimizing this distribution” (Rancière 1999:28). Driven by a “logic of domination,” “the police” aims to achieve consensus by ensuring that everyone plays his or her part in this order of distribution of the sensible. However, in that distribution of roles, there are those who are left with no parts to play in that police order, such as the stateless. Unlike Arendt, Rancière does not see the stateless as cast out of politics altogether, because of their non-recognition in the ‘political’, in the Aristotelian sense. Instead Rancière acknowledges them as the “part with no part” within his own redefinition of politics.

The political in Rancière’s terms is fundamentally driven by a “logic of equality”. It is “the assumption of an equality of anyone with everyone” regardless of an official recognized belonging to a ‘political’ community (Schaap 2011:35). One is not required to first belong *as* citizen in a ‘political’ community, in the Arendtian sense, to be involved in politics. The very act of claiming the right for equality *is* an enactment of the political. Politics is the process in which those who are allocated no part contest this “distribution of the sensible” maintained by the police order (Schaap 2011:199). A political subject is then defined as “a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus” defying the consensual logic of ‘the police’ (Rancière 2015:77).

Rancière’s distinction between the police and politics allows for a more nuanced understanding of the agency of stateless individuals. This agency is enacted through what Rancière calls political subjectivization, or the “collective claim to existence as a political subjects” (Davis 2010: 84). Political subjectivization involves a three-way process of action: (1) logical argumentation (2) theatrical dramatization (3) “impossible identification” with imposed labels (84). Firstly, “the part with no part” is involved in a logical argumentation of their rights as equals by confronting the ‘political’ society with its own foundational logic by recourse to constitutional rights or human rights discourse. Secondly, “theatrical dramatization” is in the act of claiming a “space of appearance” as political subjects by staging a scene of dissensus (Rancière 2015:45). Examples include actual demonstrations, protests and physical modes of visibility. Thirdly, political subjectivization is also a process of “impossible identification” with the imposed labels by

the police order. As Rancière explains, political subjectivity “is never the simple assertion of an identity; it is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other, or the ruling order of the police” (Rancière 1992:62). The “part with no part” is always left in an “uncomfortable position” (62) between “several names, statuses, and identities” (61).

The *Bidun* and the Part has No Part

To put it in Rancièrian terms, the *Bidun* are the part literally without (*bidun*) a part in the ‘police order’. In the distribution of roles maintained by the ‘police’, the *Bidun* are recognized in today’s official terms as “illegal residents”, excluded from the count of the political community. Yet in Rancière’s politics, the *Bidun*, driven by a ‘logic of equality’ are ultimately disrupting that maintained order by claiming their rights to be treated as recognized equals and ultimately to be recognized as citizens. Through their active engagements in the political, social and cultural fronts, the *Bidun*’s political subjectivity can be read in relation to Rancière’s three-way process as discussed earlier. In terms of logical argumentation, activists, both *Bidun* and Kuwaiti nationals, commonly resort to human rights discourse critiquing Kuwait’s non-signatory status on the UN conventions related to statelessness. Recourse is also made to constitutional rights, namely, the violations of article 29 of the Kuwaiti constitution stating that “[a]ll people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and duties before the law without distinction as to race, origin, language or religion” (WIPO). Another common form of logical argumentation is through recourse to Islamic discourse of equality as being equal under God to appeal to the religious ethos of society.

The initiation of mass street protests in 2011, which gained much local and international publicity, marks an instance of turning to ‘theatrical dramatization’ in gaining political subjectivity. Street protests were complemented by other virtual theatrical dramatizations through increased visibility and participation in campaigns in social media. One example was the *Bidun* activists’ call for a campaign on twitter to ‘flip the avatars’ as a sign of solidarity with the *Bidun* in December 2011 which can be read as a spectacle to disrupt the status quo. In addition, *Bidun* writers’ noticeable involvement in the Kuwaiti-

ti cultural scene through publishing, involvement in newspapers' cultural pages, participation in lectures and poetry readings, as discussed in chapter two, can be viewed as another, often unacknowledged, visible space of claiming political subjectivity.

Complimenting logical argumentation and 'theatrical dramatization' is the process of disidentification with imposed labels in claiming political subjectivity. As Rancière puts it, political subjectivization "always involves an impossible identification...between several names, statuses, and identities; between humanity and inhumanity, *citizenship and its denial*" (Rancière 1992:61 emphasis added). This in-betweenness is best exemplified by the paradoxical name 'the *Bidun*-Kuwaitis' as adopted by *Bidun* activists. The *Bidun*-Kuwaitis is not a combination of two names, it is precisely a position *between* the two. It is a position that insists on both a disidentification with imposed labels and a disruption of 'policing' logic. The 'impossibility' of identification lies in the fact it confronts officiality, society and legality with what is considered an oxymoron: a stateless national.

However, to limit political subjectivity to the pragmatism of political activism is reductive. It is the contention of this thesis that cultural production and literary expression should be foregrounded as a central site where political subjectivity is claimed. Literary expression goes beyond pragmatic and strategic self-positioning. Instead, it often claims spaces of even more complex "impossible identifications" vis-à-vis metaphor as a discourse of identity.

While Rancière's conceptualizations are productive for thinking through the politics of *Bidun* literary expression, it is important to highlight some of the critiques to Rancière's overall framework. Slavoj Žižek points out the asymmetrical relationship between 'the police' and 'the part with no part' manifested in Rancière's fixation on the moment where 'the part with no part' disrupts the police order while overlooking the moment of 'violent' reactions of the police to maintain its stability (cited in Davis 2010:94). While this contention holds true, an engagement with Rancière's work shows, as Oliver Davis suggests, that the focus on the moment of interruption of the part with no part is a question of emphasis. This emphasis demonstrates that Rancière politics is expressed in

“strategic rather than existential terms” (Schaap 2011:24) allowing at least an entry point for a more complex understanding of the agency of the stateless. In addition, any “violent” reaction from the police order is itself an affirmation of the potency of political agency and an acknowledgment of the stateless as political actors. Maintaining order, *after* any disruption, does not take away the inevitable imprints of such disruptions on the order. These moments of disruption, reified in the aesthetic act, must first be admitted into the conversation before any discussion of the possibility of its political efficacy can begin.

Rancière’s process might be also understood as a position that undermines the strategic urgency of overcoming the dispossession of statelessness locking the part with no part in an unending oppositional relation to ‘the police’ thus reproducing just another ontology (Žižek 2000; Valentine 2005; el-Desouky 2014). This overlaps with critiques of Rancière’s “counter-intuitive” approach questioning whether the ‘part with no part’ in the end is merely asking for a “better police order” (Davis 2010:93). In other words, if and when the stateless finally gain citizenship rights, would they be simply allotted an *acknowledged* space in a now ‘better’ distribution of roles? Yet, these questions miss one of the main impulses of Rancière’s approach which understands emancipation not as a “teleological end of a political project” but “a polemic verification of equality” (Rancière 2011:86). At the same time, when the aesthetic is considered, these questions carry the implicit assumption that literary production is ultimately a tool to gain citizenship, which cages the stateless back into “anthropological sacredness.” While acknowledging its shortcomings, the nature of Rancière’s position and conceptions of the aesthetic and the political allow a theoretical framework to understand the aesthetic subjectivity of *Bidun* writers outside of the existing ontological modalities.

In light of the discussed theoretical positions on the universal condition of statelessness, what can be taken from Arendt is the urgency of the existential dimension that arises out of statelessness relating to question of belonging. This existential impulse is indeed a driving force behind many works of *Bidun* writers, yet, as mentioned earlier, is not limited to it. From Agamben in particular, the potentiality immanent in the exclusion of *Bidun* writers from citizenship allows their literary expression to be read as a site where

alternate visions can be articulated and offered. Yet both approaches risk restricting readings of *Bidun* literature to depictions of “mere existence” or a “state of exception” rather than instances of voicing a dialogical utterance in the Bakhtinian sense.

Rancière’s politics and aesthetics, however, provides a productive entry point into reading the works of Bidun writers. It allows us to read these works as enactments of an aesthetic subjectivity that have the political efficacy and potential to reconfigure the order of the socio-political reality. One can invert Arendt’s earlier proposition that the stateless are “literally dead to the world” by saying they are “*literalily* alive in the world”.

Building on the previous theoretical discussion on the politics of statelessness, the following section aims to provide a literature review of what has already been written about the phenomenon of *Bidun* literature. The different approaches to *Bidun* literature that will be presented reflect an implicit theoretical position towards the politics of statelessness and to the role of the aesthetic in society. This theoretical position can be described as a tension between, on the one hand, approaching the works of *Bidun* writers as mere representations of an ontological condition of statelessness, and attempting to go beyond this ontological condition on the other.

Approaches to ‘*Bidun* literature’: Between Eliciting Voice and Attentive Listening

Approaches to ‘*Bidun* literature’ function by eliciting the *Bidun*’s voice or by attentively listening to that voice. In regards to the approach that works to ‘elicit voice,’ there are two dominant tendencies: the anthropological and the activistic. While both tendencies are driven by ‘sympathetic’ or ‘committed’ impulses towards the *Bidun* and are ‘pragmatic’ in consideration, they effectively elicit *Bidun* literature to speak in a particular way to further an activistic position or to correspond to a totalizing anthropological condition. When one elicits voice, one is inevitably bound to fall into the trap of dismissing the text’s capacity to go beyond narratives of victimization and passivity. Such an approach to *Bidun* literature is a corollary of an ontological conception of statelessness as a condition where literary voice cannot be comprehended beyond the expression of a condition and the lack of rights.

The other approach to *Bidun* literature involves an act of attentive listening to the works

of *Bidun* writers through direct and close readings of the works. While attentive listening to the works may overlap with anthropological and activistic conclusions, it nevertheless attempts to understand *Bidun* literature from an analysis of the texts. Attentive listening bears a relation to Bachelard's notions of "resonances" and "reverberations" in the reader's reception of the poetic image. Bachelard writes "[i]n the resonances we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poet's being were our being" (Bachelard 1994:xxii). Similarly, attentive listening demands first and foremost a perceptive engagement with the text and an acknowledgement of its capacity to "bring a change of being" to its reader. It is this "change of being" that this thesis is particularly interested in, and which formed the initial impulses behind its undertaking. Attentive listening to literary texts allows possible reconsiderations of the reader's own position with regards to fundamental questions relating to citizenship, belonging and the role of aesthetic production in society. On a more general disciplinary level, it allows an acknowledgment of the literary text's capacity to negotiate between Area Studies and critical paradigms central to literary and cultural studies where the aesthetic can reconsider fixities of Area Studies as highlighted in the first chapter.

The difference between eliciting voice and attentive listening is that difference between approaching stateless literature as merely expressing a 'state of being' and approaching it, following Rancière, as a contestation of the distribution of the sensible. More forcefully, to listen attentively is to hear *Bidun* literature as a politically charged utterance with the capacity to impact reality. This study aims to attentively listen to the works of *Bidun* writers beyond ontological impositions. In other words, it aspires to avoid reading '*Bidun* literature' as 'literature on the *Bidun*.'¹

¹ It is also important to highlight Spivak's anxieties relating to the academic representation of the marginal 'subaltern' voice: the "desire to find a consciousness... in a positive or pure state", the danger of idealizing and romanticizing the subject of that voice, and the risk of being complicit in the reproduction of the social construction of subalternity (Spivak 1987). In attentively listening to literary works of *Bidun* writers, the thesis aspires to mitigate the inevitable susceptibility to such dangers. Here, it is worth echoing John Beverly's approach to such anxieties as scholars in the academy:

we do not claim to represent ("cognitively map", "let speak", "speak for" "excavate") the subaltern. Subaltern studies registers rather how the knowledge we construct and impart as academics is structured by the absence, difficulty, or impossibility of representation of the subaltern" (Beverly 1999:40).

Eliciting Voice: the Anthropological and the Activistic

A study of *Bidun* literature, like any other marginalized literature, is not free of tension between an anthropological and an aesthetic reading of the literary texts. The dangers of an anthropological approach to ‘*Bidun* Literature’ are best exemplified in Faris al-Wuqayyān’s engagement with the term as highlighted in chapter one. After a detailed exploration of the history of the *Bidun* issue, al-Wuqayyān finds a reciprocation and corroboration of the historical experiences of the community in the works of *Bidun* writers. ‘*Bidun* culture’ is mainly concerned with the “lack of rights and the dispossession of identity,” while *Bidun* literature is characterized by the “prevalence of a melancholic tone and a tragic use of language that almost always revolves around the loss of rights and the dispossession of identity” (al-Wuqayyān 2009). Yet, al-Wuqayyān’s conclusion is not informed by a close reading the literary works of *Bidun* writers. Rather it is presented as a necessary causal generalization. Literary works, from such a view, are approached as a ‘social document’ that primarily serve to ‘reveal’ the dire conditions of the community or what it means to live as a stateless person. The voices of *Bidun* writers are elicited in this case to speak in a particular way to fit an anthropological conclusion.

On the dangers of a universalizing approaches to the ‘figure of the refugee’, Liisa Malkki comments that “[a]lmost like an essentialized anthropological ‘tribe’...[r]efugees thus become not just a mixed category of people sharing a certain legal status; they become ‘a culture,’ ‘an identity,’ ‘a social world,’ or ‘a community’ ” (Malkki 1995:551). Malkki’s comment speaks to those dangers of an anthropological dealing with the *Bidun* community. In al-Wuqayyān’s case the *Bidun* are reduced, through a necessary assumption derived from their literary production, to an archetypal victim always responding in a repetitive manner to a totalizing condition of statelessness. Instead, what is at stake in approaching literary works is just the opposite. It is a way to understand how such extrinsic universalizing depictions are challenged through individualized narratives.

Perhaps the most prevalent approach to *Bidun* literature is the activistic approach. What

is meant by an activist approach is the way in which the literary works of *Bidun* writers are seen as ‘legitimizing’ documents to advocate the *Biduns*’ rights for citizenship and to demonstrate their contribution to the nation. While also driven by ‘sympathetic’ impulses, the danger of such an approach is that a certain reading is imposed on literary works of *Bidun* writers that is limited to their deserving of citizenship and their belonging to the nation. In the activist mode of reading, what is usually overlooked is the texts’ capacity to go beyond the direct quest for citizenship and transgress the very notions of national belonging in its official manifestation.

Many short newspaper articles have approached *Bidun* literature as a tool to advocate *Bidun* rights for citizenship (al-Faysal 2011; al-Wuqayyān 2009, al-Wushayḥi 2011; al-Ḥarbi 2009). However, the most compelling example of this activist approach is the publication compiled by Fatma al-Mattar under the title of *Judhoor* (Roots) (2012). The compilation includes more than fifty poems, short-stories and one-act plays in both Arabic and English by young unpublished *Bidun* writers. As described in the cover page, the publication “includes contributions submitted to the *Bidun* Creativity Contest and *Judhoor* Contest to demonstrate the talents of creative *Bidun*-Kuwaitis.” The *Bidun* Creativity Contest was restricted to young *Biduns* writers (under 18) while the second (Roots Contest) was for *Bidun* writers who are over 18. Prizes were allocated for the winners in the contest: a first prize of 500 KD (approx. 1000£), a second of 300 KD (approx. 600£) and a third of 200 KD (approx. 400£). Copies of *Judhoor* were sold for 1 KD (approx. 2£) and its proceeds were directed to *Bidun* families in need (Anhār 2012).

The activist nature of the publication is manifested in the adoption of the politically charged term ‘*Bidun*-Kuwaitis’ championed by *Bidun* rights activists. In addition, the texts are coupled with moving images documenting the 2012 *Bidun* protests and the government’s suppression of it. Interestingly, the nature of the contest, in addition to the monetary incentive, focused on a specific expression of *Bidun* literature, specifically a direct expression of what it means to be *Bidun* in light of recent political oppression. Similar to an academic conference’s ‘call for papers’ where one is required to relate to the conference title, the literary works compiled in *Judhoor* were made to speak in a certain way that relates to the activist nature of the publication. Passing by some of

the titles of the contributions, one can identify its overarching themes, namely, the depictions of the injustices practiced on the community (“*Bidun* and Racism”, “The Suffering of a *Bidun*, “the *Bidun* are Undeserving”, “*Bidun* until the Day of Judgement”, “A Child, and I’ve Become an Old Man”, “A *Bidun* Child’s Thoughts”, “The Story of a *Bidun*”, “The *Bidun* Poem”, “A Citizen Without a Homeland”, “If the World Only Knew I was *Bidun*”), a prevalent rhetoric of blame to the homeland, (“Between My Friend the homeland and I,” “A Homeland Gone with the Wind,” “A Stranger in my Homeland,” “To my Torturer”) and a general pronouncement of loyalty to the homeland (“We Adore it”, “I love Kuwait”, “Why Migrate?”). More importantly, as many of these titles suggest, there seems to be a direct uninterrogated self-identification with the label *Bidun*. As discussed earlier, and will be explicated in chapter six, works of published *Bidun* writers seldom mention or identify with the term *Bidun*. Rather, one of the main impulses behind the literary activity of many *Bidun* writers is this quest for metaphor as a discourse of identity resisting imposed labels. While clearly advocating *Bidun* rights, *Judhoor* restricts literary expression to further an activist position.

Attentive Listening: Engaging with Literary Texts

So far, instances of attentive listening that closely read literary texts by *Bidun* writers are incompressive and are limited to newspaper and online articles. This approach has been mostly championed by writers trained in literary criticism or who are active within the cultural circles. Yet, these attempts lack in terms of scope and analytical rigor. Because of their own brevity, these attempts will be reviewed in brief.²

In January 2012, Najma Idris, a lecturer of Arabic literature in Kuwait University published an extensive newspaper article titled ‘*Bidun* literature’. In this article, Idris offers samples of works by *Bidun* writers including Sulayman al-Flayyih, Nasir al-Zafiri, Ali al-Masūdī and Mona Kareem as they relate to questions of identity and statelessness. She defines *Bidun* writers as “those ...who have found themselves

² I have not been able to access the paper titled “Statelessness against the Grain: The Bidoun’s ‘Minor Literature’ in Kuwait” by Hanan Al-Alawi presented in the 7th International Deleuze Studies Conference titled Models, Machines and Memories in Istanbul, July, 14-16th 2014.

victims of an administrative, political, and humanitarian impasse” (Idris 2012). The term *Bidun* Literature is then used without further discussion. However, what is of importance in the article is that it reads literary texts of *Bidun* writers as a point of departure in analyzing the questions of history, identity and belonging.

Another online article is by the literary critic Su‘ad al-‘Inizi titled “The Representations of the Exiled *Bidun* in Thought, Literature and Art.” The rather ambitious title provides a brief overview of the different cultural representations of the condition of statelessness. Nevertheless, the section on *Bidun* literature highlights the multiplicity of the depictions of the stateless condition. Al-‘Inizi maintains that the “creative efforts that emerge out of the impositions of the *Bidun* issue...do not establish a clear *Bidun* identity, but are scattered instances” (al-‘Inizi 2013). Again, what is key in the preceding conclusion is that it is informed by the works of *Bidun* writers and does not necessarily offer grand conclusions. However, the critique of this particular approach is that the condition of statelessness is approached analytically solely from the prism of exile (i.e. the Exiled *Bidun*). In her discussion of “the refugee condition,” Liisa Malkki criticizes literary studies bias of aestheticizing exile as an individualized experience while other conditions of displacement such as refugees are viewed as a monolithic mass (Malkki 1995). She writes “[e]xile connotes a readily aestheticizable realm, whereas the label “refugees” connotes a bureaucratic and international humanitarian realm” (Malkki 1995:513). Echoing Malkki’s critique, *Bidun* writers occupy their own unique fractured space that needs to be considered. As articulated by Muhsin al-Ramli “the *Bidun* issue ...is much harsher than exile or alienation or émigré/migration literature... because issues of exile, migration, and alienation are only parts of statelessness” (Al-Nabhan 2005:7).

In August 2011, al-Kūt TV’s *Salām Yā Kuwait* aired an episode titled “*Bidun* Literature,” interviewing the *Bidun* writers Dikhīl Khalīfa and Karīm al-Hazza‘.³ It was an unprecedented effort by the media and *Bidun* authors to approach *Bidun* literature as an undisputed literary collectivity. In the episode, *Bidun* literature was presented as a literature with a unique identity informed by a shared political history informing a

³ Dikhīl Khalīfa worked as an assistant producer in al-Kūt TV channel at the time the episode was aired (Khalīfa 2013).

difficult present. *Bidun* literature was presented as a category existing within Kuwaiti literature. However it is distinct in its themes, poetic impulses and emphasis. Speaking as members of the *Bidun* literary community, Khalīfa and al-Hazza‘ naturally demonstrate knowledge of the corpus and an awareness of the intricacies of both the communal and singular historical experiences of *Bidun* writers. More importantly, specific literary works were highlighted and analysed to arrive at conclusions relating to the particularity of *Bidun* literature. One example would be Khalīfa’s insistence on presenting literature as form of resistance⁴ or “a message to say that no matter how many obstacles you put in our way, we [the *Bidun*] will find ways to overcome them” (Al-Hazza‘ and Khalīfa 2011).

To conclude part one of the thesis, a close reading of a poem jointly written by Dikhīl Khalīfa and Mona Kareem titled “Myth of the Nest: Where the Innocent Flee” will set up the way in which works of *Bidun* writers will be generally approached throughout the study. The analysis of the poem will attempt to attentively listen beyond ontological modalities and discuss it in light of the theoretical positions discussed earlier in the chapter.

Analysis of the poem titled *Myth of the Nest: Where the Innocent Flee* (2007)

Building on the previous theoretical discussion, the section attempts to read the literary works of *Bidun* writers beyond universalizing extrinsic approaches to the condition of statelessness. The section will focus on the poem titled *Myth of the Nest: Where the*

⁴ The works of *Bidun* writers can also be approached through what Barbara Harlow terms “resistance literature,” a category of literature “that emerged significantly as part of the organized national liberation struggles and resistance movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.” (Harlow 1993:xvii). As a category, resistance literature can be particularly productive for a comparative approach framing *Bidun* literature within a wider “third world historiography” (4). However, certain issues arise when limiting *Bidun* literature within Harlow’s resistance category. Resistance literature is presented as inextricably linked to postcolonial and decolonization paradigms, placing writers within the global south movement and ‘third-world’ national liberation struggles against Western Imperial domination. Thus, the category of resistance literature may lock the literary production to an oppositional relationship to the decolonization paradigm, while limiting the readings of the literature to resisting dominant colonial ideological and poetic norms. Rather, this thesis aims to probe into the aesthetic impulse of the body of literature even beyond narratives of resistance to Western Imperialism. What is at stake in approaching *Bidun* literature is the ontological placement of the condition of statelessness, or the lack of a productive relational frame altogether. This ontological placement can take many shapes that are not solely restricted to Harlow’s emphasis on the decolonization paradigm.

Innocent Flee jointly written by Dikhīl Khalīfa and Mona Kareem published in Dikhīl Khalīfa's poetry collection titled *A Desert Emerging Out of a Shirt* (2007).

The poem is written by two *Bidun* poets from different generations: Dikhīl Khalīfa (b.1964) and Mona Kareem (b.1987). Born stateless in Kuwait, and still residing there, Khalīfa is considered a key poet of the "1990s generation" known for their radical experimental poetry and adoption of the prose poem (Mufarriḥ 2007). His poetry collections include *Eyes on the Gate of Exile* (1993), *A Squatting Sea* (1999), *A Desert Emerging out of a Shirt* (2007), *A Severed Arm Knocking the Door* (2012), and *Ascending to the Pit of the Well* (2014). Mufarriḥ describes Khalīfa's poetry as expressing an "anxious search for the impossible homeland and the impossible woman" (53). Throughout his life, Khalīfa has been actively engaged in local journalism and the cultural scene. In addition to being one of the founders of the Tuesday Gathering in 1996, he has recently established a publishing house *Dār Masārāt* in 2015. As highlighted earlier in chapter two, Khalīfa has always been adamant on advocating the precarious position and unique poetics of *Bidun* literary community.

At the time of the publication of the poem in 2007, Mona Kareem was still residing in Kuwait. At the age of 14 and 16 she had published two poetry collections *Mornings Washed by Waters of Thirst* (2002) and *Absence with Severed Fingers* (2004). Between 2006 and 2011, while in Kuwait, Kareem was actively engaged in local and Arab journalism. In 2011, Kareem left Kuwait to pursue her graduate degree in comparative literature in Binghamton University - New York. Because of her status as *Bidun*, her 'temporary passport' from Kuwait was not renewed which meant that she had to apply for residency in the US (Kareem 2013). There, she has been highly engaged as a *Bidun* activist establishing Bedoonrights.com in 2011 in addition to her activist work on Migrantrights.com and a number of other online platforms. During the 2011 *Bidun* public protests, Bedoonrights.com played a key role in providing coverage of the events to a global audience.

As to *Myth of the Nest: Where the Innocent Flee*, Kareem mentions how the poem was the first confrontational poem by *Bidun* writers to explicitly voice *Bidun* writers' resistance to exclusionary politics (Kareem 2013). Similarly, Dikhīl Khalīfa describes the poem as "a message to say that no matter how many obstacles you put in our way, we

[the *Bidun*] will find ways to overcome them” (al-Hazza‘ and Khalīfa 2011). The collective voice that speaks the poem stands as a marker of the poem’s deeply political aims by going beyond a mere description of a stateless condition. In the very act of co-writing, and in the repetitive use the first person plural pronoun, the poem reads like a manifesto that expresses a poetic statement of defiance and resilience in the face of enforced restrictions.

From the title, one is able to identify the defiant impulse of the poem located in a refusal to be contained by social and political constructs. These constructs are embodied in the image of the nest, functioning here as a metaphor for an official mode of belonging. The ‘nest’ poses as a “primal image” symbolizing an organic sense of belonging (Bachelard 1994:91), “[w]e want them [nests] to be perfect, to bear the mark of a very secure instinct” (92). However, in the poem, the image of the nest as primal, instinctive and organic is upturned. The ‘nest’ in its current exclusive configuration is denying ‘the innocent’ their right to belong.

Not only is the nest exposed as a constructed myth, but the very idea of innocence associated with it is interrogated: who is innocent, and what does it mean to be innocent? The use of the term ‘innocent,’ is suggestive when viewed in light of Arendt’s aforementioned notion of ‘naked bareness of living’ where the stateless “appeared to be nothing but human beings whose very *innocence*, from every point of view, and especially that of the persecuting government — was their greatest misfortune.” This very innocence becomes “the mark of their rightlessness as it was the seal of their loss of political status” (Arendt 1962:295). Yet, as the title suggests, there is another *active* type of innocence, a not-so-innocent innocence that has the capacity to flee this presupposed ordinary condition. Those innocent flee to where ‘the Myth of the Nest’ is exposed and to where a new subjectivity beyond the sensibilities of current institutional forces can be poetically imagined and articulated.

The poem can be read as a process of first undoing, or unlearning the givens, in order to then reimagine reality through the potential of aesthetic imaginary. The first step of this process of undoing is a mindful engagement in self-positionality. What is meant by self-positionality is an understanding of one’s position in the world, to become aware of one’s departure point. Whereas *self-positioning* is associated with aligning oneself

within a structure, *self-positionality* carries a contemplative resonance; one that perhaps probes into the very foundations of subjectivity. In other words, it is a process of re-aligning one's positionality in the name of what really matters to the poets. Entailed in self-positionality is a refusal first to internalise the extrinsic order of things and at the same time a will not to recreate an oppositional self-defined space. In the poem, the poets claim a marginal space from which they are able to articulate an emancipatory vision that reconfigures and reimagines reality through the aesthetic act.

In articulating a self-positionality, the two poets engage in a form of “literary cartography”. Simply put, literary cartography highlights the many ways in which writers can act as mapmakers creating an imagined world through the act of writing (Tally 2013). This imagined space is not a form of geospace, relating to “real world” geographies (Tally 2013:156), but a poeticised space. Nevertheless, it is a space that is negotiated and informed by the poets' real world experiences. Reading the contours of this space requires a stratigraphic vision in reading literary spaces; one that does not view literary spaces as superficial mathematical grids but “understood to compromise multiple layers of meaning” as proposed by Bertrand Westphal (Tally 2013:142). Similarly, the poets in *Myth of the Nest* articulate a positionality that constitutes “multiple layers of meaning” which the following analysis aims to bring to light.

From the outset, the most basic dimensions of existence, namely space and time are undone.

Time bows before the wind's hat ⁵
In this thrilling expanse

Time is relaxed and submitting, on the side of the poets, at their pace. The space of the poem is depicted as a “thrilling expanse” laden with potential and adventure. Rather than a set or defined space, it is a stretching unbounded expanse with transformative capacity.

We will be mad, we living dead

⁵ The original poem in Arabic is provided in Appendix C.

Poor in peacock's feathers
We will plant a stick in mid-air !
We search for what makes of time
A mischievous prince
Who, with charmed gestures, can rework this bottomless pit
Into a chuckling dream in a bird's heart (Khalīfa 2007:95).

The “living dead,” the “poor,” “this bottomless pit” is an acknowledgement of the poets’ existing conditions. One is reminded of Arendt’s notion of the stateless as being “literally dead to the world”. Yet, the poem is not merely describing such a passive condition. By insisting that “we will be mad, we living dead”, the poem proposes a generative condition that breeds a certain sense of madness with the capacity to transform the “bottomless pit” into a “chuckling dream in a bird’s heart.” The impossible task of ‘planting’ a stick in mid-air signifies the poet’s will to defy the logic of the current order.

At the same time, the poets are describing a process rather than a set space; they are “*searching* for that which can transform.” In this active search the poets seem to be describing a process out of the enforced condition rather than a description of that ‘condition’ as a predefined ontological space.

Ask not of the myth of the nest
The flower now knows that it is without wings
Ask not of the arid clouds,
When the trees have no shadow
Come, let us spread laughter on the pores of the earth
Mock a coincidence born between two wombs
Mock this blood that has become a question mark

Out of this mud, let us create a language
To cross this devilish space
we kick these black papers
to arch over this roadblock.
Scoffing at the slobber of barriers
and the frowns of the fat cats!

On colorful pavements we scatter
Where lovers exchange glances outside of the law
Where dreams create their crutches out of a rainbow
(Khalīfa 2007:96).

The question of contemplating one's positionality in the poem arises out of a unique circumstance of the absence of tangible belonging. The flower is wingless and the trees are without shadow. The *Bidun* condition is described, albeit metaphorically, as a "chance fate born between two wombs" resulting in "blood that has become a question mark." The label *Bidun* which stands as a distinctive mark of extrinsic forces acting upon the community is also undone by the power of metaphor. This metaphorical description of the condition shows how the poets refuse to internalise the condition by first eluding the term '*Bidun*' and secondly by mocking its implications. The poets persistently *search* for an intrinsic substitute metaphor for the label *Bidun*. However a final self-defined name remains unstated, just the unbounded traces of metaphor as a discourse of identity resisting a violent act of naming. In other words, it is a form of 'dis-identification', of the part with no part, with the established order of classification and identification, which itself is a powerful enactment of political subjectivisation (Rancière 1992:61).

The poets then insist on an affirmative reconfiguration and realignment of their relations with the givens through the resilient power of aesthetic imagination. Out of this "mud," or current conditions, the poets call for a creation of a new *language* with the capacity of offering an emancipatory vision. The use of the term language is suggestive when viewed in light of Michel De Certeau's description of the act of mapping one's space subjectively in an urban space as a "speech act" (De Certeau 1984:97). De Certeau distinguishes between a panoptical, officially planned, theoretical view of a city that can be 'objectively' read from above, and the everyday practice of walking the city or simply experiencing that urban space subjectively (De Certeau 1984). What is assumed in that totalizing panoramic view of the city is a set of relations and disciplined uses of that space as suggested by official urban planners. However, one is capable of eluding that ordered notion of theoretical space by the simple act of walking, or a "spatial acting-out of the place" (98). The simple act of imaginative walking in the city becomes "a space

of enunciation;” where one can express a subjective relation to predetermined space (98).

Following De Certeau’s premises, the poets’ elusive movement through “roadblocks”, “barriers”, and “colorful pavements” can be read as a reminder of the, often overlooked, agency of everyday life. In creating a new ‘language’, or the willful act of writing, the poets are able to cross this “devil-ridden space,” march over the enforced roadblocks, and scoff at the barriers. A new space *outside* of officiality’s totalizing control is enunciated where dreams are formed and where “lovers exchange glances outside of the law”.

Nothing
Nothing can stop this whiteness
No time to shake hands with a corrupt smile
No time to dress up in years of disappointment
Let us leave the broken glances to the poor with no feet

We banished departure from our daily memoirs
and left sadness with its night dance
We excel at spelling our ancestor’s graves
cursing luck in the dead-ends
and reading the shut windows
we banished departure

The thrust of this ‘new language’ refuses to be maintained by any force. Nothing can stop it now. It is a call for urgent action and an epistemological break with “years of disappointment” and passivity. There is no time *now* to “shake hands with a corrupt smile” or “to dress up in years of disappointment”. This urgency perhaps hints at the material realisations of the false promises that have kept the *Bidun* community at bay, awaiting a solution. With this realisation, the poets refuse any sympathetic impulses that have previously characterised their position as a people in society. “Broken glances” are left to “those without feet”, who lack agency and the capacity to move. In this refusal to accept “broken glances,” the poem works against the power of reductionist representations of the *Bidun* as passive victims. Instead, the poets insist on being heard without interruption. The previous lines offer a way out of anthropological or activistic

readings of the works of *Bidun* writers.

The epistemological break is also a break from the previously incessant idea of enforced departure. The repeated phrase ‘we banished departure’ may suggest a refusal to be intimidated into leaving the country for good as many other *Biduns* have. This stance can be read as an utterance that directly responds to the official designation of the *Bidun* as ‘illegal residents’ and the delegitimizing symbolic violence entailed in it. Through ‘banishing departure’ and the epistemological break with the previous attitudes, the poets are claiming this condition of marginality.

From the margin the poets are able to enjoy a multidimensional awareness and a reflective distance from official mainstream notions of belonging. This position is seen as an occasion for celebration.

Here’s to us!
Who gouge the desert’s eyes.
Who erect gallows for all directions.
Let us uproot our suffocated names from their eternal parenthesis.
And share a cup of coffee with forgotten time.

Firstly, attention is called to the *Bidun* poets’ own unique marginal space. This is signified in the call to uproot “suffocated names from their eternal parenthesis” which defies an extrinsic violent act of naming. The use of the word ‘eternal parenthesis’ is suggestive in that it mocking the ontological aspects of statelessness. As their names have been historically suffocated by parenthesis, it can be uprooted as well.

Come then
We free our winged songs
Into a toothless sky
There, where things have no boundaries
...
come, then, let us gift the beggars parts of our dreams
we do not want to count the air we have in our pockets
There is no worth for swollen bellies
for mindless clay

A few mad words
Are enough to dispel this gloom (Khalifa 2007:99).

The agency of ‘uprooting’ and ‘undoing’ is made possible through the power of the poetic. These lines express the potency of the “winged songs,” in a “toothless sky” of the aesthetic imaginary. From a reflective distance, the poets are able to offer a vision of the intangible; a “dream”. A “winged song,” a “few mad words”, a poem, have the capacity of reaching out allowing others in a wider marginal space to envision a way “to dispel this gloom”.

Even though this proposed language may appear as transcendental; existing out of real space and time, its impulse is nevertheless deeply political and material. It arises out of the stark realization of the poets’ positioning. The poem continuously vacillates between the imaginary poetic space and real conditions. We are reminded of the images of everyday administrative violence. It is personified by the figure of the mechanical government employee who is unaware of the grave impact of his occupation on the daily realities of the *Bidun*.

Without birth certificates, we pronounce the neighing of rain
How ugly are documents stamped with the malice of employees
cushioned by laziness in chocolate-filled offices

To hell with the jesters of cemented history
come then, let us draw homelands on the clouds
so that they fall in the shape of love-dampened roses
Let us pronounce our day of resurrection
Without shaking the hands of an ant
Without a dialogue with a sculpture
(Khalifa 2007:101).

The depiction of the government employee with the ugly papers in chocolate filled offices paints a scene of the general indifference of officiality to the experiences of those excluded from it. The bureaucracy is uncomprehending of the poets’ urgent conditions. At the same time, it is also unaware of the episteme resulting from such experiences that allows for a certain political subjectivity to emerge; one that is unbounded by enforced

restrictions. The official is confronted and rejected as an all-powerful containing force that controls all aspects of the poets' life: from their very names to their right to belong. "To hell" with the bureaucracy's power to define, place and name.

The poem then shifts attention to a wider condition of marginality beyond the *Bidun*'s unique space of marginality. It is associated with other marginalized groups who share a similar position, often rendered invisible and inaudible regardless of their citizenship status. Specifically, the poets reach out to migrant workers in Kuwait sharing that marginal space. Two explicit images of migrant workers are presented. The first is the image of the sleeping school guard and the other is of street cleaners. The choice of these two images hints at both Arab migrant workers and migrant workers from South Asia. What is offered by the poem to other marginalised groups is a shared emancipatory vision.

Chance is no longer our only friend
It is we who plant chance in the streets ...
We distribute lovebirds to the comers and the goers
We etch light onto the walls

And onto the locked doors of schools
We wake the guards from their naps with half a dream
We drive sleep from its humid viscous room
And call on the sun to come out and play
So that it does not wilt on death's chair

The poets paint an intimate description of the school guard's room. It is confined, behind "locked doors of schools," viscous, evoking a general sense of gloom. The poets are able to conceive of the details of the school guard's room reflecting a sense of genuine association and solidarity. They are inside his room waking him up with a dream, and in thrilling vivacious gestures "drive out sleep" and "call upon the sun to play." This intimate encounter allows the poets to incorporate the schoolguard's room into a wider space of shared marginality.

The poets then reach out to other marginalized groups, namely, the street cleaners who are predominantly from the South Asian Bengali migrant community.

We drape songs on the eyelashes of street-cleaners
We curse the colour khaki
And the city's stray dogs

Similarly, the poets are able to offer them “songs.” From that position of marginality they are able to enable political agency beyond the present political and institutional order. The emphasis is not solely one of citizenship rights but a question of making visible those who are otherwise rendered invisible and inaudible by the current order of things. At the same time, this vision is not only offered to those who share that marginal space, but goes beyond it to the nest's dwellers and seekers.

What does it mean that one can offer happiness, dreams, a song, a poem, without being officially recognized by any institution? What does it say of one's agency and actual influence on the reality of the socio-political order? This question is an inquiry into the very foundations of subjectivity in the face of the existing political and institutional parameters. In the poem, an irreducible essence of human agency is emphasised that cannot be taken away by layer after layer of institutional constructions. This essence is not situated in an apolitical space of innocence outside of political responsibility, but one that attempts to reorder reality in the name of what really matters.

The final section of the poem hints at the impossibility of an explicit articulation of the poets' proposed vision of emancipation.

We tune our madness in the sky's trapeze
within the arms reach of children
A kind of happiness ties/straps us to our souls
....
Once more our voices become rowdy
We bring down the constructed ladder in our throats
...
Who cleanses places from the lust of burning?
Who crawls deep within us?

Silence alone does
Silence alone
Babbling incessantly

Throughout the poem, the poet's associate with "innocence," "dreams", "chuckles", "madness", "childhood", "a kind of happiness"; a series of images and metaphors attempting to describe the contours of the poets' vision but not quite finally naming it. One can only identify the poem's impulse and stay faithful to it. The defiance to give a final name can be read as a form of resistance to a totalizing ontological depiction of a condition that can be entirely understood or entirely overturned.

What is at least certain is the presence of a voice and an awareness of it. This is signified in the final urgent call for pronouncing a "rowdy voice" and bringing down a "constructed ladder." The last line "just silence babbling on" is a summation of the paradoxical position of *Bidun* writers. The paradox relates to the possibility of voicing an utterance that is rendered inaudible by officiality's 'distribution of the sensible'. Here, the poem is aware of the paradox, exposing it and then confronting it. The poet's presence, often reduced into silence, babbles incessantly. It is a 'silence' that demands to be listened to. What is at stake in articulating this 'silence' is not the question of citizenship rights nor expressions of an ontological stateless condition. Rather, it is a deeper political concern related to an understanding of the politics of emancipation as an unabated "verification of equality" enacted in the aesthetic act (Rancière 2011).

The first part of the thesis has set out the contextual groundwork and the theoretical concerns regarding the general study of *Bidun* literature. As discussed, Rancière's relational understanding of the politics of statelessness allows the literary production of stateless writers to be approached as acts of enacting an aesthetic subjectivity that have the capacity to impact reality rather than a mere expression of an ontological condition. In light of such, the second part of the thesis will examine the ways in which *Bidun* writers, through complex modes of affiliation and identification, articulate notions of belonging beyond official categorizations and ontological modalities.

Chapter 4 The Cameleers of the National Spirit: *Bidun* poets and Kuwaiti Literary History

In his article “My Experience with Kuwaiti Literature,” the Kuwaiti literary historian Khalid Saud al-Zaid recounts a disheartening encounter in 1965 with a new generation of Kuwaiti literary enthusiasts in the newly established Writers’ Association. Many of these young poets, he recalls, doubted the very existence of Kuwaiti Literature, “if there were poets and a literary tradition from the time of the founding of Kuwait, we would’ve certainly heard of them,” they said (al-Ḥaddād 2002:137). He goes on, “I defended the literary tradition in Kuwait... opposed their accusation by reciting the poetry of Khalid al-Faraj, ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Niṣf, the bold stances of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rushaid as well as the poetry of Saqir al-Shibīb” (137).

What left al-Zaid saddened was this upcoming generation’s total unawareness of Kuwait’s literary past. Returning home after the incident, al-Zaid writes:

I returned home after a storm of discussion sad and disheartened. I reclined on my cushion by the wall. No one around me knew of my grief. I then quickly leapt up as if I had a planned rendezvous with old papers crammed in a timeworn cabinet in our house, a jumble of worn-out old Kuwaiti journals. I didn’t know exactly what they were... journals without cover pages, cover pages without journals. Everything seemed scattered and sad. I left them on the ground and ordered that no one touch them... After a short break, I took a deep breath and asked myself: *Where to start? And How?*

I then returned to face the scattered journals ... it is my duty now... to create out of this heap I am surrounded by something that could be remembered. For these old journals are the *dīwān* of literature and poetry in Kuwait. (137-138 emphasis added)

In 1967, two years after this foundational moment, al-Zaid published the first comprehensive work on Kuwaiti literature titled *Kuwaiti Writers in Two Centuries*, a literary history and anthology, which would develop into a relatively stable narrative for later works on national literary history.

Reflecting on al-Zaid's anecdote, one can begin to visualise what is at stake in approaching national literary history generally and in the Gulf specifically. The challenges could be summed up in the two questions articulated by al-Zaid as he stood amid the heap: where to begin? And how? In other words, when does the history of national literature begin? And how can this history be narrativized?

These questions highlight how the endeavour of writing national literary history is inextricably linked to the impulses and urgencies of nation building. To ask the question: who is the first Kuwaiti poet, requires one to first ask: who is Kuwaiti and when does Kuwaiti history begin.

Forging a new national literary history then goes beyond questions of aesthetic considerations, probing into the very meaning of both the 'national' and the 'literary' in national literary history. The words (national and literary) are studied under two different, often antagonistic, modes of inquiry. The national often operates within the logic, methods and considerations of Area Studies and the social sciences, while the critical paradigms in the humanities emphasise the intrinsic affiliative networks that often destabilise the fixities of established categories. Thus, any work that revisits the arena of national literary history, whether affirming a narrative or contesting it, is necessarily also an inquiry into the parameters of the national category both spatially in terms of geographic boundaries and temporally in terms of national beginnings. At the same time, it is a struggle over the very meaning of the literary.

This chapter will read national literary history writing in Kuwait as a site of opposition and contestation. The focus will be on the question of the placement of *Bidun* writers within national literary history narratives. The *Bidun* poet Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ's work on Kuwaiti literary history titled *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement (Ḥudāt al-Ghaym wa-l-Wiḥsha)* (2007) will be read as a revisionist work of Kuwaiti literary history against a relatively stable literary history narrative. As will be argued, Mufarriḥ opposes the exclusion of *Bidun* writers from any placement within national literature while at the same presenting *Bidun* writers as a natural and organic extension of the

national literary narrative. This is achieved by emphasising the literary in national literary history over the national, which allows a more inclusive concept of belonging that goes beyond the demarcations of the official national category.

Kuwaiti Literary History: Beginnings and Periodization

Traditional practices of literary history tend to narrate the history of the “unfolding of an idea, principal, suprapersonal entity, or Geist as its subject” (Perkins 1993:5). This subject is presented as a hero who goes through linear transitions (with a definite beginning and a life story). The teleology of the narrative or plot can then only be assumed in retrospect. As David Perkins puts it, the “function of literary history is to produce useful fictions about the past” to “project the present into the past ...while taking the past to reflect our concerns and support our intentions” (182). In the case of Kuwaiti literary history, the “hero’s” untold story that needed to be narrated was the post-independence state of Kuwait, a hero in search of a deeply-rooted sense of cultural continuity emerging in a moment of political and cultural exposure to a wider Arab and global context.

One of the main anxieties associated with traditional national literary histories is the tension between the national and the literary in national literary history, which usually tends to gravitate towards the ascendancy of the national over the literary. Commenting on the rise of English literature as a politically induced discipline, Terry Eagleton writes: “what was at stake in English studies was less English *literature* than *English* literature” (Eagleton 1996:25). With an emphasis on the national, the literary becomes a function of the national. Shakespeare's works become genealogical descendants of Beowulf and not necessarily Dante or Homer, regardless of their literary influence as pointed out by Anthony Appiah (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1995: 285).

Whereas national literature in Europe (English, French, and German literatures as examples), are corollaries of a linguistic unity, national (nation-state) literary histories in the Arab context and in the Gulf specifically are rather contingent on non-linguistic,

more arbitrary, historical factors. Thus, delineating the contours of the national was a significant challenge for early literary historians, as they needed to negotiate notions of 'national' belonging within local vernacular, regional, pre-national, and transnational affinities.

The following section will provide an overview of the early works on literary history in Kuwait to highlight the existing modalities from which Mufarriḥ's work departs, followed by an analysis of the general trends of the narratives. The focus will be on two main issues. The first relates to debates over national beginnings: or, simply put, who is the first Kuwaiti poet? The second relates to questions of periodization of the literary history narratives.

Khalid Sa'ud al-Zaid's foundational literary history *Kuwaiti Writers in Two Centuries* (1967) considered 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā'ī (1776-1853) as the founding figure of Kuwaiti literature.¹ Published just six years after the independence of Kuwait, the impulse of nation building in al-Zaid's work cannot be overlooked. At the same time, writing literary history at this critical historical juncture stemmed from a need to position Kuwaiti literature within a wider Arabic cultural context. In contextualising the question of beginnings at a time preceding the emergence of the nation-states, al-Zaid writes:

You do not need a passport or a travel document to travel from Kuwait to any other Arab or Muslim land. There are neither borders nor barriers. There is no belonging but to the town or city of your birth.

You are free to travel wherever you desire in God's vast land. You are free to reside in any land your heart desires.

Nobody will ask: where have you come from? Why do you reside here? You are welcome as a newcomer and resident or as a departing guest. This had been the case until the end of the First World War (al-Haddād 2002:26).

Without such an acknowledgment of the historical context, the newly established official notion of the national would leave Kuwaiti literature as a nascent literature void

¹ Prior works on Kuwaiti literary history were restricted to brief articles in cultural magazines (al-Basir 1962; Khalaf 1962; no author 1964 cited in 'Abdullah 1973:116).

of any historical continuity, and al-Zaid's mission to inform the young poets of a tradition would certainly have failed.

1776 marks the birth of al-Ṭabṭabā'ī as the first Kuwaiti writer and founder of a Kuwaiti literary tradition. Born in Basra, 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā'ī, arrived in Kuwait in the year 1843 at the age of sixty seven, spending only the last ten years of his life in the country. He was the first to "plant the seed of intellectual revival (*nahḍa*) in Kuwait" (al-Zaid 1967:35). Previously, he had settled in Zubāra (in modern day Qatar), and Bahrain, where he served as a secretary for the al-Khalīfa rulers (al-Zaid 42:1967). Al-Ṭabṭabā'ī is now claimed by Iraqi, Qatari, Bahraini and Kuwaiti national literary histories ('Abdullah 1986:10; al-Wuqayyān 2011:341; al-Wuqayyān 2012:30). This definite beginning set by al-Zaid was later reiterated by other writings on Kuwaiti literary history (al-Ṣabāḥ 1973; 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 1996).

The narrative of *Kuwaiti Writers in Two Centuries* is organized chronologically in accordance with the birth years of the writers and is divided into four main periods. The first period was inaugurated with the arrival of 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā'ī (1776-1853) in Kuwait in 1844. Before al-Ṭabṭabā'ī, there was "no documented poetry" (al-Zaid 1967:34).

The second period is associated with 'Abd al-'Aziz al Rushaid, a seminal figure in Kuwaiti intellectual history who wrote the first book on Kuwaiti history, *Tarīkh al-Kuwait* (The History of Kuwait) (1926). Born in Kuwait, al-Rushaid travelled through different parts of the Islamic world including Zubayr, al-Ahsa', Baghdad, Madina, Istanbul, Cairo and Indonesia (al-Hijji 1993; al-Zaid 1967:95-6). Whereas al-Ṭabṭabā'ī was the first to "plant the seed of intellectual renaissance (*nahḍa*) in Kuwait," al-Rushaid then "nurtured and developed" that seed (al-Zaid 1967:35). Influenced by his travels, al-Rushaid founded *Majallat al Kuwait* in 1927, which brought the Kuwaiti reading public into the different discourses on revival (*iṣlāḥ*) in the wider Arab and Islamic intellectual circles. The second period also coincided with other important events such as the establishment of *al-Mubarakīyya* school in 1911.

Then comes the Pan-Arabist tide as the main feature inaugurating the third period. This period is concerned with the years between 1936 and 1958 marked by important events such as the arrival of Palestinian teachers in Kuwait in 1936, the commencement of the first Kuwaiti educational scholarships to Cairo in 1939, and the establishment of *al-Bi'tha* magazine in 1946 among other events. The fourth and final period in al-Zaid's narrative coincides with the founding of *al-'Arabi* magazine in 1958, which is a further development of the Pan-Arabist tide.

Following al-Zaid's work, Muhammad Hasan 'Abdullah published another important work on Kuwaiti literary history titled *The Literary and Intellectual Movement in Kuwait* (1973). Commenting on the first Kuwaiti poet, 'Abdullah writes that al-Ṭabṭabā'ī:

is not a Kuwaiti. He only settled in Kuwait in the final ten years of his life. However, this matter can be forgiven, as Kuwaitis did not differentiate between the sons of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula in general, especially before the establishment of the state and defining citizenship by formal documents. Many Kuwaiti poets are regarded as Bahraini poets and are placed with the poets of al-Ahsa' or Najd, such as the poet Khalid al-Faraj among others" ('Abdullah 1967: 116).

In *Poetry and Poetry in Kuwait* (1987), 'Abdullah also comments that the beginnings of Kuwaiti poetry might seem self-evident, but are unacceptable from a methodological point of view since the founding figures of Kuwaiti poetry are not exclusively Kuwaiti ('Abdullah 1987:9-10). These founding poets can be "officially found in the literary histories of Najd, Qatar, and Bahrain" ('Abdullah 1987:9-10). Again for a beginning to be conceived, 'Abdullah sees it necessary to attach a caveat reminding the reader of the differences between a more fluid historic notion of belonging and a modern one substantiated by official documentation.

'Abdullah criticizes al-Zaid's logic of periodization, proposing instead two main periods in Kuwaiti literary history resulting in the political, economic and social rupture caused by the production of oil (*mā qabl al-naft wa-mā ba'dahu*). In the pre-oil production

period, literature was “conservative and traditional, holding on to a past rather than future,” while the “concerns of Kuwaiti intellectuals and poets were restricted to their limited worlds” (120). ‘Abdullah mentions that problems with writing Kuwaiti literary history is not only methodological, but pertain to the question of the existence of Kuwaiti literature as a valid categorization in the first place (109). A main reason behind ‘Abdullah’s interest in writing Kuwaiti literary history is the “the fierce dispute over the existence of this [Kuwaiti] literature” as a valid category.

Al-Ṭabṭabā’ī’s pioneer status was contested in Khalīfa al-Wuqayyān’s *The Arab Cause in Kuwaiti Poetry* (1971). Al-Ṭabṭabā’ī is left out of the Kuwaiti literary history altogether, as “the period of his residence in Kuwait was not sufficient enough and his influence on Kuwaiti poetry was minute” (al-Wuqayyān 1971:26). Al-Wuqayyān continues: “when we try to find any reference to Kuwait, or any of its emirs or of the events occurring during his stay or before it, we are left empty-handed” (al-Wuqayyān 1971:21). It would be “more honest” to consider him as belonging other countries in which he resided in such as Iraq, Bahrain or Qatar (al-Wuqayyān 1971:26). Instead, the “true beginning” of Kuwaiti literary history starts with Khalid al-‘Adsāni (1834-1898) and ‘Abdullah al-Faraj (1863-1901).²

Al-Wuqayyān periodizes Kuwaiti literary history into three main periods. The first is between the 1850s to the 1920s, a period characterized by its “backwardness” and the lack of outside cultural influences, when poetry was limited in form and content (al-Wuqayyān 1971:30). The second period, between the 1930s and the 1940s, coincides with the establishment of governmental schools, the first public library, first literary club, and the first newspaper. The poet Fahad al-‘Askar is considered the highlight of this period along with poets ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Niṣf (1906-1971) and ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Badir (1927-2008). The third period commences after the beginning of World War II as the tide of Arab nationalism surges.

² Born in Kuwait, the poet and musician ‘Abdullah al-Faraj moved to Bombay at a young age where he was educated. He later lived between Basra and Kuwait (al-Faraj 2002:16-17; al-Zaid 1967:58).

In *Culture in Kuwait: Beginnings-Currents-Pioneers* (2003), Khalīfa al-Wuqayyān revisits the question of the beginnings of Kuwaiti literature. Instead of al-Ṭabṭabā'ī, 'Uthman bin Sanad (1766-1827) is considered the founding poet of Kuwaiti literary tradition because of his historic precedence and longer residency in Kuwait. Born on the island of Failaka (in modern day Kuwait), Bin Sanad settled in Basra, al-Ahsa', and Baghdad where he is buried (al-Wuqayyān 2011). He has been referred to in different works as *al-Failakāwi* (in reference to his birth place), *al-Wā'ili* (tribal origin; descendent of Bakir ibn Wā'il), *al-Najdi* (the place of his family's origin: Najd in modern day Saudi Arabia), *al-Basri* (his place of residence in modern day Iraq), and resident of *al-Qurain* (a historical name for Kuwait). In one biography, he is referred to as 'Uthman bin Sanad bin Rashid bin 'Abdullah bin Rashid of the Maliki *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), the Qādiri *mashrab* (Sufi order), born in Failaka, and resident of al-Qurain (319). Here are multiple layers of belonging that challenge a facile nationalizing claim. However, it is important to note that al-Wuqayyān acknowledges that Bin Sanad was not primarily a poet but a religious scholar (*'ālim*) who “from an aesthetic perspective... was below the level of his contemporaries” (334) and not so influential on the literary movement in Kuwait. This perhaps reflects the urgencies of finding a historic national beginning at the expense of a literary beginning.³

A number of general trends can be identified in the literary history writings surveyed above. The first relates to the question of contentious beginnings and the search for a deeply rooted historical sense of cultural continuity. For a national beginning to emerge, for al-Zaid to reply to those sceptic young poets, the literary historian needed to address the differing pre-state notions of territoriality, sovereignty and belonging that give legitimacy and meaning to the national present. In almost every literary history, caveats were necessary to define a point of departure for national literary history. This allowed an *act of naturalisation* or nationalisation of key transnational figures including

³ A potential site of further investigation relates to a comparative view of the modalities of national literary history writing and the historical biographical genres of *ṭabaqāt* and *tarājim* of religious scholars. Refer to Aamir Mufti's *Forget English: Orientalism and World Literatures* (2016) for a rigorous comparative methodology of national literary history and the *tazkira* genre within the context of Urdu language. Similarly, a comparative analysis of printed anthologies and selections of *nabaṭī* or vernacular poetry in Arabia, a genre established in the mid-twentieth century would shed more light onto the shifts relating to questions of temporality, belonging, and authorship (Al-Sowayan 2008; Al-Ghadeer 2009).

‘Uthman Bin Sanad, ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā’ī and ‘Abdullah al-Faraj among others. Nationalising the transnational does not only pertain to the beginnings of Kuwaiti literature, but extends to later periods. One example is Khalid al-Faraj (1898-1954), who is commonly referred to as ‘the Poet of the Gulf’ (*Shā‘ir al-Khālīj*). Born in Kuwait, al-Faraj spent some time in India, then worked in Bahrain, al-Qatif, and al-Ahsa’ in the eastern Arabian Peninsula. He is also to be found in Kuwaiti, Bahraini and Saudi literary histories (al-Zaid 1967; Idris 1960:170; Ḥalibi 2003; al-Ḥaddād 2012; al-Ansari 1970).

The national literary histories discussed earlier are also keen on conceiving Kuwaiti literature within a broader Arab literary context. As al-Zaid puts it:

Arabic poetry in Kuwait - the old and the contemporary - is a branch of this Arab tree and a fruit of its many endeavours... carrying its specificities and characteristics. Even though it maintains its own noticeable specificity...this specificity is lost if taken outside of its general Arab essence. (al-Ḥaddād 2002:52)

Similarly, al-Wuqayyān’s title *The Arab Cause in Kuwaiti Poetry* attests to that affinity. National literary history writing stems from a need to historically and territorially position national literature within a wider Arabic literary context. The impulse of nation building cannot be overlooked. The conception of national literature in Kuwait is inextricable from the Pan-Arab ideological outlook prevalent at the time of publication of the respective literary histories.⁴ It can be argued that a Pan-Arab outlook allowed for a more inclusive approach to transnational poets.

The third general trend in Kuwait’s literary histories relates to the steady continuity of the narrative revolving around the establishment of national institutions and the influence of key figures. The metaphor of al-Ṭabṭabā’ī’s sowing and al-Rushaid’s reaping used by al-Zaid captures the essence of this continuous narrative. The narrative begins with an inclusionary attitude that legitimises fluid notions of territoriality and

⁴ The emphasis on an ‘Arab essence’ perhaps overlooks key historical cultural influences situated in the Indian Ocean “interregional arena” (Bose 2006). Yet, this is a matter that goes beyond the scope of the chapter.

belonging, which allow for national literature to emerge. The linear development of the narrative is then steadily focalised and consolidated within a narrowing official national framework.

Yet, this necessary inclusionary attitude of early works on national literary history recedes as the narrative develops in time. The national begins to take a more official and concrete form. Unlike the pre-national times described by al-Zaid, God's vast land cannot be traversed now without travel documents. Belonging is reduced to an official paper and a fixed border. Without this paper, one will be constantly interpellated: where have you come from and what are you doing here? Within these new official proscriptions, *Bidun* writers emerge into the national cultural scene posing the question of their placement within national literature.

The Placement of *Bidun* Literature as an “Adjacent Literature”

The works on Kuwaiti literary history discussed above precede the emergence of the *Bidun* issue as a social phenomenon. The question of the placement of *Bidun* writers can only be investigated after Sulayman al-Flayyih's first poetry collection *Singing in the Deserts of Agony* in 1979. The first comprehensive work on Kuwaiti literary history to deal with the question of the placement of *Bidun* writers is Sulayman al-Shaṭṭi's *Poetry in Kuwait* (2007).

Al-Shaṭṭi's narrative does not divert from the relatively stable narrative suggested by early historians such as al-Zaid and al-Wuqayyān. Al-Shaṭṭi's main contribution is in incorporating new developments in national literature within that overall narrative. As to the question of national beginnings, al-Shaṭṭi confirms that 'Uthman bin Sanad is the first Kuwaiti poet. Yet, the Kuwaiti literary movement did not truly commence until after the arrival of 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā'ī (al-Shaṭṭi 2007:7). On al-Ṭabṭabā'ī, al-Shaṭṭi writes “we will not enter into a debate about his belonging or background” (7). Rather, what is important to al-Shaṭṭi is al-Ṭabṭabā'ī's actual influence on the Kuwaiti literary scene regardless of his national affiliation. Yet this criterion, which establishes a

national beginning, does not necessarily apply to *Bidun* writers appearing towards the late stages of the narrative, as will be discussed later.

Al-Shaṭṭi advances a teleological view of the national literary narrative. National literature goes through a series of linear progressions starting from the first period titled *Rawāfiḍ Tataṣṣakkal* (Tributaries Take Shape) around the end of the nineteenth century to the last chapter titled *al-Shiʿr ʿAlā Bawwābat al-Qarn* (Poetry at the Gates of a New Century). The metaphor of tributaries forming assumes a general sense of continuity, progression and steady flow of the narrative. The chapter on the poets of the 1960s is titled *al-Ḥaṣād* (The Harvest), where poets reap what the founders sowed. Similarly, some chapter titles can give a general sense of that progress: *al-Marʿa Tataqaddam* (The Woman Advances), *Qadīm Yatajaddad* (The Old Becomes New), *Jīl Jadīd Yataqaddam* (A New Generation Advances) and *al-Shiʿr ʿAlā Bawwābat al-Qarn* (Poetry at the Gates of a New Century).

Within that continuity, there are diversions from the norm. Immediately after the first period, titled “Tributaries Take Shape”, the second period is titled *al-Khurūj ʿAn al-Maʿlūf* (Outside of the Norm), featuring the estranged poetics of Fahad al-ʿAskar and ʿAbd al-Muhsin al-Badīr. Similarly, another chapter later in the narrative is titled *Khārij al-Nasaq* (Outside of the Dominant Mode), featuring Fawziyya al-Salīm and ʿAlia Shuʿayb, who “leap into the arena of free experimentation unhindered by any poetic restriction” (401). What is emphasised is a general sense of national continuity and stability of the national literary narrative. Estrangement, transgression and subversion are presented as deviations that ultimately do not obstruct the river’s steady flow. While these estranged and subversive poets divert from the norm, their belonging to the national literary history narrative is unquestioned. This, however, is not the case with *Bidun* poets.

Al-Shaṭṭi advances an official view of national belonging that suspends *Bidun* writers from belonging to that narrative. *Bidun* writers are placed in a separate chapter under the title of *al-Adab al-Mujāwir* (Adjacent Literature). On *Bidun* writers, al-Shaṭṭi writes:

“there exists a social phenomenon that clearly and directly impacted the literary movement in Kuwait leaving a distinctive achievement that cannot be overlooked or neglected.” The chapter includes just two *Bidun* poets, Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ and Dikhīl Khalīfa, who reside in Kuwait. Other *Bidun* poets who have settled elsewhere, such as Sulayman al-Flayyih, Muhammad al-Nabhān, and Mona Kareem among others, are left unmentioned.

Al-Shaṭṭi’s proposed placement reflects a notion of belonging that strictly conforms to an understanding of the national as official; like a border officer, permitting only those with a passport to enter the national literary history narrative. The question of the *Bidun* poets’ impact on the Kuwaiti literary movement is unquestioned, yet what is a matter of contention is their national belonging. They are presented not as a continuation of a national plot line, but as some adjacent or parallel phenomenon that cannot be overlooked. Al-Shaṭṭi does not offer any further insight into the meaning of that adjacency and its relation to the national perimeter or any other perimeters. The term adjacent (*mujāwir*) perhaps implicitly hints at the poets’ alleged affinity and connection with Iraq, be it in literature or belonging.

Within the *Bidun* literary community, the term ‘adjacent literature’ has been flatly rejected. The *Bidun* poet Dikhīl Khalīfa deems it offensive as it is “a form of expulsion from the Kuwaiti border” (al-Hazzā‘ and Khalīfa 2011). Sulayman al-Flayyih is also critical of al-Shaṭṭi’s total neglect of his contributions and his general stance on *Bidun* writers:

A ‘litterateur friend’ denies my chirps in the sky of Kuwait and my humble contributions to the literary arena ... he knew well that I have not missed a single poetry night organized by the *Rabiʿa* for three continuous decades... my five poetry collections distributed all over Kuwait bookshops are not even enough for him... he invented, out of his own whim, a label for his colleagues who hold no citizenship that even the most racist person could not come up with. (al-Flayyih 2008)

More importantly, al-Shaṭṭi's placement is contested in revisionist works of national literary history such as Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ's *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* which will be discussed in the following section.

National Literary History: *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* (2007)

Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ (b.1964) graduated with a degree in Arabic Language and Education in 1987 from the College of Education in Kuwait University. Throughout her career, she has been highly active in journalism, working as the head of the cultural page in *al-Qabas* newspaper, and a regular contributor for *al-'Arabi* magazine, *al-Kuwait* magazine, *al-Riyaḍ* newspaper in Saudi Arabia and *al-'Arabi al-Jadīd* newspaper among others.

As mentioned in chapter two, Mufarriḥ often maintains a critical distance from self-identifying as a *Bidun* poet. Her status as *Bidun* is always situated as “a problem” that awaits a solution (Mufarriḥ 2007:67; Mufarriḥ 2011:109) and not as a poetic identity. Rather, she is incessant in decoupling belonging from acquiring official documentation. Thus, she regards herself as a Kuwaiti poet, albeit in her own subjective articulation:

Whether others like it or not... I am a Kuwaiti in my existence, belonging and inclinations. This truth is unrelated to that paper called 'passport'... whether I gain citizenship from Kuwait or any other country, or if I never gain citizenship, Kuwait will remain my first, last and eternal homeland, simply because it is my only homeland. (Fawwaz 2012)

Her poetry collections include *He was the Last of the Dreamers* (1990), *When You Are Gone, I Saddle the Horse of My Doubts* (1994), *The Book of Sins*, (1997), *A Mirror Lying Down* (1999), *My Dreams Often Humble Themselves* as translated by Allison Becker (2006) and *A Night Busy With Temptation* (2008). In addition to her poetry collections, she also published poetry anthologies including the *Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* (2007), *The Diwan of Arabic Poetry in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century: Kuwait and Bahrain* (2008), *Memory's Pain: Fifteen Poets From Palestine* (2010), *Mankind Keeps a Vigil: Biographies and Selections of Arab Poets*

(2013) and other works related to literary criticism such as *Commentaries on the Lust of Narration* (2009).

One of the overarching themes of Mufarriḥ's poetry is the theme of absence. Of her poetry, she writes:

‘Memories are the wound of absence, and my memory is never absent.’

This what I declare in my poems that celebrate absence. The condition of absence is not antithetical to the condition of presence, but an entry door to my presence... personally I often feel that I am absent and am incapable of being present except through poetry... Absence truly concerns me as it always succeeds in characterising my reality and in how it lends a unique aesthetic beauty when included in my poems. (al-Zanāti 2003)

The reception of Mufarriḥ's poetry has also been approached by literary critics mainly through the prisms of the themes of absence and alienation. In Sa'īda al-Fārsi's *A Suicide of Moorings: the Alienation of Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ* (2004), Mufarriḥ's alienation is analysed through a multileveled lens. Firstly, as a poet coming from a Bedouin background, Mufarriḥ often expresses an urge to return to the desert as she is alienated by the demands of city life. The second level relates to a generational alienation of Arab poets living through a breakdown of Pan-Arab aspirations. The third level is a specific intensified alienation of Kuwaiti poets as a result of the rupture in a Pan-Arab identity resulting from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Throughout, al-Farsi does not analyse or point to Mufarriḥ's status as *Bidun*. Mufarriḥ's poetry has also been approached from a gender perspective ('Ali 2010), from a Sufi perspective ('Abd al-Fattāḥ 1996; al-Maqālīḥ 2011), and from the perspective of the movement of modernist Arab poetics in Arabia (al-Bazei 2001). This cursory overview of Mufarriḥ's poetry and reception aims to emphasise that reading the theme of absence in light of her status as a *Bidun* is merely one way of approaching her works.⁵

⁵ For more on the reception of Mufarriḥ's poetry, particularly in local and Arab journalism, refer to Falah al-'Inizi's MA thesis *'Inkiṣār al-'Aḥlām fī Shi'r Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ* (Broken Dreams in the Poetry of Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ) (2010-2011: 42-64).

In 2007, Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ published *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* ⁶ (*Ḥudāt al-Ghaym wa-l-Wiḥsha*). The publication is primarily an anthology of Kuwaiti poetry, preceded by a lengthy introduction, a “brief historical survey” titled “Reading the Memory of Poetry in Kuwait”.⁷ In the introduction, Mufarriḥ provides an overview of Kuwaiti literary history for the uninitiated reader. The publication is referred to by Mufarriḥ as a “mission”. The Algerian House of Culture and Arts commissioned the publication as part of the Arabic anthologies project in celebration of Algeria’s selection as the cultural capital of the Arab world in 2007. A close reading of the introduction can help in highlighting the implicit ways in which Mufarriḥ’s literary history can be read as an intervention into the modalities of writing national literary history in Kuwait. Mufarriḥ’s perspective on Kuwaiti literary history can be understood as a perspective that aims to re-read and reconstruct Kuwaiti literary history through emphasising the affiliative literary aspects over the national. This allows *Bidun* poets to be a natural and organic extension of Kuwaiti literary history.

A Literary Beginning: Fahad al-‘Askar

While early literary historians were primarily concerned with the question of national beginnings, Mufarriḥ seems to be less concerned. She rather undermines the nationalizing claims of past poets by stressing the unresolved tensions between a transnational past and a national present. She comments:

If we are still contesting ... whether ‘Abdullah al-Faraj [1836-1901] was a Najdi, a Bahraini, a Kuwaiti or an Iraqi relying on the time he spent in each country, then the dispute over other poets preceding al-Faraj would certainly be more intense. Of those poets is ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Ṭabṭabā’ī, who only lived in Kuwait during the last ten years of his life. (Mufarriḥ 2007:10)

Instead of participating in the debate over the first Kuwaiti poet, Mufarriḥ abandons a historical approach altogether, starting with neither al-Ṭabṭabā’ī nor bin Sanad. Her

⁶ The title can also be translated to the Urgers or Guides of Clouds and Estrangement. The word *ḥādī* refers to the lone cameleer who both sings to and guides the camels in a desert journey. The title will be discussed with more detail towards the end of the chapter.

⁷ The introduction titled “Reading the Memory of Poetry in Kuwait” is a developed version of a conference paper titled “The Influence of Intellectual Progress on the Poem in the Gulf: Kuwait as a case study” presented at a conference on the Poetry Movement in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh 2002 (Mufarriḥ 2007:75).

criterion is more subjective, emphasizing what she calls “poetic talent” over historical precedence. She begins her anthology with the most talented Kuwaiti poet in her view: Fahad al-‘Askar (b.1917). The book is also dedicated to al-‘Askar, who she describes as “a poet, witness and martyr”. Justifying her selection of al-‘Askar as the first Kuwaiti poet, she writes:

I have chosen willingly to start my historical selection with the most important poet in the Kuwaiti poetry scene, Fahad al-‘Askar. This is not only because of my inclination towards his unprecedented poetics, but also because he was one of the turning points in the Kuwaiti and Gulf literary movements. (9)

A number of reasons make Fahad al-‘Askar the most important poet in Mufarriḥ’s view. He is an “iconoclast” both in his life choices and his poetics. Because of his non-conformist rebellious attitudes towards societal norms, Fahad became a social outcast. His relatives “rejected his life choices that went against their choices and the choices of their traditional society” (19). Al-‘Askar’s main biographer, al-Ansari, gives insight into the poet’s confrontational attitude:

From being religious to leaving religiosity, from having a conservative outlook to free progressive thought, from his sternness in conserving religion, inherited customs and traditions to a total break from it... he rushed into reading and enquiry, tracking the social and political movements, then to compulsive drinking of wine which he often wrote beautiful poems on. (al-Ansari 1997:81)

Al-Ansari notes that on al-‘Askar’s death, none of his relatives or friends attended his funeral (85). It is also purported that the majority of his poetry was burned by his close relatives after his death (al-Ansari 1997:75; Mufarriḥ 2007:18).⁸

As for his iconoclastic poetics, al-‘Askar brought about “a new variation on the content of Kuwaiti poetry where the homeland, as a political entity, is a matter of direct criticism” (Mufarriḥ 2007:20). Al-‘Askar’s poetry decoupled belonging to homeland from official notions of belonging. His critique of homeland embodies a poetics of estrangement that becomes a central theme of the Kuwaiti literary history narrative.

⁸ The claim that al-‘Askar’s relatives burnt his poetry is rejected by Nuriyya al-Rumi study titled *Fahad al-‘Askar: A Critical Study* (1978).

It is important to highlight what Mufarriḥ means in her use of the term estrangement (*wiḥsha*) by juxtaposing her analysis with previous studies concerning al-‘Askar’s alienation (*ighṭirāb*) and discontent (*shakwā*). In *Alienation in Kuwaiti Poetry*, Su‘ād Abd al-Raḥmān writes that alienation (*ighṭirāb*) is a phenomenon that “is not prominent in the [sic] Kuwaiti poetry” (Abd al-Raḥmān 1993-4:172 original translation). She adds that alienation “is not assumed to be an ‘exceptional state’, conditioned by a [sic] temporary situations, such as war or worries regarding [the] future” (172). It is rather “a state of sharp awareness of time, recognition of what occurs in life and responding to individual misfortune” (171). The category of estranged Kuwaiti poets is limited to a few, such as Saqir al-Shibīb, Fahad al-‘Askar and ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Badir. Alienation in Kuwaiti poetry is presented as resulting from an individual impulse of self-reflection stemming from a critical mind and rebellious soul (172). Similarly, Nūriya al-Rūmi locates the roots of al-‘Askar’s discontent (*shakwā*) in what the romantic school calls “sickness of the Geist” (al-Rūmi 1978). Mufarriḥ, however, offers a historical reading of al-‘Askar’s estrangement. She writes that the “reasons behind his [al-‘Askar’s] hardship, sadness and true estrangement lie in the harsh life that he had experienced in his homeland, surrounded by those who suffocate him, standing as obstacles to his personal and national aspirations” (Mufarriḥ 2007:24).

Al-‘Askar is also presented as a precursor to the Arab modernist literary movement in Kuwait. The narrative of literary history following al-‘Askar is guided by a notion of literariness embedded in an affiliation to the poetics of Arab literary modernism. Particular attention is given to those poets who adhere to that notion of literariness embodied in al-‘Askar. Others perceived as “traditionalists” or “classical” are given less attention. After al-‘Askar, Mufarriḥ introduces ‘Ali al-Sabti (1936-200) and Muhammad al-Fayiz who inaugurate the “new poem” (*al-qaṣīda al-jadīda*) influenced by the Arab literary modernity movement embodied in the figure of the Iraqi poet Badir Shakir al-Sayyab. Al-Sabti is the first to introduce modernist poetics (*al-ḥadātha al-shi‘rīyya*) while al-Fayiz’s use of free verse poetry (*taf‘īla*) in his epic poem “Memoirs of a Seafarer” registered him a place within the poets of the modern Arabic literary movement. Yet both poets are criticised in the latter stages of their poetic life as they fell back into a more traditionalist outlook. In addition, the period includes Khalid Saud

al-Zaid, whose poetry “did not fall into the pits of traditionalism... as many of his contemporaries” (37-38).

Mufarriḥ brushes over a number of poets previously emphasised by al-Shaṭṭi’s *Poetry in Kuwait*, including Khalīfa al-Wuqayyān, ‘Abd ‘Allah al-‘Utaybi, Ya‘qūb al-Subai‘ī, Ya‘qūb al-Rushaid, Ahmad al-Saqqāf and ‘Abdullah Sinān, as “their poetic attempts... did not step out of the general framework” (40). Particular attention is given to those who “stepped out of the general framework” in the later stages such as the *Bidun* poet Sulayman al-Flayyih, Nayif al-Mukhaymir and Sulayman al-Khulayfī (40). It is worth noting that al-Flayyih is not mentioned as a *Bidun* poet.

The bulk of Mufarriḥ’s literary history is focused on what she terms the “nineties generation” (*al-tis ‘inīyyūn*), which includes the majority of *Bidun* poets. This generation “found refuge in a style that rebels against all previous experimentations in writing in a more bold and intensified manner” (51). The content of this generation’s writing tended to gravitate away from the “grand issues” of the previous generations and into intrinsic articulations of anxious identities. Mufarriḥ excludes a number of poets from the nineties generation as they wrote from within “the trench of the classical musicality of the *qaṣīda*” (64).

Before analysing the placement of *Bidun* writers within the narrative, it is important to identify a number of overarching themes in Mufarriḥ’s narrative that allow *Bidun* writers to be a logical and organic extension to the narrative. Firstly, in speaking about al-‘Askar as the ‘first’ Kuwaiti poet, Mufarriḥ begins at a literary moment, rather than a chronological one. The notion of literariness guiding the narrative is embodied in the founding figure of al-‘Askar. Al-‘Askar’s historical exclusion, rebellious attitude, poetics of estrangement and constant critique of homeland embody the spirit of the national poet and become the benchmark for inclusion for successive poets.

Secondly, estrangement is presented as a central theme in Kuwaiti literary history. It is not necessarily a reliable sense of belonging to the nation that gives the narrative its

unity. Rather, it is the poets' unsettled sense of belonging and the inherent estrangement associated with the poetic vocation. As discussed earlier, the impulses of nation building tend to reinforce a stable sense of belonging in national literary history. Whereas al-Shaṭṭi reads al-ʿAskar's poetry as a "departure from the norm," and a digression from the national literary narrative's relative stability, Mufarriḥ establishes al-ʿAskar as the norm. Al-Shaṭṭi's moments of rupture are Mufarriḥ's moments of continuity. Estrangement and exclusion here are not simply matters of paperwork and citizenship, but poetic identities that speak to a larger social and psychological condition that is at the heart of national literature and literary vocation. In stressing the dominance of the theme of estrangement in Kuwaiti poetry, Mufarriḥ makes way for the *Bidun* poets, and their poetics, to become a natural extension of that history.

Thirdly, the emphasis on "poetic talent" at the expense of historical precedence is a claim against the concept of authentic belonging. Simply put, belonging is not necessarily related to the question of how long one has been there, but a question of what one has given to the homeland. Literature in this case, or poetic talent, is another form of 'document' articulating its own intrinsic belonging beyond the official. Transposed to political discourse, this position can be also read as a way to challenge the common political and social topos of bona fide, or first class Kuwaiti, based on the legal distinction between (Kuwaiti *bi-l-ta'sīs*), those 'original Kuwaitis' who have had an maintained an established residence in Kuwait prior to 1920 and (Kuwaiti *bi-l-tajnīs*) those who were naturalised without having maintained an established residence; a topos still strong in Kuwaiti political and social discourse.

The hero of Mufarriḥ's national literary history, it seems, is that individual poet who is constantly struggling with the established societal and poetic norms. With such a notion of literariness, or criteria for belonging to the national literary narrative, *Bidun* writers become a logical and organic extension of the narrative.

The Sons of Fahad al-‘Askar⁹

The *Bidun*’s placement within Mufarriḥ’s narrative is incontestable. Mufarriḥ does find a special place for *Bidun* writers. Rather, they are placed within their generational clusters. Sulayman al-Flayyih is introduced as part of the few poets from the 1970s generation who wrote their poetry “outside of the general framework.” Al-Flayyih was also a:

reminder of the other half of Kuwaiti society... if Kuwait was established as a maritime city par excellence, it couldn’t have soared without that accord between its two wings of sea and desert... and from the depth of the desert, al-Flayyih emerged. (41)

With no mention of his *Bidun* status, al-Flayyih is placed within a wider context of a Bedouin poet from the desert whose contributions cannot be overlooked.

The majority of *Bidun* poets are placed within the nineties generation. She writes, “the loss of identity is one of the main problems facing this generation as part of the Kuwaiti cultural scene within a wider Arab topography” (66). This loss of identity is primarily a result of the shock of the Iraqi invasion that necessitated major ideological revisions to the idea of a unified Arab national identity. Yet, within the nineties generation, Mufarriḥ specifically singles out *Bidun* poets as suffering from a more acute sense of loss that goes beyond ideological revisions, as they “search for an identity on the margins of a present that refuses to recognize their identity” (66). The question of the loss of identity of the *Bidun* is thus presented as an intensification of the dominant literary *theme* of estrangement within the Kuwaiti literary history narrative. These conditions imposed on the *Bidun* writers give rise to a new unique poetics, which is considered an essential contribution that adheres to the very founding spirit of Kuwaiti literature.

In her discussion of *Bidun* poets, Mufarriḥ includes former *Bidun* poets who have left Kuwait to become citizens of other countries such as Sulayman al-Flayyih (Saudi),

⁹ In Tahani Fajr’s article “The Sons of Fahad al-‘Askar,” *Bidun* poets including Dikhīl Khalīfa, Muhammad al-Nabhān, Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ and ‘Ali al-Ṣāfi are presented as literary descendants of Fahad al-‘Askar (Fajr 2011).

Muhammad al-Nabhān (Canadian) and Ahmad al-Dūsari (Swiss) among others. Whereas early literary historians needed to contextualise and acknowledge the fluidity of the notion of belonging of past poets to understand a national past, Mufarriḥ suggests an extension of this logic to understand a national present. The inclusionary or contextualising attitude expressed by early literary historians in approaching the question of beginnings is extended in Mufarriḥ's reading of a national present. In forging national literary histories, a certain spirit of a nation is projected through its poets and poetry. The essential spirit of national literature, as Mufarriḥ seems to suggest, is that forsaken inclusive attitude and openness towards those who contribute. Any exclusionary approach then becomes a deviation from the very spirit that constituted Kuwaiti literature as a category. Mufarriḥ transcends official notions of belonging by insisting on re-inserting deserving poets who have been forced, one way or another, to leave the official borders at one point. *Bidun* poets, who have gained citizenship elsewhere, have been excluded from the national narrative because of a certain historical context that needed to be emphasised.

In *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement*, Mufarriḥ does not propose to abandon a national platform, nor does she essentialize the *Bidun* as a marginal literary community having a distinct identity or tradition that is independent of the national narrative. While *Bidun* writers specifically are emphasised and made visible, they are not excluded by excess visibility through writing a *Bidun* literary history, for example. Mufarriḥ carefully treads the fine line between recognizing the uniqueness of the *Bidun* writers and their inclusion within the national narrative. Her point of departure is precisely national literary history. However, what is at stake is the concept of the national itself, which is reworked through an emphasis on the literary.

Language style

A final radicalizing tool in Mufarriḥ's revisionist work is the question of language style. Instead of a more pedagogic use of language found in other literary histories, Mufarriḥ is more liberal with her use of poetic language. The title stands as a marker of that poetic use of language. When compared to other literary history titles such as *Kuwaiti*

Writers Between Two Centuries, The Literary Movement in Kuwait, Modern Poetry in Kuwait, Poetry and Poets in Kuwait, Culture in Kuwait and Poetry in Kuwait, the title *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* seems like a methodological shift and a departure from that genealogy of Kuwaiti literary history titles.

The question of ‘proper’ titles for literary histories is brought to light by the Kuwaiti poet and critic ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Baṣīr (1919-1999), who once criticized al-‘Alawi al-Hashimi’s 1981 study on Bahraini literary history titled *Ma Qālat al-Nakhla li-l-Baḥr* (What the Palm Tree Told the Sea) (1981). On the title, al-Baṣīr comments:

I don’t know why Dr. ‘Alawi al-Hashimi has selected this title for his book. It is more suited for a story or a poem. But to be a title of a broad and in-depth work of literary criticism is a matter over which I see myself in disagreement with the author. (al-Baṣīr 1986:117)

Al-Baṣīr’s comment perhaps reflects a general classicist attitude and expectation of language use in approaching works of national literary history within the region. A clear distinction is made between literary histories’ factuality and seriousness and literature’s playful subjectivity, which are both realised in ‘proper’ respective discourse. This distinction is what Mufarriḥ’s approach attempts to problematize.

In addition to her poetic title, the use of highly stylised poetic language is copious throughout Mufarriḥ’s work. In her introduction, she suggests a definition of poets and poetry written in the form of poetic prose. She writes:

They are the cameleers of clouds and estrangement. With their talent they scratch the waters’ surface and slowly tread the earth. They picnic around the coasts of a mirage, breathing in the fragrance of poetry. They delineate the features of their own topography according to their peregrinations in the expanses between waters and desert, where a homeland grows at the banks of poetry... poetry, despite its impossible definitions is wonder.... and nothing but an honest and intelligent capture of that inexplicable moment of wonder. (7)

What is at work in this introduction is an emphasis on the literary over other extrinsic filial elements such as national belonging. Poets create their own intrinsic spatiality out

of their talent. The homeland, as she puts it, “grows at the banks of poetry.” Poetry seems to offer its own form of intrinsic homeland and articulates its own form of belonging.

This contrast between Mufarriḥ’s literariness and al-Basir’s insistence on an objective use of language can be read in a number of ways. One can read it in light of post-modern approaches to historiography, where “the neutral tones of traditional historicism have yielded to a rampantly tropological language: language pervaded by metaphorical, analogical, and associative modes of connection and argumentation” (Currie 2004:77). Mufarriḥ’s use of tropological language can also be read in light of a gendered approach to rewriting history. Literary history is a site of contestation, not only as it relates to an inclusion of a marginalised group in the national framework, but also as a gendered space subject to another form of hegemonic masculine discourse. Indeed, one can entirely read Mufarriḥ’s work in such light. A commitment to literary language, as in the case of Helene Cixous, becomes a “political imperative... that offers the possibility of an account of feminine writing” (91). Mufarriḥ’s playful use of a poetic language in writing literary history blurs the lines between a seemingly neutral, masculine, and objective writing usually associated with nation-building and a subjective literary approach capable of resisting hegemonic discourses both in its national and masculine manifestations.

The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement radicalises national literary history writing in Kuwait through emphasising literary affiliation at the expense of official national filiation. This in turn opens up spaces for articulating a presence and a belonging beyond questions of official exclusion. The title of the publication encapsulates the capacity of the literary to intervene: the individual cameleer in the desert urging the camel, always with an effort, a song or a poem to follow her trail. The poet becomes a cameleer of the spirit of the nation, imprinting her meaning while contesting its limiting demarcations. An investigation into the arena of national literary history in Kuwait provides critical insight into how official notions of belonging to the nation are contested from the margin. At the same time, it brings an understanding of how the

agency of those excluded from the national operates outside of the immediate concerns of area studies.

Chapter 5 The Desert Imaginary: the Bedouin Poet in the City

In June of 1976, the poet Sulayman al-Flayyih (1951-2013) was invited to participate in an annual poetry festival organized by the Kuwaiti Writers' Association. There, he debuted poems from his first poetry collection *Singing in the Deserts of Agony* (1979), which was the first poetry collection to be published by a *Bidun* poet. On that night, the Kuwaiti poet and literary historian Khalid Saud al-Zaid enthusiastically introduced al-Flayyih as a rejuvenating "desert prophet" in whom "the intuition of the desert and the experience of the city converge." The desert space, from which al-Flayyih arrived, is described by al-Zaid as a site of intuition, purity and serenity that is unpolluted by the perplexities of modernity afflicting the city (Majallat al-Bayān 1976:10). In this moment of reception, which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, al-Flayyih's voice was elicited to represent a long lost and romanticised space, an ahistorical idealized desert against which modernity and the city are perpetually contrasted. Contrary to al-Zaid's description, al-Flayyih, in the poems recited on the night, contested that depiction and articulated a desert space that is itself subject to modern disturbances and in need of rejuvenation. The use of desert themes and the desert space as a means of contesting filiative categories and forging affiliative ties lies at the heart of al-Flayyih's work, whether it is in his contesting representation of desert space or his explicit affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets, the desert vagabonds of Arabic literary tradition.

This chapter aims to explore the theme of the desert and desert related imagery in the works of the *Bidun* poet Sulayman al-Flayyih (1951-2013). The desert space, as will be argued, is utilized poetically as a pre-national site where modern statelessness is historicized and particularized. The first part of the chapter begins by contextualizing the historical significance of the desert space within the wider context of the *Bidun* issue. This is followed by an examination of how al-Flayyih's depictions of the desert space in his autobiographical reflections serve to historicize his statelessness. The chapter then brings to light the reception of al-Flayyih by the national literary establishment as a representative of a communal desert imaginary. This communal imaginary represents the desert as a romanticized site of purity, innocence, timelessness and authenticity. Read against such ahistoric representations of the desert, two poems

of al-Flayyih will be analysed. In these poems, al-Flayyih disrupts the communal projections of his city-dwelling, nostalgic audience by articulating a desert space that has been subjected to the very same material realities as theirs, of the modern imposition of borders and the demise of the authentic life. Thus, the historicity of the desert and the agency of its inhabitants are restored. The second part of the chapter focuses on al-Flayyih's poetic affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets in Arabic literary tradition. The utilization of the literary mask of the *Ṣa'ālīk* is read as an act of self-positionality that situates the poet within a wider Arabic literary tradition.

Stateless Sons of the Desert

As highlighted in chapters one and three, the continual denial of citizenship rights for the *Bidun* is contingent on the depoliticized and dehistoricized representations of the *Bidun* issue. It is useful to be reminded of Beaugrand's contention that "the decade-long conflict that has set the Kuwaiti state in opposition to its stateless population claiming nationality entitlement illustrates the confusion in the understanding of transnationalism that needs to be better historicized" (Beaugrand 2010:29). Any attempt to historicize this transnationalism is inextricably linked to an understanding of the history of the desert and its inhabitants. In the face of an overpowering national narrative concomitant with the development of modern states, the desert as an alternative material and conceptual space of belonging was overlooked, which in turn rendered many of its inhabitants stateless.

In her thesis, Beaugrand argues that the Nationality Committees established in the 1960s engaged in an "urban snap-shot citizenship" approach which favoured those settled within the old city wall built in 1920 and peripheral villages while failing to understand the nomadic nature of people living in the desert (Beaugrand 2010). A cursory view of the 1959 Nationality Law of Kuwait reveals how it shifted notions of belonging, territoriality and sovereignty in a way that did not fully attend to the region's transnational nature, and consequently resulted in the statelessness of many of the desert's inhabitants.

The 1959 Nationality Law defined 'original' Kuwaiti nationals as those who maintained an established residence in Kuwait prior to 1920. The year 1920 marks the construction

of *al-Sur al-thalith* (the third wall) around the town of Kuwait to protect it from the threats of the *Ikhwan* tribal forces (al-Nakib 2014:9). As al-Nakib puts it, the wall became “a new physical barrier separating the town from the desert, it developed over time into a psychological obstacle dividing the *hadhar* on the inside from the Bedouin tribes and villagers on the outside” (al-Nakib 2010:384). The 1959 Nationality Law’s requirement of providing an established residence within the walls of the town of Kuwait prior to 1920 laid the foundations of the modern-state’s fixed notions of belonging and territoriality.

To validate citizenship claims, the 1959 Nationality Law established Nationality Committees. Originally, four committees were established each including five prominent members of Kuwaiti society “who were considered to have reasonable knowledge of most Kuwaiti families” (Al-Anezi 1989:182). The evidence for establishing a proof of residence prior to 1920 included providing official documentation (including ownership of real-estate deeds, Kuwaiti passports based on the 1948 Nationality Law, birth certificates and marriage contracts), and other subjective evidence such as statements made by witnesses who can validate the applicant’s claim and the applicant’s accent and appearance (181). Such criteria, which favour those living within the town wall, made it especially difficult for Bedouin applicants to provide evidence of their citizenship claims. As al-Anezi puts it:

The task of the Nationality Committee was made more difficult by the fact that thousands of Bedouins applied for Kuwaiti nationality on the ground that they lived and had for long lived within the territorial limits of Kuwait but not within a city or town. Similarity of culture, traditions, appearance, dialect and costume existing between the Bedouins of the Arabian Desert, which extends between Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Jordan, made it more difficult still for the Committee to distinguish between dwellers of the Kuwaiti Desert and others. Proof of belonging to a tribe settled within the territory of Kuwait was furnished through a statement from the leader of the tribe that the individual person was a member of the tribe. (256)

As a result of such subjective measures, the work of the National Committees “resulted in the creation of a large number of people who insist that they are Kuwaiti nationals notwithstanding decisions of the Committees to the contrary” (257). Many of the

Bidun, who at the time of the establishment of the committees were officially labeled as *Abnā' al-Badiyya*, (sons of the desert), were not incorporated into the national imaginary. Indeed, one can trace the roots of the *Bidun* issue to the critical historical juncture of the 1959 Nationality Law and the subsequent assessment of citizenship claims performed by the Nationality Committees between 1960-1963.¹

In subsequent years, the *Bidun*'s official label was changed from "sons of the desert", which designated an historicized positionality, origin and historical space of belonging, to other labels that fixed the *Bidun* within the legal discourses of the state: *Bidun Jinsiyya* (those without citizenship); *Ghayr Kuwaiti* (non-Kuwaitis); *Ghayr Muḥaddad al-Jinsiyya* (those with undetermined citizenship); *Majhūl al-Hawiyya* (those whose identities are unknown) and finally *Muqīmūn bi Ṣūra Ghayr Qānuniyya* (illegal residents).

Such labels dehistoricise the issue by positioning the *Bidun* within the hegemonic historiographical discourses of the state. The pre-national notions of belonging, territoriality and sovereignty embedded in the desert space are rendered superfluous by an overpowering national narrative. The history of the sons of the desert, as a collective group, then becomes restricted to the history of modern statelessness. In light of the above, the significance of the desert space in many works of *Bidun* writers cannot be overstated.

Bidun writers often utilise the desert as a space where modern statelessness and uprootedness are contested. It is often returned to, poetically, as both a real and an imaginative space to reclaim a sense of uncontested origin and belonging prior to the inception of the modern nation-state. At the same time, it is a space where pre-national conceptions of belonging, territoriality and sovereignty are historicized and legitimated. Before examining al-Flayyih's representation of the desert in his autobiographical reflections and analyzing his literary works, the following sections briefly explores the desert as a site of statelessness in the context of modern Arabic literature.

¹ Another single National committee was created in 1963 and by 1966, the committee declared the completion of assessing all applicants' claims (Al-Anezi 1989:183).

A Brief Note on the Desert and Statelessness

The desert has long been a site of many imaginations in literature. In the context of modern Arabic literature, the desert space has often been utilized as a space where questions of displacement, identity and belonging are tested and refigured. Wen-Chin Ouyang comments, “the historical ambivalence towards the desert makes it possible for the Arabic novel to portray the desert as stateless and situate statelessness there” (Ouyang 2012:73). Particularly, Palestinian writers such as Ghassan Kanafani, Ibrahim Nasrallah, and Mahmoud Darwish often depict the desert as a space of “journey and transformation” and at the same time “a metaphor for displacement, homelessness, and statelessness” (76).

The case of Palestinian writers’ representations of the desert space carries special relevance to *Bidun* writers. Firstly, both Palestinian and *Bidun* writers share an experience of displacement in its different manifestations. Secondly, Palestinian writers such as Kanafani and Nasrallah write of the desert of the Arabian Peninsula, a geographic and imaginative space often revisited and shared by *Bidun* writers. In both cases, the desert space is closely related to questions of identity and displacement, yet, in significantly different ways.

Khalida Sa‘id describes the desert in Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun*, as a “geography of danger” (cited in Ouyang 2012:77). The desert is portrayed as a space of absolute unfamiliarity, failed journeys and hostile death. Similarly, the desert in Nasrallah’s *Barāri al-Ḥumma*:

spreads, stretches endlessly, covers everything and swallows anything on its path. It engulfs like its night, day, and silence, leaving nothing and nobody immune to its overpowering hegemonic immensity... it is the home of wolves, foxes, hyenas, snakes, carnivorous vultures feasting on human remains, and wild dogs barking incessantly.
(77)

The desert, in such works, becomes a metaphor for ultimate displacement and a liminal space of inhabitability, unfamiliarity and statelessness. However, in the works of *Bidun* writers, specifically in the work of Sulayman al-Flayyih as will be discussed, the desert

is represented as a familiar space of abode and as a site where statelessness is historicized and particularized.

The Desert of National Belonging(s)

As mentioned above, al-Flayyih's collection titled *Singing in the Deserts of Agony* (1979) is the first poetry collection to be published by a *Bidun* poet. The poetry collection inaugurates the body of what this thesis reads as *Bidun* literature. Even though al-Flayyih is considered the first published *Bidun* poet, the term *Bidun* did not at the time carry the connotative weight that it carried in later periods. When Al-Flayyih first contributed to the national literary scene in the mid-1970s, the *Bidun* issue had yet to emerge in clear material form as it did in the post-1985 era. Only preliminary features of statelessness were perceivable, mostly restricted to the lack of official documentation, denial of political rights and spatial segregation as mentioned in chapter one. Yet, statelessness was not a direct impediment to everyday life in the city. Many of the *Bidun*, such as Al- Flayyih were integrated into the state's structure by enlisting in the Kuwaiti army.

Before arriving in Kuwait in the late 1960's, al-Flayyih lived and received his education in Jordan where his uncle served in the Jordanian army under Glubb Pasha.^{2 3} He later moved to Kuwait to enlist in the Kuwaiti army, which was facilitated by a tribal identifier (*mu'arrif*) who would authenticate applicants belonging to his tribe. In the army, al-Flayyih was chosen to serve as part of the communications bureau, which offered him a chance to train as a journalist in *al-Siyāsah* daily newspaper. The army later dispatched him during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War to serve as a war correspondent. During his career, al-Flayyih was highly active in journalistic circles and a prolific commentator on cultural affairs. Between 1975 and 2013, the year he died, he continued to write in different newspapers including the Kuwaiti papers *al-Siyāsah*, *al-*

² Sir John Bagot Glubb, commonly referred to as Glubb Pasha (1897-1986), was a British army officer who commanded the Arab Legion between 1939–56. The Army consisted of Arab tribesmen in the Transjordan area. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica no date)

³ The section is informed by al-Flayyih's biography written by his son Sami (Al-Flayyih 2014).

Ṭalī'a, *al-Waṭan*, *al-Rai al'Ām*, *Awān* and *al-Jarīda* and the Saudi papers *al-Riyāḍ*, *al-Jazīra*.

While living in Kuwait between the late 1960's and 1990, and despite his service in the army and established journalistic and literary career, al-Flayyih continued to live in Kuwait as a *Bidun*. Interestingly, in Sami al-Flayyih's biography of his father, there is no explicit mention of al-Flayyih's *Bidun* status. It is only hinted at as "facing daily procedural problems" (al-Flayyih 2013:31). In 1999, al-Flayyih was granted Saudi citizenship by Salman Ibn Abdulaziz, who was the governor of Riyadh at the time. Along with his family, al-Flayyih settled in Riyadh where he passed away in August 2013.

Given his biography, al-Flayyih's 'national belonging' cannot be understood solely through official documentation and recognition. In a newspaper article titled "I Have Two Homelands", al-Flayyih does not just speak of a national belonging, but of national *belongings*. He writes:

Here I am for the first time writing about *umī al-waṭan* (my mother-homeland), Kuwait, since I have left her to *al-waṭan al-um* (my homeland-mother), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Dear readers, have you ever witnessed a man with two mothers and two homelands despite living most of his life homeless? Travelling on his camel in the desert, he has been tossed from one to another. Without a passport, he wakes up in one homeland and sleeps in another heeding to his camel's will in the search for survival (Al-Flayyih 2007).

In the above description, al-Flayyih transcends official notions of belonging by emphasizing his belonging to the more fluid space of the desert. Situating himself in the desert, travelling on his camelback without a passport, allows him to belong to more than one homeland simultaneously and interchangeably or to none.

Al-Flayyih constantly refers back to the desert as a space of uncontested belonging where official notions are challenged. Of his birth, al-Flayyih writes:

I am Sulayman bin Flayyih al-Subā'i al-'Inizi. I was born, according to the tribe's narrative between 1951 and 1952...under a desert tree, my mother gave birth to me. She wrapped me in her *Abaya* and continued to sing along the journeying tribe's trail moving towards the brink of the clouds in search of water and fodder (al-Khaldi 2013: 11).

The description, albeit in metaphorical language, emphasises notions of temporality and spatiality associated with the desert space. Al-Flayyih is born into movement in the undisclosed vastness of the desert. The fluidity of the desert space is given precedence over territorial and temporal fixities.

The spatial fluidity of the desert is emphasized by al-Flayyih's description of his tribe's semi-nomadic movement and the abrupt shift that occurred in the 1950s. Al-Flayyih was part of a generation who had experienced a transition from a semi-nomadic mode of life in the desert to an enforced process of sedentarisation at the peripheries of cities. He describes this collective transition:

I have moved to and fro on my camel's back across many homelands that share the vast Ḥamād region reputed to be one of my tribe's lands since pre-Islamic times. Its vastness extends to parts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. My journeying tribe has always slept within one country's borders waking up in another... in search of rainfall, and fodder, and water sources.

This constant movement lasted till the mid-fifties when years of drought ... hit that part of the region. Thus, my tribe (greater 'Iniza) dispersed in all cities and countries that overlapped or are part of that land. (Al-Flayyih 2007)

Al-Flayyih historically identifies with the Ḥamād area of the northern Arabian Desert, which spills over four modern national borders. It is a space that both extends over and transcends official national borders. The Ḥamād area is depicted as a witness to an uninterrupted sense of origin and belonging since "pre-Islamic times." At a particular moment in history, the tribe's historical seasonal movement in between the different national borders halted due to the restrictions imposed by modern state borders. At work in such a description is a legitimization of the differing notions of territoriality, sovereignty and belonging of the desert space.

Edward Said describes the life of the displaced exile as life “led outside habitual order...nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” (Said 149). Said speaks of a modern conception of exile in a post-colonial world where one is forcibly taken “out of place” into an alien place. However, the notion of displacement takes on a different light when viewed in the context of al-Flayyih’s reflections. Displacement as a modern phenomenon occurred precisely at the time when restrictions on transnational movement took place and when life became forcibly *centered* and *sedentary*. Al-Flayyih’s insistence on reclaiming the desert space as a site of belonging is also evident in his literary persona as the ‘last Bedouin’.

The ‘Last Bedouin⁴’ in the City

Desert space and desert related imagery is central to al-Flayyih’s poetry.⁵ Throughout his literary career, al-Flayyih affiliated with the deep-rooted literary tradition of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* (sing. *Ṣu‘lūk*) poets in classical Arabic literature. The *Ṣa‘ālīk*, who will be examined in more detail later in the chapter, are a band of excommunicated poets who sustain a sense of self-sufficiency outside of the dominant social order by taking refuge in the desert. In terms of their poetic expression, the poetry of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* valorizes *ṣa‘laka*, or the act of living as a *Ṣu‘lūk*, as a mode of life and a subjectivity that defies communal consensus.

In her newspaper article titled *Bidun Literature*, Najma Idris considers al-Flayyih the “godfather of *Bidun* literature” who uses the literary mask of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* to confront his

4 Throughout the thesis other proximate terms for the term ‘Bedouin’ have been used interchangeably depending on different contexts. As a legal identification terms such as *afrād al-‘ashā’ir* (tribesmen) or *abnā’ al-badiyya* (sons of the desert) have been used in national legal discourse to refer to a group of people who come from a Bedouin background as highlighted in the first chapter. The term *Badu*, as opposed to the *Ḥaḍar* has also been used as an anthropological unit of analysis within the Kuwaiti social structure (Longva 2006; al-Nakib 2014). In such works, the term Bedouin is used as a classifier of origin, as opposed to Badu which refers to a socio-political category, of Bedouin origin, but “are no longer technically Bedouin” (al-Nakib 2014:8).

The particular choice of the term ‘Bedouin’ to describe al-Flayyih is based on his own use of the term as a self-identifier. Similarly, his reception as will discussed, emphasizes his experiences a Bedouin poet belonging to the desert. However, as the chapter aims to demonstrate, al-Flayyih problematizes the category of the Bedouin in both its legal and its anthropological guises. Al-Flayyih posits ‘Bedouinness’ as a subjectivity rather than a question of anthropological origin. At the same time, ‘Bedouinness’ becomes a question of a relational alterity, as opposed to a fixed notion of identity.

5 The titles of his six poetry collections can give an indication to the centrality of the desert to his poetry: *Singing in the Desert of Agony* (1979), *The Sorrows of Journeying Bedouins* (1980), *Night Wolves* (1993), *Grazers Approaching Dawn* (1996), *Moving Sketches* (1996), and *Lightning Over Bardawil* (2009).

marginalization (Idris 2012). Yet, the critical reception of Al-Flayyih's works has seldom been read in light of his statelessness. Instead of being identified as a *Bidun* poet, al-Flayyih's literary persona as expressed in his early works and reception is encapsulated in the image of the 'last Bedouin' who is experiencing an acute sense of estrangement amid the perplexities of the modern city.

Khalil al-'Abwīni and Abd al-Fattah read al-Flayyih's return to the desert in light of modern Arabic poetry's Pan-Arab aspirations. The desert, in al-Flayyih's works, offers a deep-rooted sense of identity that can guide the awakening Arab nation (Abd Al-Fattah). The desert is also utilised to warn against the return of neo-colonial forces threatening the aspirations of Arab nations (Al-'Abwīni 1982:205). Within the context of literature in the Gulf, al-Bazei reads al-Flayyih's merging of Bedouin imagery with modernist techniques as an embodiment of the transformation in modernist poetics in the Gulf (al-Bazei 1991:148).

When al-Flayyih debuted his first poems to the literary community through the aforementioned reception at the annual poetry festival of the Kuwaiti Writers' Association, al-Zaid introduced him as follows:

Whenever the streams of the city dry out, the desert brings forth its streams. Whenever life in the city becomes more perplexed, the desert gushes with the intuition of Bedouin life, which is like the sun in its purity and serenity. The desert is forever a merciful mother and its prophet is now carrying to you some of its fragrant flowers... In this man sitting on my right, the intuition of the desert and the experience of the city converge.
(Majallat al-Bayān 1976:10)

Al-Flayyih's reception seems to celebrate an arrival that is seemingly outside of history. Al-Flayyih emerges from the desert like a "prophet," and with this emergence, he is made visible in history at the precise moment of encounter with the national. The desert space from which al-Flayyih arrives is depicted as a romanticised ahistoric space of purity, origin and serenity. The city, on the other hand, is a space where things happen and where life is subject to perplexity. Such an ahistoric depiction of al-Flayyih's arrival renders superfluous other histories preceding the encounter with the city. More

importantly, while this depiction comprehends al-Flayyih's arrival from an established space of origin - the desert - it undermines the desert as a space of alternate historical beginnings.

Regina Bendix's insights on the search for authentic culture, particularly within the discipline of folk studies, are helpful in understanding al-Flayyih's reception as a desert poet. In her book titled *In Search of Authenticity*, Bendix contends that the pursuit for authentic culture, within German and American folklore studies, has been inextricably linked to nationalist ideologies and the processes of modernization. Authenticity has long served as legitimizing tool for nationalists' claim of returning to a 'true spirit' of the nation (Bendix 1997:8). At the same time, the search for authenticity is "oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity" (8). The object of this pursuit, or the ideal folk community, is that which is "pure and free from civilization's evils... a metaphor for everything that was not modern" (7). Authentication is a two-way process. As Bendix puts it, "[d]eclaring something authentic legitimated the subject that was declared authentic, and the declaration in turn can legitimate the authenticator" (7).

The reception of al-Flayyih as a representative of a communal desert imaginary can be read in light of Bendix's insights. As presented by al-'Abwīni and Abd al-Fattah, al-Flayyih's desert is read from an Arab nationalist outlook as a space of authentic national origin where an essential identity for the Arab Nation can be found and recovered. Al-Flayyih's desert is also depicted, as in the reception of al-Zaid, as an authentic space to reflect on the nature of modernity afflicting the city. The desert's intuition, purity and serenity are juxtaposed with the city's perplexities and experiences. Read in light of the *Bidun* issue and statelessness, such representations of the desert carry semblances to the ontological depictions of the condition of statelessness discussed in chapter three. In such depictions, the desert is a space of innocence suspended from historical time and outside of political responsibility.

The Writers' Association's poetry festival in 1976 was a stage from which al-Flayyih contested a communal desert imaginary by articulating the desert space as a site of alternate historical beginnings. In the poems recited in the Writers' Association, al-Flayyih historicises his arrival by turning to a pre-national time situated within the desert space. While his reception emphasized the moment of arrival in the city, al-Flayyih's poems were instead absorbed in the moments of displacement and departure from the desert abode.

Two poems exemplify this contrast between al-Flayyih's conception of the desert space and his audience's. In the first poem *The Journeying Bedouins*, published in the poetry collection *Sorrows of the Journeying Bedouins* (1981), the poet articulates the experiences of a generation of last Bedouins as they complete their final journey from the campsite to an uneasy arrival at the city gates where they are faced by fierce politics of exclusion. In the second poem *Apprehensions of Corrupt Times*, published in al-Flayyih's first poetry collection *Singing in the Deserts of Agony* (1979), the poet thematises the apocalypse of the poet's campsite and the total demise of desert life and the displacement of its people.

Both poems will be read against al-Flayyih's reception as a representative of the communal desert imaginary. This moment of encounter in the Writers' Association is a prime instance highlighting the *Bidun* writers' claim of aesthetic subjectivity through poetic expression. *As will be argued, the encounter exposes the mediation between the poet's reception and his poetic articulation; labeling and self-positionality; eliciting the communal desert voice and act of attentive listening to the poet; and the materiality of the sociological and the potential of the imaginary.*

A Journey of Displacement: *The Sorrows of Journeying Bedouins*⁶

Here they are-my tribe descending from the heights of the past- dust-colored
gray eyed

⁶ The original poem is provided in Arabic in Appendix D.

Winds of the future lash them towards oases populated with rainwater
 Here they are - Like locusts of imminent drought coming from the last lands of
 the world
 They arrived and scattered in this sandy desert like stones
 Here they are- sleeping at the borders of the blue clouds
 Impoverished they bed down in bramble bushes
 They dreamt of dawn and wept as they saw a thunderbolt tearing the darkness
 limping in the circle of shut horizons, receding gradually
 At dawn, their tears wetted the wind, the earth, and the trees,
 Here they rise to their feet walking towards the limits of big cities
 Hungry, thirsty, eating parched bread, drinking putrid water and fire
 Here they are at the borders of big cities with hunched backs, broken spirits,
 overspread in their shabby clothes, covered only with old worn-out garments.
 Here they are lashed by the cavaliers of the Tatar army to push them away from
 the gates of the big cities.
 Here they are before the gates, laying down like pieces of hollowed wood.
 There they are, extinguished stars at the horizons of the blue clouds,
 so that in this era, a curtain comes down on the tales of the journeying Bedouins
 (al-Flayyih 1981:71-73).

The poet's voice narrates the last journey of his tribe from the desert campsite to the
 peripheries of cities. The poet is at once a participant in the journey and an onlooker.
 The journey is described from a bird's-eye viewpoint: "here they are descending." This
 panoramic view allows for an understanding of the tribe's history prior to the encounter
 with the national. In this poetic narration, the poet traces the enforced displacement and
 uneasy arrival of the last generation of Bedouins.

The enforced displacement in the desert is twofold. It is induced by the desert's
 "imminent drought" and unsustainability and by the modern impositions on movement
 that rendered a known way of life obsolete. The desert's unsustainability is symbolised
 by the theme of water, or the lack of it. The tribe's journey is essentially in search for
 oases filled with rainwater as the imminent drought besieges them. In sight, blue clouds
 and thunderbolts in the horizon promise rain, but are now, like the desert as an abode,
 short of their potential.

The image of blue clouds is returned to in the final part of the poem. Before the city
 gates, the tribe are like "extinguished stars at the horizons of the blue clouds." This
 double usage evokes the two 'blue' limits of the desert. On the vertical side, the blue
 clouds in the sky promising rain and life and horizontally alluding to the blue sea, a
 metaphor of the city, as a geographical limit of the desert. Besieged by limitation and

lack of water, the only instance of water in the poem is found when the tribe's own tears wet the winds, earth and trees. The relationship between the desert and its inhabitants is now inverted. A new relationship emerges where the desert can only be cried for as it is rendered obsolete as a space of habitat. Whatever is left of that mode of life is past and unattainable. Tears, laments and elegies of the desert now give meaning and life back to the desert, at the level of the poetic imaginary. The *Sorrows of the Journeying Bedouins* is itself elegiac; an instance of those tears wetting the desert with meaning. The lack of water, as a pressing theme throughout the poem, stands as a signifier of the desert's unsustainability inducing the tribe's displacement.

Concomitant with the desert's own rejection of its inhabitants is the imposed restriction on movement by the modern inception of state borders. This is expressed in the discrepancy between the desert's promised spatial capacity and a modern inability to fathom it. The vastness and fluidity of the desert as a site of journey is underplayed by a vocabulary charged with a sense of limitation and a general ambience of confinement. In the desert, the tribe is confronted with "shut horizons," "limits," "edges," "borders" and "city gates." This sense of limitation transforms the desert from a space of familiarity and habitability to a space where its inhabitants are estranged. In their own abode, they now undertake their last journey as interlopers, as "locusts" seeking rain and refuge. They travel as disempowered broken individuals "lashed by the winds," "impoverished" and "limping" towards water-filled oases. More so, the tribe is scattered in the desert like stones. This juxtaposition of sand and stone is indicative of the divide between the desert's unbounded potential and modern borders' imposing reality on the tribe's movement.

These two forces, drought and modern restrictions coerce the tribe to undertake their last journey from the desert into the peripheries of cities. They arrive at the city gates hungry, thirsty, broken, and powerless. It is an uneasy, destabilizing, and unwelcome arrival. At the city gates, they are confronted with violence and exclusion. The "army of the Tatar" stands as a signifier for a power exercising exclusionary politics that is both physical and psychological.

Displacement started with the desert's rejection of its people and is then finalized at the city gates when the tribe is denied entry into the city. They are not only denied entry,

but more importantly, denied a journey back. Even more, they are denied the journey as an essence of the journeying Bedouins as the title of the poem suggests. The inherent adjective “journeying” of the Bedouins is usurped leaving them as extinguished stars, pieces of hollow wood, contained and controlled at the mercy of “the army of Tatar.” The end of the journey represents the end of an era, where the “curtain comes down on the tales of the journeying Bedouins”.

At work in the poem is a historicisation of the communal arrival of the last Bedouins. This arrival carries its own particular historical process outside of ready-made histories. Most importantly, it narrates an enforced displacement represented in a destabilising desert journey and an uneasy arrival at the city gates. Read against al-Flayyih’s reception in the Writers’ Association, the poem highlights a destabilising and disempowering arrival to the city. The poet’s arrival from the desert is received as a source of rejuvenation, like the desert bringing forth its water streams, intuition and a sense of repose from the perplexities of the city. Yet, the poet instead articulates a desert space that is itself perhaps even more perplexed, in dire need of water and rejuvenation.

While the national reception celebrated promising beginnings and inevitable harmony, it is countered by another history of ends and beginnings, an end of an era of the last Bedouins and a beginning of a new history of a displaced people. In retrospect, one can read the arrival of the last Bedouins as the very arrival of the first *Biduns*. In a broader sense, al-Flayyih’s historicisation of the collective journey of the tribe can also be read as a historicisation of the *Bidun* issue. Al-Flayyih’s depiction of a communal arrival offers a more nuanced understanding of the transnational nature of the region and more importantly of the particular history of the *Bidun*. In the poem, the desert space is returned to as a site to claim a historical narrative that precedes an overpowering national narrative.

While *The Sorrows of the Journeying Bedouins* follows the trail of the journeying Bedouins as they complete their last journey from the campsite to the city’s periphery, the next poem in this analysis *Apprehensions of Corrupt Times* thematises the moment of displacement of the poet in the desert abode.

The Apocalypse of the Desert: *The Apprehensions of Corrupt Times*^{7 8} (1979)

And I have dreamt today, mother
of winds storming the grazing lands
holding back my horses
expelling my camels
lashing me in public with a snake
tying me behind my tribe's campsite
and when thirsty, it serves me my blood
mother, it has stretched in its tyranny

* * *

And yesterday I saw, mother, horses with severed heads
invading my tribe
And I saw a woman over a banner hoisted
chanting my name
naked, blood-ridden
I saw ruby coloured clouds racing over our campsite
Showering our tribe's men with firewater and the spirit of poison.

And I saw you, mother, in anguish
spreading sand between the dead
gathering left over flesh
and I saw a crow as great as the night
crowing around me
circling around the tent, neglecting my presence
stealing my child
and flying far away
leaving me wallowing over the black sand
losing my sanity
and I saw lions roaring whispers
I saw dogs barking at the sun
I saw voracious wolves
I saw crowds of black ants atop the flowers
I saw drunken goats

And I have dreamt today, mother, of the long tamarisk branches
protruding out of the horses' corpses
turning into yellow buds
smelling of a stony scent
intertwined like the horns of deer
mushrooming like a terminal anxiety
the teeth of the night chews on it
vomiting it on the flowery face of dusk
in the face of whorish times

⁷ The poem was originally published in *Majallat al-Bayān* in June 1975. The original title of the poem was *The Apprehensions of the Lakhmid Knight in Corrupt Times*.

⁸ The original poem is provided in Arabic in Appendix E.

spitting on a generation's face
and I saw the big cities running across the desert's mirage
hunted by a tiring sense of fear
chased by a terrifying sickness
the devil of estrangement and evil
breaks it stone by stone.

* * *

And I saw Falcons and camel ditties and penguins atop it
I saw the blood of its kin
dripping from the vulture's claws
I saw an eagle hijacking a palace
and saw snakes in the horizon
drawing rainbows
I saw faces on terraces
wearing ghostly masks
I saw minds on the streets
drinking a salty toast

Mother, is this a nightmare or an illusion?
or is it something approaching, or...
is this isolating restlessness a dream?
but, since awakening, I felt when laying my head
on the tent's cord
feeling the grass
like spikes it stings me
the cord severs the neck
and it moves from *wāsiṭ* (middle column) towards the '*uqda* (the knot on the
peg)

And I have dreamt, mother, that I was blindfolded
And my tribe's campsite pilfered
And the heads of my men plastered to the wall
And I saw you mother not crying
Because tears are crucified
and because the '*uqda* is now tied to the *wāsiṭ*.
(al-Flayyih 1979:2-7).

The poem begins with the apocalyptic vision of the campsite's demise⁹. From the outset, the storming winds, an allusion to a sweeping and overpowering change, disrupt

⁹ The imminent apocalypse of al-Flayyih's desert campsite is a recurrent theme in many postcolonial sites narrating the demise of authentic life. In the context of modern Arabic literature, the apocalyptic theme has been one of the main subtexts in Abdulrahman Munif's quintet *Cities of Salt* (1984). The novels trace the gradual demise, not just of the desert life, but of the very environment of subsistence for societies in Arabia. The radical shift propelled by the oil age helped create new cities that have ever since been marked by an unsustainable character.

In his reading of Munif's *Cities of Salt*, Rob Nixon explores the effects of this radical shift on the inhabitants of desert, "the lower-class Bedouin" especially, the likes of al-Flayyih. As Nixon puts it: "[n]omadic Bedouin culture had been inscribed on the land through movement; theirs was a belonging-

the familiar setting of the campsite and the grazing lands. It transforms the campsite from a site of familiarity and habitability to one of total displacement and disintegration of meaning as the desert environment turns against its people. Prior to the moment of disruption, the poet can affirm a sense of meaningful relationship with the campsite. This familiarity is marked by the use of the possessive pronoun; my horses, my camels, and my blood. Yet, as the disrupting winds storm, the poet's horses and camels are expelled from the campsite while the poet himself is displaced outside of it.

Thereafter, the campsite loses its sense of wholeness and is only described in fragmented images. This fragmentation is expressed through a series of grotesque, surreal and absurd images. The poet's vision includes horses with severed heads, crows as great as the night, drunken goats, tamarisk branches protruding out of horses, penguins in flight, eagles hijacking a palace and snakes drawing rainbows among many other surreal images.

While everything in the apocalypse lacks meaning, the figure of the mother, who is addressed throughout the poem, acts as a referential point. Unlike the poet, the mother is situated amidst the fragmentation of the campsite. As the poem approaches its end, only the mother remains intact amidst the carnage. In repeatedly addressing the mother, the poet is invoking her to make sense of the vision. The mother is "in anguish, spreading sand between the dead, gathering left over flesh." This image alludes to the mother's attempts at piecing together the fragments to make sense of the carnage and to possibly restore it. Yet, the mother is not even capable of shedding tears, "because tears are crucified" and because the tent has collapsed. The campsite, as an intelligible form of life has totally disintegrated. The figure of the mother can be read as a symbol of what is left of the desert life: an enduring sense of origin, belonging and memory that contests notions of uprootedness brought about by the apocalyptic times.

in-motion shaped to an arid world. But the deracinations of the oil age plummeted them into a rootlessness that was nomadism's opposite. Driven from their lands, increasingly urbanized, repressed and exploited by a corrupt sepoy class in cahoots with American oil interests, many lower-class Bedouin found themselves culturally humiliated and politically estranged." (Nixon 2011:76).

Another potent way in which meaning is created out of the chaos is through the poetic utilisation of the apocalyptic form. It is useful here to refer to Peter Child's analysis of the theme of fragmentation and disintegration in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. While the two poems come from different literary and historical trajectories, they both share a compulsive sense of apprehension towards their present moments expressed through mythical and sacred language. Childs suggests that:

[w]hile history, reason, logic had failed the modern world as organising principles, aesthetics had not. Using mythology and pre- to early modern culture... Eliot creates a form in the poem which aims to both master the content and to patch together all the many scraps of experience contained in the five parts. (Childs 2000:183)

While fragmentation and disorientation dominate the poem, Eliot achieves "a kind of design in his poem through the only voice he felt capable of doing so: mythology" (Childs 1999:73). Similarly, al-Flayyih in *The Apprehensions of Corrupt Times* resorts to sacred language embodied in the trope of the apocalypse. The utter demise of desert life seems to be only articulated and comprehended in the familiar form and language of the apocalyptic vision.

The form of the apocalypse allows the poet to bring together the series of fragmented images in an intelligible manner. In the apocalyptic vision, all creation is brought to a sudden end. At the same time, all creation is summoned before the reader's eyes as a reminder of what once was. While everything is disintegrating in the desert, it is at the same time paraded before the poet's eyes. The poet exhibits the material archive of the desert: horses, camels, snakes, lions, dogs, wolves, ants, goats, deer, vultures, eagles and tamarisks. In addition, the tent's components are also detailed in footnoted terms such as "*al- 'uqda*" (the knot on the tent's peg) and "*wāsiṭ*" (the main middle column of the tent). The exhibited material archive of the desert is also a reminder of an alternate subjectivity and a distinct cultural memory that exists within the desert space. The apocalyptic form allows the poet to create a sense of meaning of the carnage by exhibiting the archive of the desert.

The apocalypse of the familiar life of the campsite also alludes to the paradox of literary modernity in the context of the Arabian Peninsula. In his readings of modern Arab poets in the Arabian Peninsula, Sa'ad al-Bazei highlights the dual meaning of the word *bayt*, which refers to both the Bedouin's tent and the basic unit of classical poetry. The classical ('*āmūdi*) form in Arabic poetry is derived from the pole of the tent ('*āmūd*). Al-Bazei reads modern Arab poets' break away from the classical form ('*āmūdi*) to free verse (*taf'īla*) poetry as a form of "tension in the house." This tension is taken as a metaphor of the challenges of literary modernity. Modernist poetic forms shake the basic unit of poetry holding together the poem, and ultimately a known way of life.

In *The Apprehensions of Corrupt Times*, the *bayt*, or tent, which is the focal point of the campsite implodes inwards. As the poet awakens from his vision, he lays besides his tent. The grass stings "like spikes" while the "tent cords sever the neck" as it moves from the peg towards the middle column. The collapse of the campsite's *bayt* also signals the necessity of finding a new 'modern' language to face modern impositions. This new language is manifest in the poet's use of the *tafi'la* form and his utilisation of the trope of the apocalypse to face the new realities.

Unlike apocalyptic literature's ultimate promise of a post-apocalyptic vision of salvation, the poem ends with utter carnage. The poet describes the end of the world as he knows it while offering no vision of salvation or a fresh beginning. The poem ends with a sense of lingering shock as the mother stands enervated amid the carnage unable to cry for what she has witnessed. The poet is blindfolded and unable to see beyond the apocalypse he is witnessing.

The lack of a post-apocalyptic vision is better read in relation to the prevalent theme of rebirth within modernist Arabic poetics. The theme of rebirth has been central to modernist Arab poets connected with the *Tammūzi* movement. Within their different social and political contexts, poets including the likes of Adonis, Salah Abd Al- Ṣabūr and Badir Shakir al-Sayyab have often utilised the theme of rebirth to face their present realities (Asfour 1988). This rebirth is actualised in a particular form of modernity that

manifests itself culturally in modern Arabic poetics and politically in the form of a modern Arab nation emerging from the rubbles of history.¹⁰

Within the Kuwaiti literary scene, one prime example, which is highly influenced by Badir Shakir al-Sayyab's *Hymn of the Rain* (1954), is Muhammad Al-Fayiz's epic poem *Memoirs of a Seafarer* (1964). The poem tells of the perils of the Kuwaiti pearl diver whose perseverance of the hardships of seafaring is symbolic of a historical national spirit. It is written as both a celebration of and an elegy to maritime culture. Like the desert, maritime culture has also witnessed a radical transition that "rendered obsolete an entire traditional system of manual skills, maritime knowledge, commercial practices and cultural forms built up over centuries" (Al-Hijji 2010:134). Yet, unlike Al-Flayyih's disintegrated desert, al-Fayez anticipates a vision of salvation and rebirth. The seafarer's values of perseverance, honor and sacrifice finds a place in the modern construction of national identity (al-Rabei 2014).

The poem's lack of a post-apocalyptic vision of rebirth is perhaps indicative of the poet's apprehensions towards any promises of future integration. The post-apocalyptic is not presented as a new beginning for a history of salvation. Rather, it is a source of apprehension as it may render superfluous al-Flayyih's desert and what it offers, as a history, a people and a set of values. All that is left at the end of the poem is the poet's apprehension of what is to come for a displaced community, which later materialised in the statelessness and disenfranchisement of many of the desert's inhabitants. The desert, as an archive and an alternative subjectivity, it seems, can only be sustained through poetic articulation.

The poet, while using mythical language demythologises the desert space. The romanticised desert space of serenity and purity is disrupted by an apocalyptic vision. The perplexities of modernity, afflicting the city, are extended to the desert space. Both desert and city are enveloped in the historical moment of apocalypse. This perplexity does not simply extend to the representations of the desert, but to the language of its articulation as well. As the cord, the pillar that holds up the tent snaps and severs the poet's neck, he must find a new abode in a new language, one that is more indebted to

10 For more on the theme of rebirth and the nation within the context of poetry in the Arabian Peninsula, refer to Al-Bazei's *Desert Culture* (1991), pp-65-80.

modernist aesthetics than to the classical forms from which he is expected to speak in. The event of the apocalypse restores the historicity of the desert as a pre-national site of alternate historical beginnings, while simultaneously reinforcing the desert's own vision of modernity.

In 1978, al-Flayyih was again introduced by al-Zaid in the Writers' Association's poetry festival. While acknowledging al-Flayyih's own disruptive poetic voice, al-Zaid urges al-Flayyih to "return to his first instinct." Addressing al-Flayyih, al-Zaid said: "you Bedouin, return to your first intuition. With it you are more valuable to us...Have mercy on the voice of your inner intuition" (Majallat al-Bayān 1978:40). Similarly in the 1981 poetry festival, al-Zaid introduced al-Flayyih once again with the following words:

a poet who carried in his beginnings the soul of intuition. Thus, we loved and blessed him. He still carries remnants of it. Will he return to his original intuition and uninhibited tendencies? Or will life's paths lead him astray from his intuition...I still hope that he returns for I have loved him and long-awaited him. (Majallat al-Bayān 1981:22)

In the above introductions, al-Zaid insists that al-Flayyih returns to his unpolluted intuition, purity and authenticity of the desert voice. Al-Flayyih is reinstated to a romanticized desert space of self-reflection on the nature of modernity afflicting the city. He is representative of the communal desert imaginary; a rejuvenating prophet bringing forth fragrant flowers and streams of water. Instead, al-Flayyih, in his poetic voice sounds like a tired displaced broken prophet who has something else to say. Indeed, like a prophet, al-Flayyih came into the Writers' Association not to affirm continuity or expectations but ultimately to rupture a communal imaginary and disrupt perceived reality through aesthetic articulation.¹¹

¹¹ In his final participation in the Writers Association annual poetry festival in 1982, al-Flayyih dedicated his poems to al-Zaid:

To the person who never practiced hate. He embraced me when I knew not the direction to the place where I am standing today. He cursed me by the desert because he wanted me to be like a cloud. To my father and friend... despite his ferocity towards me. (Majallat al-Bayān 1982: 17)

From within the communal arrival of a generation of last Bedouins emerges al-Flayyih's personal poetics guised in the figure of the modern *Ṣu'lūk*. Throughout his literary career, al-Flayyih willfully affiliates with the *Ṣa'ālīk* poets in the Arabic literary tradition. In this affiliation, the modern *Ṣu'lūk* is utilized as a literary mask that resists an imposed totalizing modern national subjectivity. It is also an act of intrinsic positionality that situates the poet within a deep-rooted Arabic literary tradition with contemporary resonance. The next section will first explore the *Ṣa'ālīk* tradition in relation to wider discussions on nomadology within postcolonial discourse.

Nomadology to *Ṣa'laka*

The nomad has been initially conceived as a spatial signifier within the context of empire, as “an intermediate figure between the primitive society without a state on the one hand and the so-called civilized imperial state on the other” (Buchanan 2010:354). As put by Gilles Deleuze, nomad thought works as a force of “deterritorializing” the ordered “striated (metric) space” of the state in order to produce a notion of space that is “smooth (vectoral, projective, topological)” (cited in Tally Jr: 2013:159). The figure of the nomad has been often used as signifying a transgressive subjectivity within feminist and postcolonial discourses. A nomadic subjectivity is an “intellectual position” (Noyes 2010:163), “a metaphor for critical thinking” (al-Saddah 2012:166), “a suitable theoretical figuration for contemporary subjectivity... an epistemological and political imperative for critical thought” (Braidotti 1994:1-2) and a “useful critical figure...that interrupts the persistently binary schemas which tend to condition the way we read and discuss not only postcolonial literature, but postcolonial situations in general” (Lowe 1993:47 cited in Noyes 2010:164). Within the context of Arabic literary studies, al-Saddah reads the postcolonial nomadic Arabic novel in Egypt as a “state of mind, an intellectual project, and a style of life not as ends in themselves, but as strategies to negotiate new, more liberating identities” (al-Saddah 2012:189). The abstraction of the figure of the nomad, as illustrated above, allows it to become an easily accessible tool for spatial readings of deterritorialisation in very disparate contexts.

In her critique on the prevalent use of nomadism as a conceptual tool within feminist studies, Caren Kaplan highlights the dangers of the “privilege of universalizing

theories” (Kaplan 1990:194). Kaplan warns against inattentiveness on behalf of first world critics to questions of positionality within existing power relations where “the margin becomes a linguistic or critical vacation, a new poetics of the exotic” (191). The abstractness of the notion of the metaphorical nomad often overlooks the particular realities of the represented marginal space.

Rather than starting with an abstract universal notion of the metaphorical nomad to read the literary thrust of al-Flayyih, the chapter works on understanding how a particular subjectivity emanates from within al-Flayyih’s literary works and the linguistic and literary tradition from which he writes. Al-Flayyih’s situates himself within a particular tradition of *Ṣa‘ālīk* poets that has an untranslatable¹² resonance within a specific linguistic and spatial context. The following section aims to provide an overview of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* tradition to highlight its resonance in Arabic literary history and in al-Flayyih’s present.

In *The Poetry of Ṣa‘ālīk: Method and Characteristics*, Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥifnī defines the *Ṣa‘ālīk* as a group that is distinct from the rest of society; having a sense of self-sufficiency sustained by an active engagement in marauding and thievery (Ḥifnī 1979:27). The figure of the *Ṣu‘lūk* is conventionally associated with the following connotative terms: a wolf (having ‘wolfish tendencies’), the *khalī*¹³, the *fātīk*¹⁴ and the *shaṭīr*¹⁵ (Ḥifnī 1979).

As to their poetry, the most distinctive aspects of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* poetic tradition are the semi-autobiographic nature of their poetry and the emphasis on the poet’s subjective experiences of his surroundings (374). On the communal level, the poetry of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* valorizes the act of *ṣa‘laka*, which works as a defiant force against the status quo and

12 The term *Ṣa‘ālīk* has been translated in a number of ways including: “robber-poets” (Treadgold 1975), “brigand-poets” (Stetkevych 1986), “destitute poets” (Jones 2011) and “outcasts” (Farrin 2010). Yet, these translations fall short of capturing the connotative weight of the term and its cultural and political resonance in the Arabic literary tradition.

13 In Edward Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon*, the *khalī* is an excommunicated individual from the tribe due to continual unwarranted aggression. Cast off repudiated or renounced by his family (Lane 1863:700).

14 In Edward Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon*, the *fātīk* is “one who comes upon another suddenly, with some evil, or hateful act, or [more commonly] slaughter... one who when he proposes a thing, does it...any one who attempts to venture upon, great, or formidable affairs... bold or daring, courageous.” (Lane 1863:2333).

15 In Edward Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon*, the *shaṭīr* “one who withdraws far away from his family... any clever or cunning person.” (Lane 1863:1551).

social immobility of the social tribal structure (184). Through the act of *ṣa'la*, the poet gains his self-sufficiency and his sense of inner coherence by withdrawing into nature and outside of the impositions of the social structure.

Kamal Abu-Deeb reads the *Ṣu'lūk* poem as inaugurating a sense of agency of the individual poet in the face of communal consensus. Read against the classical *qasīda*, the space of the *Ṣu'lūk* poem is a “stage for the individual’s event” (Abu-Deeb 1986:576) and not the abode of the tribe. Juxtaposed with the classical *qasīda*’s emphasis on ruins and lamentations over the campsite of the beloved, the space of the *Ṣu'lūk* poem is a space of presentness and action, laden with future potentiality and possibilities of “creating a new world” (578). Another distinction in Abu-Deeb’s analysis relates to the depictions of time between the cyclical/mythological time of the classical *qasīda* and the historical notion of time of the *Ṣu'lūk* poem (584). The notion of historical time gives way for the poet to exercise his agency and will.¹⁶

From another, more structural angle, the *Ṣu'lūk* poem has been analyzed through the anthropological modality of ‘rite of passage’ proposed by Van Gennep. This modality was later appropriated by Suzanne Stetkevych to read the classical Arabic *qasīda*¹⁷ (Stetkevych 1983). In Stetkevych’s reading of the classical *qasīda*, the anthropological subject, or passenger, is the classical *Jahili* poet. His poem is read as a tool to consummate a rite of passage into a wider sense of community. The tripartite structure of the classical *qasīda* consisting of *nasīb-rahīl-madīh/fakhar* is seen as analogous to the three stages involved in the rite of passage (separation-liminality-reintegration). The *nasīb*, where the poet laments the traces of his beloved’s campsite, represents the first stage of separation. In *rahīl*, where the poet describes his journey and his she-camel, the poet enters into a liminal phase. Finally in *fakhr*, or *madīh*, the poet reintegrates

16 In comparison with the classical *qasīda*’s evocation of place names as a marker of the poet’s abode, the *Ṣu'lūk* remains elusive about his whereabouts. As Raymond Farrin writes, “the poet comes out of nowhere, strikes civilization, and then slips back into the obscurity whence he came” (41). The lack of territorial attachment gives the *Ṣu'lūk* a fluid notion of belonging to the vastness of the desert.

17 The rite of passage consists of a tripartite process of separation, liminality, and reintegration as proposed by Arnold Van Gennep. In the first phase, the individual is separated from “an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both” (cited in Stetkevych 1984:661). The separation is followed by an in-between liminal phase where the individual is in an “ambiguous state ... that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (661). Finally, reintegration is achieved and the rite of passage is consummated through an acceptance and adherence to a “clearly defined ‘structural’ type” embodying a sense of shared societal norms (661).

into the tribe's value system by reiterating and valorizing shared values through self-pride or panegyrics of tribal leaders (Stetkevych 1983).

In light of such an approach, Stetkevych suggests that the *Ṣu 'lūk* poem, with reference to al-Shanfarā's *Lamiyyat al- 'Arab*¹⁸ (L-poem of the Arabs) is rather:

a failed or aborted rite in which the passenger does not achieve reintegration into the community or tribe, but rather, the hardships and perils of the liminal state are realized and become a permanent way of life instead of a temporary transitional stage (Stetkevych 1984:662).

In other words, the *Ṣu 'lūk* naturalizes and reintegrates into the liminal phase by withdrawing into nature.

The *Ṣa 'ālīk*'s transgressive, subjective and self-sufficient attitude carried connotative resonance that attracted modern Arab poets to recourse to *ṣa 'laka* to face their present conditions. With this in mind, Hassan Nūriddīn views *ṣa 'laka* in the modern times as enabling a form of agency against new "ideologies of the tribe" manifest in the hegemonic forces of globalization and global empire (Nurridin 2007b:361).

In a more localised context of the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi literary critic Sa'ad al-Bazei, sees that the utilization of *Ṣa 'ālīk* is prompted by an "unrelenting estrangement" experienced in the modern social settings (al-Bazei 1991:58). This estrangement is due to the modern city's abandonment of the "noble neglected values" of the desert, which the *Ṣu 'lūk* embodies. The evocation of the *Ṣa 'ālīk* by modern poets and contemporaries

18 A brief overview of the Al-Shanfarā's *Lamiyyat al-Arab*, which stands as an archetype of the *Ṣa 'ālīk* poetic tradition, provides a clearer understanding of this anthropological-literary paradigm. Similar to the classical *qasīda*, al-Shanfarā begins with the first phase of separation as he severs links with his tribe. He announces his departure and withdrawal from the outset of the poem. After separation, the poem enters into the second stage of the rite of passage embodied in the poet's journey, or *raḥil*. Throughout the second part of the poem, the poet describes the hardships of life in the desert. He speaks of prolonged hunger, the piercing winds of winter, the sun's unrelenting heat. Yet, like a lone wolf in the desert he endures with a sense of pride. The liminal existence of the poet is seen "as exceeding, not falling short of, the reaggregate tribal male in endurance, fortitude, and resolve" (Stetkevych 383). The descriptions of the liminal stage is not followed by a final reintegration into any form of tribal norm. Instead, the poet reintegrates into and naturalizes the liminal stage. In the final two verses of the poem, al-Shanfarā describes himself amidst a flock of she-goats as if camouflaged in nature. Thus, the poet sustains a sense of inner coherence and self-sufficiency through reintegrating into nature. For more on the structural approach to al-Shanfarā's *Lamiyyat al-Arab* refer to Raymond Farrin's *Abundance from the Desert: classical Arabic poetry* (Farrin 2010: 25-45).

of al-Flayyih, such as the Saudi poets Muhammad al-Thubaiti and Abd al-Karim al-‘Ūda, is read by al-Bazei as part of a poetic discourse that modern poets confront their societies with (58). These modern *Ṣu‘lūk* poets present themselves as upholders of the “noble neglected values” of the desert. More importantly, the poetic evocation of the *Ṣu‘lūk* provides an immediate sense of identity and belonging to the desert of the Arabian Peninsula. The *Ṣu‘lūk* is “not only that exiled Arab *Jahili* persona. He represents, before everything else, the desert’s history (its stones, flora, animals, aura and its harshness)” (59). Thus a poetic evocation of the *Ṣu‘lūk* is also an evocation of the fluid desert topography, which carries an immediate and deep-rooted sense of belonging.

Sulayman al-Flayyih: the Modern *Ṣu‘lūk*

In a newspaper column, al-Flayyih introduces himself to his readers as a ‘desert wolf’, a synonym of the *Ṣu‘lūk* (Hifnī 1979:26):

To those 3rd or 4th generation Kuwaiti readers who do not know me, I am one of the wolves of the desert who came down to the cities of oil when the desert so blatantly rejected its people with its terrible drought. Kuwait has absorbed me and allowed me the chance to practice all of the wolves’ honourable traits (nobility, loyalty, sincerity, generosity and love) (al-Flayyih 2008a).

More so, poem titles such as *Songs of the Ṣa‘ālīk* (al-Flayyih 1981:26), *The Last Will of the Son of Oil Ṣu‘lūk* (al-Flayyih 1993:53), *From the Diary of a Ṣu‘lūk* (al-Flayyih 1979), *The Lone Wolf* (al-Flayyih 1993: 20), *Just Ṣa‘ālīk* (30), *The Ṣa‘ālīk Let Go of ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward* (al-Flayyih 2013:342) *Howls of the Restless Wolves* (al-Flayyih 2013:394) and the title of his 1993 poetry collection *Night Wolves* (1993) attests to his strong affiliation with the *Ṣa‘ālīk*.

How does al-Flayyih’s poetry build a link with the amorphous *Ṣa‘ālīk*, who are defined by a rejection of belonging to traditional forms of filiation? And more pressingly, what space is left for the *Ṣu‘lūk* when his natural environment, the desert, is overcome by the same “whorish times” of the big cities as he put it in *The Apprehensions of Corrupt Times*, and when the desert itself has so “blatantly rejected its people with its terrible

drought?” Before answering these questions, it is important to first understand how al-Flayyih establishes a poetic affiliation with the *Ṣa‘ālīk* as historical literary forbearers.

In the wider context of modern Arabic poetics, Muhsin al-Musawi reads the modern Arab poet’s recourse to historical figures as literary masks as “prompted and coloured by the politics of urgency” (al-Musawi 2002:179). The mask serves “as a foil for his present status as a modern poet in trying circumstances” where the poet “emphasises differences, variants and displacements, between his situation and that of his forebears in order to obliquely enhance his achievement” (205). In addition, literary masks are used for the purposes of “textual apprenticeship” (207) where the modern poet identifies with a strong literary precursor, but where he ultimately “out-grows association” (207).

An example of this use of a literary mask as a foil, which al-Musawi calls ‘dialogisation’, can be found in the poem *The Songs of Ṣa‘ālīk*. The poem¹⁹ is written in five “poem-songs” each dedicated to a *Jahili Ṣu‘lūk* poet: Ta’abbāṭa Sharran, al-Shanfarā, al-Sulayk ibn Sullaka, and Abū al-Ṭamḥān al-Qaynī respectively. In each of these short and highly intertextual poems, al-Flayyih situates the historical *Ṣu‘lūk* poet in the present to highlight the challenges and impositions of modern times on the *Ṣu‘lūk*. The *Ṣu‘lūk* in the “now” seems more vulnerable and bereft of his sense of inner coherence and self-sufficiency. Rather than focusing on all of the poets in the poem, this analysis will look closely into the treatment of two historical figures, Ta’abbāṭa Sharran and al-Sulayk ibn Sullaka, as representative of the general treatment of the *Ṣa‘ālīk*.

Before presenting the individual *Ṣu‘lūk*, the Song of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* opens with the following lines under the title of *uhzūja* (anthem):

Because we refused,
our manhood refuses to remain your captured slaves.
and remain as your concubines
presented at night to the *shaykh* of the tribe,
we have been excommunicated,
lost, dispersed, and starved

19 Excerpts from the original poem are provided in Appendix F

while the dogs of the tribe bark at us. (al-Flayyih 1981:26).

From the outset, the use of the first person plural pronouns “we”/“us” marks al-Flayyih’s alignment with the *Ṣa‘ālīk* poets as part of and an extension of that tradition. This mirrors the *Ṣa‘ālīk*’s prevalent use of the first personal plural pronoun in their poetry, which refers to the community of excommunicated *Ṣa‘ālīk* and not their tribe (Khulayf 1978:206). The space of the poem allows al-Flayyih to join the band of *Ṣa‘ālīk* in a communal anthem. This choral performance reproduces a sense of the transhistorical brotherhood of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* and sets the ambience of the poem. One is reminded of the *Lamiyyat al-Arab* of al-Shanfarā’s where the pack of wolves sing in unison with the poet.

The anthem starts with the shared act of refusal “because we refused to...” that leads to shared consequences “we have been...”. The poets refuse to succumb to the social injustices and subjugation. They find a way out of through engaging in *ṣa‘laka* while enduring its consequences. The conditions and social triggers of *ṣa‘laka* are not necessarily related to a specific historical era, but persist throughout. *Ṣa‘laka* then is articulated more as an embodied physical stance and a defiant attitude that sustains a sense of dignity and communal pride beyond the imposed social order.

In his treatment of the Jahili *Ṣu‘lūk* poet, Ta’abbāṭa Sharran, al-Flayyih writes:

The one with evil under the pit of his arm (Ta’abbāṭa Sharran)
is chased by the whirlwind
he races the sound grouse birds to the water streams
which will soon be engulfed by the whirlwind
Ta’abbāṭa Sharran comes, without evilness under his arm
save for his sword of sorrows
and the hunger of the *Ṣa‘ālīk* and the deprived
He turned back and ran as an arrow racing his fleeting days.(al-Flayyih 1981:26).

Ta’abbāṭa Sharran, which translates to the one who carries evil under the pit of his arm, now comes with “no evil under the pit of his arm.” The conditions of *ṣa‘laka* persist: the whirlwinds, the hardships, the sorrows and hunger. Yet, what is lacking now is his nickname, that ‘evilness’ or panache that is necessary for his survival as a *Ṣu‘lūk*.

Ta'abbata Sharran then swift-footedly disappears as he realizes the limitations of practicing *ṣa'laka* as he has known it.

Al-Flayyih then turns to another *Ṣu'lūk* poet, al-Sulayk ibn Sullaka, conversing with him and informing him of the betrayals of his fellow *Ṣa'ālīk* in modern times. He writes:

O, deviously shrewd man of perishability.
Do you know that your companions have now pushed you into your demise?
And your blood is still trickling over the sand.
They returned your sword to its sheath, after you were injured
And before the end of the battle, they surrendered.
While you have saved last winter's water for them
In ostriches' eggs
And you carry on, noble one, practicing *ṣa'laka*. (al-Flayyih 1981:26).

The noble act of *ṣa'laka* is conceived as a battle that is getting increasingly more difficult in the present. While al-Sulayk, holds on to his noble values, his comrades in the “now” leave him wounded and surrender. That which defines al-Sulayk's historical legacy as a *Ṣu'lūk* poet, his honorable values of courage, sense of justice and generosity to his fellow comrades becomes the source of his demise in the present.

In the two cases, the historical *Ṣu'lūk* is inserted into the present scene, and after a realization of the imposed limitations on his life as a *Ṣu'lūk*, depart the scene. Despite the realisation, they both attempt to continue practicing *ṣa'laka*. Ta'abbata Sharran “turned back and ran as an arrow” as it is the characteristic of the swift-footed *Ṣa'ālīk* while al-Sulayk carries on “practicing *ṣa'laka*.” The historical *Ṣu'lūk* resorted to the desert to practice his values outside of the established social structure. Yet it seems that *ṣa'laka*, in the absence of the desert as refuge, can only be sustained as a defiant attitude or subjectivity in poetic expression.

This is most evident in the way al-Flayyih enacts a recognition of contemporary *Sa'laka* as a subjectivity that transcends its historical scene (i.e. the desert). As the historical *Ṣu'lūk* joins a band of excommunicated *Ṣa'ālīk*, al-Flayyih affiliates with a literary network of contemporary modern *Ṣa'ālīk* poets in the Arab world more broadly. Unlike

the traitorous companions of al-Sulaik, these contemporary *Ṣa'ālīk* persist in their own doomed *ṣa'laka*.

For example, his elegiac poem *The Wind's Silver Wings* is dedicated “to the soul of Naguib Surur, the poet and *Ṣu'lūk*.” Naguib Surur (1932-1978) is an Egyptian poet and playwright known for his rebellious and non-conformist attitude. As Mohammad al-Lozy puts it, “Surur challenges, ridicules and denounces all aspects of official culture and its representatives, and reminds us of everything that official culture forgets, ignores or falsifies” (Ahram Weekly 1998).

Another poem titled *Bows on the Rababa for the Journeys of Shlaiwīḥ al-'Atāwī*, is dedicated to another *Ṣu'lūk* poet from the Nabati, or vernacular tradition of the Arabian Peninsula Shlaiwīḥ al-'Atāwī. In a footnote to the title, al-Flayyih notes that “Shlaiwīḥ al-'Atāwī is one of the most famous, brave, and noble *Ṣa'ālīk* poet knights of the Arabian Peninsula in the 19th century known for his infamous unaccompanied raids²⁰ (al-Flayyih 1981:74).

In *Night Wolves*, one poem's title is dedicated to the *Bidun* poet “Misfir al-Dūsari and the wolf” (7). Al-Dūsari is a contemporary of al-Flayyih, was also *Bidun* at the time of the poem's publication. In the poem, al-Flayyih refers to al-Dūsari as a “beautiful crow” alluding to his dark skin complexion and drawing an analogy with the group of “poet-crows” (*aghriba*), or dark-skinned poets in Arabic literary history, the likes of the *Ṣu'lūk* poets al-Sulayk ibn al-Sullaka, and Ta'abbata Sharran (Khulayf 1978:113; Ḥifnī 1979:114; Lewis 1985).

Outside of his poetry collections, al-Flayyih's affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk* tradition is not less obvious. In 2011, thirty years after publishing his first poetry collection, al-Flayyih presented a lecture at the Kuwaiti Writers' Association titled “A Comparative Approach between *Ṣa'ālīk* poetry and the late Desert *Ḥanshal*.²¹ In this lecture, he presents

20 For more on Shlaiwīḥ al-'Atāwī refer to the work of Marcel Kurpershoek *The Story of a Desert Knight: the legend of Shlaiwīḥ al-'Atāwī and other 'Uṭaybah heroes* (1995).

21 The *Hanshal* are a band of footmen whose nightly exploits and adventures are the subject matter for

himself as belonging to the last generation of the dying tradition of *Ṣa'ālīk* in Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula. Within the national literary scene, al-Flayyih mentions the poets Fahad al-‘Askar and Sagir al-Shibīb, and his contemporaries Misfir al-Dūsarī, Fahad ‘Afet, Ibrahīm al-Khāldī and Fahad Dūhān as part of that dying breed of *Ṣa'ālīk*. Interestingly, he points out that while the *Ṣa'ālīk* tradition has died away, resonances of it remain in the culture of internet hackers, or the *Ṣa'ālīk* of internet.

As evident from the above, the contemporary network of *Ṣa'ālīk* transcends geographical, political, and linguistic registers. A *Ṣu'lūk* recognizes another *Ṣu'lūk* whether he is Naguib Surur practicing *ṣa'laka* in Egyptian colloquial, Misfer al-Dusari, a *Bidun* poet writing colloquial poetry, Shlaihī al-‘Atāwī practicing *ṣa'laka* in the *Nabaṭi* tradition, or Fahad al-Askar, a Kuwaiti poet writing in Arabic Fusha. These poets have consciously taken on *ṣa'laka* regardless of their filial constraints. What establishes the act of recognition is a shared critical stance towards political, societal, and often literary norms; an expression of an ascetic desire to return to a self-sufficient life free and far from any form of dependency; and a deliberate will to excommunicate oneself.

In his affiliation, al-Flayyih abstracts *ṣa'laka* as a concept beyond its desert constraints. It is not just the ‘noble neglected values of the desert’, as al-Bazei posits, that the modern *Ṣu'lūk* is a reminder of. *Ṣa'laka* is a defiant attitude and a set of values that is sustained primarily through poetic expression.

In conclusion, al-Flayyih problematizes the categories that might seem empowering to him, such as the ‘desert prophet’ and the ‘godfather of *Bidun* poetry’. Through his autobiographical reflections, literary works and literary affiliation, al-Flayyih eludes such categories. Firstly, the desert space is depicted as a site that has witnessed an apocalypse and can no longer be represented in romanticized terms. Secondly, in his willful affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk*, al-Flayyih engages in an act of claiming and forging a literary history. Instead of the extrinsic filial (tribal, national, or stateless) as being central and constitutive of literary history, al-Flayyih builds on older moments that exist within a literary tradition and a cultural memory. The affiliation with the *Ṣa'ālīk* offers

Bedouin tales (Jabbur 1995:354).

a deep-rooted sense of belonging to a literary tradition that has historically been associated with the desert, yet is not restricted to it. At the same time, it forges a transnational network of *Şa‘ālīk* poets built on contemporary aesthetic and individual practices.

Chapter 6: Representations of the ‘*Ashīsh*: a Unique *Bidun* Experience

This chapter explores the representations of the spatial metaphor of ‘*Ashīsh* in novels featuring *Bidun* characters. In the immediate sense, the ‘*Ashīsh* (sing. ‘*Isha*) directly refers to the “squalid slums” (Human Rights Watch 1995), “squatter settlements” (al-Haddad 1981:109) or “shanty towns” (al-Moosa 1976:75) where the majority of the *Bidun* once resided. Shantytowns were first established in the late 1950s and the early 1960s around the Kuwait Oil Company work sites that offered jobs for Bedouins (al-Moosa 1976:58-59). As al-Moosa puts it:

[t]hese shanty Bedouins form a separate community with personality characteristics peculiar to themselves. The shanty areas in which they live are known in Kuwait as ‘ishish’ [sic] areas or Bedouin areas...The shanty Bedouins are new immigrants who were attracted by the improved conditions of a wealthy developing state, and in that way they are at least different from the old itinerant Bedouins. (88)

These Bedouins differ from other migrants as they considered Kuwait’s territory as “part of their own wide-spread homeland” (68). The increased settlements of Bedouins in shanty towns was driven by the prospects of gaining Kuwaiti citizenship which would grant them access to free housing, health and education services, as well as guaranteed employment¹ (68). As mentioned in chapter one, the government also set up temporary housing, commonly referred to as *al-Masākin al-Sha’biyya* (popular housing), for the increasing number of shanty dwellers. Those who gained citizenship were later rehoused to Low Income Housing projects while “non-Kuwaiti Bedouins,” i.e. the *Bidun*, resettled in popular housing where many still reside (al-Moosa 1976:300; al-Nakib 2014:19). The majority of *Bidun* writers in this study have experienced life in ‘*Ashīsh* including Sulayman al-Flayyih, Dikhīl Khalīfa, Muhammad al-Nabhān, and Nasir al-Ẓafīri whose aesthetic treatment of the ‘*Ashīsh*, will be analysed in the chapter.

¹ It is estimated that 12.3-25% of Kuwait’s population in 1970s, which was at the time 738.662, lived in shanty towns (al-Haddad 1981:109). In 1975, Bedouins constituted 80% of total shanty population of 131.275 (al-Moosa 1976:61). For more on the historical development of shantytowns in Kuwait refer to Abdurassoul al-Moosa’s thesis titled *Bedouin Shanty Settlements in Kuwait: a study in social geography* (1976) and Mohammad S al-Haddad’s dissertation titled *The Effect of Detribalization and Sedentarization on the Socio-economic Structure of the Tribes of the Arabian Peninsula: the Ajman tribe as a case study* (1981).

While the material reality and historical circumstances of life in the *'Ashīsh* has been discussed by the aforementioned studies in the social sciences, the deployment of the *'Ashīsh* by novelists is explored in this chapter as a consistent metaphor for the unique and fractured space of statelessness, both as a wider experience and as an 'episteme'. This is following Ania Loomba, who in her critique of the emphasis on diaspora and exile in the 'postcolonial subjects', comments that "large numbers of people in the third world have not physically moved, and have to speak from 'where they are', which is also often an equally ideologically or politically or emotionally fractured space". An exploration of the *'Ashīsh*, aims to explore the multitude of meanings embodied in that fractured space that Loomba hints at, a space that is embodied with different inflections by the novels that I will discuss.

The historical and symbolic significance of the *'Ashīsh* carries some semblance with Hoda al-Saddah's analysis of the *'Ashwā'iyyat* in the context of the modern Egyptian novel. The *'Ashwā'iyyat* are "new informal urban spaces that sprang up with minimal or no links with the nation-state apparatuses and structures" inhabited by "marginalized subjects that have never been integrated in the national imaginary or progress of building a modern nation" (al-Saddah 2012:204). At the same time, *'Ashwā'iyyat* are "chaotic, unplanned, nonconformist, unruly" and "a characteristic feature of the modern postcolonial city" (212). More importantly, the *'Ashwā'iyyat* are metaphorically read as a "liminal space at the threshold of cities, narratives, identities" that "is not exclusive to the inhabitants of the physical *'Ashwā'iyyat*" (212).

Keeping in mind the similarity of the *'Ashīsh* to al-Saddah's description of *'Ashwā'iyyat*, it is important to note their specific historical singularity. For example, as the *Bidun* novelist Nasir al-Zafīri reflects:

My consciousness of the *Bidun* issue was linked with the poverty that was associated with the marginalised space. This space created the marginalised human who was cast far from the rapid development of a country witnessing an oil boom. Al-Jahra was one of those neglected areas inhabited by different groups of *Badu* (Bedouins) who settled far from the drought and famine of the desert. The possible jobs available for them included work in the army, police and in light labour that these fatigued and unlettered

people were able to do. I was the son of one of those families that shared the difficult life. At first, it did not discriminate between us because of citizenship. Later, because of the unjust and selective naturalisation process, the area [al-Jahra] comprised of two groups: the *Bidun* and Kuwaitis. I was a member of the former. (Majjalat al-Ṭalī‘a 2016)

This account, presented in a newspaper interview, provides a descriptive rather than the aesthetic fictionalized narrative of the *‘Ashīsh* that al-Zafīri presents in his novels. The *‘Ashīsh* was not originally conceived as a space of statelessness. Rather, it is a space with a unique history of migration related to wider demographic shifts in the region. The original marginalisation of the inhabitants of the *‘Ashīsh* is not due to the lack of citizenship rights. Rather, it is a result of how the *‘Ashīsh* was left out the nation’s political, economic, and social progress. Al-Zafīri depicts statelessness as a haphazard process that arbitrarily discriminated between the *‘Ashīsh*’s already marginalized inhabitants.

As the *‘Ashīsh* fell outside of the national state structures and economic development, it also remains a scarcely explored space in the national literary imaginary. In his study titled *Al-Makān fi-l-Qiṣṣa al-Kuwaitiyya* (Space in the Kuwaiti Story) (2003), Salāḥ Sāliḥ designates five main spaces in which stories written by Kuwaiti writers take place. The most common spaces are the sea and the old Kuwaiti quarters of mud houses. Both spaces are symbolic of a historical Kuwaiti specificity and are emblematic of a nostalgia for the lost social cohesion and national values of the pre-oil era. The less prevalent spaces include the modern apartment in the urban space of the city, the space of the desert, and other spaces outside of the Kuwaiti geography such as European cities (Sāliḥ 2003). In his comprehensive analysis, and in the critical responses to Sāliḥ’s study, the *‘Ashīsh* remains outside of the commonly perceived Kuwaiti literary spatial imaginary.

Despite this omission, recent times have seen a surge in representation of the *‘Ashīsh* in Kuwaiti and *Bidun* fiction. Novels characterising and thematising the *Bidun* experience within the space of *‘Ashīsh* commonly posit this space as a site of contestation between different modes of subjective and collective belonging. The particular choice of the narrative form of the novel is important in this regard, as it emphasizes the potential dialogical nature of the form allowing a multitude of voices, discourses, and

representations of reality to compete (Bakhtin 1981; Bakhtin 1984). Secondly, novels depicting *Bidun* characters can give insight into the contested position of the *Bidun* community within wider narrative constructions of “founding fictions” and “imagined communities” (Bhabha 1990; Anderson 2006).

The analysis of these novels is best read in conjunction with the discussions on the theoretical framework provided in chapter three between a depiction of the ‘*Ashīsh*’ as, on the one hand, an ineluctable ontological space of exclusion where notions of *Bidun* identity are confined to expressions of lack and, on the other, to depictions of the relational ‘*Ashīsh*’ as a potential site where counter-narratives are exposed, liminal identities are performed and where ontological representation are disrupted and problematized.

The chapter begins with an overview of the recent rise in novels featuring *Bidun* characters and the reception of these novels by *Bidun* writers. Building on the critical reception of the novels, the chapter first offers close readings of the representations of what will be termed as the ‘ontological ‘*Ashīsh*’ in three novels: Buthayna al-‘Isa’s *Unheard Collision* (2004), Fawziyya al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day* (2011), and Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013). The analysis will focus on themes of identification, visibility and agency, which will be threaded throughout the different readings of the novels. This will be then juxtaposed with how Nasir al-Zafīri’s novels *Upturned Sky* (1995) and *Scorched Heat* (2015) provide a way out of the ontological depictions of the condition of statelessness.

The Rise of the ‘*Bidun* Character’ and the Critical Reception

When I first began research on this thesis in 2011, there were only two novels featuring *Bidun* characters, whether by *Bidun* authors or otherwise: *Upturned Sky* (1995) by the *Bidun* novelist Nasir al-Zafīri and *An Unheard Collision* (2005) by the Kuwaiti writer Buthayna al-‘Isa. Since then, novels dealing directly with *Bidun* characters have seen a significant rise in number, visibility and circulation. Since 2011 and till the date of completion of this study, an increased presence of the ‘*Bidun* character’ in novels written within the national context is highly noticeable. At least 8 novels and novellas

have been published featuring *Bidun* characters (both as central or peripheral characters) including Fawziyya al-Salim's *Staircases of Day* (2011), Saud al-San'ūsi's *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), Ismail Fahad's *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013), Nasir al-Zafīri's *Scorched Heat* (2013), Basma al-'Inizi's *A Black Shoe on the Pavement* (2013), Abdullah al-Buṣayyīṣ's *Stray Memories* (2014), Nasir al-Zafīri's *Kaliska* (2015) and Hanadi al-Shimmiri's novella *A House Made of Tin* (2015). In addition a number of short story collections included *Bidun* characters such as Abdullah al-'Utaybi's *Ik'aybar* and Muna al-Shimmiri's *The Rain Falls, the Princess Dies*. In 2013 the publishing house Dār Mas'ā republished al-Zafīri's out-of-print *Upturned Sky* (1995).

It is worth noting that a number of these novels have been widely circulated within local, Arab, and global readership. In particular al-San'ūsi's *The Bamboo Stalk*, which features a peripheral *Bidun* character, stands out as the most widely circulated novel. The novel was the recipient of the much-celebrated International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2013. Since then, it has received increased attention by local and Arab audiences.² The novel introduced Arab readers to issues of otherness, the status of migrant workers and the *Bidun* in Kuwait. The novel also enjoyed wider popular circulation when it was turned into a TV drama series broadcasted in the holy month of Ramadan (June-July) in 2016. As a TV drama, the novel's peripheral *Bidun* character was turned into a central character. At the global level, *The Bamboo Stalk* has been translated to English by Jonathan Wright and is currently the only novel in English featuring a *Bidun* character. In addition, Ismail Fahad's *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* has also been widely circulated within an Arab readership as it was long-listed for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014. Interestingly, al-Zafīri has consistently asked his publisher, Dār Mas'ā, to not nominate any of his novels to the prize because of the prize board's lack of "awareness of the form of the novel" (Majjalat al-Ṭalī'a 2016). Al-Zafīri's novel *Scorched Heat* was banned by the censors in the Ministry of Information from circulation in Kuwait.

With the exception of novels by Nasir al-Zafīri and Hanadi al-Shimmiri, most novels depicting *Bidun* characters are written by non-*Bidun* Kuwaiti novelists. One can read

² The novel is currently in its 27th edition.

this surge of interest in the *Bidun* character within national literature in a number of ways. First, it can be read as consequence of the undeniable presence and increased visibility of the *Bidun* community on the social, political and cultural levels. Secondly, and at the level of the national novel, and perhaps the Arabic novel more broadly, questions of national identity, difference and otherness have recently become dominant themes. For many national writers, the ambience and marginality of the *Bidun* space has become an attractive position from which to explore that otherness and reflect on national identity. One can also argue that representing the *Bidun* character is a form of appropriation of the marginal voice and space by writers outside of the *Bidun* community. As Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ notes in relation to the proliferation of the *Bidun* character in contemporary fiction, the creative impulse often comes at its subject matter from the marginal space (Mufarriḥ 2014).

This surge in interest in the '*Bidun* character' has, unsurprisingly, caught the attention of *Bidun* writers themselves, who have offered their critical insight into the representations of the *Bidun* in these novels. Both Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ and Nasir al-Zafīri have surveyed the representations of *Bidun* characters in novels written by Kuwaiti writers, and both have expressed certain anxieties related to the problematic depictions of *Bidun* characters and the community at large. What is mostly emphasized in their critique is the creation and reiteration of a *Bidun* archetype who stands as the national's 'other' and whose individuality is constantly threatened by collective, reductionist representations. The following section will overview al-Zafīri and Mufarriḥ's critical insights into the representations of the *Bidun*.

In his paper titled "The Representations of the *Bidun* in the Kuwaiti Novel³" Nasir al-Zafīri's focuses on three novels: *An Unheard Collision* by Buthayna al-'Isa, *The Bamboo Stalk* by Saud alSan'ūsi and *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* by Ismail Fahad. In the three novels, al-Zafīri identifies a reoccurring trope of the *Bidun* male character pursuing a Kuwaiti female character. In this pursuit of the

³ This paper was presented by Nasir al-Zafīri as part of the weekly cultural activities of the Tuesday Gathering on the 11th of February 2014. The hand written excerpt of the lecture was made available to me through the event's organizer Dikhīl Khalīfa.

Kuwaiti national female, the *Bidun* male ultimately strives to attain a form of self-realization, material gain and upward social mobility through citizenship. This representation, al-Zafiri argues, cements an archetype of the *Bidun* as the opportunist ‘other’. At the same time it also fails to articulate the *Bidun* character’s sentiments and life story outside of that pursuit of citizenship.

The first of these novels is Buthayna al-‘Isa’s *A Collision Never Heard* (1995). Set in Sweden, the novel is narrated by Farah, the Kuwaiti student who falls in love with Dhāri, the Swedish-*Bidun* interpreter. Al-Zafiri sees that “the novel didn’t succeed... in presenting a clear articulation of Dhāri’s condition and sentiments.” (al-Zafiri 2014). Farah, the Kuwaiti student, is presented as the uncontested national self, a true proprietor of the land while Dhāri’s romantic pursuit of the national female is to attain a sense of completion and self-realisation through her.

The second novel, Saud al-San‘ūsi’s *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), features a peripheral male *Bidun* character Ghassan. Similarly, as al-Zafiri argues, Ghassan is only seen in relation to his pursuit of a national female, Hind. After failing in his pursuit, Ghassan is dropped from the narrative altogether and never makes an appearance again. Al-Zafiri reads this depiction of Ghassan as affirming the archetypical depiction of the *Bidun* male as an ‘other’ who is invisible outside of the pursuit of the national female.

In the third novel analysed by al-Zafiri, Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013), the *Bidun* narrator protagonist Mansi ibn Abīh gives an account of his life experiences as a *Bidun* through key shifts in Kuwaiti national history. What is of interest to al-Zafiri’s is the way in which Mansi is depicted as an opportunist in his marriage of his Kuwaiti wife ‘Uhūd. Mansi’s mother persuades him to marry into a Kuwaiti family to increase his chances for gaining citizenship. Again, the male *Bidun* ‘other’ is only able to achieve a sense of self-realization through the national female.

In Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ’s paper titled “the Novels of Marginalisation” (*rewāyat al-tahmīsh*), she offers a brief chronological survey of the different representations of

Bidun characters. Starting with Nasir al-Zafīri's *Upturned Sky* (1995), she argues that while establishing a beginning for the *Bidun* in the history of Kuwaiti literature, the novel "doesn't call things by their correct names." The novel, as will be discussed later in the chapter, is implicit in dealing with the *Bidun* issue as the word 'Bidun' itself throughout the novel remains unmentioned. As to Buthayna al-'Isa's *An Unheard Collision* (2004), the novel "wasn't able to offer any depth into the *Bidun* character Dhāri," presenting only a superficial characterisation. On the other hand, Saud al-San'ūsi's *The Bamboo Stalk* "comes closest to the understanding of the *Bidun*'s position in society" where Ghassan, the *Bidun* character, is depicted not as an additional outsider but as constitutive of the national cultural milieu. As to Ismail Fahad's *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, the novel is commended for two main reasons. Firstly, for how it avoids the suppression of the singular voice of *Bidun* characters at the expense of the collective. Secondly, it is commended because of how *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, in comparison with other "novels of marginalisation," presents the most nuanced representation of the environment of the marginal space. Finally, in *Scorched Heat* (2015) by al-Zafīri, Mufarriḥ points to how the author's own lived experience as a *Bidun* allowed for a proximate representation of the *Bidun*.

Putting aside Mufarriḥ's impressionistic insight, one can identify her main apprehensions in the depictions of *Bidun* characters as follows: that the depiction of *Bidun* characters often takes the form of reductive archetypes, that the marginal space is represented without an attention to nuance, and that the issue of the *Bidun* is often dealt with implicitly rather than explicitly. It is worth mentioning that both al-Zafīri and Mufarriḥ totally dismiss Fawziyya al-Salim's *Staircases of Day* (2011) because of its unfavourable portrayal of the *Bidun* community.

Representations of the 'Ashīsh between the Ontological and the Relational

The analysis of the depictions of the 'Ashīsh in this chapter will follow and reorganize the critical impulses of both al-Zafīri and Mufarriḥ. The depictions of *Bidun* characters and the 'Ashīsh, as a unique space of exclusion, relate to a wider discussion of the

politics of statelessness as expressed in chapter three of the thesis. Put simply, the difference between ontological and relational depictions is *between those characters who are ultimately defined and confined by their statelessness as an originary ineluctable ontological condition and those whose statelessness is historical, contingent, and bounded by context.*

On one side of the analysis is Buthayna al-‘Isa’s *Unheard Collision*, Fawziyya al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day*, and Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*. These three novels, all incidentally written by Kuwaiti novelists, represent the ‘*Ashīsh*, as I will argue, in ontological terms. The ‘*Ashīsh* becomes the ultimate embodiment of the ontological space of exclusion. In the ontological representations of the ‘*Ashīsh*, the *Bidun*’s unique space of exclusion is often constituted in terms of difference to the national space. The agency of *Bidun* characters is often restricted to the instrumental role of self-reflection as the national’s ‘other.’ The ‘*Ashīsh* is largely defined in terms of lack: of citizenship rights, and as a corollary of agency, of visibility, and of an intrinsic expression of identity. Any sense of identity beyond the quest for citizenship rights is limited. This is demonstrated in the *Bidun* character’s often-unchallenged self-identification with extrinsic imposed labels while internalizing stereotypical depictions of the community. At the same time, the ontological ‘*Ashīsh* often positions the *Bidun* synchronically, described voyeuristically from afar in a specific historical moment. As a corollary, the ‘*Ashīsh* is often devoid a historicized positionality. When the particular *Bidun* experience is narrated diachronically, as in the *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, the *Bidun*’s particular historical narrative is often subsumed and overpowered by a national narrative.

Novels such as Buthayna al-‘Isa’s *Unheard Collision* and Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, which can be categorized as sympathetic, or even committed, towards the *Bidun* community’s plight tend to offer a positive image of *Bidun* characters. Fawziyya al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day*, on the other hand, is more hostile in its representation of the community. Yet, both approaches risk reducing *Bidun* characters to repetitive archetypes. On one hand, the *Bidun* character is portrayed as the archetypical victim who is often also an ever-loyal and patient ‘citizen’ barred from his or her rights. On the other hand, is the archetype of the

undeserving, opportunist interloper. With such archetypes, the works elicit *Bidun* characters to speak in certain ways fitting an ontological depiction of the 'Ashīsh.

On the other side of the analysis are *Upturned Sky* and *Scorched Heat* written by the *Bidun* novelist Nasir al-Zafīri. The two novels, as will be discussed, present the 'Ashīsh in more relational terms. The relational 'Ashīsh is a permeable space of presence, agency and visibility. A sense of exclusion is realized from a subjective experience and an interaction within the space rather than preconditioned imperative. The 'Ashīsh is not necessarily constituted in opposition to the national space, but as a space laden with childhood memories, memories of certain particular events and a personal and collective memory that is not restricted to expressions of lack and narratives of victimization. The agency of *Bidun* characters is most evident in their ability to negotiate their positionality in claiming, rejecting or going beyond the 'Ashīsh. The *Bidun* characters in these novels are not necessarily confined by the 'Ashīsh. As well as actively interacting and negotiating a presence within the national space, the novels are concerned with pre-national spaces such as the desert as an alternative space of beginnings and post-national exilic and diasporic spaces.

Al-Zafīri's novels are characterized by a 'dis-identification' with imposed labels, namely 'the *Bidun*', and stereotypical communal depictions. Rather, metaphor becomes a mode of resistance. Examples from al-Zafīri's novels include the metaphor of "abnā' al-thahīra (sons of noon), "those born in an instance of dull fate," "Scorched Heat," "those exiled out of time, marginalized on land," among others. Notions of the *Bidun* character's identity are not foundationally constituted by the character's statelessness. Rather, as Stuart Hall put it:

"identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming, rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we came from", so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves." (Hall, 1996:4)

Margaret Somers conception of "narrative identity" is also helpful in understanding how a process of becoming unravels within the spatial and temporal relations of a

fictionalised narrative. Narrative identities are “processual and relational” and “are constructed in the context of internal and external relations of *time* and *place* and *power* that are constantly in flux” (Somers 1994:621). This relational approach shifts any “interpretation of action from an a priori categorization to a focus on contingent narratives of meaning” (629). The narrative construction of identities, which is a main feature of relationality, operates against the dominant modes of representations.

In his article titled “The Comparative and the Relational,” David Theo Goldberg argues for a relational approach to better deal with questions of racial conceptions, identities and practices within the field of comparative literature. While a comparative approach reveals through analogy, a relational account “signals how state formations or histories, logics of oppression and exploitation are linked” and “how effects are brought about as a result of historical political or economic, legal or cultural links, the one acting upon another” (Goldberg 2011:361). A relational account “uncovers constitutive and transforming connections, circuits of mutual making that are never (totally) unidirectional” (366). Goldberg’s points offer important insights into how a relational approach to the stateless condition creates a more nuanced and complex understanding of the notion of *Bidun* identity.

At the same time, the relational *‘Ashīsh* is context bounded and understood historically. The interplay between history, fiction and narrative highlights the contingency and interconnectedness of both the national narrative and the *‘Ashīsh*’s particular narrative. An overpowering national narrative does not necessarily subsume the historical particularity of the *Bidun* community’s experiences. A marker of that historicized positionality, as will be discussed, is the figure of the father developed in Nasir al-Zafīri’s novels.

The particular choice of novels selected is guided by the relevant themes of the chapter: the manifestations of agency, identification and visibility in the spatial and temporal representations of the *‘Ashīsh*. As mentioned in the introduction, novels published after

the initial draft submission date of Sept 2015, including *Kaliska* (2015) by Nasir al-Zafiri could not be incorporated in the analysis.

Buthayna al-Isa's *An Unheard Collision*: the *Bidun* as balconies of self-reflection

Published in 2004, *An Unheard Collision* is the first novel by Buthayna al-'Isa (b.1987). the novel was originally conceived as a short story published in the online cultural forum *Jasad al-Thaqāfa* (<http://jsad.net/>) in 2002. The general plot of the novel doesn't differ much from the original short story. The main difference between the two is in the way Dhāri, the main character, is depicted as a *Bidun*. While the short story does not explicitly mention Dhāri's *Bidun* status, the novel directly elucidates the condition for its readers. This difference is perhaps due to the nature of the readership between the online forum *Jasad al-Thaqāfa* and the novel published by Dār al-Madā in Damascus. The readership of the online cultural forum *Jasad al-Thaqāfa* is more familiar with the background and history of the *Bidun* issue as it was one of the main platforms from which *Bidun* writers gained literary exposure online (Khalīfa 2013). *Jasad al-Thaqāfa*'s readership are able to make sense of Dhāri's Bedouin accent, his Swedish citizenship and his *Bidun* upbringing without explicit explanation. The novel's wider Arab readership and circulation, however, necessitated a more descriptive approach of the *Bidun*'s situation for the uninitiated reader.

The short story was published under the title *Wa Khānat al-Awṭān Fīh* (And the Homelands have Betrayed Him) which is a direct quote taken from a poem by the *Bidun* poet Fahad Dūhan. Excerpts from Fahad Dūhan are also embedded within the text itself. This contextual note can give some insight into al-'Isa's links to and solidarity with the *Bidun* literary community. The sympathetic impulse entailed in the story demonstrates how the author aligns herself with the plight of the community by projecting a positive image of the *Bidun*. Yet, in that attempt to positively image the *Bidun*, the novel, as will be argued, restricts the *Bidun*'s agency to a tool for self-reflection on the national.

An Unheard Collision is narrated by Farah, an 18-year-old Kuwaiti student, who travels to Sweden to represent her country in an international biology competition. There, she encounters Dhāri who is sent by the Kuwaiti embassy as an interpreter. Dhāri, a

Swedish citizen with a Kuwaiti Bedouin accent, remains ambiguous to Farah throughout the first part of the novel. Later, she comes to realise that because of his *Bidun* status, Dhāri left Kuwait for Sweden as a teenager to seek citizenship. The narrative throughout primarily revolves around Farah and Dhāri's relationship and their insightful discussions about love, homeland and belonging. After seven days in Sweden, Farah returns to Kuwait with new feelings towards Dhāri and a new revised national consciousness.

The *Bidun* status of Dhāri is central to the narrative. The novel is written in two main parts divided by the moment of Farah's realisation of Dhāri's *Bidun* status. Throughout the first part of the novel, Dhāri's *Bidun* status is only hinted at yet left explicitly unmentioned. When Farah first encounters Dhāri, she is taken aback because of his greeting in Kuwaiti dialect '*guwwa*' (al-'Isa 2004:17). She reflects:

I look at you, with your gel-combed hair, as if it were handled with glue, with silver chains hanging from your neck, and a small tattoo of a sickle on your wrist. Everything in you does not resemble the language you are using. Yet, everything in you awakens in me a country I know. (18)

This first encounter instigates Farah to ask: "Are you Kuwaiti?" (19) Dhāri replies with a smile that "eludes any identity" (19) simply saying "I am Dhāri." (19). He continues to resist any explicit mention of his previous *Bidun* status. When asked why he left Kuwait for Sweden, he replies, "let us just say that Sweden is better than Kuwait" (25). After further interrogations by Farah, the first part of the novel ends with Dhāri's confession that he left Kuwait because it had refused to give him citizenship.

During the first part of the novel, Dhāri's elusiveness puts him in a position beyond national definition giving him an epistemic edge over Farah's 'naïve' national tendencies. He asks her "why should I tire myself in being on one land and not another and call it –with all the world's naivety- a homeland." He goes on, "I ... want nothing. (44). You are the one in need." Yet, in the second part, Dhāri's multidimensional awareness is suddenly halted with Farah's realization of his previous *Bidun* status.

The second part starts off with a climactic scene where Farah asks Dhāri "are you *Bidun*?" adding "I ask you while tears fill my eyes, my limbs shake. I fall tired while

you drag your sad steps towards the car with your head down, o noble one, for the first time” (73).

After Farah’s realisation, she contemplates on the word *Bidun*:

That is what they name you there. It means that you live without any formal papers confirming your existence... it means that you see the world, while it does not see you. It means that you are always in need of a hell called ‘others’ to have a life, job, education... it means that you are supposed to conceal your existence because you are an illegal resident in a place you call home. It means that you are deprived of marriage and divorce because the government records do not bless your statelessness. (73)

After enjoying a ‘worldly’ self-sufficiency and an upper hand earlier, Dhāri is left powerless and wanting sympathy as a wronged *Bidun*. It is a scene where Dhāri is described from afar and reduced to an archetypical victim of his condition most explicitly.

This archetypical depiction is then affirmed in Dhāri’s own recollections of his particular experiences of living as a *Bidun* in Kuwait. He tells Farah: “add to my CV, a previous felon in the juvenile detention center, a tissue-seller in traffic lights around Damascus street under the ‘*Udailiyya* bridge, and finally ... a fugitive from the homeland of no-future” (81). In this description, Dhāri identifies with stereotypical images of the *Bidun* community as hawkers and hucksters, which reoccur in many of the works depicting *Bidun* characters as will be discussed in the other novels. Dhāri goes on:

Imagine living without a future, without guarantee. Imagine depending on others all your life, or become a trader in the black market chased by the authorities...Imagine loving someone who doesn't love you. I was that person and Kuwait was my love (81)

From the above description, Dhāri’s life experiences are restricted to stereotypical images of the national imaginary. The novel doesn’t give any insight into Dhāri’s life experiences outside of it nor does it contextualize his experiences within a wider historical narrative.

The novel attempts to present a positive image of the *Bidun* as loyal deserving Kuwaiti citizens who are victims of an injustice. One of the ways in which this is achieved is through incorporating Dhāri in a particular national collective memory which Farah projects on him. On their last day together in Sweden, Dhāri and Farah spend the night reminiscing about their ‘common’ childhood memories ranging from children's cartoons to national songs. Farah writes “that night ... we only sang. The thread of songs started with ‘*Awaḍ Dūkhi* and ended with Britney Spears, including those national songs that you memorise well yet refuse to believe in” (122). While many of this national collective memory may perhaps be shared between the two, some memories seem to be forced upon Dhāri to include him in a unifying Kuwaiti national identity. Dhāri’s belonging to Kuwait and consequently his right to citizenship is subjugated to Farah's collective idea of what it is to be Kuwaiti. This projection compels one to ask about the unshared experience unique to Dhāri and those marginalized beyond the stereotypical images. In that attempt to include Dhāri in a unifying national discourse, the novel excludes the particular unshared experiences of the *Bidun* from the national imaginary.

Dhāri’s agency is reduced to an instrument for the national character to self-reflect through. The allegorical implications in the novel are not implicit. Farah and Dhāri’s tumultuous relationship suggests a mirroring of the wider relationship between Kuwait and the *Bidun* community. The title represents this encounter between the two as “an unheard collision”. The moments of encounter between the two attempt to voice this collision between Farah and Dhāri, Kuwait and the *Bidun*. In one scene, Dhāri puts it explicitly telling Farah: “for some time I had a feeling that Kuwait will visit me one day” (78). He continues: “you are Kuwait in all its sumptuous details in the shape of a female” (78).

Similarly at the opposite end, Dhāri is a “balcony” from which Farah can view Kuwait (41). He offers her a fresh outsider’s perspective and a way to reflect on her previously unquestioned sense of nationalism. Through Dhāri, Farah’s conception of national belonging is interrogated. Farah asks him: “I want to see Kuwait through your eyes” (77). Throughout, Dhāri provokes and unsettles her sense of unquestioned nationalism. Dhāri later explains his provocative stance towards Farah as a form of revenge from a country that had previously rejected him. The allegorical impulse is also evident in the

last scene before Farah's departure. Amid the noise of a party, Dhāri confesses his love to Farah:

I love you.

I can't hear you? I love you

What did you say?

Damn you, I love you.

Raise your voice, the music is very loud! (107)

The one-sided love story can be read in terms of the *Bidun*'s relationship with a country that pretends not to hear their expression of love and loyalty. What is significant in the allegorical framing of Dhāri is how he seems to serve a purpose for the narrator, namely, as "a balcony" for the national embodied in Farah to self-reflect. Dhāri's agency as a *Bidun* is directly linked to that task of revising Farah's national consciousness.

In the attempt to draw a positive image of the *Bidun*, Dhāri is depicted in an essentialised archetypal manner elicited to speak in a certain way that fits an ontological condition. Dhāri's own experiences of exclusion are those of lack of citizenship. At the same time, Dhāri serves an instrumental purpose for the national character to self-reflect and is subjected to Farah's conceptions of national belonging. The 'Ashīsh in *An Unheard Collision* seems to represent a space restricted to utterances of victimization and pain.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of positive imaging comes a demonizing and hostile depiction of the *Bidun*. At both ends, similar dynamics are at play where *Bidun* characters are reduced to certain archetypes; the patient loyal citizen-to-be or the opportunist impostor. The latter's depiction is found in Fawziyya al-Salim's novel *Staircases of Day* (2011) which will be analysed in the following section.

Fawziyya al-Salim's *Staircases of Day* (2011): "Us/Them"

Unlike al-'Isa's *An Unheard Collision* which arose out of a position of solidarity with the *Bidun* and an interaction with *Bidun* writers, al-Salim's *Staircases of Day* is perceived to represent the *Bidun* in an uninformed and ill-disposed manner. In both

Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ and Nasir al-Ẓafīrī’s critical reception of novels representing the *Bidun*, *Staircases of Day* has been totally dismissed. The reasons behind this total neglect perhaps lie in the unfavourable way the *Bidun* community was depicted in whole. In an online review, Mona Kareem writes:

Setting aside its mediocre language, the novel is a good example of how the aristocracy (*al-ṭabaqa al-aristuqraṭiyya*) does not understand a thing about the social structure except that which concerns them...

The writer expresses a number of racist myths created by her social class that depict the *Bidun* as mercenaries, opportunists and even prostitutes...

The writer is surely unaware of the forms of legal exclusion practiced against the *Bidun*. Neither is she aware of the *Bidun* community’s general conservative make-up. The characters do not emerge from any real context. (Kareem 2014a)

Similarly, Buthayna al-‘Isa critiques the inimical representation of the *Bidun* in *Staircases of Day*:

I didn't like the way the writer depicted the *Bidun* in Kuwait as a locus of illegal, psychopathic and immoral dealings: as drug dealers, human traffickers, and pimps. The likes of her know well the cultural richness of this community as they constitute a large component of writers and artists in Kuwait. (al-‘Isa 2011)

Staircases of Day’s representation of the *Bidun* is totally rejected by both Kareem and al-‘Isa as it is non-representative of the community’s values and unaware of its daily material realities while reiterating prevalent hostile racial myths and stereotypes.

On the other hand, the novel’s author al-Salim believes that *Staircases of Day* aimed to reflect an accurate reality of *Bidun* life in Kuwait:

In the time of writing the novel in 2011, they [the *Bidun*] had much less rights.

Thankfully, much progress has been achieved since then such as issuance of marriage and birth certificates and civil ID cards. Now, the government gave them more rights than legal expatriates. (Layali Programme 2016)

From the outset, al-Salim frames the *Bidun* purely as legal subjects. Thus, they can be represented and characterized in a way that reflects their legal position and their lack of rights. What is at stake here between al-Salim’s attempt at accurate representation and

the hostile reception of her novel is the understanding of the politics of statelessness between the ontological and the relational. As will be discussed, the '*Ashīsh*' in the novel is represented as the ultimate embodiment of the *Bidun*'s ontological space of exclusion.

Fahda, the female *Bidun* protagonist, recounts her material and spiritual life journey from a life of poverty in the '*Ashīsh*' to a life of affluence outside of it after marrying her Kuwaiti husband Dhāri. Fahda and Dhāri first meet in a private party held by affluent Kuwaitis where Fahda and her sisters were hired as call girls. After noticing her lustfully dancing along with "prostitutes, homosexuals... and the elite of Kuwaiti society (*'ilyat al-qawm*)," Dhāri proposes to her. Much to her chagrin, Fahda's marriage is kept secret from Dhāri's family. When Dhāri passes away after a short-lived marriage, Fahda is left impregnated.

The narrator then switches to Fahda's son who becomes mainly fixated with his identity and position between his maternal *Bidun* family and his affluent Kuwaiti paternal side. Between the two, Fahda's son is able to witness and later expose the fundamental underpinnings that have conditioned the relationship between his *Bidun* maternal side and his Kuwaiti national paternal sides. The decisive factor, which creates a certain class structure that ultimately separates the two sides, is citizenship. When describing his relation to his maternal *Bidun* uncle, Fahda's son writes "the social class structure made me a master and son of a master holding first class citizenship and made out of him an outcast *Bidun* even though he is my uncle" (127). The dialectic that guides the relationship between his maternal *Bidun* side and his paternal Kuwaiti side is that of the master and slave. As he puts it "the social structure made him a slave, and I, a master" (127). With such a realization, the novel concludes as Fahda's son, who remains unnamed, threatens to disrupt the structure.

Spatially, the novel distinguishes between two clearly delineated spaces: a national space and its 'other,' a non-national space. This is clearly articulated in the distinction between what Fahda calls 'their streets' and 'our streets.' Whereas 'their streets,' the national space, is defined by presence; a space where characters can be seen in action, 'our streets' (non-national) is defined by absence, mystery and strangeness.

Fahda, as a member of the *Bidun* community, does not directly associate with a space that is distinctly *Bidun*. Rather “our streets” is a wider marginal space, an amalgamation of nationalities and cultures other than Kuwaiti. She writes:

In our streets, the smells and tastes effused from the frying pans in the alleyways and street corners mix... Indian, Chinese, Bengali, Korean, Pakistani, Filipino, Iranian, Thai, Somali, Abyssinian, Egyptian, and Kurdish traditions and odours rise upwards and define our identity (23).

Similarly, in another passage, Fahda further elucidates this *hajīn* (hybrid) identity:

Us too, we have our odours and tastes. Our tastes are unified in one space- gathered and poured in one mould. It offers us a distinct identity despite our different races, religions, and doctrines. Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis), Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Baha’is and Sikhs, all melt and mix in our streets’ identity. A new unique language is created and is understood by everyone...a unique hybrid identity is born out of our streets which produces all that is strange, peculiar and distinct (23-24).

This non-national marginal space is imagined as a melting pot of people and cultures unified into one identity, namely, the national’s other. Implicit in this description of a mixed and hybrid identity is the national’s stable and reliable sense of identity. At the same time, the non-national’s strangeness and peculiarity is implicitly juxtaposed with the ordinariness of the national space.

While Fahda mentions this space’s ability to create an identity and a language, the description does not offer any depth to that identity. Rather, it is purely constituted by opposition and difference to the national space. This is best illustrated in the way Fahda juxtaposes the lack of ‘our streets’ (non-national space) with the plenitude and sufficiency of ‘their streets’ (national space). In describing ‘their streets’, she writes:

Their streets and neighbourhoods are filled with an aura of soft stillness and quietness. Maids pass the day picking up children from the supermarkets and public gardens returning them home. Nothing we have corresponds to what they have. Every element of grandeur and beauty is unknown to us. All these sport, health, educational, cultural and entertainment centres are unheard of here. (35-36)

She goes on:

“Every stone in the pavement is left in its place, every flower is not yet picked, every manhole cover has not yet melted, every street lamp is intact, every pigeon, *bulbul* or bird hasn’t been shot at yet, every car passes by without a scream from its horn”. (36)

The national space is identifiable by a sense of order, stability, normalcy and by certain institutional markers (sports, health and educational centres) while the non-national is defined by a lack of the above. This depiction begs the following question: what kind of language or identity can be constituted in a space of lack other than an identity based on lack?

The materiality of such lack is most evident in the absence of Kuwaiti citizenship. Kuwaiti citizenship is the defining element constituting difference between the two spaces. As Fahda puts it:

Those things that distinguish between them and us are many. Yet, what is most heavy and difficult on the soul is that they are citizens who belong to it whereas we do not have the rights to become citizens, nor belong to it, or enjoy it. (36)

Belonging and experiencing the national space is equated with possessing citizenship rights. It seems that outside of an official belonging, the possibilities of constituting an identity, other than one defined by a lack of citizenship, is minimal.

Citizenship becomes the defining aspect of the characters’ agency. This is evident in the way Fahda’s agency as a subject is enabled only through a national subject, namely, her relationship with her Kuwaiti friend Nora and her Kuwaiti husband Dhāri. Through Nora, Fahda is offered an opportunity to discover the national space: “my relationship with Nora means a knowledge of the streets. When I befriended her I also befriended her streets” (29). Unlike her previous precarious access as a call girl, with Nora they “drive through them with all ease” (29).

Similarly, Fahda’s understanding of her own self is only made possible through her Kuwaiti husband Dhāri. He offers her a passport out of her space and an opportunity to

travel and discover the world “from New York to Miami, from Hawai to Tokyo, from Hong Kong to Bangkok, from India to Roma and Berlin and Vienna and Copenhagen and Stockholm” (52). More importantly, he offers her a chance to discover herself. In different instances throughout the novel, Fahda writes:

With him the seven gates of life opened with all its knowledge, its sweet pleasures, and its magical flow;” (51) “with him I knew myself... I discovered my essence, my inner soul, my habits, my personality, my desires, and my eternal hunger;” (71) “all knowledge was brought by him. Life commenced with him (72).

Fahda emerges as a subject only after marrying a Kuwaiti and acquiring citizenship through him. In Fahda’s relationship with Nora and Dhāri, she emerges out of absence and is made visible through a national enabler. In the absence of a national enabler, her agency is incomplete and her access to the national space is limited.

The absence associated with the non-national space is best illustrated in the narrator’s description of an underground ‘society of noon’ that comes into presence during the time of *thahīra* (noon) within the national space. During the hot time of *thahira*, when ‘everyone’ in the suburbs is asleep under air-conditioned roofs, a ‘society of noon’ bursts into action. This society includes Baṭṭaḥ, Fahda’s *Bidun* uncle, Abu-l-Kalām the Bengali, Abu Kiroz the Kurd, Abu Daghfās the Afghan and Ayman the Egyptian *Shāṭir* (one who is cunning) who are part of an underground industry of illegal manufacturing of recycled waste.

The narrator carefully describes the movement of the Bengali street cleaner, abu-l-Kalām as he manoeuvres in the suburban streets picking up wastes and garbage bags from the front doors Kuwaiti homes:

When his shadow appears in the beginning of the street, the sun’s rays would fall vertically on the surface of the earth. The fumes would reach its peak. The blaze would sting the dry slit asphalt....all movement would be still. People would disappear inside their air-conditioned walls of their villas where the refreshingly cold air seeping from the openings of the air conditioners makes people forget the severity of the flames awaiting outside. (37)

Abu-l-Kalām's movement is then carefully described as he works his way from the suburbs to the site where the waste is recycled along with his "society of noon's" accomplices. They are most visible in that moment at noon where they engage in their illegal activities and become less visible as they move away from the national space. The narrator describes their return home: "after a long journey they arrive to their destiny in the non-place... they become outside of the coverage area, far from all the benefits of the city's civilisation... in an emptiness shaded by silence" (46).

Their visibility is totally lost as they move outside of the national space and arrive in their 'other' space. It seems that whatever is outside the vision and scope of the national is an illegible 'non-place,' empty and silent. From such a description, the agency of the 'society of noon' is restricted to the national space and is unintelligible beyond it.

Another aspect relating to the depiction of the *Bidun* community's lack of agency is the question of Fahda's unchallenged identification with the label *Bidun* and its legal connotations. Within that wider marginal non-national 'noon' society, Fahda turns to her immediate belonging to a distinct *Bidun* community. As she explicitly puts it:

We are not expatriates, nor are we residents. We did not arrive with contracts or official agreements. We are "*Bidun*" (Withouts); without protection, shelter or defense. We are an abandoned nakedness of withoutness (36).

In this description, Fahda self-identifies with the term *Bidun* as a legal identity. As opposed to other legal statuses in the non-national space (expatriates and residents), she is from those who have arrived outside of legal means. While the description seemingly poses an ambiguous position (neither residents nor expatriates), it is nevertheless clear about their extrinsic 'illegal' positioning. Fahda internalises the label without any form of resistance or an attempt to claim, interrogate or problematize it. In the novel, the *Bidun*'s agency and capacity to resist, even at the level of internalising the label, is beyond them.

At the same time, Fahda self-identifies with unchallenged and uncontextualised stereotypes and certain cultural and social 'markers' limited to what the national gaze permits. Firstly, Fahda's family profile is described in a strikingly archetypical

manner. Fahda's father, a soldier in the army, was dismissed and denied his previously enjoyed government housing because of his *Bidun* status. Uncle 'Awwad helps keep Fahda and her sisters safe while they work as call girls. Uncle Baṭṭaḥ is a taxi driver who deals in underground 'recycling' activities as well as pimping. Uncle Mirdās similarly is involved in shady business activities while uncle Saqer is in prison because of his engagement in the illegal trading of alcohol and drugs. One can describe this depiction of a *Bidun* family not only as stereotypical but of holding a specific hostility towards the community mirroring a demonising discourse often prevalent in local media.

Secondly, Fahda, is able to list all the typical 'jobs' that are available for *Bidun* women like her other than her current work as a call girl. These jobs include:

“Embroidery, tailoring, selling products to cheap common workshops or through street vending at the doors of co-op markets, assembling spray perfumes to sell by the traffic lights, making *ruqāq* bread for weddings, restoring the muscles of the uterus, holding *Zar* nights to exorcise people from *Jinns* and *Ifrīts*, practicing witchcraft (*sha 'wadha*), 'reading' coffee cups (Tasseography), putting together magic to entangle lovers, and practising traditional medicine.” (25-26)

This descriptive urge to list every possible job for *Bidun* women illustrates how the *Bidun* community's agency is restricted to their own unofficial space.

Thirdly, is the emphasis on the reoccurring stereotypical image of adolescent *Bidun* boys selling spray perfumes by the traffic lights in the suburbs of Kuwait. This image has been previously encountered in *An Unheard Collision* and is perhaps the most stereotypical and accessible image for the national gaze. A chapter under the title of *Rushūsh* (spray perfumes) is dedicated to describing the process of assembling and selling these spray perfumes. Fahda's mother concocts the bottles while her brother Baṭṭaḥ steals some bottles to get drunk. Adolescent *Bidun* boys then sell the remaining bottles at the traffic lights. The internalisation of the label and the affirmation of stereotypical images are markers of the *Bidun* utter lack of agency in *Staircases of Day*.

In *Staircases of Day*, the ‘*Ashīsh* becomes the materialised space of ontological exclusion. Being *Bidun* is not depicted as a condition brought about or understood by the unfolding of events in the novel within a particular space. *Rather, it is an a priori condition that delineates Fahda and the Bidun community’s agency in that space.* The *Bidun* as stateless people become entirely visible and easily identifiable by reductive stereotypical depictions. At the same time, the ‘*Ashīsh* is depicted synchronically from afar in a specific historical moment. The novel leaves one questioning whether it is possible for the *Bidun* to contest official notions of belonging or identify with an intrinsic subjective experience of space.

While the analysis of the *An Unheard Collision* and *Staircases of Day* emphasised the spatial dimensions of the ontological ‘*Ashīsh*, the third novel in the analysis, Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, highlights the temporal aspect. Namely, it looks into the diachronic representations of the ‘*Ashīsh* and its relation to an overpowering national historical narrative.

Ismail Fahad’s *In Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013): The *Bidun* in national memory.

Of the five novels analysed in this chapter, none have received more critical acclaim than Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013). This is primarily due to Ismail Fahad’s (b.1940) long established career as a writer in the Arab and national literary scenes. Since 1970, and preceding the publication of *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, Ismail Fahad has published more than 24 novels. *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*’s particular renown was partly owed to the novel being long listed for the Arabic Booker Prize in 2014.

Within the local scene, Ismail Fahad has consistently shown an affinity to *Bidun* writers. As mentioned in chapter two, he had been one of the main sponsors of ‘the Tuesday Gathering’ since its establishment in 1995, which for a period of time held its meeting in his private office. This affinity is also noticeable in the many paratextual links with other works concerning the *Bidun*. In an interview, Buthayna al-‘Isa explicitly mentions that it was Ismail Fahad’s literary connections that made the

publication of *An Unheard Collision* possible (Maktabat Iqla‘ 2012). Similarly, Ismail Fahad’s connections assisted the publication of Mona Kareem’s first poetry collection *Absence with Severed Fingers* (2004) in Cairo (Kareem 2014b). Along with Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ and Dikhīl Khalīfa, Ismail Fahad is also one of the dedicatees of Nasir al-Ẓafīrī’s novel *Scorched Heat*. In addition, *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* is introduced by Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ. These affiliative links give insight into Ismail Fahad’s involvement and solidarity with *Bidun* writers. In an interview, Ismail Fahad mentions that the main impulse behind writing the novel was that of “duties of citizenship” (*wājib al-muwāṭana*); to tell the nation of historical injustices practiced against the *Bidun* (Hussain 2014).

Ismail Fahad’s position and affinity with the *Bidun* community was reflected in the positive reception of the novel. Even though the novel was published many years after al-Ẓafīrī’s *Upturned Sky* (1995), al-‘Isa’s *An Unheard Collision* (2004) and al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day* (2011), the literary critic, Su‘ād al-‘Inizi, writes that the novel “deserves to be the first foundational novel; a god-text for any future work on the subject” (al-‘Inizi 2013). While in her introduction Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ writes:

In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend attempts to delve into the psychological core of this group of people through a single being which is not viewed as an archetype, but a unique case. Perhaps this highlights that every single individual in the overall group is a unique case in a humane context and not simply a number in the collective context. (Fahad 2013:7)

Mufarriḥ hints at a particular sensitivity towards a certain stereotypical portrayal of *Bidun* characters. *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*’s characterization of the ‘the single being’ protagonist Mansi ibn Abīh (literally the forgotten one, son of his father) is seen as a departure from collective reductionism to an emphasis on the character’s individuality and singular experiences outside of any collective, communal and spatial affiliations to the ‘*Ashīsh*, in its direct physical sense.

The favorable reception notwithstanding, Mansi’s individuality, as will be argued, is constantly jeopardized by a passive self-identification with an overpowering collective condition of being *Bidun*. He is not necessarily depicted as Mansi *who happens to be*

Bidun. Rather, he is the *Bidun* who happens to carry the name Mansi. Being *Bidun*, in the legal or administrative sense, seems to be his main identifier. More importantly, in his recollection of his 'singular' life story, an overpowering national narrative subsumes the particular historical experience of the *Bidun*.

In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend is written in the form of a long personal letter written by the *Bidun* narrator Mansi ibn Abīh. It is directed to his daughter Zaynab, who perhaps stands as a signifier for a national memory that has dropped Mansi's life story and the *Bidun*'s particular historical experience altogether. In this letter, Mansi attempts to explain to Zaynab, the historical reasons behind his enforced absence through highlighting his life experiences as a *Bidun*.

In the beginning of the novel Mansi expresses a sense of uneasiness towards his ambiguous identity, "in our context, a baby is born...as he grows and becomes conscious of what is happening, he confronts his parents, why me?" (37). Yet as the novel progresses, this ambiguity recedes when Mansi's *Bidun* status becomes clearer to him. This is illustrated in the generalised statements he makes relating to the condition of being *Bidun*. In one instance, he writes: "there is a specific type of elderliness that is unique to the *Bidun* that others do not share" (122). Along the same lines, he writes: "the *Bidun* generally arrive at the age of puberty early" (109). This is also shown in the parallels Mansi makes between the *Bidun* and women within a patriarchal society. He writes: "it is not just the *Bidun* who are victims of injustice and denial of existence, women too are *Biduns* of a different kind" (74). These generalized depictions keep Mansi shackled to the collective depictions of the *Bidun*.

Unlike Fahda in *Staircases of Day*, Mansi does not reside within the specific geographical space of the 'Ashīsh with other *Bidun* members. Rather, Mansi is placed within a wider marginal space. Along with his mother, Mansi resides in an attached room in al-Nugra, a residential area well known for its Arab expatriate community, especially the Palestinian community. Throughout the novel, his relations and interactions are mostly with Kuwaiti nationals or other expatriates. Mansi is severed from any *Bidun* communal links. Along with his mother, they are the only *Bidun* characters present in the novel.

Mansi's life experiences as a *Bidun* are demonstrated primarily through his engagement with state institutions within a national space. His first awareness as a *Bidun* started in primary school where he discovers that he is administratively neither a national nor an expatriate. Later on, after being denied higher education, he works as a janitor in a theatre-related civil society organisation. When he travels with the theatre troupe, he is given a temporary passport that gets confiscated at the airport's security checkpoint. Marrying his Kuwaiti wife, Mansi is not able to certify his marriage officially. When he divorces his wife, he is confronted with legal administrative violence. Ultimately, he is denied custody of his daughter Zaynab, and is kept distant from her. During the Iraqi invasion, where Kuwaiti institutions had fell and were substituted by the Iraqi forces, Mansi becomes confronted with a new set of institutional proscriptions. Because of the now 'privileged' status of being *Bidun*, he is forced by the Iraqi forces to join *al-jaysh al-sha'bi* (the popular army), an *ad-hoc* temporary army assembled by the Iraqi forces from local *Bidun* and Arab residents. Mansi then, in a patriotic scene, escapes the popular army and joins the Kuwaiti resistance forces. Finally, after the liberation of Kuwait, the post-liberation martial courts summon him because of his alleged voluntary participation with the Iraqi forces in the popular army.

What is significant in the episodes above is how official dealings with the national decide Mansi's life experiences. Mansi as a character is not necessarily central to such events. Rather, it is his status as a *Bidun* that is emphasized. If one would substitute the character's name with the word *Bidun*, the novel perhaps would not be read differently. It would probably be read as different episodes in the life of a *Bidun* character in Kuwait during those different markers of national history narrativised to highlight the psychological weight of such episodes on the character. In other words, *Mansi is treated as a lens from which one can understand the development of the Bidun issue in Kuwait.*

As Mansi is framed within a wider national space, similarly he is also framed within a national historical timeline. Unlike *Staircases of Day* or *An Unheard Collision's* synchronic depiction of the *Bidun*, the novel engages deeply with questions of historicisation of the *Bidun* issue. The development of the *Bidun* issue is approached diachronically through the individual story of Mansi. The narration of his life story is set chronologically in accordance with critical junctures in national history. The

timeline of the novel follows three main periods: pre-Iraqi invasion, the invasion, and post-liberation.

The novel reflects how the *Bidun* have been treated differently in each period in accordance with shifts in official policy. In the pre-invasion period, the Kuwaiti scene is depicted in its Arab nationalist state of mind where Kuwaitis, Arab expatriates and *Biduns* interact naturally in the political, social and cultural spheres. Mansi is frequently visited by his neighbor Naji al-Ali, the well-known Palestinian caricaturist, who gives Mansi the label of *Haḍḍalat al-Bidun*. At the same time, Mansi along with the theatre troupe travel to Damascus to perform one of the Syrian playwright Sa‘dallah Wannūs’ plays. However, this Arab nationalist spirit is entirely ruptured with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The ‘other’ simply starts to take the form of non-Kuwaiti. ‘Uhūd, Mansi’s Kuwaiti wife, questions her husband’s loyalty to the nation and later totally rejects him. In the post-liberation period, Mansi is only remembered for his forced participation with the occupying forces while his involvement with the Kuwaiti resistance is deliberately ignored. His imprisonment as a result reflects the official governmental stance characterized by rejection and accusation of the *Bidun*.

In such a depiction, one can argue that the main subject of inquiry in the novel is not the *Bidun per se*, but the nation at large. Mansi and the *Bidun*’s particular history seem to serve as a function of national history. It is a way of narrating the national through the experiences of the *Bidun* and narrating the *Bidun*’s history solely through the experiences of the national. There seems to be limited space for a particular memory outside of the national timeline. While the history of the *Bidun* is inextricable from national history, the *Bidun*’s particular memory is presented as nothing other than the history of official exclusion.

In an attempt to incorporate the *Bidun* within the nation as deserving citizens, *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* frames the *Bidun* within an overpowering national narrative. Yet, this subsumption limits an understanding of the historical process and contingency of both the national and the overall condition of being *Bidun*. It also limits any recourse to different modes of belonging and identification beyond a lack of citizenship rights and institutional recognition. In the act of narrating his life as

a *Bidun* facing legal, political, social and psychological exclusion, Mansi is unable to escape the ontological '*Ashīsh*'.

The next section will shift the focus to the works of Nasir al-Zafīri *Upturned Sky* and *Scorched Heat*. The two novels will be juxtaposed with the themes discussed in the ontological depictions of the '*Ashīsh*'. The analysis of *Upturned Sky* will emphasise the spatial aspects while *Scorched Heat* will focus on the temporal.

Nasir al-Zafīri and the Relational '*Ashīsh*'

Nasir al-Zafīri (1960) cannot be situated easily within established national literary categorization. Having grown up stateless in the '*Ashīsh*' of al-Jahra, he then left Kuwait in the mid 1990s to Ottawa, Canada and is now a Canadian citizen. In her introduction to his novel *Upturned Sky*, Mufarriḥ describes him as "an important writer of the nineties decade in Kuwait" (al-Zafīri 1995). As opposed to introducing him as a Kuwaiti writer, a Canadian writer, or even a *Bidun* writer, he is carefully placed as part of a generation of writers who resided in Kuwait emphasizing the emotive and contributive aspects of belonging. To al-Zafīri, gaining official Canadian citizenship is not necessarily equated with a cultural sphere of belonging and engagement. As he puts it:

I was one of those who preferred to migrate to Canada in search for a wider margin of freedom of movement...yet, my belief in my right to my homeland has never waned. I still believe that I am a Kuwaiti writer. I will not become a writer belonging to any other country.⁴ (Majjalat al-Ṭalī'a 2016)

Al-Zafīri's insistence on cultural and emotive belonging is evident in his continuous activity within the local cultural and literary scenes. While in Kuwait, he worked as one of the editors of *al-Watan* Newspaper's cultural page along with Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ. In Canada, he continued to be culturally active in Kuwaiti journalism as a columnist in *al-Jarīda* newspaper as well as in online cultural platforms such as Ufouq.com magazine among others. In his travels between Canada and Kuwait, he has been an active

⁴ The works of al-Zafīri are included in the few studies on contemporary Kuwaiti prose writing, including Najma Idris *Wings and the Sun: an analysis of the Kuwaiti story and selections* (1998) and Mirsil al-Ajmi's *A Search for Wider Horizon: selections of contemporary Kuwaiti stories* (2013).

participant in events organised by The Tuesday Gathering. These participations include critical readings of his novel *Aghrār* in December 2008, the book launch of his novel *Scorched Heat* in November 2013, a lecture titled The Representations of the *Bidun* in the Kuwaiti Novel in February 2014, critical readings of the *Bidun* writer Hanadi al-Shimmiri's novella *A House Made of Tin* in February 2015, a Q & A session on his literary project in November 2015 among other events. A common theme in the above cultural engagements with the local scene is his concern with the *Bidun*.

As al-Zafiri puts it "the *Bidun* is my concern since I was born and until the day I die" (Fajr 2014). This self-proclaimed concern is the main theme of his literary oeuvre. Informed by his upbringing in the 'Ashīsh of al-Jahra, al-Zafiri's novels are mainly concerned with the depictions of the marginalised space of the 'Ashīsh and its characters. Of his experience of al-Jahra, al-Zafiri comments "I lived the people's hardships and miseries. When I realised I am passionate about writing, they were my first aim. Out of their lives, I create what is worthy of writing. As a writer, I am enamoured with their characters, their madness, and their fervor of life" (Majjalat al-Talī'a 2016).

His first novel *Snow Lover* (1992) however is not set in the 'Ashīsh but is set in the Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq and narrates the untold plight of the Kurdish people under despotic rule. Al-Zafiri's second novel, *An Upturned Sky* (1995), is the first novel ever to capture the ambience of the 'Ashīsh through the story of the tumultuous upbringing of the *Bidun* adolescent Sulayman Abdulla. While it is set in al-Jahra 'Ashīsh and depicts the poverty and precarious life of its inhabitants, the novel is not explicit in its dealing with the *Bidun* issue. The term *Bidun*, throughout, is left unmentioned. Al-Zafiri's third novel *Aghrar* (2008) is his most experimental novel as it is spatially and temporally ambiguous. Yet, the story of a brother's revenge and the reoccurring themes of unchecked crime and scandalous sexual encounters carry traces of an abandoned marginalised space as in *An Upturned Sky*. In 2013, al-Zafiri published his fourth novel, *Scorched Heat*, which to him is his "most important novel" (Fajr 2014). The novel is very explicit in its dealing with the historical origins of the creation of the *Bidun* community. The novel is set in 'Ashīsh of al-Jahra and narrates the historical development of the 'Ashīsh from the arrival of the Bedouin patriarch Shūman to the departure of his *Bidun* son Ali to Canada. *Scorched Heat* is the first part

of the ‘al-Jahra Trilogy’ concerned with the *Bidun* community. The second novel of the trilogy *Kaliska* (2015) was recently published while the third is yet to be published. In addition to his novels, al-Zafiri published two short story collections short *Feast of the Moon* (1990) and *First Blood* (1993), which have not been reprinted since.

As a novelist who is concerned with the *Bidun* cause, al-Zafiri is very careful to distance himself from any autobiographical imprints or claims of authentic realistic communal representations of the ‘*Ashīsh*. He is aware of the fine line between the realistic/descriptive and the novelistic/aesthetic impulses. He writes “I am not a writer of articles and political manifestos on the *Bidun*. I am a novelist and that is all. I am not concerned with matching characters with real life” (Fajr 2014). His statement highlights the inherent tensions of depicting a lived reality of a marginalised community aesthetically. As opposed to producing sociological or political (articles and manifestos) treaties, al-Zafiri prioritises the imaginative aesthetic act as a potent form of agency. The fictionalised narrative of the ‘*Ashīsh* allows for an agency of individual voice that disrupts hegemonic collective modes of representation, which often reproduce ontological notions of fixed identities and schematic belonging. As Margaret Sommers puts it “to make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality” (1994:617).

The novels which will be analyzed as part of al-Zafiri’s relational depictions of the ‘*Ashīsh* will be *An Upturned Sky* (1995) and *Scorched Heat* (2013), as both novels are explicitly concerned with complicating existing depictions of this space. The spatial aspects of the depiction of the ‘*Ashīsh* will be emphasized in the analysis of *Upturned Sky* while the temporal aspects and the interplay between the foundational myths of national narrative and the birth of the *Bidun* community will be discussed in the analysis of *Scorched Heat*.

Nasir al-Zafiri’s *An Upturned Sky*: In-between the ‘*Ashīsh* and the national space

Published in 1995, *An Upturned Sky* is the first novel to thematize the space of the ‘*Ashīsh* and represent its characters. Unlike other novels published in the 2010s, *An*

Upturned Sky was published at a time when debates on the *Bidun* issue remained highly sensitive and mainly monopolized by national political discourse as a security problem. In her introduction to the novel, Mufarriḥ writes that the novel “presents a very particular spatial and temporal circumstance, never before touched upon by novelists in Kuwait” (5). Mufarriḥ’s introduction highlights the political backdrop in which the novel was published where the *Bidun* issue was yet to surface as a daily political and social reality at the national level. This contextual note allows for a better understanding of the novel’s implicit and indirect approach to the representation of the *Bidun* community where the term *Bidun* remains unmentioned throughout.

The novel begins with Sulayman’s recollection of his life in Kuwait as he is about to leave Kuwait for good. This recollection is divided spatially and temporally into two main parts. The first part is mostly set in the ‘*Ashīsh* of al where Sulayman’s recollections of his tumultuous upbringing unfold. The second part deals with Sulayman’s coming of age as a student in Kuwait University and his interactions within a wider national space outside the ‘*Ashīsh*. Between the two spaces, Sulayman continually compounds the question of his positionality between his own upbringing in the ‘*Ashīsh* and his material and psychological exclusion within a wider national space.

Unlike the ontological depictions discussed in *Staircases of Day* and *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, *An Upturned Sky*’s ‘*Ashīsh* is not necessarily constituted in terms of difference to the national space or as an instrument of self-reflection. Rather, the ‘*Ashīsh* of al-Jahra is presented as a self-sustained world with minimal contact with the official state’s institutions, structures and symbols while having its own set of narratives, characters, memories and ambiances. It is presented as a space of visibility, presence, and a personal and communal memory that goes beyond narratives of lack and exclusion.

While the novel is set in ‘*Ashīsh* of al-Jahra and narrates the *Bidun* community’s distinct historical experience, the word *Bidun* remains unmentioned throughout. An

uninitiated reader, unaware of the *Bidun* situation in Kuwait would read the novel simply as a story of a troubled adolescent belonging to an impoverished and underprivileged community. The precarious conditions of the community are realized intrinsically through the daily realities unfolding in the *‘Ashīsh* and are only contrasted later as Sulayman leaves the *‘Ashīsh* to study in the city.

During his adolescence, Sulayman does not demonstrate an awareness of the existence of a national space as an oppositional space. Rather, the *‘Ashīsh*’s dwellers maintain an ambiguous relationship with the official state throughout the novel. To Sulayman, his father’s service in the national army is hard to fathom: “my father returned from his previous absence: furious, defeated, exasperated... I didn’t understand a thing” (152). Throughout the novel, the official state is present in the *‘Ashīsh* just once when a government army official takes Sulayman to see his moribund father after fighting in the 1973 October War (115).

The theme of unchecked crime stands as a signifier of the community’s ambiguous relationship to the state structures. Along with his friends and foes, Sulayman leads a life of a vagabond. In this environment, Sulayman experiences his sexual awakening with his neighbor and mature seductress Najwa. His scandalous relationship with Najwa leads him to a life of crime. He kills her husband al-Aḥṭal, and becomes an accomplice in the murder of Najwa’s Palestinian lover ‘Ala’.

Similarly, experiences in the *‘Ashīsh* are remotely linked to key events in national history. Sulayman writes: “Up until 1973, I was awaiting the events that would change the course of my life: my father’s absence in his military camp, the opening of al-Jahra cinema with the screening of *Khalli Bālak Min Zūzū* (Take Care of Zouzou and the arrival of *thāt al-rayya* (flag bearer), a nickname for Najwa the mature seductress. These temporal markers reflect a distinct personal and communal memory that may overlap with the national historical markers but are not necessarily subsumed by them.

The subjective experience of the *'Ashīsh* is highlighted in the refusal to self-identify with the label *Bidun*. Even though the word *Bidun* is unmentioned in the novel, al-Zafīri resorts to symbol and metaphor to speak of the *Bidun* as a group. A telling metaphor used to describe the historical birth of the community is that of *thahīra*, which translates to noon. In describing the time of *thahīra*, which is a terribly hot time in a desert climate, the hardships of the community unfold. *Thahīra* is “God’s rage,” the narrator adds:

Thahīra, and nothing awaits us but endless emptiness... Water has dried in the veins and our tongues are pale. Our lips are chapped and our speech fails us... There is no one to meet but ourselves. We are the group that has been shaped in an instance of dull fate, and has continued to live on as an inevitable result of previous destinies on our way to coming destinies. (20)

In the above description the narrator is trying to make sense of his community’s position by refusing to self-identify with the label *Bidun*. The community is not positioned in terms of lack of citizenship, but described as a people who have been shaped in “an instance of dull fate” highlighting a historical contingency.

The historical contingency of the creation of the *Bidun* remains ambiguous throughout the novel. Sulayman is not able to make full sense of his position. The absence of his father to him is a missed opportunity for him to know what really happened. Sulayman writes:

He wanted to tell me ‘the things’ when I am older... I grew older and he didn’t tell me a thing... I wanted to tell him everything now, all that was not allowed to be said by *thahīra* and darkness, but he was dead... I wanted to ask everyone: what would they tell their fathers? (152)

Without knowing ‘the things’ his father wanted to tell him, Sulayman is left to understand his position on his own. His understanding is sharpened as he leaves the *'Ashīsh* in the second part of the novel to study in the city.

The second part of the novel deals with Sulayman's interactions with the wider Kuwaiti community outside of the '*Ashīsh* space. As an adult, Sulayman leaves the '*Ashīsh* to study at Kuwait University where an awareness of exclusion is highly sharpened by grim realities of everyday experiences. There, he also meets Sarah his Kuwaiti classmate and partner who gets him involved in student politics. Of his time in Kuwait University, Sulayman writes: "three years have passed as my life is distributed between involvement in student politics, my studies, and meeting Sarah. I return to al-Jahra by midnight and leave again at 7 AM" (177).

Sulayman's daily physical and symbolic movement between the '*Ashīsh* and the University allows him to enjoy an experience and awareness of both spaces. The awareness is materialised in the narrative style of the second part of the novel where the present is interrupted by scenes from Sulayman's childhood in the '*Ashīsh*. This allows Sulayman to actively negotiate and comprehend his position between both spaces. At the same time, it allows him to expose and radicalise both symbols of the '*Ashīsh* and of the national space.

In his interactions with the wider Kuwaiti community, Sulayman immediately feels a powerful sense of estrangement. Upon arriving at the campus of Kuwait University, Sulayman is conscious of his different appearance. He asks "why are they looking at me in that way? What are they looking at? My clothes? My oiled wet hair? ... my raw accent?" (146). Sulayman's sense of distance is then confirmed when his peculiar appearance is questioned and mocked. On the steps of Kuwait University campus, a young girl approaches Sulayman and asks him scornfully "when did you leave your '*Ashīsh*?" (144).

Sulayman's feelings of alienation are further affirmed through his relationship with the image of the sea. In the university campus, Sulayman encounters that sea for the first time. He reflects: "I *discovered* a beautiful sea there. I stood there looking far into it" (147 emphasis added). Sulayman explicitly establishes that relationship between the image of the sea and its ports and national sentiment. He writes "I think of those ports that I hear of often as symbols of nations. What audacity allowed al-

Aḥṭal to penetrate them?” (125). Al-Aḥṭal, was the only character who after murdering his wife escaped the slums to work at the port. To Sulayman, al-Aḥṭal’s audacity to work at the port is incomprehensible.

Looking at it for the first time, he describes it as a “mesmerizing innocence”; “I want to ... throw my body into this melted salt, to wash the wounds of my soul...to dip in like these birds and emerge pure from sins” (147). The image of the sea is depicted as a site of endless possibilities, crossing, departures, arrivals and new beginnings. Sulayman has never been this close to an interaction with the symbols of the nation. Yet, at that moment of arrival, he realizes how his experience of reality makes it seem not as great as it was imagined to be. The imagined potential of the symbols of the nation seem unattainable and impenetrable by the likes of Sulayman. He contrasts his own experiences with the promise of the sea: “the nature that shaped the young man...his deadly *thahīra*...the accumulated dust of his desert on the whiteness of his soul...and this beautiful sea” (147). He then asks scornfully: “what can it do to the son of hot sand?” (1995:147). The symbol of the nation: the sea, is contrasted with symbols of the *‘Ashīsh* (the deadly *thahīra*, accumulated dust and hot sand). He imagines the sea asking him “young handsome man, why do you cry?” to which he replies “nothing, sea.. nothing” (148). The son of hot sands knows of the sea and its promise. Yet, the sea knows nothing of him. It seems futile for Sulayman to explain to the sea why he is crying. In that encounter with the sea, Sulayman offers his own radicalized rendition of national symbols as a site of unrealized potential. At the same time, he highlights the challenges of communicating the experiences of the *‘Ashīsh*, which are not readily translatable and seem outside of the epistemic scope of national symbols.

Sulayman’s subjective experience of the national space is also illustrated in his relationship with his Kuwaiti classmate and partner Sarah. She is attracted to Sulayman because of his “rawness” and his particular background. She buys him new clothes, takes him to the barber shop, gives him driving lessons, and gets him involved in student politics. Yet unlike, *Staircases of Day* and *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*, the trope of the national enabler of the *Bidun* character’s agency is inverted. Instead, Sulayman is capable of exposing to Sarah the underlying pretentiousness that drives her leftist egalitarian political convictions.

In one instance, Sulayman is invited to the house of Dr. Jassim, a Kuwaiti merchant who is one of the movement's political leaders. There, the disparity between his own economic condition and the lavish lifestyle of the movement's leader is acutely realized. Inside Dr. Jassim's house Sulayman reflects:

I marveled at the palace from the inside; Italian crystal chandeliers, Persian silk carpets, copper antiques, a huge golden-framed mirror, indoor plants, grand curtains, and chairs made for kings. I felt too insignificant... (179)

After leaving Dr. Jassim's house, he asks his partner Sarah, "is this him? The 'revolutionary man'?" He then asks scornfully, "do you know why he is 'a revolutionary'?... so that no one would revolt against him" (180-181).

Sulayman adds:

I was left with great disappointment...this wealthy man...capable of arousing the sentiments of ignorant masses gathering in lines cheering along. I am one of them, lines of believers who lift him on their shoulders without looking at his gluttonous face. (181)

He realizes that his attempts at being politically represented within the national space are futile for people from his particular social and economic background. His own ability to reflect on his experience allows him to expose the underlying ideological structures to Sarah.

The sense of exclusion and lack of representation within the national space is constantly contrasted with Sulayman's experiences in the *'Ashīsh*. Yet, the *'Ashīsh* is not presented as a reliable substitute space of belonging. Rather, it is an experience that Sulayman wants to erase from his memory. As a child, Sulayman has an incessant desire to burn his house. After managing to burn his house for the second time, Sulayman says: "I don't want to remember that I was here" (140).

Sulayman maintains a reflective distance from both the *'Ashīsh* and the national space contemplating and negotiating his positionality. He refuses to be contained by a space of exclusion or a space of potential inclusion in its current formations.

Rather, he is able to problematize the very notion of reliable belonging by deciding to migrate “towards a language that I have escaped to” (13). The use of the term language highlights Sulayman’s will to learn anew and find a possible system of signs elsewhere that does not confine him to the seemingly inescapable officially ordained exclusion/inclusion binary.

In this act of departure, Sulayman’s agency is most clearly manifest. In the departure scene he writes:

The plane took off towards the west leaving al-Jahra... nothing is left of it except a tale to tell. An illusion created by the fortunes for its own pure pleasure. An illusion which we have become its victims and its heroes.

I have decided to rid myself of that tale that spreads through houses and street corners with my own will. I am no more capable of carrying the burden of its secrets. I am in no need of carrying it for the rest of my life. (16)

In the above description, the relational aspects of statelessness are most evident. The use of the terms ‘tale’ and ‘illusion’ are also suggestive in the way they highlight the contingency of constructed narratives of belonging. In the very act of telling the tale, Sulayman continuously tries to make sense of his positionality. The necessity of getting rid of the burden of the tale can be read as a way of emphasizing the power of the aesthetic act in contesting the ontological modes of representation. The expressed ‘will’ is the novelising impulse that allows the narrator to undermine the categorical fixities of belonging and imagine a new possibilities elsewhere.

The analysis of the novel highlighted the *Bidun* character’s simultaneous awareness of dimensions that allow him to implode stable notions of belonging and identity to either the ‘*Ashīsh*’ or the national space. Belonging and identity are depicted as a continuous process of negotiation and becoming as opposed to a mere acting out of an already set identity beyond the proscriptions of the ontological ‘*Ashīsh*’.

Scorched Heat: Itineraries of Arrivals and Departures

Eighteen years after the publication of *An Upturned Sky*, *Scorched Heat* (2013) was published at a moment when the *Bidun* issue became perceived within the national cultural and political circles as an undeniable everyday reality. The title is suggestive in the way it compares with *An Upturned Sky*. The title *Scorched Heat*, is an intensification of the *thahīra* metaphor expressed in *An Upturned Sky*. The inauguration of *Bidun* street protests in February 2011 at the wake of the ‘Arab Spring’, created a paradigm shift in the political modes of representation of the *Bidun* as highlighted in chapter one. On the literary front, *Scorched Heat* needs to be read dialogically in light of contested representations of the *Bidun* in national novels including al-‘Isa’s *An Unheard Collision*, Fawziyya al-Salim’s *Staircases of Day* (2011), Saud al-San‘ūsi *The Bamboo Stalk* (2012), and Ismail Fahad’s *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* (2013). Read against the ontological representations of the *Bidun* in these novels, *Scorched Heat* confronts the underlying problematic of ahistoricity which enables such representations.

Commenting on the novel, al-Zafīri mentions that the novel’s main impulse is “to demonstrate to the Kuwaiti people that those labels that separate Kuwaitis are nothing but myths, which have been behind the enforced exile of many from Kuwait, like myself” (Ahmad 2013). The way these myths are exposed is through an “understanding of the historical process behind the creation of the *Bidun* issue in Kuwait” (Fajr 2014). This historicising impulse is reflected in the two-part structure of the novel. The first part of the novel is titled *Ta’rīkh* (historiography) that aims to rewrite “a historiography of Kuwaiti society that includes the *Bidun*” (Fajr 2014). The second part of the novel titled *riwāya* (the novel) is “purely novelistic in terms of language, stylistics and entangled narrative lines” (Fajr 2014). Through this dichotomy of historiographic narrative and fictional narrative, al-Zafīri aims to “transform history into a novel and the novel into a history” (Majjalat al-Ṭalī’a 2016).

The structure of the novel, between historiography and novelisation, lends the tools of analysis. In light of al-Zafīri’s above comments, both De Certeau and Hayden White’s distinctions between historiography and fiction are useful in understanding how this dichotomy plays out in *Scorched Heat*. For De Certeau, “fiction, in any of its modalities.... is a discourse that “informs” the “real” without pretending either to

represent it or credit itself with the capacity such a representation” which is fundamentally opposed to historiography’s “ambition to speak the ‘real’” (Ward 2000:39). Similarly, Hayden White understands the difference between history and fiction as a “difference between enquiry directed at the provision of the true and enquiry designed to give access to the real” (White 148). Both views problematize the divide while emphasising the fluidity between historiography and fiction. In *Scorched Heat*, al-Zafīri blurs the line between the putative objectivity of historiography and the subjectivity of aesthetic representation. The historicising of the narrative enables the novelising of history. In other words, historicising the narrative reorders the ‘real’ historiography of the past to offer a critical perspective on the contingency and fictionality of the ‘real’ present categories.

Historiography: Itineraries of Arrival

From the outset, the novel expresses a self-awareness of the inherent foundational myths of origin and creation associated with narrative constructions. The opening scene of the novel describes the mythical origins of Shūman the Bedouin patriarch and the mythical moment of excommunication from his tribe. Shūman (translated to the doubly cursed one) emerges naked out of a pool of water interrupting a group of naked Bedouin women. As a result, he is summoned by the tribal Sheikh and is excommunicated from the tribe. The narrator describes how the story of Shūman travels throughout the desert:

the wind carried the story of the being...everyone treated the story as nothing but a myth like any other weaved by the wind to tell of a certain age. In the same speed, the wind overturns the story under the pressures of a substitute myth (15).

The sacred moment of origin is treated by the desert dwellers as nothing but a necessary myth illustrating the inherent fragility of a moment of origin. This in turn opens up the space for the multitude of possible beginnings at the level of the *Bidun* community’s displacement and the moments of genesis of national historiography.

The notion of historiography then turns from questions of mythical origins to historical beginnings. Unlike *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend*’s narration of

the *'Ashīsh* from the perspective of the national, *Scorched Heat* explores how the margins narrate the many moments of the nation's genesis. The nation is narrated through the multiple, decentred and fragmented historiographies of a generation of displaced characters who for different particular historical processes all converge in the *'Ashīsh* of al-Jahra. These characters include the Bedouin patriarch Shūman, the Palestinian teacher Kamal al-Askalani, the Indian Ocean trade merchant Ibn Fadl, the Iraqi Shiite scholar Sayyid Jassem and the Basran farmer Shakir. The itineraries of these characters are traced back from different pre-national and transnational spaces such as the desert between recently established national borders and the sea along the littoral zones of the Indian Ocean trade route. The displacement and eventual arrival of these characters is situated within wider narratives of displacement concomitant with new postcolonial political and economic realities. The first of these new realities is the demise of a sustained tribal mode of life in the desert compelling many tribes residing in-between recently established borders to settle at the outskirts of cities. The second is the shift in economic orientation from the Indian Ocean trade route to oil-production that acted as a pull factor for new arrivals. The third relates to wider regional political upheavals such as the *Nakba* in Palestine and the 1958 *coup de 'at* in Iraq and the consequent migration to countries in the Gulf.

The first chapter of the first part of the novel is set in an undisclosed area in the desert between the recently formed borders of Kuwait and Iraq. The description of the desert is reminiscent of al-Flayyih's apocalypse scene in chapter five. Shūman is the last Bedouin who becomes the first *Bidun*. The narrator describes the influence of the harsh and abrupt end of the desert life on Shūman. To Shūman, with "his mother Fiḍḍa, a camel or two, a steed, a *saluki* and a hunting rifle" the desert is a "universe in itself" (19). Desert life is then transformed, "the sky was barren like a dried up udder, nothing sprung from the earth put heaps of sand, snakes, lizards, scorpions and desert plants that did not satisfy his lonely camel's hunger" (19). The narrator describes the consequences of such transformation on Shūman's life choices, "he sat on a pasture land not far from the hills between Kuwait and Iraq... he used to tell his mother, if the camel dies in spring we'll enter Iraq, if it dies in summer we'll enter Kuwait (18).

At that particular in-between desert space the second major character, Ibn Faḍl, is introduced. After his car broke down in the desert, Ibn Faḍl finds Shūman's tent and asks him for a ride back to his estate in Basra. Without asking him any questions Shūman offers him a ride on his only camel. The narrator describes their journey: "Shūman took a path that he knew well. He memorised its stones, hills, and plains, as if he was traveling on a paved road, eliding the eyes of the border control guards" (21). After their arrival at Basra, Shūman realises that this man is Ibn Faḍl, one of the most influential merchants whose transnational business extends to Kuwait, Basra, Aden and Bombay.

Given Shūman's knowledge of the desert, Ibn Faḍl offers him work as a gold smuggler between Basra and Kuwait. Shūman's encounter with al-Jahra is incidental, "on his way to his desert, al-Jahra appeared to him a village of mud houses, tents, and sheets of wood and metal" (37). Eventually, Shūman gets married and settles in al-Jahra. Shūman then returns to Basra to smuggle Ibn Faḍl and later his loyal Iraqi servant Shakir to Kuwait in the wake of the 1958 *coup d'etat*. All three characters Shūman, Ibn Faḍl, and Shakir along with their families, eventually settle in al-Jahra.

The second chapter of historiography titled "the mangrove load" is set on a dhow, owned by Ibn Faḍl, traveling through the different ports of the Indian Ocean trade route from Kuwait to East Africa. As with the Bedouin smugglers, the dhow's *nūkhidha*, or sea captain smuggles goods along the way. In its constant movement between ports, Sayyid Jassem, an Iraqi Shiite scholar asks the *nūkhidha* for a ride back to Najaf. Prior to embarking in Aden, Sayyid Jassem itinerary included travels around Shiite religious networks in Iraq, Iran, and Mecca. On their way back, Sayyid Jassem cures a fellow Bedouin seafarer who later promises him his daughter's hand. As a result, he marries the Bedouin's wife and moves to Iraq. Yet, he is later executed because of his involvement with the Iraqi communist party. His wife and daughter Layal, who plays a major in the second part of the novel, end up stateless in Kuwait.

The third historiography of displacement is that of the Palestinian teacher Kamal al-‘Askalani. Kamal’s itinerary starts with his enforced departure from ‘Askalan in 1948 to Gaza. As a result of the 1967 Israeli occupation, he is again forced to leave to Cairo. From Cairo he travels to Buraydah, in Saudi Arabia to work as a teacher. The intolerable life in Buraydah, mainly due to the prohibition of tobacco, encourages him to leave. Through the help of a Bedouin tobacco smuggler, Ibn Ghazzay, Kamal and his family are smuggled to Kuwait. Finally, Kamal arrives at al-Jahra where the influential Ibn Faḍl offers him work as a teacher in the government.

What is of interest in the above itineraries is the often-underplayed role of the pre-national and transnational spaces in national historiography. The symbols of the camel and the dhow in constant movement in-between established borders are legitimised as points of alternative historical beginnings where notions of the national were originally conceived. The desert and the sea symbolise a particular fluid subjectivity and problematize notions of belonging by contesting the rigid fixities imposed on these communities retrospectively. Much like Paul Gilroy’s conceptualization of the ‘Black Atlantic,’(1993) the desert and the sea here contain within them the alternative historical origins for the modern realities that the novel enters into in its second chapter.

Instead of the trope of the national enabler who enables the agency of the *Bidun* character as often portrayed in novels discussed in this chapter, those in-between characters in *Scorched Heat*, enable the very existence and establishment of national centres. The network of smugglers, whether on camelbacks or dhows, allows for the arrivals of different characters and the creation of the commercial networks. Without the Bedouin’s knowledge of the ways of the desert and the *nūkhidah*’s knowledge of the sea, national history would be significantly different. Without Shūman, Ibn Faḍl would never be able to arrive and establish his position in al-Jahra.

Al-Jahra becomes the focal point where all the above characters converge and where another history begins. As in the case of *An Upturned Sky*, the new arrivals, including the *Bidun*, are positioned within the general condition of marginality of al-Jahra’s

scorching heat. The historical process and arbitrariness of citizenship distribution is then highlighted as a critical juncture in national historiography shaping the future life of the sons and daughters of the generation.

The establishment of a centralised bureaucracy in al-Jahra is illustrated in the increasing powers of Ibn Faḍl, “the government’s close friend who holds to key of miracles” (86). He becomes the main link between al-Jahra’s resident and the emerging bureaucracy in the capital. Ibn Faḍl asks Shūman to recruit Bedouins to work in the government, “we will find them work in the army, police, guards, or the mounted police (*Hajjana*). We are building a modern country, don’t you understand Shūman?” With time, Shūman realises that he hasn’t been offered “papers that validate his belonging,” an idea that seems strange to him. Ibn Faḍl becomes selective in documenting the town’s people in the mid-1960s often excluding the Bedouins. Ibn Faḍl’s Iraqi servant Shakir is offered citizenship while Shūman is left stateless as his “time did not yet come” (88). Shūman reminds Shakir, “yesterday I brought you here on my camel’s back when you were terrified like an ostrich chick” (89). In a symbolic reply, Shakir responds “You always bear what you are incapable of valuing, ever since you used to carry gold around your waist like an ass” (89).

The first part of the novel works against the prevalent ahistorical depictions of the *Bidun* community. It provides a nuanced understanding of the historical process behind the creation of the *Bidun* as a stateless community. The history of the *Bidun* is contextualised and placed within wider narratives of displacement in the region. The first part of the novel emphasises the arbitrariness of the naturalisation process and contingency of citizenship. At the same time it highlights the personal and structural bias that denied a generation its rights despite their historical roles. The historiography of this generation’s displacement allows for a relational understanding of the *Bidun* characters in the second part of the novel.

The *Rewayya*: Itineraries of departure

The second part of the novel titled *Riwāya* (the novel) is mainly concerned with the “novelisation of the histories” of the sons and daughters of the father’s generation (Fajr 2014). While the first part was concerned with untold history of arrivals of the fathers’ generation, the second part narrates the untold itineraries of departures and histories of displacement of the sons and daughters. Shūman’s son Ali and Sayyid Jassem’s daughter Layal become *Bidun* for the reasons highlighted in the first part. Kamal Askalani’s daughter Rima becomes a stateless Palestinian. Ibn Faḍl’s son Sherīf works on expanding his father’s wealth with the assistance of Qays the son of Shakir.

What is of particular interest in the second part is the interplay between a *Bidun* particular memory and national historiography. While the *Bidun* characters’ histories are entangled with key events in national history, a *Bidun* particular memory is not totally subsumed by an official national historiography. The second part deals with the novelising of the untold histories of internal marginalisation in Kuwait and the consequent experiences of exile in Canada.

The second part begins with the return of Ali, the son of Shūman, who is now a Canadian ‘expatriate’ working in Kuwait. In an encounter with a government officer Ali is asked scornfully “Are you Canadian?” (157). The complexity of answering such a question is tackled throughout the second part of the novel. Gradually, the narrative exposes another historiography of marginalisation, departure and return. As the first part is concerned with legitimising transnational spaces as constitutive of national historiography, the second part works on historicising and legitimising spaces of exile and diaspora as integral extensions of national historiography. The camel and the dhow in the first part are replaced with scenes from airplanes, buses carrying asylum seekers between the borders of the United States and Canada and asylum shelters in Canada. Similarly, the image of desert sands as a point of alternate beginnings is replaced with the symbol of snow as a new horizon of belonging.

During his years as a student in Kuwait University, Ali continuously maintains an aloofness from key political events. He writes: “It was the winter of 1989, I find myself lonely and isolated not knowing which side I should be on... both sides aren't concerned with my issue, they had no real vision towards us” (218). His aloofness comes as a result of his feeling of being totally cast out of the historical time of the nation. He goes on:

I have never participated in a political union, nor have I participated in a leftist rally smearing the right, nor have I attended a rightist rally smearing the left. I have never participated in Earth Day. I do not participate in national day celebrations. *I am in the place, but outside of its time.* I await that moment when my space and time coincide. If I fail in this life, let my conviction be that I have fallen on the wrong land in the wrong time. (230-231 emphasis added)

Ali expresses a wilful distance from aligning himself within the existing structures and limiting binaries. It is as if his mere participation is a legitimisation of the official national historiography that is the root of exclusion. Rather, he insists on legitimising an existence outside of the historical time of the nation. The moment when “space and time coincide” is perhaps only actualised in the act of writing, or “novelising the history” of his untold exile.

Ali's wilful distance then is materialised in his migration to Canada. A great part of the second part is set between New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Ottawa, and Montreal, and in spaces between the United States and Canadian Border. There, Ali meets his friend Fawaz, a fellow diasporic *Bidun*, who has married an American. Fawwaz assists Ali in the process of asylum seeking. Similarly, Ali reconnects with Rima Askalani who is a student in Canada. The novel offers insight into the *Bidun*'s particular history of internal marginalisation, migration, exile, and diaspora that are experienced outside of the official national historiography.

Multiple Narration

The second part is also characterised by a plurality of spatial and temporal planes, narratives and voices. The chapters alternate between three main narrative lines, often

interrupting each other. The first is set in the present and is narrated by Ali Bin Shūman who lives in Kuwait as a Canadian ‘expatriate’. The second narrative line, also narrated by Ali, is set between 1989 and 1990 and describes his time in Kuwait University, his affair with Layal and love of Rima, and his subsequent migration and arrival at Canada. In the third narrative line, Ali reads the long letter addressed to him from Layal, which she wrote before committing suicide in prison.

The technique of narrative polyphony challenges hegemonic representations of the *Bidun*. The contending representations and multiple narratives and histories of *Bidun* character are played out. Differences in gender, social and political standing, and personal disposition are emphasised to highlight the diverse narratives and experiences of statelessness within the *Bidun* community. In addition, the overlapping fates of Palestinians and *Bidun* highlight how *Bidun* characters share a wider marginal memory of displacement.

While sharing a legal status, Ali and Layal substantially differ in their experiences of statelessness. Firstly, Layal is exposed to particular pressures due to her gender. In her letter, Layal discloses to Ali the sexual abuses she faced as a child from her stepfather. Later, she also becomes vulnerable to sexual abuse when she works as a secretary in Sherīf’s company. Ali is only made aware of these episodes through reading Layal’s own words, which highlights the multiple untold narratives within the *Bidun* community.

Secondly, and at the political level, Ali is critical of Layal’s non-contemplative political engagement. Whereas Layal is continuously active politically during the events of 1989, Shūman maintains a neutral stance. He tells her “you and I, no one will bother with us” (219). Ali is also critical of Layal’s ignorance of his particular experiences in al-Jahra:

Layal does not live her real condition. She does not acknowledge that she is *Bidun Jinsiyya* (without citizenship) and doesn’t see the existential angst of the condition....

she never lived amongst them and like most politicians, writers, and a great segment of the population, she never thought of visiting their homes or getting close to their public or private lives (313).

Layal, another *Bidun*, is equated with the rest of the population in their lack of awareness of the intricate daily challenges of life as a *Bidun*. This disparate representation of two *Bidun* characters attests to the novel's problematization of a monolithic representation of the *Bidun* community's particular memory and experience.

The *Bidun* characters' statelessness is shared with the Palestinians living in Kuwait. Within life in al-Jahra, both Shūman's family and Kamal's family share a similar vulnerable position. This is made clear to Ali when his love of Rima is mocked by Qays: "What would a Palestinian girl do with a young *Bidun* man?" (23). Eventually, both Ali and Rima find no real hope of establishing their lives in Kuwait and migrate to Canada in pursuit of college degrees and citizenship. The Iraqi invasion becomes a defining moment in Ali and Rima's relationship. Rima's nonchalant attitude towards the invasion enrages Ali: "she doesn't know the meaning of homeland within me and wants it an occupied homeland. She doesn't understand that I've left my homeland not because I don't belong to it, but because I didn't want for it to leave me" (361). While Ali and Rima share the condition of statelessness marginalised position, Ali's distance from Rima further complicates the question of homogenous narratives of the marginalised by emphasizing the complexity of subjective affiliation. The entangled narrative lines and multiple narration illustrate how a *Bidun* particular memory is always singular within the histories of marginalised communities and national historiography and pluralistic within the community itself.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to analyse the representations of the '*Ashīsh*, as a unique space of *Bidun* experience and exclusion through closely reading five novels featuring *Bidun* characters. The representations of the '*Ashīsh*, in these novels, fall under two main

umbrella terms: the ontological ‘*Ashīsh* and the relational ‘*Ashīsh*. As highlighted in the analysis of the novels *An Unheard Collision*, *Staircases of Day* and *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* depict ‘*Ashīsh* in ontological terms. In that ontological space of exclusion, *Bidun* characters are often defined by and confined to their stateless condition. The characters’ agency is restricted to the articulations of victimisation associated with statelessness. In *An Unheard Collision*, the main *Bidun* character Dhāri is reduced to an instrument of self-reflection for the national character. *Staircases of Day* depicts the ‘*Ashīsh* synchronically and purely in juxtaposition with the national space; the main marker of this contrast being citizenship rights. In the novel, the *Bidun* community are depicted as legal subjects whose lack of citizenship is the principal determinant of their identity. The *Bidun* character’s experience in *In the Presence of the Phoenix and the Loyal Friend* is utilised merely as a lens from which the *Bidun* issue can be understood. The national historical narrative within the novel overpowers the *Bidun*’s particular narrative. Such ontological depictions of the ‘*Ashīsh* often produce notions of *Bidun* identity that are oppositional and fixed.

On the other hand, al-Zafiri’s novels *Upturned Sky* and *Scorched Heat* offer a relational account of the ‘*Ashīsh* and the experiences of the *Bidun*. The ‘*Ashīsh* is always presented in relation to other spaces such as the pre-national (the desert), national, exilic and diasporic spaces. In *An Upturned Sky*, al-Zafiri depicts the ‘*Ashīsh* as a porous and permeable space that allows Sulayman Abdullah to enjoy a multidimensional awareness of both the ‘*Ashīsh* and national spaces simultaneously. He is also able to negotiate an in-between positionality. In *Scorched Heat*, the *Bidun*’s historical experiences are situated in relation to national historiography and wider narratives of displacement concomitant with post-colonial realities. Situating the *Bidun*’s historical experiences in such a manner informs the contingency of the present social and political categories. In addition, the polyphonic voices and entangled narratives found in al-Zafiri’s novels contest notions of a fixed identity.

The novel as a commercial, mobile, translatable and transformable (from a novel to a TV drama series) form has probably had more popular impact regarding knowledge of the *Bidun* issue than human rights discourse or political activism. Yet, the form of the

novel invites both strands of representation of the *Bidun* experience, those that allegorize the *Bidun* experience synchronically in broad strokes as highlighted in novels of the ‘ontological’ *Ashīsh* and those, such as al-Ẓafīri’s novels, that offer nuanced and relational representations of a *Bidun* identity. Interestingly, it is the former type of novels, mainly through prize winning and translation, that brought the *Bidun* issue to the forefront of cultural discussions on Kuwaiti society in the wider Arab and global English contexts. A prime example is *The Bamboo Stalk* by Saud al-San‘ūsi, which after winning the International Prize for Arabic Fiction was translated to English in 2015.

In contrast, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, al-Ẓafīri has refused to participate or allow his publisher, Dār Mas‘ā, to nominate any of his novels to the International Prize for Arabic Fiction because of the prize board’s lack of “awareness of the form of the novel” and lack competence in reading literary works (Majjalat al-Ṭalī’a 2016). In the same interview, al-Ẓafīri criticized the impinging role of big publishers and the politics behind the nomination and selection processes. I would also argue that the nature of the prize elicits a particular preference for, what Jameson calls, ‘Third-world literature’ novels, which can be simply read as national allegories (Jameson 1986). This preference is mainly driven by the necessities and politics of translation to a global English readership.

In his critique of Jameson’s postulate that all third world texts are to be read necessarily as national allegories, Aijaz Ahmad writes:

I find it significant that first and second worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism, respectively), whereas the third category—the third world—is defined purely in terms of an “experience” of externally inserted phenomena.
(6)

Ahmad’s critique resonates with al-Ẓafīri relational depiction of the *Bidun* that similarly goes beyond the articulations of an external “experience” of statelessness. On a global level, it seems that it is not just the *Bidun* who are represented in ontological terms, but perhaps ‘all third world texts’ as Jameson suggests. The works of al-Ẓafīri, in their

complex, fragmented and multifocal representation of the national experience, prompt new ways of reading 'third-world texts' beyond the paradigm of national allegory.

Conclusion

And if they search for you

You are a memory

In my heart

They won't find you

And if they do

You are bare, transparent, like a cloud

They wouldn't know you

And if they do

You will remain

They won't take you

And if they do

You will not die

And if you die in my heart's home...

Would you die in the heart of all homes?

*My Homeland*¹ by Sa'diyya Mufarriḥ (Mufarriḥ 2010a:294).

In *My Homeland*, Mufarriḥ is describing a hunt. A collective “they” is in constant pursuit; attempting to seek, find, know and capture Mufarriḥ's homeland. Yet, the homeland remains elusive. It is depicted as a mercurial memory in the heart. If they seek it they would not find it. If they find it they would not know it. Mufarriḥ's homeland cannot be fully captured or found.

¹ The original poem in Arabic is provided in appendix G.

This poem is not only resisting official notions of belonging that cast her out of the official homeland. At work, as well, is a refusal to be contained by any totalizing force that aims to seek, find, define and finally name. One cannot begin to understand Mufarriḥ's homeland without engaging with the subjective language in which it is articulated.

This thesis at its core is an attempt to search for that elusive homeland in Mufarriḥ's poem, but with no intention of completely capturing it. Rather, it acknowledges the impossibility of such a task and the dangers involved in assuming a successful hunt. Throughout the thesis, I have tried to remain consistently beholden to Mufarriḥ's apprehensions. Particularly, I tried to resist transposing my critical insight on the works of *Bidun* writers to definite and conclusive insight on the *Bidun* community at large. In doing so, I have tried to keep a distance from prevalent academic practices that exist within scholarship on the Gulf.

In a recent volume by Lawrence G. Potter, *The Persian Gulf in Modern Times* (2014), he emphasizes the need for a 'new' approach to Gulf studies outside of the dominant paradigms that have historically defined the field: the role of the British empire in the region; the oil industry; and rentier state approaches (Potter 2014:1). One of the ways in which this is surpassed is by focusing on 'Peoples of the Gulf'. As he puts it:

[o]ne aim of this volume is to highlight and recover the history of groups who played an important role historically, but have been excluded in the national narratives promulgated by ruling dynasties. (11).

One of the groups that are dealt with in the volume are the Hawala, which are described as "a mysterious group of Arabs who migrated from Arabia to Iran starting around the eighteenth century and later returned to play important roles in places like Bahrain and the UAE" (13). To finally uncover the mystery, the academic "questions the cohesion and historicity of this group and charts their identity transformation" (13). Eight thousand words later, these people are finally captured in the academic net and made visible to scholars on the Gulf.

The endeavor, and the impulses behind making societies in the Gulf entirely visible in the Western academy is a matter that requires its own study. Yet, what is of particular interest is the underlying assumption involved in such approaches. It is assumed that people in the Gulf can be easily dissected and understood as anthropological subjects along facile grids: national, sectarian (Sunni-Shiites), tribal, socio-political (Badu-Haḍar) and according to territory of origin (‘Ajam, Hawala, Najdis, Africans). It is also unfortunate that many local academics from the region fall into the trap of reiterating such paradigms, often with minimal awareness of the intentions behind such academic endeavors.

This type of knowledge production, where people are primarily understood anthropologically in terms of origins, kinship ties and sectarian affinities can be attributed to what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls a “denial of coevalness”; a dominant methodological approach within anthropology that assumes that the researcher (at the time of communicating his findings to a scholarly community) and the subject of study are in two distinct temporal planes. The denial of coevalness is “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (Fabian 1983: 31). This is evident, for example, in Potter’s introduction to *Persian Gulf in History* (2009), where he asks

[w]ho, then, are the Khalijis? Historically, they are the descendants of the Ichthyophagi, the “fish eaters” that lived all around the coasts of East Africa, the Gulf (“Erythraean Sea”), southern Iran, and India who were mentioned by Greek and Latin writers. Like the Ichthyophagi, they share a similar lifestyle but not a common identity, except perhaps in the eyes of outsiders.² (Potter 2009:12).

The language of knowledge production used to synchronically describe these ‘fish eaters’ names the origins of a people according to ancient Greek historical texts. In addition, such representations can be attributed to plain and simple orientalism that has been fueled by easy access to Gulf studies through increased funding focusing on international relations, strategy and policy issues. These approaches often are

² The same volume includes a chapter by William O. Beeman titled, “Gulf Society: An Anthropological View of the *Khalijis*—Their Evolution and Way of Life” (Potter 2009:147-59).

dependent on knowledge of the Arabic language as “a ‘field’ language,” (9), as Spivak puts it, which would limit alternate critical and analytical perspectives on literature and culture.

In my personal experiences as a researcher from the region and with access to local circles of knowledge, I have also been subject to such anthropological violence. I recall an encounter with one of the notable Orientalists focusing on Nabatī (oral) poetry in Arabia. After presenting my work in an academic setting, he asked me about my tribal background and whether I was a *Bidun*. He asked “if you are not *Bidun*, then why write about them?” Having knowledge of his academic work, I mentioned one of his books that is entirely dedicated to a fringe Bedouin poet from one of the southern tribes of Arabia. I then asked him whether he was related to him by any chance. He then chuckled and answered: “I am interested,” to which I replied “me too.” The aforementioned orientalist’s ‘interest’, unlike mine, or in his case, putative ‘disinterest’, does not require any justification.

This thesis is a preliminary investigation into how *Bidun* literature could potentially be discussed outside of such assumptions. In the thesis, I have presented *Bidun* literature as a struggle for intrinsic articulations of belonging, presence and self-positionality through complex modes of affiliation, beyond official acts of absencing, labeling and ontological representations. Every chapter in the thesis aimed to play out an aspect of this struggle.

The first chapter situated the struggle within the discursive practices of Area Studies. It highlighted the dangers of limiting the knowledge production on the *Bidun* to the immediate concerns of Area Studies. At the same time, it argued for the necessity of engaging critically with the cultural production of *Bidun* writers to shed light on the possibility of a different type of knowledge. Chapter two explored how the struggle for presence plays out in relation to the materialities of cultural production. It highlighted the ways in which *Bidun* writers actively create their own affiliative cultural networks and spaces of representation beyond the exclusionary forces of the cultural institution.

The third chapter highlighted how the major depictions of the stateless condition within the discourse of political philosophy influence readings of *Bidun* literature. Ontological depictions of the stateless condition restrict the ways in which *Bidun* literature is read and received. These readings often reduce the voice of *Bidun* writers to mere expressions of an anthropological condition that does not go beyond narratives of victimisation and the pursuit of citizenship. The chapter offered an analysis of the poem titled *Myth of a Nest* that articulates a self-positionality beyond the ontological depictions of statelessness. Chapter four explored the struggle for presence of *Bidun* writers within national literature and their placement as an ‘adjacent literature’. The chapter offers insight into how the poet Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ, through her work titled *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* includes *Bidun* poets as an organic extension to the national literary history narrative. This is achieved through her affiliation with a particular transgressive poetics within national literary history and her affiliation with a particular notion of Arab literary modernity. Chapter five analysed the way in which the works of Sulayman al-Flayyih contest romanticized ahistoric representations of the desert imaginary. Instead, the desert space is depicted as a site of alternate historical beginnings. Chapter six investigated how the novels of Nasir al-Zafīri contest the reductive depictions of the *Bidun* identity in novels written by Kuwaiti writers. Al-Zafīri’s novels offer a more fluid, nuanced and relational understanding of identity beyond ontological modalities.

In understanding how *Bidun* writers offer complex modes of affiliation beyond official categorizations, I hope that this thesis, and some of the tools it proposes, will be useful to understanding how a different type of knowledge on the ‘people of the Gulf’ can be produced.

A critical and analytical engagement with *Bidun* literature has highlighted the ways in which marginalized literatures can be read more broadly. A study of a highly politicized ‘stateless literature’ has demonstrated the dangers of approaching the literature as a mere reflection of a condition or an experience. It goes beyond immediate political, anthropological and activist concerns. In practice, *Bidun* writers posit other ways of reading related to affinities with unofficial national literary history

as in Mufarriḥ's literary history, questions of historiography and narration as in the works of al-Zafīri and transnational networks built on pre-modern yet contemporary aesthetic affiliations such the Sa'ālīk.

The analysis of the body of literature also demonstrated the legitimacy of the debates in world literature on how to engage beyond borders. In her critique of Franco Moretti's model of 'distant reading' of a peripheral world literature (Moretti 2004), Emily Apter writes:

[W]orld literatures, including Lu Xuns *The True Story of Ah Q*, Mao Duun's *Midnight*, Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and Orhan Pamuk's *The Black Book* receive short shrift as representative prototypes (i.e. the political narrative, literature of the metropolis). (Apter 2013:52)

Apter's comment serves as a reminder of the prevalent readings in which literatures, especially non-Western, are read reductively as "an elliptical refraction of national literatures," as David Damrosch puts it, or as part of a totalising world literary system mirroring geopolitical delineations such as Federic Jameson's first, second and third world categorizations of literary production and Moretti's categorizations (center-semiperiphery-periphery), in which non-western literatures are placed in the latter categories. Within Arabic, or Near Eastern, literary studies, the situation is not much different where works are often read to provide insight into the sociological and political aspects of cultures or to feed an orientalist imaginary that is disconnected from the present.

I hope that the thesis demonstrates how literary considerations function in a sphere that does not necessarily correspond with such world literary systems. A literary approach allows for a widening of the categories of representation. As demonstrated, it is through literary expression that *Bidun* writers have contested hegemonic representations whether it be an 'adjacent' literature, an ahistoric desert of authenticity or the ontological statelessness of the *'Ashīsh*.

Yet, there remains an important point to make with regards to the materialities of the affiliative networks that have the potential of ‘crossing borders’. I would like to end the thesis by highlighting these materialities through tracing the physical and cultural peregrinations of Muhammad al-Nabhān as he travels in-between many borders from Kuwait to Canada and in his many attempts at forging online literary networks that transcends those borders. While these attempts express an incessant desire to find affiliative spaces above and beyond official categories, they nevertheless continuously negotiate their presence within a pervasive national framework, border controls and geopolitical realities.

Born 1971 in Kuwait, Muhammad al-Nabhān locates the ultimate realisation of his condition of statelessness in 1985 with the advent of the national card scheme.³ The national document was a physical manifestation of his exclusion. While denied official paper, al-Nabhān throughout his life enjoyed an intimate relationship with ‘paper’ in the widest sense of the word. As an adolescent, he worked as a freelance calligrapher and designer, until the Iraqi invasion in 1990. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, his skills in design proved useful as he creatively forged official documentation; ID cards for Kuwaiti military officers that were used to avoid persecution. A paperless person, denied documents throughout his life, was now able to forge and subvert national documents, in a time when national papers lost their potency under the weight of occupation. After the Iraqi invasion, al-Nabhān continued to live paperless until 1995 when he finally decided to leave Kuwait to Canada to seek asylum.

While in Kuwait, al-Nabhān did not publish any of his poetry. His literary activity was restricted to intermittent contributions in local newspapers’ cultural pages. Along with other *Bidun* poets, who were shunned by the state sanctioned cultural institution, al-Nabhān worked on establishing cultural networks outside of the cultural institution.

³ The discussion of Muhammad al-Nabhan’s journey is informed mainly by an interview conducted with him in the summer of 2013 in Bahrain (al-Nabhan 2013).

To live paperless is difficult, but to depart without it is practically impossible. In order to leave Kuwait to Canada, al-Nabhān was issued *tadhkarat murūr*, (passage ticket). This ticket is a one-way travel document issued for special purposes to the *Bidun*. On its face, it reads: Valid for one trip!! (followed by two exclamation marks, as al-Nabhān carefully emphasized when describing it). To obtain the ticket, he had to sign another paper; a consent form assuring that the traveler would never return.

With these papers of expulsion, he began his itinerary arriving in Syria, where he spent a year. He then entered Jordan and from there arrived in Canada as an asylum seeker. During this time, al-Nabhān recalls writing a poem titled *The Wind... and the Fear of the Runaway at Night*, which he had started in Kuwait and continued writing throughout his journey in Syria, Jordan, and finally completing it in Canada; a poem that literally ‘crosses borders’.

In 2000, when in Ontario, Canada, al-Nabhān founded the online literary magazine *Ufouq* along with his brother Sāliḥ and Karīm al-Hazzā‘ based in Kuwait. Through *Ufouq*, al-Nabhān was able to retain a nascent literary network already established in Kuwait of *Bidun* and Arab poets gathering in coffee houses, private homes and other spaces below the radar of cultural institutions. This new paperless online space allowed for this network to develop to include “the *Biduns* of the Arab world in a wider sense” as al-Nabhān describes it.

In the early volumes of *Ufouq* from 2000 to June 2002, contributors from the Arab world were described by national belonging while *Bidun* contributors were described only by name. However, after 2002, a shift in the editorial policy was implemented where national belonging of all contributors was unmentioned. This shift attests to *Ufouq*’s potential of being a space where national belonging is not a precondition of cultural exchange.

Entering this new spatial terrain of online publishing, the paperless existence of *Ufouq* was constantly debated. The editors of *Ufouq* originally expressed an incessant urge to

see their magazine in paper form; an urge perhaps reflecting apprehensions of belonging that is always validated by some sort of paper. After one year, the publishers ask in an editorial: “it has been fourteen months of aspiration, challenges, and distress awaiting the publication of our first paper copy, but how?” (al-Nabhān 2001).

The question posed by the publishers (how?), relates to the materiality of putting into print a paperless literature and a network including *Bidun* writers between Kuwait, Canada, the USA and other writers from the Arab world. How and where will this printed *Ufouq* be published and how will it circulate? These unresolved questions caused the editorial board to abandon their desire of seeing *Ufouq* in paper form. Two years later, al-Nabhān writes in an editorial:

perhaps our first concern was to turn this publication into paper form. Yet, this concern slowly receded as every new volume opened broad horizons of new worlds that transcend time and space. (al-Nabhān 2002)

Ufouq remained a strictly paperless publication until 2005 when al-Nabhān abandoned digital publishing altogether. In 2005, al-Nabhān, along with Fadi Sa‘ad, a Syrian writer residing in the United States and Jackleen Sallam, a Syrian writer residing in Canada, established Juzoor Cultural Foundation in 2005. Juzoor was a short-lived publishing outlet for Arab migrant writers in North America that was intended to revive the spirit of the early 20th century *al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya* (The Pen Bond), which included the likes of Khalil Gibran and Mikhail Na‘ima.⁴ Through Juzoor, he published his poetry collection *My Heart is Stone at Your Still Door* (2005) in the USA. The collection, which was published in Indiana, was banned from circulation in Kuwait by the censors of the Ministry of Information.

This shift back to paper publishing put al-Nabhān in a direct confrontation with the national’s hegemony over publishing; deciding which works are allowed to circulate. Yet, al-Nabhān, in another act of creative forgery, finds a way out of this situation. In

⁴ While al-Nabhān’s remains unmentioned in national literary histories and anthologies save for Sa‘diyya Mufarriḥ’s, *Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement*, he is mentioned in *Contemporary Arabic Migrant Literature* compiled by Lutfi Haddad.

Cairo, he published ‘a selection of his works’ titled *Between Two Cities* (2011), which included, not a selection of, but *all* of his previously banned poetry collection.

In 2008, and now as a Canadian expatriate in Kuwait, al-Nabhān ventured on his latest attempt at publishing with the establishment of the publishing house *Dār Mas‘ā*. Like *Ufouq*, *Dār Mas‘ā* provided access especially for young local *Bidun* writers to publish their works. Yet, this time, al-Nabhān’s publishing project is based within a national context that is subject to the demands of government censors, local and Arab literary markets, such as literary festivals and book fairs. What is significant in this narrative is how *Dār Mas‘ā*, has formed a visible and substantial canon of works by *Bidun* writers since 2008 while *Ufouq* has disappeared altogether from the internet and with it an archive of more than six years of paperless publishing.

The case of Muhammad al-Nabhān, and his journey from Kuwait to Canada and back, and from paper to digital publishing and back, highlight the materialities, everyday obstacles involved in the affiliative attempts to cross borders whether literally or metaphorically. In summary, this final section aimed to illustrate that paper, in the wider sense of the word, is still very relevant. As al-Nabhān’s case demonstrates, the affiliative networks forged by *Bidun* writers are continuously negotiated in light of the everyday inescapable authority of paper.

This thesis barely scratches the surface of literature written by *Bidun* writers. There are many more potential sites of investigation related to the subject. One important strand of research relates to questions of translation and circulation. What are the possible modes of circulation for writers located outside of the dominant categorizations prevalent in world literature i.e. national canon?

Another way in which the thesis can be taken forward is by reading *Bidun* literature in a comparative lens with literatures of other marginalized communities. A comparative study of *Bidun* and Palestinian writers is especially relevant. The powerful *Bidun*-Palestinian cultural connection, as highlighted in the introduction, and the modes of

identification, can offer insight into new ways of conceiving questions of literary history in contemporary Arabic literature and marginalized literatures more broadly.

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Appendices

غربة أخرى
الى الشاعر الفقيد علي الصافي
محمد النبهان
من ديوان غربة أخرى ٢٠٠٤
صفحة ٥١ إلى ٥٤

(1)

مرّة قلت - صديقي:
"لظمة المظلوم" أقسى،
والقُرى وحشة طفل غاب في الليل
وأعياء الإياب

"المرايا..."

وجه من غابوا "صغاراً"
حين لم تبقى المسافات طريقاً ليعودوا
فالمرايا...
وجه من ماتوا صغاراً
في خليج الخوف،
أو صمت الصوّاري المهملة

(2)

جلسة...
تُرحل في الليل،
وتُهدينا صُداًع الأسئلة

(3)

"يرحل البحر" جداداً
واحتجاجاً
وخديجه... (كذا)
تتهجى بنشيج لغة الموت

وتخطو رعدة الحرف عزاء

تلبس الحزن ترايباً،

تغني:

(يا حضورا...

يا حضورا..

كيف عانقت الغياب؟)

حلمك الأخضر مازال على الوعد صلياً

كلما قلت سيأتي

خالفت ريح شراعي

قلت: يأتي

• كيف والـ...

يا...

كيف والعمر مضي كالعاصفة

(4)

غربة أخرى صديقي

تمنح الصبر جوازاً

ثم تنسى وجهي المصلوب جوعاً

في زوايا الأرضية

Appendix B: Poem titled *Two Steps Towards Ali al-Ṣāfī* by Shahad al-Faḍlī.

شهد الفضلي
مقطع من قصيدة بعنوان خطوتان .. لعلّي الصافي
من ديوان فاصلة منقوطة
صفحة ٧٦ إلى ٨٠

{لُطْمَةُ مَظْلُومٍ وَوَحْشَةُ غَائِبٍ}

ليوم رحيلك السابع،
لخديجة وأعين الدّهشة،
لآخر قصيدة في درج السيارة.

طريقٌ من مخالبٍ يقتنصُ وردةَ الشعر،
يغرسُ غياباً ينهشُ أفندتنا
يسيلُ وجعُ التأويل
فتُحصي ((المدن النائمة)) خطواتها!

كانَ الصُّبْحُ قَلْبَهُ،
يتفقدُ الملائكةَ المبعوثينَ للأمنية،
يلملُمُ حيرتهم
شحوبَ المنام
جمراً عينيها
((صوتي الذي بين احتمالين كام))

يُهدي التسابيحَ لصمتنا
ويطمئنُ لظله.

كُلَّ صباح،
يُشرِّعُ ببراءتهِ نوافذَ الأملِ
يُرتبُ البحرَ كي يبتسمَ،
يرسمُ سماءَ وطيراً
يُهديني بياضه
... ويعلمني كيف أصنعُ لي {وِطَنَ}.

يُحرّضني أن أكونَ سنبلةً تنبُثُ في مواسمَ
القهر
واليباس
واللا انتماء!

أن أصرخَ (ني) وحلمه،
(في الصفحة الأخيرة من كراسات المدرسة)
ليزهر حُلْمِي.

اليوم،

سبعُ سنواتٍ لم ترَ القصيدةَ نوراً
لم تصافحُ النوافذَ أحلامها
..... وما خلّقَ السربُ.

سبعُ نكباتٍ والحزنُ يربضُ على قلبٍ
يتمتمُ مغبوناً:

((أنا لطمَةُ المظلومِ ووحشةُ الغائبِ))
أنا فجيعةُ الذاكرة،
ووهنُ البقاءِ.

سبعُ لعناتٍ من غيابٍ
وخديجة لم تبتسمَ للضوءِ
وما طرّقَ بابها أحدٌ.

لَكَ الجنةُ يا علي.

قصيدة بعنوان خرافة العش

(حيث يهرب البريء)

نص مشترك: منى كريم - دخيل الخليفة
من ديوان صحراء تخرج من فضاء القميص (٢٠٠٧)
صفحة ٩٥ إلى ١٠٢

١

الوقت ينحني لقبة الريح،
في هذا الفضاء اللذيذ
نبوح
أو لا نبوح
ليست نهاية الضوء،
سنكون مجانين نحن الموتى الأحياء،
فقراء بريش طاووس
سنغرس العصا في منتصف الهواء!..
نبحث عما يجعل الوقت
أميراً بإيماءة مشاكسٍ نزق
يجعل الهاوية
ضحكة حلمٍ في قلب عصفور!..
أو أصبع نبي،
يحول الأرض امرأة في عين رجل.

٢

لا تسألوا عن خرافة العش
الورد أيقن أنه بلا أجنحة،
لا تسألوا عن يباس الغيوم
حين يكون الشجر بلا ظل
تعالوا ننثر الكركرة في مسامات الأرض
نسخر من صدفة ولدت بين رحمين
من دم أصبح علامة استفهام
لنصنع من الطين
لغة تعبر الفضاءات المزروعة بالشياطين،
نركل الأوراق السوداء!..
لنتجاوز الحاجز المروري من الأعلى،

هازيئين من سعال العوادم
وتجهم القطط السمان.
تبعثرنا الأرصفة الملونة
حيث يتبادل العشاق نظراتهم الخارجة عن القانون،
حيث تصنع الأحلام عكازها من قوس قزح..

٣

لاشيء..

لاشيء يوقف البياض...
لا وقت لمصافحة ضحكة أسنة
لا وقت لارتداء سنوات من الخيبة،
لنترك النظرات المكسورة لفقراء بلا أقدام!..
هنا عند عتبة الضحكة
ننزع ألماً معلقاً على ثقب الباب
حيث التثاؤب الأول للأرض،
طردنا الرحيل من مذكراتنا اليومية
وتركنا للحزن رقصته المهداة لليل
نجيد تهجئة قبور أجدادنا،
ركل الحظ في الطرق الميت!..
قراءة النوافذ المغلقة..
طردنا الرحيل
مخلفين ذكرى على شكل زمن أعلن توبته
وكمن يؤثث لعالم بلا نظارات سوداء
سنعلن العصيان على غصة قديمة
تاركين الصمت المثقل بالدهشة
يتأملنا من خلف الأبواب
بينما السماء المغرورة
تسأل عن يهربون أكذوبة الجدران المنتهكة
إلى حقائق القلب!..
مرحى لنا نفقاً عين الصحراء
ونقيم مشنقة الجهات؛
لنستأصل أسماءنا المخنوقة بقوسين أبديين
نشارك الزمن المنسي فنجان قهوة.
طردنا الرحيل
الرحيل الذي كان يلتهم الأقدام المدماة
في طريقه الأصفر،
زرعنا العشق في شفاها الجديدة..

تعالوا إذاً،
نطلق الأغاني المجنحة
في سماء بلا أسنانٍ حادة!..
هناك حيث تكون الأشياء بلا حواجز
نرفع الغطاء عن فرح يتراقص
على خاصرة بحر دون جذور
نسخر من قمر يتململ وحيداً
في مساء يتبرقع باللامبالاة
لاشأن لنا بعكاز الليل المكسور
الصباحات تفتح نوافذها في أعيننا،
من أيدينا تنبع الأنهار،
لا نحلم ببناء مملكة للذباب!..
جننا لنمسح الغبار عن الغد المجهول
أمسنا
كان متسولاً يرتل حزنه في عيون الفراشات
أن له أن يموت،

٤

تعالوا إذاً، نمنح المتسولين جزءاً من أحلامنا
لا نريد أن نعد ما في جيوبنا من هواء
لا وزن للكروش المنتفخة
لا وزن لطين بلا عقول
بضع كلمات مجنونة
تكفي لكسر اللون المعتم
لم تعد الصدفة صديقنا الوحيد
نحن الذين نزرع الصدف في الشوارع
نوزع طيور الحب على المارة
ننقش الضوء على الجدران
وعلى أبواب المدارس المقفلة،
نوقظ الحراس من غفوة بنصف حلم
نطرد النوم من غرفته اللزجة
ونستدرج الشمس لتلهو معنا،
لئلا تذبل على كرسي الموت
نعلق الأغاني على رموش عمال النظافة
نلعن اللون الكاكي
وكلاب المدن الضالة
نعلن صهيل المطر بلا شهادة ميلاد

ما أبشع الأوراق المختومة بحقد الموظفين
أولئك الذين يتوسدون كسلهم
في مكاتب تغص بالكاكو.

ليذهب مهرجو التاريخ الأسمنتي إلى الجحيم.
تعالوا إذاً، نرسم أوطاناً على السحاب
لتسقط على شكل زنايق مبتلة بالحب
تعالوا نعلن قيامتنا
دون أن نصافح نملة
أو نفتح حواراً مع تمثال

ندوزن جنوننا في أرجوحة السماء
وقريباً من متناول الأطفال أيضاً..
فرح ما يربطنا بروحنا
يصلبنا بزقزقات الأمس ونميمة أم متصوفة.
مرة أخرى تصبح أصواتنا مشاغبة
لذا نهدم السلم المقام في الحنجرة
ونغفو بنفسجة لرائت صحراوية
نخنق الحيرة ونحصد الحلم قرب ياقاتنا
نتركها في اللامكان،
كغيمة تعلن فرحها متى تشاء
من يغسل الأماكن
من شهوة الاحتراق؟
من يزحف عميقاً فينا؟!..
وحده الصمت يفعل..
وحده الصمت
يثرثر كثيراً...

Appendix D: Poem titled *The Journeying Bedouins* by Sulayman al-Flayyih

قصيدة بعنوان البدو الرحل
سليمان الفليح
من ديوان أحزان البدو الرحل (١٩٨١)
صفحة ٧١ إلى ٧٣

ها قومي انحذروا من مرتفعات الماضي – شهب الأعين
تجلدهم ريح المستقبل نحو الواحات المأهولة بالأمطار.
هاهم مثل جراد القحط القادم من آخر إقليم في الدنيا
جاءوا وانتشروا في هذي الصحراء الرملية مثل الأحجار
هاهم عند حدود الغيم الأزرق ناموا
فتوسد كل فقير منهم عرفجه/عوسجه

حلموا بالفجر وأبكاهم برق شقّ الظلمة (يشعق)
يتعرج في دائرة الأفق المغلق

لكن ما يلبث أن يخبو
فابتلت من أدمعهم عند الفجر الريح

الأرض

الأشجار

هاهم قاموا

ساروا نحو تخوم المدن الكبرى
جوعى

عطشى

(يستعطون) الخبز اليابس والماء الأسن والنار
هاهم عند حدود المدن الكبرى محنيو القامات

منكسرو الهامات

ومشتملون بأسمالهم الرثة لا تكسوهم

إلا الأطمار
هاهم تجلدهم

كي تبعدهم

عن أسوار المدن الكبرى

خيالة جيش التتار
هاهم يضطجعون هنالك

مثل الأخشاب المنخورة خلف الأسوار
هاهم ينطفئون هنالك

عند حدود الغيم الأزرق مثل الأنجم

كي يُسدل عن آخر أخبار البدو الرحل

في هذا العصر ستار

قصيدة توجسات من الزمن الفاسد
سليمان الفليح
من ديوان الغناء في صحراء الألم (١٩٧٩)
من صفحة ٢ إلى ٧

وحلمتُ الليلة يا أمي بريحٍ تجتاح المرعى
تقمع خيلي
تطرد إبلي
تجلدني علناً بالأفعى
تربطني خلف مضارب قومي
تسقينني إذا أعطش دمي
توسعني يا أمي قمعاً
ورأيت الليلة يا أمي خيلاً برؤوسٍ مقطوعة
تغزو قومي
ورأيت امرأة فوق اليبرق مرفوعة
تهتف باسمي
عارية يغسلها الدم
ورأيت غيوماً راکضة فوق مضاربنا قانية اللون
ترش رجال قبيلتنا بمياه النار وروح السم

ورأيتك يا أمي مفجوعة
تذرين الرملا
يبين القتلى
وتلمين فتات اللحم
ورأيت غراباً كبر الليل
ينعق حولي
ويدور كثيراً حول الخيمة، يتغافلني
ينهب طفلي
ويطير بعيداً ، يتركني
أتمرغ فوق الرمل الأسود
أفقد عقلي
ورأيت أسوداً تزار همساً
ورأيت كلاباً تعوي الشمس
ورأيت ذئاباً مسعورة
ورأيت حشود النمل الأسود فوق الورد
ورأيت تيوساً مخمورة
**

وحلمت الليلة يا أمي بغصون الأثل الممتدة
تخرج من أجساد الخيل
تتبرعم أزهار صفر
تتضوع طيباً حجرياً
تتشابك كقرون الأيل
تتشعب كالهم المزمّن
تعلقها أضراس الليل
تنقيها في وجه الفجر الزاهر
في وجه الزمن العاهر
تبصقها في وجه الجيل

ورأيت المدن الكبرى تركض عبر سراب البر
يتعقبها الخوف المتعب
ويطاردها المرض المرعب
ويفتتها حجراً حجراً ، شيطان الوحشة والشر

ورأيت صقوراً وحداءات وبطاريقاً (كذا) بأعاليها
ورأيت دماء أهاليها
تقطر من مخالب النسر
ورأيت عقاباً يخطف قصراً
ورأيت غراباً يأكل نمرأ
ورأيت أفاعي في الأفاق
ترسم أقواساً قزحية
ورأيت وجوهاً في الشرفات
تلبس أفئدة شبحيه...
ورأيت عقولاً في الطرقات
تشرب أنخاباً ملحية..!!

يا أمي كابوس هذا أم وهم ؟!
أم شيء يأتيني أم ...
هذا الأرق الموحش حلم ؟!
لكني منذ الصحو كنت أحس وأنا أسند رأسي
فوق (الطنب)
التمس العشب
يلسني كالإبر العشب
ويحز .. يحز العنق (الطنب)
ويسير من (العقدة) نحو (العقدة) (للواسط)

**

وحلمت الليلة يا أمي أن عيوني معصوبة
ومضارب قومي مسلوبة
ورؤوس رجالي ملصقة بالحائط
ورأيتك يا أمي لا تبكين .. لأن الأدمع مصلوبه
ولأن (العقدة) في (الواسط)

مقاطع قصيدة أغاني الصعاليك
سليمان الفليح
من ديوان أحزان البدو الرحل (١٩٨١)
صفحة ٢٦ إلى ٣٤

-أهزوجة-

لأننا أبينا
وتأبى الرجولة
بإنا سنبقى
عبيداً سبائا
لديكم
ونبقى جوار بغايا
يقدمن ليلاً لشيخ القبيلة
خُلِعْنَا
وضعنا
و(صعنا)
وجعنا
وهرت علينا كلاب القبيلة
* * *

تأبط شراً

تأبط شراً تطارده الزوبعة
يسابق رف القطا للغدير
الذي سوف تجتاحه الزوبعة
تأبط شراً يجيء ولم يتأبط شيئاً
سوى سيف ألامه الموجهة
وجوع الصعاليك والمعدمين
وولى
يسابق كالسهم أيامه المسرعة

السليك بن السلكة

آه يا داهية المهلكة
أندري بأن صحابك ألقوا بك
الآن للتهلكة
ودمك ما زال ينزف فوق الرمال
وسيفك لما جُرحت أعادوه للغمد
واستسلموا
قبل ان تنتهي المعركة؟
وأنت الذي تخزن الماء للصحب منذ الشتاء
ببيض النعام
وتمضي تمارس
يا سيدي الصلعة

Appendix G: Poem titled My Homeland by Sa'diyya Mufarrih

قصيدة وطني

سعدية مفرح

من ديوان تغيب فأسرج خيل ظنوني (١٩٩٤)

ولو فتشوا

أنت في القلب

ذاكرة

فلن يجدوك

وإن وجدوك

أنت باهٍ شفيفٍ كغيمٍ

فلن يعرفوك

وإن عرفوك

أنت باقٍ

فلن ياخذوك

وإن أخذوك

فلمست تموت

وإن متَّ

في بيت قلبي

فهل ستموت

في قلب كل البيوت ؟