

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE STATE OF STATELESSNESS:
RETHINKING BELONGING IN STATELESS
NARRATIVES FROM LEBANON AND KUWAIT

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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A stateless individual, as described by the United Nations, is a person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law. While statelessness is a relatively well-represented issue in humanitarian, political, and anthropological studies, the cultural and literary production of stateless individuals around the world is overlooked and understudied. This thesis examines the aesthetic and narrative structures of two stateless narratives, *Qayd El Dars* by Lebanese author Lana Abdulrahman and *Kaliska* by Bidun-Canadian author Nasser Al Dhafiri. It utilizes the critical concepts of legality and spatiality to look at how places in *Kaliksa* and *Qayd El Dars* are mapped, and the effects that they have on their inhabitants. Under spatiality, it argues that stateless literature can uncover places of belonging that are often ignored or discredited in the public narrative of the nation-state. The concepts of roots and routes, which are often used in analysis of refugee, exile, and diaspora literature, are revisited from the lens of statelessness. Through a close reading of both content and form, this thesis argues that the arbitrary and self-serving methods employed by the states to exclude the stateless from official national belonging are built into the fabric of the narrative in stateless literature, with the Novel form serving as an embodiment of the totality of the stateless experience and its humanity and interconnectedness.

Keywords: Stateless Literature, Lebanon, Kuwait, Spatiality, Belonging, Roots, Routes, Focalization

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INTRODUCTION

While statelessness is a relatively well-represented issue in humanitarian, political, and anthropological studies, the cultural and literary production of stateless individuals around the world is overlooked and understudied. As the focus on statelessness within human rights reports and political agendas remains on concepts such as legality and rights, stateless literature provides a more nuanced and personal perspective on the lived experiences of stateless individuals. This thesis argues that reading stateless literature, with a close attention on its themes and structures and a focus on its aesthetic devices, humanizes stateless individuals away from the exclusive concepts of citizenship and belonging dictated by the nation-state.

Through a close reading of two novels, *Qayd El Dars* by Lana Abdulrahman from Lebanon and *Kaliska* by Bidun writer Nasser Al Dhafiri from Kuwait, this thesis highlights the way in which stateless literature can subvert and challenge the hegemonic narratives of modern exclusionary nation-states by challenging traditional notions of belonging, roots, and routes. It further argues that this challenging effort is built into the very structure of the stateless novel, drawing on concepts of narrativity and focalization from Genette Gerard and Terry Eagleton.

The following introductory chapter introduces a historical background of statelessness, both globally and in Lebanon and Kuwait specifically. It describes the origins of statelessness and highlights the role of politics and regional events, such as the Arab spring, in situating the issue of statelessness in the higher or lower levels of public social and political priorities. Following a quick overview of stateless literature globally, the introduction highlights the specificities of the stateless literary scene in Lebanon and Kuwait, formulating a framework which brings together concepts from spatiality and

narrativity to conduct a close reading of the two novels, *Qayd El Dars* by Lana Abdulrahman and *Kaliska* by Nasser Al Dhafiri. Both novels were written in Arabic and have not been translated yet. All following translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

A. Statelessness as a World Phenomenon

Statelessness is a world phenomenon which has been gaining more attention in the twenty-first century, along with similar topics of refuge, exile, and displacement. Under Article One of its General Provisions, the 1954 United Nations *Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* defined a stateless individual as “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.” Despite the several conventions articulating the basic and fundamental right of having citizenship, several million individuals remain stateless around the globe. The UNHCR estimates that about 12 million individuals live without citizenship around the world¹. As stateless individuals, they do not enjoy the protection of the state or the rights granted to its citizens, face “inadequate access to health care and education, poor employment prospects and poverty, little opportunity to own property, travel restrictions, social exclusion, vulnerability to trafficking, harassment, and violence” (Southwick & Lynch i).

Many reasons have historically led to statelessness, including failure to apply for citizenship, wars, and sudden and brutal forced displacement. Yet as the label ‘stateless’ suggests, having defined nation-states is a prerequisite for statelessness. While some scholars consider the English Commonwealth established in 1649 as the first nation-state

¹ OHCHR and the Right to a Nationality, 12 June 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness#:~:text=%20The%20exact%20number%20of%20stateless,many%20other%20human%20rights%20violations>.

to be created, the modern nation-state is largely a product of the rise of nationalism in the aftermath of the First World War. In light of nationalism, prejudice and discrimination against certain groups based on ethnic, religious or linguistic differences became the leading cause for statelessness around the world (Blitz and Lynch 6). In *Statelessness and Citizenship: A Comparative Study on the Benefits of Nationality*, Brad Blitz and Maureen Lynch give an overview of global cases of statelessness. On a global level, state succession has historically been a cause of statelessness. The break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Soviet Unions are among the prime examples leading to statelessness in Europe historically. “The dissolution of these political structures fomented numerous nationality contests that left millions stateless and forced them to live as minorities in new political contexts. Since 1992, the de-federation and division of Czechoslovakia has left thousands of Roma in a precarious situation while their citizenship status was initially challenged and questioned by both successor states, often because individuals lacked documentation and proof of nationality” (6). In addition to politically induced reasons, statelessness on the basis of discrimination is very prevalent around the world. This discrimination is built into the fabric of nationality policies in some countries, where nationality is built on blood origin rather than birth on territory, such as in Cote d’Ivoire, the Dominican Republic, the former Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy (7). Minority groups in these countries are often denied citizenship even though they meet the requirements instigated by the state, such as prolonged habitual residence. Among the many minority groups that live stateless around the world because of discriminatory nationality policies are the ethnic Serbs in Croatia, the Bihari Community in Bangladesh, the Nubian population in Kenya, and the ethnic Rwandese Banyamulenge in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (7-8). In addition to discrimination based

on ethnicity or religion, gender-based discrimination can lead to statelessness in cases where citizenship is passed down only through patrilineal lines, such as in the Arab world.

B. Statelessness in the Arab World

Several stateless populations live in the Arab world, such as the Bidun in the gulf, the Kurds in Syria and Lebanon, minority groups such as the Tuareg in Libya, and the Palestinian refugees who do not enjoy the legal protection of an internationally recognized state. This paper will focus mainly on statelessness in Lebanon and Kuwait. I first got exposed to the Bidun case in Kuwait because of my frequent travels to the Gulf. One of my Kuwaiti debate trainers, upon knowing I studied literature, recommended a podcast titled 'Bidun Waraq: Adab Al Bidun' (Without Documents: The Literature of the Bidun). The episode's guest was Tariq Alrabei, whose book *Stateless Literature of the Gulf* I'll be using in this thesis. Doing more research on the topic led me to statelessness in Lebanon. However, I was not able to find much about the literary production of stateless individuals in Lebanon. Since the literary focus on the production of stateless people in Lebanon is far less developed and mature than in Kuwait, my thesis aims to bridge the gap by reading *Kaliska* by Nasser Al Dhafiri and *Qayd El Dars* by Lana Abdulrahman in conversation, as an effort to broaden the scope of work on stateless literature in the Middle East.

1. Statelessness in Lebanon

It can be argued that statelessness in Lebanon dates back to 1920, when the state of Greater Lebanon was announced as a product of the Franco-British colonial partition of the Middle East (Trabousli 75). In 1923, the colonial border agreement was amended,

transferring seven Lebanese Villages to British Mandate Rule and excluding them from Lebanon's map. These villages are: Tarbikha, Saliha, Malkiyeh, Nabi Yusha, Qadas, Hunin, and Abil al-Qamh. The border agreement was followed by a census in 1932 which mapped Lebanese territory and identified laws for citizenship. Many individuals in Lebanon were not legally covered by this census, and therefore failed to apply to or receive Lebanese citizenship. Rania Maktabi, in her paper "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who Are the Lebanese?" argues that the 1932 census, as well as the 1943 national pact, can be seen as a "cementation of the political elite's perception of Lebanon as a Christian nation. This premise was embodied in the 1932 census and internalized in the 1943 Pact when [...] the debatable statistical findings, the problematic inclusion of the emigrant population, and the legal significance which the census later acquired were formalized politically" (224). The individuals not covered by the census came to be stateless, and are known as Maktoumi El Qayd (MeQ - Unregistered) in Lebanon. They live without official state recognition and are therefore denied basic rights such as education and work. Many of these individuals are bedouins who were residing on Lebanese land and failed to apply for citizenship because of the complicated paperwork required. These populations continue to live nomadic and bedouin lifestyles, especially in Northern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley, and are known in some places as *Al Arab* (العرب). Additional reasons for statelessness in Lebanon include the forced expulsion of the many individuals who settled in the seven aforementioned villages on the border following the 1948 Nakba. Due to their mixed heritage, having first been residents of Lebanon following Sykes-Picot and then later recognized as residents of Palestine, and in an effort to resolve the issue of statelessness, the Lebanese Government created the Qayd El Dars (QeD - Under Study) category in 1962, applying it to holders of an

undetermined nationality, especially residents of the seven villages (UNHCR SIREN 12). In 1994, a naturalization decree was promulgated, which granted citizenship to over 202,527 individuals, most of whom were residents of the seven villages. Soon enough, the Maronite league in Lebanon challenged this decree, arguing that it had naturalized way more stateless individuals than was deserved, and that it would eventually mess up the sectarian balance of Lebanon. As a result, nationality was withdrawn from hundreds of individuals in 2011 (12).

According to a UNHCR report published in 2021, there are approximately 27,000 stateless individuals in Lebanon, excluding the thousands of Palestinian refugees². The reality, however, presents much bigger numbers, including unregistered children of Syrian refugees and migrant workers, in addition to unregistered cases.

Recent efforts championing the rights of the stateless population in Lebanon are emerging. In mid-2020, ‘Hawiati,’ part of a new regional network on statelessness in the Middle East and North Africa region, was established. This initiative is part of a larger ecosystem of activists shedding light on issues of statelessness, including the NGO *Ruwad Al Houkoug* (Frontiers of Rights), a more recent initiative called Maktoum Aid by stateless mobiliser Sami Haddad in northern Lebanon, and work done by the Issam Fares Institute in the American University of Beirut. Yet the problem remains understudied and marginalized from an official governmental side.

² According to UNRWA, the number of registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as of March 2023 was 489,292 persons, in addition to over 30,000 Palestinian refugees who escaped the war in Syria and settled in Lebanon. https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/lebanon_field_update_-_adcom_june_2023.pdf

2. Statelessness in Kuwait:

The biggest stateless population in the Gulf is situated in Kuwait, which hosts over 100,000 Biduns. Several historians and activists—including Claire Beaugrand, Dawn Chatty, Ronen Cohen, Roswitha Badry, and more—have researched and explained the historical roots of this case, which has its origin in the rise of nation-states in the gulf, influenced by partitions that were dictated by colonial powers in the early 1960s. In 1959, a nationality law set up different levels of nationality “linked with a difference in rights enjoyed by citizens by origin (‘first-class’ citizens) on the one hand, and citizens by naturalization (‘second-class citizens’) on the other” (Badry 100). Before the Iraqi invasion, the Bidun community enjoyed rights similar to those given to Kuwaiti citizens, with economic and social benefits. With the instability that defined the 1980s and 1990s in the area, and especially in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, these rights were significantly reduced.

The Iraqi invasion and its consequences (Second Gulf War and Kuwait’s liberation in 1990/91) provided the state authorities with a suitable opportunity to more than halve the numbers of the Bidun and to deprive the bulk of them of the rights to formal employment and welfare benefits... As a result, additional costs for basic services and precarious employment with lower pay caused more poverty. Since 1993, Bidun have been officially treated as “illegal residents”. Identity documents are no longer available to them; the registration of births, marriages, divorces, and deaths is no longer possible. In 2000, the parliament passed a law that pledged to naturalize 2,000 persons a year, yet the law has not been applied consistently, and the quota has never been filled up. (101).

As years went by, a very little number of Biduns managed to attain Kuwaiti citizenship, while the bulk remained stateless. Kuwaiti citizens also face the possibility of being stripped of their citizenship as a means of punishment by the state. Nationality is usually only revoked in cases of national betrayal or terrorism, but is sometimes used as a political tool to threaten minorities and groups that constitute significant voting blocks.

In addition to the reduction of the rights of the Bidun in Kuwait following the area's political instability, the general outlook, attitude, and language used in discussions of statelessness in Kuwait shifted greatly with time. A report by the Human Rights Watch quotes a Kuwait University Professor who said "there is nothing stable about the Bidun issue" (3). This instability is not only built into the legislations issued by the Kuwaiti government, but also into the terminology used to describe the Bidun. At first, when the Bidun enjoyed similar rights as Kuwaitis in the early stages of nation-state formation, they were called *abnaa al badeya* (sons of the desert). This was greatly due to the fact that many of these individuals belonged to well known nomadic tribes scattered across the gulf's deserts. With time, they came to be known—in chronological order—as, "*Bidun Jinsiyya* (those without citizenship), *Ghayr Kuwaiti* (non-Kuwaitis), *Ghayr Muḥaddad al-Jinsiyya* (those with undetermined citizenship), *Majhuli al-Hawiyya* (those whose identities are unknown) and, since 1990, *Muqimun bi Şura Ghayr Qanuniyya* (illegal residents)" (Tareq Alrabei 18). With each new linguistic employment of the issue came a new political employment further reducing the rights of the Bidun. When the state adopted the term 'illegal resident', the choice was explained through the following reasoning, articulated in 1993 by Saud al-Nasir al- Sabah, who was the minister of information and official spokesman for the government:

There is no such people as Bedoons. 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 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. (55-56)

Following these discriminatory state legislations, several movements calling for the rights of the Bidun emerged, both in Kuwait and the diaspora. “The first two (unregistered) Bidun-run societies were set up in 2008 after Kuwaiti citizens had been making efforts to disseminate information (and spread awareness) about their difficult situation since the beginning of the new millennium. Of utmost importance was an event held in November 2006, organized by the Kuwaiti Society of Human Rights (KSHR), when Bidun were given the chance to speak for themselves in public” (Badry 103). Activists in exile and in Kuwait have also played a pivotal role in advocating for Bidun rights, such as London-based Muḥammad Wali al-‘Anazi who founded the “Kuwaitis Bidun Movement” (Ḥarakat al-kuwaytiyyin al-bidun), registered in England and Wales, in 2006 (@KuwBedMovement), in addition to “Kuwaiti Bidun Citizens” movement and “Group 29” (Badry 103-104). The case gained even more national and international attention following the Bidun Movement, which was sparked by the events of the Arab Spring in 2011.

C. The Arab Spring and the Bidun Movement

The Arab Spring, which started in 2010-2011 and saw the birth of several movements across different Arab countries which demanded political reform and democratization, had its impact on the Bidun case. After all, the Arab spring was born out of people's demand for their rights, first as humans and as citizens next. Roel Meijer argues that it was not only political reform, echoed in the chants calling for democracy and a change in leadership, that mobilized the masses of Arab citizens and non-citizens. It was rather the "outrage at the complete denial both of people's basic humanity and of their civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, all deepened by crony capitalism, the self-enrichment of the elite, rampant corruption, and constant harassment by the security forces" (90-91). In Kuwait, the protesters who took to the streets in response to the unvoiced call which mobilized almost all Arab nations were not citizens asking for governments to be brought down or changed, but were non-citizens asking to be treated as humans. As Dr. Abdul Hakim Al Fadhli put it, "it is not about naturalization (tajnis), it is about existing (wujud)" (Claire Beaugrand 488). The importance of the Bidun Movement which was sparked by the Arab Spring lies in its unprecedented confrontational nature, whereby Biduns organized themselves, expressed unified demands, and shifted their overall strategy. Before the movement, their strategy mainly focused on attaining citizenship. After the movement, they focused more on demanding some of the basic human rights which they are denied, such as healthcare, legal work permits, and education.

With this shift in strategy came another shift, characterized by a growing interest in Bidun literature. According to Mona Kareem, a former Bidun poet and academic who migrated to the United States and is now an Assistant Professor of Jewish, Islamic, and

Middle Eastern Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, ““Bidoon literature” would never have been born without the birth of the Bidoon movement. Every political cause has an innate need for literature, for culture, to voice the suffering of a people and recount their progress towards their collective aspirations” (para. 3). In that sense, the literary and the political are both embedded within and in need of each other, with the former aiding the latter. However, the recent attention to stateless literature established in Kuwait did not extend to other countries, including Lebanon. This can be largely due to the different ways in which the Arab Spring manifested in different Arab countries. The high standards of living enjoyed in Kuwait leave larger space for cultural and literary movements to flourish and take center stage, whereas the Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian contexts differ tremendously, casting the rights of non-citizens aside as even legal citizens are denied basic rights.

D. Stateless Literature: Mapping the Homeland Through Literary Pens

In addition to political and humanitarian activists, literary critics, authors, intellectuals, and poets such as Tareq Alrabie, Saadiyah Al Mufarreh, Mona Kareem, Ismail Fahd Ismail, Buthayna Al Issa and many more, have contributed to the Bidun cause through literature. As an attempt to focus on the literary, Tariq Alrabiei, in his book *Stateless Literature of the Gulf* aims to approach Bidun literature in a comprehensive way which showcases the work of Biduns “as part of a wider literary phenomenon which we can call *Bidun literature*” (1). Alrabiei argues that current readings of Bidun literature approach any text with a sympathetic view, expecting the text to merely address the victimization of Biduns. For him, this approach dismisses the ability of the text to go beyond “the expression of a condition of a lack” (3). Similarly, Kareem points out how Kuwaiti

literature anthologies and encyclopedias ignored Bidun literature up until recently (para. 3). In Lebanon, most work related to statelessness consists of UNHCR reports and policy research. This approach disregards the personal and focuses on the idea of citizenship, which is something that even stateless movements have shifted away from. On several occasions, stateless individuals expressed their disappointment at the impersonal way in which their case is treated. It is often in modern society that causes are taken away from their humanitarian essence and used and expressed as political topics. Lynn Al Khatib, a stateless woman from Lebanon, described her struggle to deal with the dehumanizing effects of approaching stateless private stories as testimonies.

I was viewed by organisers as a representation of statelessness, with the other elements of my humanity and life disregarded - no matter how much more of a person I am, no matter how many panic attacks, how many angry outbursts and how many traumas I've absorbed. I was there to represent statelessness, not my whole experience as a person affected by statelessness. In these situations I told myself - I have to be what they expect me to be in. My story and the way I deliver it is the thing that could show the world that statelessness is an issue that affects people made of flesh and bone, after all: nothing is more powerful than a personal story, right? For a long time I was convinced that in these spaces I am a real example and treated myself as one because this is how I've been received, I just wanted my voice to be heard! (para. 4-5)

Focusing on the *private* is not only about listening to real accounts of lived experiences, but also to fictional aesthetic choices made by poets and writers. While 'stateless literature' can be considered as a term simply referring to literary works by stateless

individuals, it can also be considered as a literary collectivity or a genre in literature, in the same way that ‘refugee literature’ has come to be considered as such. In that sense, stateless literature can be situated within the broader realm of World Literature, allowing for a more focused investigation into its employment of aesthetic choices and literary tools.

Globally, stateless literature is beginning to gain more attention as a literary genre. In “Stateless Literatures: Writing Globally from the “Margins” of Western Europe” Benjamin Owen offers a de-centered conceptualization of “World Literature” through an analysis of works of literature from Catalonia, Valencia and Roussillon, and Wales. Mauro Lazarovich, who is a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University, decided to title his dissertation “Citizen of Nowhere: Stateless and Refugee Literature in Latin America” where he analyzes a constellation of poems, fiction, essays, and paintings by Latin American authors and artists, such as Gabriela Mistral, João Guimarães Rosa, Pablo Neruda, Victoria Ocampo, and Lasar Segall. Taking on a more linguistic than a literary approach, Talar Chahinian Traces the key movements in Western Armenian literary history to explore how a stateless language sustains itself in a diasporic setting in her book *Stateless: The Politics of the Armenian Language in Exile*. All the aforementioned publications are very recent, either being currently developed, or published in the period between 2022-2023.

Focusing on Lebanese and Kuwaiti stateless literature, and in the intersection between literature and politics, this paper leans towards the literary. It aims to shed light on the aesthetics of stateless literary production through a close reading of two texts, guided by three critical concepts: legality, spatiality, and narration. The texts are *Qayd El*

Dars by Lebanese Author Lana Abdulrahman and *Kaliska* by Bidun-Canadian Author Nasser Al Dhafiri.

Lana Abdulrahman is a Lebanese journalist and writer who currently resides in Cairo with her husband and children. She is the writer of several published novels and contributed to various newspapers throughout her career. Although not stateless herself, she chose to write about statelessness and the question of identity in her novel *Qayd Al Dars (Nationality under Study)*. Qayd El Dars is a legal term used in Lebanon to refer to some stateless inhabitants of Lebanon, whose nationality is ‘under study’. The novel was published in 2016 in Arabic, and remains untranslated. It is not widely circulated—not even in Lebanon—and remains understudied in the critical literary scene. The novel tells the story of three generations of stateless individuals living in Lebanon between the 60s and early 2000s, and is predominantly set at the time of the Lebanese civil war which lasted from the mid 70s to the early 90s. The story starts with Souad, a Lebanese girl who runs away with Awwad, a Kurdish stateless merchant, and marries him. In a country where citizenship is exclusively determined through patrilineal lineage, Souad’s children all inherit their father’s statelessness. Among her children is Najwa, who marries Bassem. Bassem's nationality is also Qayd Al Dars, since his parents were Palestinian refugees who came from Qadas, one of the seven villages on the border. During the war, Bassem leaves his family in order to fight with the Feda’eyeen; Palestinian freedom fighters. Their Children Layla, Hassan, Hasan, and Yasmine all inherit their stateless status, and the story is mainly centered on Hassan and Layla as they struggle with their identity and the consequences of their statelessness.

Published at around the same time, in 2015, *Kaliska* by Nasser Al Dhafiri is one of the most widely circulated works of modern Bidun literature in Kuwait. Nasser Al

Dhafiri is a Bidun who departed from Kuwait to Canada in 2001 and later acquired its nationality. He is the author of several works of fiction, the most recent being the *Jahraa Trilogy*. He passed away in 2019 after a fight with cancer, and was buried in Canada. *Kaliska* is the second novel in the Jahraa Trilogy, which is made up of *Al Sahad (Scorched Heat)*, *Kaliska (The Coyote Chases a Gazelle)*, and *Al Mastar*. The three novels were first published independently by the author in 2013, 2015, and 2017 respectively. They were published in Beirut and censored in Kuwait until after the author's death, when a group of Bidun writers worked on publishing them in Kuwait under one title: *The Jahraa Trilogy*. The novels are set for translation soon, as a part of the efforts to spread Bidun literature and give it a place within world literature. It is worth noting, however, that while several Kuwaiti novels featuring Bidun characters have gained attention and won prizes, most notably *The Bamboo Stalk* by Saoud Al Sanousi, Nasser Al Dhafiri refused to nominate any of his novels to certain international prizes because of assumed biases. Implicit in this decision is a disillusionment with international categorizations of literature, which are often generated in the European or American Centers. It is in light of such attitudes that the need for a comprehensive analysis of stateless literature within the Arab world arises. With their geographic proximities, shared language, colonial history, and cultural similarities, Arab countries pose a rich scope of literary comparison which does not have to necessarily take Western literary production as its point of reference.

The events in *Kaliska* unfold in three countries: Kuwait, Syria, and Canada. As the main character, Al Awwad, crosses from one border to another, his experience and emotions remain centered on his homeland, Kuwait. Al Dhafiri's *Kaliska* does not focus solely on statelessness, but rather carries in the folds of its plot various pressing questions

about the nature of good and evil, the limits of vengeance, and the politics of belonging. Al Awwad, a Kuwaiti Bedouin, is lured into the love of Rasha, a Kuwaiti *Hadhar* (حضر). The word *hadhar* comes from the Arabic *hadhara* (حضارة), meaning sedentary or modernized city dwellers, while the word *bado* (بدو) or bedouin comes from the Arabic *badiya* (البادية) meaning desert. On the onset, the semantic difference between the two terms appears to be related to the geographic place of dwelling. In reality, however, the two terms are used in social categorization. In light of the government's efforts to urbanize most Kuwaiti areas, hardly anyone in Kuwait now still lives outside cities, including the country's bedouins. The term '*bado*' in Kuwait is usually used to refer to tribes which come from Saudi Arabia and the surrounding desert, while '*hadhar*' is used to refer to people who worked in places by the sea, in what is modern-day Kuwait City, and who are further categorized into *Ajam* (shiite Kuwaiti *hadhar*), and the Arab *hadhar*, who are the highest ranking social group made up of wealthy merchants and governmental figures. This background is important to understand the character dynamics in *Kaliska*. Al Awwad is rejected by Rasha's brother because of his status as a bedouin, and his citizenship is revoked halfway through the novel. He is then exiled to Canada, where he lives with the pressing need for vengeance.

Even as more attention is being given to stateless literature recently, there is still a dearth in studies, and no papers whatsoever which try to go beyond the orders of one nation-state in the region to look at statelessness across borders. My paper seeks to bridge this gap by studying the two novels, *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars*, singularly and comparatively. It situates the more circulated work of Biduns in Kuwait in proximity to the less studied literary production on statelessness in Lebanon, in an aim to widen the scope of literary criticism in the region. It poses the following questions: to what extent

do these novels challenge traditional notions of statelessness, citizenship, and belonging? How are places of residence mapped through literature, and what role do they play in the character's feelings of belonging and exile? How is the form of the novel used to shape its contents? What are the literary tools employed by the authors, and what do they try to emphasize? How are the two novels similar or different? And what impact does the nationality of the writer, or its absence, have on the mode, voice, and type of narration and narrative structure? These questions are explored in the two chapters using the concepts and guiding framework elaborated below.

E. Framework

1. *Spatiality: Mapping Statelessness in the Margins*

One of the main guiding concepts utilized in chapter one of this paper is spatiality. In his book *Spatiality*, which is part of a series called *The New Critical Idiom* published by Routledge, critic Robert Tally Jr. gives an overview of the "Spatial Turn" in which *space* was placed in the foreground of literary and cultural studies instead of *time*. Major theorists of spatiality include Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, Edward Soja, Erich Auerbach, Georg Lukács, and Fredric Jameson. Foucault, in a speech given in 1967, argued that the present time is 'the epoch of space,' stating that:

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (R. Tally Jr., 11).

Spatiality asserts that we need to put space in the foreground because of the "transformational effects of post-colonialism, globalization, and the rise of ever more

advanced information technologies” which caused traditional spatial or geographic limits to be erased or redrawn (3). In that sense, as R. Tally Jr. argues, “space and place are indeed historical, and the changing spaces and perceptions of space over time are crucial to an understanding of the importance of spatiality in literal and cultural studies” (5). In relation to statelessness—maps, borders, nation-states, and social spaces play a huge role in creating non-citizens and exacerbating their feeling of exile within their ‘homeland.’ Moreover, spatiality in literary criticism argues that:

Literature also functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live (2).

Ricardo Padron, in his paper “Mapping Imaginary Worlds” argues that stories do not only allow us to imagine and picture places and spaces, but also play a role in giving those places life and meaning through sculpting characters associated with them (258). For that, I will be focusing on spatiality to study how maps are drawn in *Qayd El Dars* and *Kaliska*, especially in relation to the places that the stateless occupy.

In relation to spatiality, it is important to draw a distinction between two concepts that are often used interchangeably: space and place. Generally, space is thought to be more abstract than place, with the former denoting a hypothetical dimension that does not need to be necessarily defined by geographic borders. In their paper “Boundaries, Extents and Circulations: An Introduction to Spatiality and the Early Modern Concept of Space” Jonathan Regier and Koen Vermeir give a detailed account of the etymology of ‘space’ and ‘place.’ Most often, “space denoted sufficient room for a concrete action or purpose. This room could be a distance, an area or temporal interval” (3). Space in its Epicurean

sense defines an “abstract entity” (5). As for place, its etymology in Greek philosophy and language define it as the unmoving boundary containing an object” (6). Later, the concept of place gained more philosophical power, whereby “specific places could possess virtues or powers: places had an effect on the elements found within them” (6). Interestingly, the neoplatonist definition of place extended far beyond the Greek definition, arguing that “place did not only encompass an object, it also sustained the object into its very being. Place could also “strengthen” or elevate an object, or draw it together with other objects. In short, place itself became powerful, capable of affecting what it contained. And the less material a place was, the more powerful. This meant that incorporeal places were more powerful than the physical objects inside them. Objects therefore got their power to a great extent from the places they occupied in a hierarchized cosmos” (9-10). This notion of place as having a powerful influence over the objects or people within it is especially relevant to my study, as I adopt the argument that stateless individuals are often rootedly displaced into a state of liminality. In her paper “Rooted Displacement: The Paradox of Belonging Among Stateless People” Kristy Belton argues that stateless individuals can be seen as internally displaced individuals. She deconstructs the relation between displacement and mobility, arguing that people could be displaced while never leaving their place. This displacement takes on a different shape, whereby stateless individuals are considered to be internally displaced in the sense that they are forced into liminality. it is important to look at ‘places’ because they play a role in the production of outsiders. Depending on where the border is drawn, where the city’s towers are erected, and where the marginalized people settle, people are either covered by a nationality law or cast as outsiders. The place of settlement of the ‘outsiders’ or the ‘stateless’ itself then becomes part of the problem. When stateless people cannot legally

work or go to school, they are forced into liminal and marginal places where they can work as farmers or domestic workers. This liminal position that they are forced to occupy is what makes them—as Belton argues—internally displaced, as they do not have the luxury to choose where to settle.

A report published by UNHCR in 2021 provides statistics about the numbers and demographics of statelessness, in addition to a historical background explaining the reasons leading to statelessness, the ways in which it can be inherited, and the ways in which stateless people are oppressed and discriminated against. It also explains why, in the aftermath of the 1994 decree which aimed to naturalize many of the stateless people from the Qayd Al Days category, many people remained stateless. Most importantly, the report highlights the places in which stateless people mainly settle in Lebanon, and the activities they engage in: farming, cleaning houses, and other types of hard labor. It maps statelessness in various areas in Northern Lebanon: Akkar, Tripoli, and the Bekaa region, with a special attention to Akkar as it hosts dense populations of stateless people (27 & 32-37). The areas in which stateless people mainly settle are: Wadi Khaled, El Sahel, Sahel El Qayte, Wasat El Qayte, Jurd El Qayte, Halba and surroundings, Akroum, El Dreib, El Joumeh (32). These areas are known for being rural and marginalized. They are the areas on the outskirts of well-known Lebanese cities and villages, the ones you'd never find on a postcard or a post by Live Love Lebanon on instagram.

Similarly, Tareq Alrabie highlights how the Bidun in Kuwait settle in the Ashish: “In the immediate sense, the *Ashish* (*Ishash* in standard Arabic) (sing. *Isha*) directly refers to the ‘squalid slums’ (Human Rights Watch 1995), ‘squatter settlements’ (al- Haddad 1981:109), ‘shacks ... old dwellings’ (al-Eisa 1985) or

‘shanty-towns’ (Freeth 1972; al-Moosa 1976:75) where the majority of the *Bidun* and other naturalized Bedouins once resided” (Alrabie, 113).

He describes the Ashish as “one of the often-neglected spaces within the historical spatial imaginary and urban memory of Kuwait” (113). In that sense, these marginal places that the Biduns in Kuwait settle in are similar to the ‘slums’ or ‘shantytowns’ in which stateless people in Lebanon reside. It is important here to highlight that residing in these areas is not a choice, but a necessity. Since stateless people do not have the legal rights to work, go to school, and enjoy other services like naturalized citizens, they resort to places where rents are low and labor work is needed, therefore settling in marginal towns, outside major cities.

This demographic distribution highlights how stateless people are forced to live in marginal areas in order to survive. In light of the effect that space and place are thought to have on their occupants, and given that the stateless occupy marginal places both in reality and in the two novels, *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars*, how are places mapped in the two novels? What aspects of these places are emphasized, and what attitudes are adopted towards them? Is the feeling of rooted displacement expressed in the novels? And when occupying liminal places, what abstract spaces do the characters resort to?

2. Legality: The Politics and Poetics of Belonging

The concept of legality in the following chapters is utilized in relation to belonging and citizenships. One of the most adopted arguments by governments who refuse to naturalize stateless populations is that those claiming statelessness ‘do not belong’ to the country. In the face of such an argument, and given the recurrent theme of ‘belonging’ in stateless literature, it is necessary to understand what is meant by belonging. Is belonging a purely

psychological term? Is it determined through bloodline? How is it expressed literarily?
And how can it be politicized?

In *Politics and Poetics of Belonging*, Mounir Guirat defines belonging as “a site of conflicts and struggles between those who are empowered to set the terms and requirements of belonging to a given community and the individuals and groups whose sense of identity cannot be defined within the boundaries set by these requirements” (1). This notion of belonging as something that is defined by a powerful state and imposed within this definition is very prevalent in the texts studied. While ‘belonging’ can seem like a completely psychological bond with one’s country or place of birth, it has been politicized in a way which renders it as an almost legal term. You are allowed to have rights in a country only if you ‘belong’ to it. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt elaborates on the complexities of the ‘right of man.’ She argues that since the declaration of human rights, man had made himself the only commander of rights, and the notion of ‘rightlessness’ was born.

The Rights of Man, after all, had been defined as ‘inalienable’ because they were supposed to be independent of all governments; but it turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. (591)

Both belonging and nationalism are politicized by nation-states in order to render some people rightless. In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt argues that the political is not characterized by actions, laws, or battles, but rather by the ability to distinguish, scrutinize, and divide people. “Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings

effectively according to friend and enemy” (Schmitt 37). The concept of legality and belonging is built on divisions. These divisions exist based on ethnicity, language, religion, or even gender, as highlighted earlier. Victims of these divisions end up ‘rightless’, meaning that they do not have the ‘right to have rights’ (Arendt 601). This rightlessness will be analyzed in the following chapters in relation to the role it has in producing ‘ghost citizens’ or ‘legal ghosts’. The concept of *ghosts* is repeatedly utilized in relation to statelessness by many critics and literary writers. In *Ghost Citizens: Decolonial Apparitions of Stateless, Foreign and Wayward Figures in Law*, Legal scholar Jamie Liew describes *in situ* stateless people as ‘ghost citizens’. While many historians, scholars, and writers have adopted the term ‘non-citizen’ for stateless individuals, Liew develops the concept of ghost citizens to describe the dilemma of existing—philosophically and physically—in a country, and not existing—legally—in it.

Perhaps the closest literary expression to what Liew argues was expressed by Mahmoud Darwish in his *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*. Anyone who had fled Palestine in 1948’s Nakba and then stolen back into their land had lost their right to Palestinian citizenship. Those individuals were later called ‘present absentees’ by the Israeli occupation. Darwish expressed his frustration at not being able to attain a passport to travel to Greece because he was neither a citizen of Palestine nor a resident of Israel.

You despair of a passport and ask for a laissez-passer. You find out you’re not a resident of Israel because you have no certificate of residence. You think it’s a joke and rush to tell it to your lawyer friend: “Here. I’m not a citizen, and I’m not a resident. Then where and who am I?” You’re surprised to find the law is on their side, and you must prove you exist. You ask the Ministry of Interior, “Am I here, or am I absent? Give me an expert in philosophy, so that I can prove to him I exist.”

Then you realize that philosophically you exist but legally you do not.

The duality of simultaneously existing but being denied official recognition is a staple of the stateless experience globally. Individuals are simultaneously present and absent, in a ghostly manner. The term ‘legal ghosts’ was first mentioned in a report by UNHCR in 2006, and referred to an anonymous ‘expert.’

In light of the dual presence and absence of stateless individuals, it is evident that ‘belonging’ is not merely a psychological attachment to a country or place. In the written law of states, one needs to be a recognized citizen of the state in order to belong to it, and not the other way around. The rightlessness that comes with this alienation of stateless individuals further situates them as ghost citizens or legal ghosts. This paper will look into the clash between belonging, statelessness, and legality in order to highlight how citizenship is expressed as a tool for exercising power in the two novels. It will address the following questions: How does the state’s notion of belonging clash with that of the stateless individual’s? And how is this clash expressed in literature? What space do the stateless occupy after being casted away from the country’s collective space of belonging? Are ghosts utilized in the two novels? And if so, how?

3. Narrative Structure

In its survey of the employment of notions of spatiality, legality, and belonging in *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars*, this paper will draw on Terry Eagleton’s *How to Read Literature* and Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Eagleton argues that “the most common mistake students of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way that it says it” (2). In what follows of this paper, both

content and form will be studied in relation to spatiality and legality, with chapter 1 focusing on the former and chapter 2 on the latter.

Eagleton argues that “stories are possible because some initial order is disrupted” (104). Taking citizenship to be the ‘order’ which every person’s life should start with, being born into statelessness in itself becomes the original point in which the order is disrupted. A stateless person’s moment of conception becomes, thus, the beginning of their story. In the same spirit, Eagleton places much emphasis on ‘literary openings,’ starting his book with a chapter that focuses on how the opening passages in a work of literature set the mood and tone for what’s to come.

He then compares between different employments of openings and closures, commenting on the structure and order of the narrative in different genres of fiction.

For classical realism, the world itself is story-shaped. In a lot of modernist fiction, by contrast, there is no order apart from what we ourselves construct. And since any such order is arbitrary, so are fictional openings and endings. There are no divinely ordained origins or natural closures. Which is to say that there are no logical middles either. What may count as an end for you may serve as an origin for me. You can make a start or call a halt wherever you want. Ends and origins are not inherent in the world. It is you, not the world, who calls the shots in this respect. Wherever you make a start, however, you may be sure that an enormous amount will have happened already. And wherever you call a halt, a great deal will carry on regardless. (105-106)

Is the revocation or granting of citizenship, thus, seen as the beginning or the end of an individual’s story? In *Kaliksa* and *Qayd El Dars*, the characters are not stateless throughout the novels. Al Awwad’s citizenship is revoked midway into *Kaliksa*, and

Najwa's Family is naturalized also midway into *Qayd El Dars*. This positioning of the origin of statelessness or citizenship in the middle of both novels strategically serves to highlight the 'before' and the 'after', which will be closely analyzed in the rest of this paper.

In addition to openings, narrative structure plays a big role in shaping the content of both novels. Eagleton describes narratives as "hired assassins, ready to do the dirty work that their characters may flinch from" (101). This characterization of narrative grants it power over its characters. What Eagleton is saying here is that the narrative can simply guide the plot in whichever way it sees necessary, without the characters' direct interference. Genette presents a more nuanced understanding of narrative structure, with his concept of 'focalization' as a revision for 'point of view.' in his theory, Genette distinguishes between the person who is narrating the story and the person whose point of view orients the narrative. In other words, *who* tells the story is not necessarily the same as *how* the story is being told. For example, Genette explains how the narrative structure, mood, and voice of the narration can differ "depending on whether events are focalized through the consciousness of the narrator at the moment of narration or through his consciousness at a time in the past when the events took place" (10). While point of view is usually 'from' a certain character, focalization is usually 'on' or 'through' a certain character. When the narrative is focalized on a character, the reader can know what this character sees, does, and speaks, but not what he/she feels or thinks (10-11). On the other hand, when the narrative is focalized through a character's consciousness, the reader has access to everything the character does and thinks and feels. Such distinction is important in stateless literature, as it allows for a closer inspection of how the narrative shapes the

reader's reactions and emotions. As most of *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars* are told from a third person point of view, chapter 2 will analyze the patterns of narrative structure in relation to focalization, uncovering places where the narrative breaks away from its dominant focal point, and the effects which these abrupt disruptions have on the reception of the novel.

Finally, the structural analysis and close reading of the two texts will take into account the form of the novel, as opposed to other forms of literary expression, such as poetry. It is mostly in the novel form that the writer is able to present a work of fiction or reality which covers an experience in its entirety and totality. György Lukács—whose theory of the novel will be utilized in the following chapters to showcase the novel as he calls it: as a site of transcendental homelessness—describes the novel as an “art-form of virile maturity, in contrast to the normative childlikeness of the epic [...] This means that the completeness of the novel's world, if seen objectively; is an imperfection, and if subjectively experienced, it amounts to resignation. The danger by which the novel is determined is twofold: either the fragility of the world may manifest itself so crudely that it will cancel out the immanence of meaning which the form demands, or else the longing for the dissonance to be resolved, affirmed and absorbed into the work may be so great that it will lead to a premature closing of the circle of the novel's world, causing the form to disintegrate into disparate, heterogeneous parts” (71-72). In essence, Lukacs is saying that the novel has to strike a balance between portraying a complete world while also leaving room for unresolved conflicts to keep the story engaging. If it's too complete, it feels imperfect, but if it resolves conflicts too quickly, it falls apart as a cohesive work of art. The close reading of the novels' structures in chapter 2 showcases how *Kaliska* adheres more closely to the conventions of the novel, while *Qayd El Dars* falls into

instances where the novel turns into a journalistic account of news-telling. Such differences in the structure of both novels will be visited at the end of chapter 2, and merit even more consideration in future studies.

F. Chapter Breakdown

The aforementioned theories can help us articulate certain questions in relation to stateless literature. In what follows of this paper, chapter 1 will utilize the critical concepts of legality and spatiality to look at what *Kaliksa* and *Qayd El Dars* are saying. It aims to answer the question of how stateless characters map their existence: how do they describe the places in which they settle? What effect do these places have on them? And what spaces do they occupy in order to subvert the rooted displacement forced upon them by society? Through an analysis of the opening and closing locations of both novels, and a close attention to the symbolism of these locations—the airplane and the jail—the first chapter argues that stateless literature can uncover places of belonging that are often ignored or discredited in the public narrative of the nation-state. The concepts of roots and routes, which are often used in analyses of refugee, exile, and diaspora literature, are revisited from the lens of statelessness. The chapter introduces the concept of ‘mobile roots’ and argues that we cannot view roots as stationary when we consider the pre-nation-state era. For the nomadic tribes of the early 19th century, roots could be seen as interchangeable with routes.

In chapter 2, the concepts of legality, belonging, and spatiality are revisited with a close attention on the form and narrative structure of the novels. The chapter looks at how *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars* incorporate these concepts into their narrative, with a special

attention on focalization. It analyzes the characters on which and through which the narrative is focalized, asking the following questions: how does the focalization technique and voice emphasize or de-emphasize the role of statelessness in the novels? Are there frequent disruptions in focalization, such as *paralepsis* and *paralipsis*? How do these disruptions affect the narrative, and where do they take the reader? In what way are the two novels similar and different? And to what factors can these similarities and differences be attributed? The chapter argues that the arbitrary and self-serving methods employed by the states to exclude the stateless from official national belonging are built into the fabric of the narrative. This is found more in *Kaliska*, which presents a non-linear and non-reliable narration, than in *Qayd El Dars*, which often diverges away from the aesthetic techniques of novel-writing and employs a journalistic voice. In both novels, writing is highlighted as a method for subverting the marginalization of the stateless. In *Kaliska*, the narrative does not confine itself to the limits of topics of nationality, belonging, homelessness, or rightlessness, but goes beyond that to touch on philosophical dilemmas of good and evil. *Qayd El Dars*, on the other hand, remains focused on the linearity of the stateless characters' struggle, up until they become naturalized citizens. The chapter evaluates the possible role that the background of each author could have had on their priorities while writing their novel, arguing that Nasser Al Dhafiri's employment of aesthetic literary tools serves stateless literature more than Lana Abdulrahman's preoccupation with history and factual events.

CHAPTER I

BELONGING WITHOUT BELONGINGS: SPATIALITY AND LEGALITY IN *KALISKA* AND *QAYD EL DARS*

A. The Need for Self-Expression

Stateless literary production has been largely marginalized in literary studies. Instead, the focus has mostly been on statelessness as a legal topic. Even when stateless literature is studied, it is approached as some kind of ethnographic evidence testifying to the struggles faced by the stateless and the absence of civil and political rights. Reading stateless literature with a focus on its aesthetics allows for its positioning within the larger genre of national and transnational literature, and grants its writers a broader space for self-expression and agency.

Demanding the right for self-expression is a common theme in most of the writings of the stateless, as well as the refugees, the exiles, and the displaced. It is often that these less privileged factions of society find themselves stripped of their meaningful voices and their right to decide ‘who’ they are—with privilege in this case being closely tied to notions of citizenship and political stability in one’s home country. Hannah Arendt opens her essay “We Refugees,” saying “in the first place, we do not like to be called refugees” (110), instead identifying more with the experience of Jewish ‘exile.’ She poetically explains the way in which Jewish refugees turned inwards to try to comprehend what was happening around them, stating how “the stars tell us—rather than the newspapers—when Hitler will be defeated and when we shall become American citizens. We think the stars more reliable advisers than all our friends...sometimes we don’t rely even on the stars but rather on the lines of our hand or the signs of our handwriting. Thus we learn less about political events but more about our own dear selves” (111). This desire

to turn inwards and express oneself is common among a lot of communities of migrants, refugees, and exiles—to each the term they wish to use. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, in his essay “The Palestinian Exile as Writer” says, “If anyone used the word “refugee” with me, I was furious...I was not a refugee, and I was proud as hell” (77). In this aspect, literature plays a role in giving stateless writers a sense of agency. It allows for an individualized narrative where the writer has power over what his/her characters are characterized as, what they are labeled as, and how they act.

It is true that writing in and of itself is a form of self-expression by the authors, and this will be more closely studied in the second chapter of this thesis. Nonetheless, the authors’ needs are translated into a similar insistence on self-expression on the part of their characters, all of whom express a need to tell their stories as they have lived them. In *Qayd El Dars*, Hassan sets the tone for his narration of the story from the very first opening chapter, saying:

مقعد الطائرة يساعدك على البقاء سارحًا في أفكارك. تُراجع ذاكرتك كلها في رحلة العودة؛
تبحث عن أوّل الحكاية؛ رغم انها ليست حكايتك وحدك. عالمك الفوضويّ هو حكايتك؛ وانت
تبحث عن الكلمات، وحكايتك تشبه طبقات الموسيقى المتكسرة عند فاغثر، والعيون الحزينة في
لوحات مودلياني، وقضّة دراكولا المختبئ تحت الأنقاض في «دير السرو». «حكايتك لا يمكن
كتابتها الا من رقعة الظلام التي تعرفها جيدا. سيقولون انك تعبت بالحقيقة، وسوف تقول لهم
بنزق: انها حكايتي.

The airplane seat helps you get into your line of thoughts. You go down
memory lane on this journey, looking for the beginning of the story,
although it is not your story alone. Your chaotic world is your story. You
are searching for words, but your story resembles the layers of broken
music in Wagner, the sad eyes in Modigliani’s paintings, and the story of

Dracula hiding under the rubble in “Der El Saro.” Your story can only be written from the pitch of darkness you know so well. They will say that you are tampering with the truth, and you will tell them irritably: It is my story.

By claiming that the story is his own from the very beginning, he discredits any other possible narration of events, claiming that only those who have lived through that darkness can really write about it. His story is, nevertheless, distorted—even inside his head. He tries to search for a beginning but is unable to find it. Was it the start of the civil war? The day his father left them? The day they were born with a Qayd El Dars identity? Grappling through this distortion, he decides to tell his story the way he sees fit, arguing that it is his story.

Similarly in *Kaliska*, Awwad’s last sentence in the novel goes as follows:

لقد انهيت مهمتي، فلتقم القيامة الآن! ما افكر فيه هو الرواية التي سأقولها حول كل ما حدث

I have completed my mission, the world can end now! All I'm thinking of is the story I'm going to tell about everything that happened. (*Kaliska*,

412)

At this point in the novel, which is the very end, the reader is aware of everything that has happened, which was mostly narrated from an omniscient third person point of view and focalized on Al Awwad. Despite that, Awwad insists on telling a story that would align with his individual lived experience. Such insistence can be seen as a resistance to the marginalization that stateless individuals face in society. It gives them a literary space to occupy, which makes up for the places of liminality that they are forced into in most cases. These places of liminality, and the resulting spaces that the stateless characters in *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars* occupy, will be analyzed in this chapter.

B. Places of Liminality

In her introduction to *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora : Representations of Place and Transnational Identity*, Jumana Bayeh criticizes the way that “very little is said about host societies” in diaspora literary studies (3). In looking at host societies in relation to statelessness, one needs to ask: What happens when the homeland itself becomes the host society? In “The Bidun in Kuwaiti Novels: A Cultural Approach,” Hessa Al Mufarrih argues that despite the Arabs’ pride in their nation, there is no one big ‘Arab identity’ (659). Instead, it is observed that the general identity is divided into sub-identities resulting from the modern political divisions. While the ‘Other’ in the ‘Arab world’ has been taken to be the Western or the ‘non-Arab’, many ‘Others’ emerge within the Arab world, including the stateless. In that sense, many types of ‘host communities’ exist within the Arab world, and even within one and the same country. Especially for the stateless, the whole country of birth can be considered a host country, as the individual is denied any form of official belonging to it.

Place plays an especially important role in complicating the case of the stateless, and is therefore one of the key elements that this chapter will examine in the two novels. As explained in the introduction, stateless individuals are often forced to live in marginal places, such as the outskirts of cities, the desert, and rural areas. They are internally displaced into marginal places that in turn make them occupy marginal and liminal spaces. The distinction between place and space is subtle but persisting, and it is evident in stateless literature. While places are locatable and geographic, spaces are more abstract and metaphysical. Marginalized places, such as Al Jahraa in *Kaliska* and Der Al Saro in *Qayd El Dars*, make their inhabitants more subject to stereotyping and dehumanization by the state, as well as by citizens of the state—thus exacerbating the feeling of being in

a ‘host’ country instead of one’s own. Such attitudes towards country dwellers or Bedouins is clearly reflected in the Kuwaiti Constituent Assembly in 1962. In answering criticism on the state’s neglect of the Bedouin dwellers of the Ashish, Minister of Social Affairs Mohamad Al Nuf says:

As to the issue of the *Ishash* (shanty towns), I believe that all bona fide Kuwaitis or Kuwaitis who have been sedentarized (*tahadaru*) have already resided in houses. As to those ... in the *Ishash*, they are all Bedouins from the desert who have not been *sedentarized* and will not be before a year or two, some of them do not hold citizenship. (7)³

Alrabei comments on Al Nuf’s reply in his book, highlighting how it sheds light on the varying understandings of belonging during the early stages of nation-state establishment, as well as the correlations between citizenship and the process of settling. Government officials perceive Bedouins who remain nomadic, many of whom have long inhabited Kuwait’s geographical boundaries, as existing outside the envisioned geographic framework of the nation (115). Other remarks from the same member of the Constituents Assembly who was criticizing the state, Yusuf Al Mukhlid, included accusing the state of ‘erasing’ certain villages as part of its nation-building vision, stressing that these villages were inhabited by Kuwaitis. To that, Al Nuf replied that removing a village or organizing it “is not a crime, but rather a service to the citizens” (8). He did not comment, however, on the fate of those Bedouin dwellers whose villages would be removed, and who—as Al Mukhlid clarified—were continually uprooted by the state from one place to

³ The assembly’s minutes are available online at <https://www.kna.kw/Democratic/ConstituentAssembly/4/19?Page=3>, English translation by Tareq Al Rabei, from his book *Stateless Literature of the Gulf*.

another. Zahra Freeth, daughter of the British political agent in Kuwait Harold Dickson, wrote in 1972 that “the only fault of these hut-dwellers is poverty. They are the ones who have fallen through the sieve of the welfare state....If their menfolk are employed, it is the lowest-paid jobs, or else they are some of the unfortunate hundreds from the deserts outside Kuwait who have not yet acquired that desirable piece of paper, a *jinsiya*, or certificate of nationality, enabling them to find better-paid work” (175). Such historical accounts prove that the way in which the state divided the city-dwellers from the Bedouins prepared for and exacerbated the harsh conditions later faced by the stateless, many of whom used to belong to nomadic tribes moving within the borders of modern-day Kuwait. Understanding the differences between geographic locations in the modern nation-state is necessary to understand the representation of the places that the Bidun inhabit in their literature. Places like Al Jahraa, in the historical context in which *Kaliska* was set, were seen as degenerate and intolerable by the city-dwellers and the *hadhar*. To their dwellers, however, they held more nuanced meanings. In the novel, Al Awwad is a Bedouin from Jahraa, while his friend Fahad Ghanem is from the *hadhar*. After being jailed in Kuwait and then deported to Syria, the following conversation takes place between the two friends:

التفت فهد غانم الى العواد مبتسما. «هل تعلم فائدة سجنك؟» «فائدة؟» «اختفى عن وجهك غبار الجهراء وشمسها». «وها هي اختفت كلها». «من حظك، ماذا تتذكر فيها؟». «اتذكر الذي لن تفهمه انت.»

Fahad Ghanem turned to the Awwad, smiling. “Do you know what benefit came from your imprisonment?”

“You speak of a ‘benefit’?”

“Your face no longer carries the dust and sun of the Jahraa.”

“And now I no longer carry any of it.”

“You are lucky. What do you remember of it?”

“I remember what you would never be able to understand.”

Not only do Al Jahraa’s inhabitants belong to it, but it also belongs to them. Places, in this sense, acquire their meaning from the people who live in them. In another conversation with the Syrian *moaalem* (master) helping him in finalizing the fake passport to travel to Canada, the *moaalem* describes Damascus as the most beautiful place in the world, to which Al Awwad replies

“دمشق عاصمة جميلة ولكنها بالنسبة لك اجمل ما في الدنيا”

لا يريد العواد ان يقارن دمشق بالجبراء ولا يستطيع ان يقنعه بأن المدن لا يمكن ان ننظر اليها بعيدا عن علاقتنا بها، فالمقارنة بين مدينتك واخرى، وان كانت اجمل منها فعلا، كمقارنة حبيبتك بنساء الارض.

“Damascus is a beautiful capital, but it is the most beautiful place in your eyes.

Al Awwad does not want to compare Damascus to Al Jahraa and he can’t convince the man that our view of a place cannot be independent of our relation to it. Comparing your city to another, even if it were truly more beautiful, is like comparing your loved one to all the women on this earth. (272-273)

Establishing a strong relation between a place and its inhabitants is one of the ways in which Kaliska deconstructs the relationship between citizenship and belonging. To the Kuwaiti *hadhar* or city-dweller, Al Jahraa represents a marginal place which does not fit into their nationalistic imaginary—despite being citizens themselves, and despite having that place within the official borders of their country. For the Bedouin or the Bidun, however, the place holds a great emotional, aesthetic, and historical value.

This is not to say, however, that the characters are not aware of their marginality or that they are simply romanticizing their ‘home.’ This awareness is clear in Al Awwad’s

description of Al Jahraa and his statement that “poverty does not breed beauty, but it breeds real humans” (50). Al Jahraa is described as a marginal place with no clear identity:

يجتاز البيوت التي توزعت عشوائيا وتشابهت كشفاء الوجوه التي تسكنها، بيوت لا عناوين لها ولا أرقام تميزها ولا أسماء لشوارعها الترابية؛ بيوت نكرات تسمى بأسماء ساكنيها وألقابهم وكناهم التي اكتسبها لسبب ما

He walks past the houses that are randomly scattered, each looking the same as the other, resembling the misery that you see on the faces of their inhabitants.

Houses without addresses or numbers to distinguish them, scattered on dirt streets that have no names. Houses without an identity, named only after their

inhabitants. (46-47)

This awareness, coupled by a continuous appreciation of the homeland despite being cast into marginal places, further deconstructs the relation between belonging and citizenship.

C. Roots and Routes

Central to the idea of place are the concepts of roots and routes, which are commonly discussed in relation to refugee and diaspora literature. Naturally, roots represent a person’s origin and relation to his/her homeland, while routes constitute the diasporic transformational journey(s). In the introduction to *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora : Representations of Place and Transnational Identity*, Jomana Bayeh calls for a balance between roots and routes when studying the experience of the Lebanese Diaspora. She argues that neglecting roots for the sake of routes can be a “deeply flawed and dangerous venture” (7). Adopting concepts from Marxism, she agrees that “those who celebrate rootlessness seem to celebrate a form of human fetishism in which humans themselves [...] appear on the capitalist market as if they are totally detached socially and

emotionally from the spaces and the socio-historical processes that made them into what they are” (6-7)⁴. This can be true when these routes lead them outside their country, in the case of the diaspora that Bayeh is discussing, and in the case of the stateless individuals who seek their rights and citizenship elsewhere, outside the place in which they were born; their forbidden homeland. When Al Awwad reaches Canada in *Kaliska*, the scene is described as a rebirth.

يتبع خط البشر المتصل في سيره نحو منفذ الخروج ويعيد النظر الى جوف الطائرة العملاق الذي خرج

منه

”امي طائرة، ليس لي اسم ولا اعرف من سأكون او ماذا سأكون ولم يعد يهمني كل هذا، سحقا لكل شيء.“

He follows the line of people heading towards the exit and looks back at the enormous body of the airplane from which he emerged.

“My mother is an airplane. I don’t have a name and I don’t know who or what I’ll be. I don’t care about any of that anymore. Screw it.” (299)

His arrival in Canada is narrated as a rebirth, yet where would the roots of a person born from the womb of an airplane be? As he leaves the airport after having signed an application for asylum, he reflects on this rebirth:

احس انه ولد مرة اخرى في عامه الثاني والعشرين باسم اختاره، وبلد سيقول انه اختاره، وغموض يكتنف

المستقبل هو غموض جميع المواليد الذين لا يعونه كما يعيه هو

He felt that he was born again at twenty-two with a name that he chose, a country that he would say he chose, and a mystery surrounding the future that greets all newborns, only they do not understand what he does. (303)

In what follows of his interactions with people he meets in Canada, this rootlessness—exacerbated and solidified by his statelessness—comes to be seen as a privilege. When

⁴ Also see Ghassan Hage, *Under the Global Olive Tree*, <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/under-the-global-olive-tree/>

asking an Arab friend he had met in Canada, what might happen to him, the answer was “I don’t know, but you’re lucky that you don’t have a country that they can return you to” (310). In another instance, a Canadian girl he met expressed the same thoughts. When asking her if his asylum application might be turned down, she answered “I don’t think so, you’re safe. It’s good that you have no country” (329). In that sense, Awwad becomes a commodified individual whose assumed rootlessness is celebrated in a society where getting the nationality of a Western country like Canada is seen as an upgrade in one’s life.

However, the argument that celebrating rootlessness is a form of commodification becomes complicated when pre-modern modes of living are considered, and when the routes taken are only within the homeland. Can the Arab nomad who lived through the rise of nation-states between 1920 and 1970 have roots all over the Arab Peninsula, which has now been organized into a number of nation-states—each having a separate national identity? Addressing roots in his memoir, Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf says:

I don’t like the word [roots], and I like even less the image it conveys. Roots burrow into the ground [...] they hold trees in captivity from their inception and nourish them at the price of a blackmail: “Free yourself and you’ll die!” [...]

Trees are forced into resignation; they need their roots. Men do not.

Maalouf’s words echo more realistically the experience of the Arab nomad Bedouins who lived most of their lives in constant movement from one place to another, and identified largely with the Arab Peninsula instead of with a specific bound geographic location. I argue that a reconsideration of the dynamics between roots and routes needs to be made with respect to statelessness, which has its roots in the period prior to the mid-twentieth century. For the stateless and the Bedouins of Arabia, long before the borders of the

modern nation-states were drawn, routes constituted an essential part of roots. In fact, it can be argued that the two concepts could have been used interchangeably; a Bedouin's routes make up a big part of their identity. Their roots, on the other hand, are not geographically determined. They lie in their bloodline, and in the tribe into which they were born.

Suleiman Al Flayyeh, a Bedouin who lived as a Bidun in Kuwait despite serving in its army and contributing to its literary and journalistic environment, opened his handwritten autobiography with the following:

١٩٥٢ في الحدود -ولدت حسبما يقول رواة القبيلة بين العام ١٩٥١. أنا سليمان بن فليح السبيعي العنزي الشمالية للمملكة العربية السعودية؛ وتحديداً في صحراء الحماد التي تتقاسمها جغرافياً عدة دول عربية هي المملكة والعراق والأردن وسوريا، وهي المدار الإقليمي لنجعات قبيلتي وارتحالاتها حتى تخوم تلك البلدان ثم سارت تغني في ركب القبيلة. وضعتني أمي تحت شجيرة في الصحراء؛ ولفتني بطرف عبائتها
(١١). الضاعنة نحو حدود الغيم بحثاً عن الكلاً والماء

I am Sulayman bin Flayyih al-Suba'i al-'Inizi. I was born, according to the tribe, between 1951 and 1952 in the northern borders of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In the Al-Hammad Desert, which is geographically shared by several Arab countries, namely the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia], Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. It served as the regional orbit for my tribe's travels within the borders of those countries. 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 in constant search of water and food. (11)

Al Flayyeh was granted Saudi nationality in 1999, and he relocated to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with his family. His words testify to the argument about interchangeable roots and routes. According to his tribe, his birthplace was in a desert shared by multiple

countries—and it was, more specifically, 'under a tree in the desert.' As Alrabei puts it, Al-Flayyih was “born into movement in the undisclosed vastness of the desert” (88). His tribe continued to move between the borders of modern-day nation-states, but these borders did not exist as they do today. The desert, as a vast geographic location, serves as his 'roots', but what defined his experience and sense of belonging were his tribe and the routes they took in search of food and water.

It is essential to problematize the concept of roots when considering statelessness. Since the word 'roots' connotes, as Maalouf highlights, a fixed reference and place of origin, the question arises: who or what decides on where your roots are set to be? Can a person decide to have roots in a place that they love and feel that they belong to? If roots are geographically determined, they become obsolete when we consider the bedouin. Roots are in fact often exploited by nation-states to problematize bedouins' 'belonging' to the country. They are asked to provide proof of residing within a country's borders for extended periods of time to prove that they have roots in the country—a proof that disregards the lifestyle of the nomadic bedouin.

By showcasing how citizenship can be granted and revoked in *Kaliska*, Al Dhafiri shows how 'roots' can be transplantable, especially by powerful authorities. This is clear in the novel in two instances: (1) when Saleh Al Jazzaz—a bedouin from Iraq—is granted citizenship and considered to be a first-class citizen, one of the 'founding members' of Kuwait, and (2) when Al Awwad's citizenship is revoked by Abdulrahman Al Jazzaz, son of Saleh. In both instances, money and power play a big role—as opposed to the assumed notions of 'belonging' and 'roots' that the nation-state promotes.

Due to the complex role that the modern understanding of 'roots' plays in justifying statelessness by powerful authorities, roots are not something that any of the

characters are proud of in *Kaliska*. As Al Awwad puts it: “We all here don’t want to remember where our ancestors came from” (127). Instead of roots, the characters take pride in money, which is seen as the only tool of power that could grant them any wish they have.

”عليكما ان تفهما ان المال هو سلطنتكما الوحيدة، منصبك الذي تطمح اليه لن يدوم طويلا، سيأتي يوم ما
تعود فيه الى مالك، الى سلطتك الوحيدة“.

“You need to understand that money is your only power. The career and positions that you strive for won’t last long. A day will come when you will resort to your money, your only source of power.” (93)

Instead of bringing people together, roots can set people apart. They create the ‘others’ who could only be Kuwaiti if they had enough ‘proof’—with proof being money.

The concept of roots as a fixed geographical place is perhaps better defined in the case of Bassem in *Qayd El Dars*, whose roots lie in the village of Qadas, one of the seven villages on the Lebanese-Palestinian border. Bassem was born in Lebanon, but his parents were among the residents of Qadas who were forcibly displaced into Lebanon following the 1948 *Nakba*. Despite holding the Qayd El Dars identity card, he does not have the same identity crisis that his wife and children have. He is proud of his Palestinian identity and constantly speaks to his children of Qadas, making his daughter Layla question herself: “Dad has never been to Qadas, so how does he feel that he belongs to it?” (99). Having been denied his roots, he takes armed resistance as the only route that can take him back to his roots. Thus, he spends most of his time away from his family, fighting with the *Feda’eyin*—the Palestinian resistance fighters. Once the war was over in the early 1990s, he returned to his family for a short period of time, before leaving to train resistance

groups in the Gulf. His return home is described as a 'retirement from fighting' and consequently a 'retirement from life' (116). For Bassem, routes are only important if they lead back to your roots. Any journey that would take him further away from Palestine would be meaningless. And since staying in Der El Saro or Beirut meant not doing anything to be able to go back to Palestine, he chose to leave his family once again at the end of the war.

ولانه مفروض عليه عدم الانتماء، ظل يتعامل مع سلاحه على انه الحل الوحيد الذي سيحسم
قضية هويته الغير محددة. كان يقول انه يقاتل من اجل تحرير فلسطين، ومن اجل
استعادة الاراضي المحتلة في لبنان... وفي كل مرة، كان يعود مهزوما من داخله، ومع
كل حزب، كان الرفاق او الاخوة يشككون في انتمائه... حين قاتل مع الفلسطينيين، كان
فلسطينيا اكثر منهم، ومع الشيوعيين هتف بشعارات ماركس ولينين، ومع القوميون
العرب كان عربيا حتى النخاع. ظل يبحث عن هويته الحقيقية، الهوية التي تقول انه
لا ينتمي الى قيد الدرس.

Because he was denied the right to belong anywhere, he treated his rifle
as the only savior that can resolve the mystery of his undefined
identity. He said that he was fighting to free Palestine and the
occupied Lebanese lands in the South...and each time, he would
return defeated, with every group or party that he fought with,
his fellow fighters would question his belonging and
commitment...When he fought with the Palestinians, he was
more Palestinian than them, and when he fought with the
communists he chanted the slogans of Marx and Lenin, and with
the Arab nationalists he was an Arab to the core. He kept looking

for his true identity, the one that would say that he was not simply 'Qayd El Dars' (under study). (71)

Even in the case of Bassem, who identifies as a Palestinian, roots are problematized by the occupation. Bassem ends up taking his rifle as a substitute for tangible roots, or as the only route that could lead him to the roots that he's been denied. In his constant search for roots, he ends up taking different and sometimes politically diverse routes. Ironically, Bassem was the only member of his family who was not naturalized in 1994 because he was outside the Lebanese borders at the time. In his constant search for roots, he remained rootless in the eyes of the authorities. For him, however, his roots were and would always be in Palestine. His story resembles the stories of thousands of other Palestinians who live as stateless refugees in the twenty-first century.

D. In-betweenness as a Place and Space: The Jail and the Airplane

The places that both novels open with set the tone for a state of in-betweenness that the characters find themselves in. In the opening lines of *Qayd El Dars*, Hassan reflects on his life from the vantage point of an airplane, on his way back to Lebanon after having settled in France. The opening paragraph reads:

من جديد، ها انت تقف على حافة تحول اخر من تحولات حياتك الكثيرة... لبيتك تبقى كما انت الآن... عالقا بين السماء والارض. حالة من التحرر، تسكنك منذ بداية اي رحلة سفر. تحب المطارات، حركة الناس فيها، وجوه الغرباء الغامضة، تعجلهم، حيرتهم، تلهفهم للوصول، حالات تلهمك امنية استمرار السفر،
والوصول الى اللامكان.

Once again, you stand on the verge of another transformation...You wish you could stay as you are, stranded between heaven and earth. You feel free when you travel. You love airports, the movement of people rushing around, strangers'

mysterious faces, their hurry, their confusion, and the excitement of arrival. Their states make you wish you were in constant transit, arriving nowhere. (9)

As the novel proceeds, Hassan continues to ruminate and reflect on his life from the airplane, while Layla reflects on hers from her kitchen in Der Al Saro. Both the airplane and the kitchen, as concrete places, serve as metaphorical representations of the abstract and marginal space of in-betweenness that the characters occupy. The airplane is literally stranded between heaven and earth, and between two locations: Lebanon and France. Similarly, Layla's kitchen—located in their house in Der Al Saro—is described merely as a transitory place, supposed to be only a stop between two more favorable locations. The house has “pale, unpainted walls and a tin roof. As for the windows and doors, their wood was corroded at the edges” (23). On the onset, the house looks like a transitory place only, meant to be occupied for a short period of time—and the family treated it as such. However, such houses are a permanent residence for many of the stateless settled in Bekaa and Akkar. Not only does the appearance of the house make it look like an in-between temporary station, but also its location. Najwa, Layla's mother, comments on how she would stare at the bridge facing the village and their house, “where cars speeded past in the distance. To the North is Damascus, and to the South Beirut. Yet here she stays, stuck in the middle” (26). In that sense, the village itself constitutes a place that is in-between; located between two major cities, with cars passing by in the distance but never really stopping there. The bridge itself also functions as a symbol of this in-betweenness; it is always in the middle, transporting people between two different locations.

Going back to the neoplatonist notion of place, which argues that places have the power to shape the objects in them, we can argue that the marginality of Der El Saro

imposes a marginality on the people who live there. I argue that this marginality and in-betweenness of the *place* become a *space* that the characters in *Qayd El Dars* occupy. In-betweenness is no longer only described by a geographical place and a tangible identity card, but also by an abstract space that the characters occupy. Throughout the novel, Hassan reflects on this space of in-betweenness from his place on the airplane:

انت ايضا اخترت السفر كي تكون غريبا، كي تحسم الامر لصالح الغربة، افضل من البقاء في وطن، لا
انت غريب فيه، ولا انت من اهله .

You also chose expatriation so that you can become a stranger in a foreign land.

To impose an absolute state of foreignness onto yourself, which is better than staying in your own country, where you are neither a citizen nor a stranger! (219)

Exactly as statelessness in itself is a ‘state’, Qayd El Dars becomes a space of in-betweenness that the characters occupy. Their importance, their role in society, people’s perception of them, and their own perception of themselves become painted and affected by this abstract space of in-betweenness. Different from place, which is a geographic location that influences the objects within it, space is an abstract dimension that has social, cultural, and political connotations. In the last lines of the novel, Hassan confronts himself by saying:

Face reality, you are still living Qayd El Dars (under study).

Everything in your life remains Qayd El Dars.

Qayd El Dars is not just an identity card ya Hassan, it is a state.

And Beirut is not just a place, it is a choice.

It is not only a city, made up of a sea, and houses, and streets, and people...it is your choice, your main place, and your final embrace. (247)

This closing passage echoes the opening passage of the novel, but with a growing certainty of viewing Beirut as the homeland. We are introduced to Hassan as someone who feels most at peace when he is stranded between heaven and earth, when he is ‘in-between’. Later on, we learn more about Hassan’s struggle to overcome this state of in-betweenness, eventually deciding to leave his country. At the end of the novel, he is once more confronted by this reality, and from what is clear from the passage, it can be argued that he would decide to stay in Lebanon. However, it is worth noting that the connection that he feels with Lebanon is mainly related to Beirut, despite having lived most of his life in Der Al Saro. His rumination in the airplane is struck between the three places that shaped him: Der El Saro, Beirut, and France.

If *Qayd El Dars* starts with Hassan confined in an airplane, *Kaliska* starts with Al Awwad confined in a prison cell, saying to his fellow prisoner:

وطني هو اعاقتي الابدية الوحيدة التي لن اشفى منها ابدا.

My country is my only eternal impairment from which I’ll never recover. (11)

The jail as a place plays an important role in *Kaliska*. Al Awwad is imprisoned three times: once in Kuwait, once in Syria, and once in Canada. In Kuwait, he is jailed by Rasha’s brother who wants to keep him away from her. His jailer only allows him to get out of jail and straight to the airport, where he departs for Syria. In Syria, he is jailed for three days where he is forced to witness the ‘torturing sessions’ of other Syrian detainees. His imprisonment in Syria only served that one purpose: to watch other people being tortured as a method of blackmailing him—was he to speak of anything to anyone, his fate would be similar, if not worse. In Canada, it is not clear whether he was jailed for murder or other convictions, as the story becomes distorted and the narration unreliable

towards the end. The most plausible reason for his imprisonment in Canada is the murder of Abdulrahman Al Jazzaz, Rasha's brother.

Jail in *Kaliska* represents a place of helplessness—of not knowing what would happen next, and not having any agency over the outside world. In a book placed in his prison cell in Canada, he reads that a wise man was once asked about what happens to people when they die, and his answer was that they simply turn into their deeds: they turn into something pleasant if their deeds were pleasant, and into something bad if they had bad deeds. To that, Al Awwad replies:

اسمع ايها الحكيم: ماذا عن الانسان الذي يبدأ حسناً وينتهي قبيحاً؟ وماذا عن الانسان الذي يبدأ قبيحاً وينتهي
حسناً؟ الى اي شيء يتحول الاول والى اي شيء يتحول الثاني؟ ام ان الامور عندكم، كما هي عندنا،
بخواتيمها. ماذا عن الزمن الذي حول القبيح الى حسن والحسن الى قبيح. الى اي شيء يتحول هذا الزمن؟
تبا لك ايها الحكيم!

Listen, wise man: What about the person who starts good and ends bad? And what about the bad person who ends up being good? To what end does each turn?

Or are things for you, just like they are for us, summarized in the way they end.

What about time, which has turned the good into the bad and the bad into the good? What happens to this time? Screw you, wise man! (13)

What Al Awwad asks the wise man about in this excerpt is the in-between which—just like him—is ignored in most cases. This in-between state is what the story is trying to visualize: his individual lived experience and the things which have led him into that prison cell in a foreign country. For a person not aware of his story, he is just another criminal—it does not matter what led him to it. In the same way, for a country, a stateless individual is a nobody who is greedy for the benefits of citizenship—it does not matter where he came from. Yet for the Bidun, every day is another lived experience marked by

its own struggles and victories. In a way, stateless literature is all about uncovering these spaces of in-betweenness, and shedding light on the intricacies and nuances of the daily lives of the stateless individuals. It is the writers' own way of saying: "Screw you, wise men. Here is my story, from beginning to end. Read it before you make any judgements."

E. The Myth of 'Belonging'

ان يهرب معها الى بلد اجنبي ويتزوجها هناك يعني انهما لن يعودا ابدا الى هنا، وهنا يعني كل شيء.

To run away with her and get married in another country would mean that they would never be able to come back here, *and here means everything*.

-*Kaliska* (162-163)

اصدقاء صولا يصفقون لي حين انطق جملة كاملة باللغة الفرنسية، ادرك حينها انني عربي، من جنوب لبنان، قادم من بيروت، وعشت في دير السرو، ارتبط يقينا بالبحر وبشوارع بيروت العتيقة، وبهوية شكلها المكان دون وعي .

Sola's friends applaud me whenever I say a full sentence in correct French. I realize then that I am an Arab, from South Lebanon, coming from Beirut but having lived in Der El Saro. I share a genuine connection with the sea and with Beirut's archaic streets, *and hold an identity shaped by these places*.

- *Qayd El Dars* (212)

Despite an unwavering awareness of the marginal space that the characters occupy, they continue to relate their identity and their belonging to these places. As Al Awwad says, "Here means everything." By doing so, the dominant narrative of the state is challenged. The myth that one can be granted citizenship only if they prove that they 'belong' to the country is debunked. It is not the place that rejects a person, but rather the people having

power over that place. In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt elaborates on the problematic dynamics of rights, citizenship, and belonging:

The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice. (575)

Arendt argues that in the modern world, humans are not simply born with their ‘human rights’ as the international declaration of human rights states. Instead, they are either born with the ‘right to have rights’ (575) or not. In that sense, rights are granted by humans to humans, and the main condition to be granted such rights is to have—as Arendt puts it—a ‘place’ in the world; and to have a place in the world means to be a recognized citizen of a country. As Hassan says in *Qayd El Dars*,

امام تقديس الهوية، لا يوجد مجد للانسان المجرّد منها، لفرديته المستقلة، لفنه، لانتصاراته،
لانسانيته وذاتيته الحرة. الهوية تصنيف فردي ظاهريا، لكنها توظيف اجتماعي واقعي... الهوية
هي اختزال ابعادك الانسانية الى عنوان .

In the face of the glorification of citizenship, there is no glory for the human being devoid of it, for his independent individuality, his art, his victories, his humanity and his free subjectivity. On the surface, identity is seen as an individual classification, but in reality, it has a social employment... Your identity card is a reduction of your human dimensions into a single title. (170)

The two novels serve in deconstructing the relationship between identity, belonging, and citizenship. They show how, as Hassan says, identity cards issued by governmental authorities serve their own forms of social employment. This is also highlighted in *Kaliska*, when the committee responsible for citizenship procedures is described as follows:

لجنة الجنسية التي شكلت لحصر المواطنين وتصنيفهم حسب تاريخ تواجدهم في البلاد، ليحمل كل منهم صفة يفاخر بها الآخرين، صفة تفرق بينهم كمؤسسين ومهاجرين

The committee was formed to identify citizens and classify them according to the date of their presence in the country, so that each of them can be proud of a specific social standing, determined by categorization—either as first-class citizens, considered the founders of the country, or as second-class citizens, or immigrants. (81)

When Saleh Al Jazzaz applies for this citizenship with a special recommendation from his father-in-law—who is a wealthy Kuwaiti merchant—the committee grants him a categorization as a first-class citizen. As the novel puts it, no one can question the authority of money. These authorities, which exist independent of the authority of belonging, are what the novels uncover. They include the authority of money, class, and social standing—of *belongings* as opposed to *belonging*.

It is worth noting that the authority of money and status are sometimes even seen as greater than the authority of the citizenship itself. Whether a person is a citizen or not, society will judge him/her based on multiple factors. When Layla and Hassan lived in Der El Saro, they were “respected among the Bedouins and the *Fellahin* (landowners) because they came from Beirut and went to school” (111). And among returning to Der

El Saro for a visit after being naturalized in 1994, Hassan recounts how he came back to find everything that was supposed to change still as he had left it.

الارض غير مسفلنة وملينة بالوحول، التمييز الاجتماعي ضد البدو ما زال على حاله، رغم حصولهم على الهوية اللبنانية، فقد ظل ينظر اليهم على انهم «عرب». «الاطفال يذهبون الى المدرسة في المرحلة الابتدائية فقط كي يتمكنوا من القراءة والكتابة والحساب، والرجال يعملون في نقل الخضروات، وفي ورش البناء، وفي الحقول الزراعية في المناطق المجاورة، والنساء ينظفن البيت، ويعتنين بالاطفال، ويصنعن المون لبيعها لنساء بيروت .

The land is unpaved and muddy. Social discrimination against the Bedouins is still the same despite obtaining Lebanese identity, and they are still viewed as “Arabs.” Children go to school only at the primary level so that they can read, write, and understand basic math. Men work transporting vegetables, in construction workshops, and in agricultural fields in the surrounding areas. Women clean the house, take care of the children, and make canned food and products to sell to the women of

Beirut. (225)

Despite obtaining Lebanese nationality, social discrimination against the Bedouins remained the same. On the other hand, although stateless before, Najwa’s family was respected because her children went to school, and she was known as the ‘Beirut woman’ (58).

Through problematizing the notion of roots and routes, exploring the ways that the characters describe the places they occupy and their relationships with them, and showing how social discrimination exists regardless of statelessness, this chapter argued that stateless literature uncovers places of in-betweenness often ignored in the public

narratives. It addressed issues of place, roots, routes, displacement, rooted displacement into liminality, and marginalization. Finally, it highlighted the way in which belonging is detached from emotional bonds and politicized by the nation-state to serve certain agendas.

CHAPTER II

STATE-LESS BUT NOT PEN-LESS

A. Belonging to the Novel

Much has been written about the novel as a literary form. György Lukács, a Hungarian Marxist philosopher, literary historian, and literary critic referred to the novel as a site of ‘transcendental homelessness’ in *The Theory of the Novel* (41). He argued that certain changes in the “concept of life” in our modern times can only be expressed in the totality of the novel form (41-42). A totality that can surmount the complexities of man’s loss of his unity with the world. For Lukács, and for many other literary critics, historians, and philosophers, the novel genre is a result of the change in the structure of human consciousness and the dynamics of belonging to the world at large. In ancient times, everywhere that humans went was considered—or could be considered—as *home*. In the aftermath of WW1 and WW2, several restrictions—including the rise of modern nation-states and their spread to Asia and the Middle East by colonial powers—led to a breach between spatial, temporal, and psychological notions of being. Homelessness, which in modern times can be considered as an umbrella term for many other states of being: alienation, exile, diaspora, statelessness, refugee, displacement, and the list goes on...became a widespread feeling and state among different factions of society. Among these factions were the writers who sought refuge, change, and belonging in the novel. In “The Arabic Novel between Aesthetic Concerns and the Causes of Man: Commitment in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif,” Sonja Mejcher-Atassi highlights how the aftermath of the Nakba of 1948 and the June War of 1967 “mercilessly shatter[ed] people’s hopes and dreams”, leading prominent Arab intellectuals such as Munif to call

the second half of the twentieth century “the era of the novel” (148). It was in writing, and in the novel specifically, that the defeat and homelessness felt by many Arab intellectuals after the Nakba was expressed.

In *The Writer and Exile*, Munif highlights the novel’s role in “giving voice to “the history of those who do not have a history”” (qtd. in Mejcher-Atassi 143). While it is ideally impossible for a nation or group of people to ‘not have a history,’ it is possible in modern times for a peoples’ history to be altered, controlled, misrepresented, and even discredited. In light of the rise of modern nation-states, many tribes’ histories of movement and cultural exchange were cast aside. What mattered for the nation-state was the history of prolonged settlement in a defined geographic area. The history of the nation-state naturally starts with its establishment, and it encompasses all the events leading up to the present day. However, the stateless are cast out of this ‘national’ history of the country they live, and in many instances were born in. As they stay on the margins of society, they also stay on the margins of history, or even further apart than the margin. Although many Biduns in Kuwait serve or have historically served in the national army as *asaker* (soldiers), they remain outside the legal documents of the state—with no birth or death certificates—and therefore outside any office historical documentation. While several events have been sparked and led by the Bidun, such as the Bidun movement following the 2011 Arab Spring, these events are not considered to be national historical events, but rather mere inconveniences. The events are overlooked and considered to be, as Mona Kareem puts it, echos of the voices of the people from the margin, talking about the margin⁵. This marginalization extends beyond political events and social

⁵ Mona Kareem. “Bidoon: A Cause and its Literature are Born” (2020), <https://monakareem.blogspot.com/2021/06/bidoon-cause-and-its-literature-are-born.html>

documentation, further into literary marginalization. It is often that, when writing the history of a country's national literature, the stateless writers fall into the cracks and end up either unrepresented or misrepresented. Alrabei summarizes this dilemma with a set of questions:

The challenges could be summed up in the two questions...: 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 probes into the very meaning of both the 'national' and the 'literary' in national literary history. (62)

Alrabei then gives an overview of several efforts to document Kuwaiti literary history, starting with Khalid Sa'ud Al-Zaid's *Kuwaiti Writers in Two Centuries* (1967) and Muhammad Hasan Abdullah's *The Literary and Intellectual Movement in Kuwait* (1973), both of whom disagreed over whether Abduljalil al-Ṭabṭabai should be considered the first Kuwaiti poet, having lived only the last 10 years of his life in Kuwait. Both writers left the Bidun out of their work, as the Bidun issue was not yet a social phenomenon. It was only in 2007, with Sulayman al-Shaṭṭi's *Poetry in Kuwait*, that the Bidun were included, but distinguished from the national literature in a separate chapter titled *al-Adab al-Mujawir* (Adjacent Literature) (70). Much dispute arose from the term 'adjacent literature,' a term which most Bidun writers rejected. Only recently, efforts by Bidun writers and other intellectuals have highlighted the role that Bidun literature has played

in shaping Kuwaiti literary production, such as *The Cameleers of Clouds and Estrangement* by Bidun poet and writer Saadiya Mufarrih. Nasser Al Dhafiri, author of *Al Jahraa Trilogy*, said in one of the events celebrating his work: “I will fight until the last day of my life so that this literature remains Kuwaiti” (Alrabei 39).

Going back to Lukács’ concept of the novel as a site of transcendental homelessness, Al Dhafiri’s statement echos how writers employ their literature to find a place, or a home, in a country which has rendered them politically homeless. This literary conquest is perhaps more well-defined and mature in Kuwait than it is in Lebanon. In Lebanon, engaging with stateless literature is yet to be seen as a topic within debates surrounding the nature of Lebanon’s national literary history. In fact, as far as this research has uncovered, no novels or literary publications have been circulated by stateless individuals in Lebanon, and we are yet to have a serious effort to collect and publish them. Despite that, it is clear how the novel is the most prominent modern form of literary expression among the stateless. In one of her interviews, Lana Abdulrahman describes writing as a way of emptying one’s memory onto paper, thus getting relieved from the burden of that memory.

ذاكرة الحرب من الصعب التحرر منها بالنسبة لأي انسان بل ولأي كاتب عايش لحظاتها، لأنها
تطل برأسها المفزع الذي نحاول التخلص منه عبر الكتابة، من هنا ربما يكون الكاتب محظوظا
في تلقيه هبة الكتابة التي تساعد على التحرر من ذاكرته المثقلة بالألم

It is hard to free oneself from the memory of war, especially for writers.
Its unwanted memory keeps intruding on our lives through writing. It is
perhaps through the act of writing that the author can luckily be freed
from the shackles of these memories.

Similarly stressing the role of the novel, Al Dhafiri, in an interview with Al Taleea, comments on how he did not mention the word ‘Bidun’ in any of his published short stories, and only started focusing on the nuances of the Bidun case in his novels, starting with *Al Sahad (Scorched Land)*, the first of the *Jahraa Trilogy*. The novel as a form allows for a story to take shape in its totality, in its interconnectedness and nuanced details.

This chapter will unpack the literary aesthetics of both novels, *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars*, focusing on concepts such as literary openings, focalization, and narrative structure. It will highlight the role of writing as an aesthetic choice, and the view of the two novels as not only contributing to a cause, or to a literary genre with a specific label—such as stateless literature—but a view of contributing to literature at large, in all its aesthetic and creative forms.

B. Literary Openings

1. *Beginning at the End in Kaliska*

In *How to Read Literature*, Terry Eagleton highlights the role that form plays in shaping the content of a literary work, arguing that “the most common mistake students of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way that it says it” (2). He dedicates his first chapter to a close reading of literary beginnings, and the role they play in setting the tone for the rest of the novel. I shall start my discussion of *Kaliska* by unpacking its epigraph:

الذين منحوا اقدارهم لهذا الصخب .

Those who have surrendered their fate to this noise. (10)

Al Dhafiri opens the chapter with an epigraph that immediately sparks the following questions: What noise is he speaking of? How can someone surrender their fate to it? And what about those who have surrendered their fate to it? It is unclear whether this opening

line is a dedication, a description of the characters, or a means of communicating the novel's target audience: those who would relate most to the events unraveling in the coming chapters. Among many other things, the 'noise' could refer to the bustling life of the city, outside Al Jahraa. It could symbolize the noise of the airplane engines, leading Al Awwad into exile outside his homeland Kuwait. To think of what the noise refers to, one needs to consider what its opposite—tranquility— might refer to, and the places in which it can be found. In other words, the noise could refer to anything outside the quiet and still vastness of the desert and the dwelling areas of the Bedouins and Biduns. The city has long been referred to as a place of bustling activity and noise. On the back cover of the third edition of Al Dhafiri's *Al Musater* (المسطر), the third novel from the *Jahraa Trilogy*, the following line is quoted:

كان حلمي الوحيد ان اهرب من هذا السكون القاتل الى الضجيج. المرات القليلة التي رأيت بها الحواضر كانت تستلبنى تماما، ولا اريد ان اعود لهذه الفضاءات المسكونة برغاء الابل وثغاء الانعام .

My only dream was to run away from this suffocating stillness into the *noise*. The *cities* captivated me in the few times I had seen them, and I dread the idea of settling back in these rural spaces that are inhabited only by the bleating of camels and cattle.

The opposition between the stillness of the desert and the noise of the city is clearly established in this section. Yet the 'noise' in *Kaliska*'s epigraph does not only symbolize the city, but it also symbolizes all the complexities associated with the 'modern' city. Especially in the context of Kuwait, the modern city is one built on the ruins of Bedouin dwellings, and one where notions of citizenship, money, and power dictate one's destiny. Because of his status as a Bedouin—and later a Bidun—from Al Jahraa, Al Awwad's fate is indeed dictated by this 'noise' and these modern complexities. Before leaving to Canada, he is rarely ever an active agent. He is lured into a love affair, stripped of his

nationality, imprisoned and accused of terrorism, and finally deported. Ironically, he is not even an active agent in the act of falling in love—the act which can be seen as the cause of his many struggles. As the novel puts it, Rasha was the first to fall in love.

لكنه لم يتجاوز ذلك الى اول الحب اما هي فقد تجاوزت ذلك منذ اللقاء الاول .كانت تعرف انها تسير به الى قصة حب وتعرف انها قادرة على ان تجعله يسير معها، رغم ان تلك هي تجربتها الاولى .

He liked her, but had not yet trespassed the line between liking and love. She, on the other hand, had loved him when they first met. She knew she was luring him into a love affair, and she also knew that she could make him follow in her footsteps, even though this was her first time falling in love. (60)

Al Awwad’s helplessness is also built into the fabric and language of the novel. Below is a breakdown of the sections and chapter titles of the novel:

Intro: Those who Have Surrendered Their Fate to This Noise	مدخل: الذين منحوا اقدارهم لهذا الصخب
Book Zero/1: Intruding Tellers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Bizarre Calamity Entangles a Stranger and Six Dead Victims ● A Girl Intrudes on the Story 	الكتاب الصفري/ ١: الطارئون على الحكاية <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● غريب وستة قتلة طارئون على الحكاية ● فتاة طارئة على الحكاية
Book 1: The First Kaf (the letter ‘K’ in Arabic) Chapter 1: Al Awwad Chapter 2: Al Jazzaz Chapter 3: An Odor Chapter 4: Nikab and National Security Chapter 5: Loose Beginnings Chapter 6: Baffling Beginnings Chapter 7: Well-defined Endings Chapter 8: The Needle in the Haystack Chapter 9: Uncalculated Beginnings	الكتاب الاول: كاف اولي الفصل الاول: العواد الفصل الثاني: اليزاز الفصل الثالث: رائحة الفصل الرابع: نقاب وامن دولة الفصل الخامس: بدايات غير محكمة كما يجب الفصل السادس: بدايات اكثر ارباكا الفصل السابع: نهايات مرسومة بدقة اكثر الفصل الثامن: ابرة التنين الفصل التاسع: بدايات غير محسوبة العواقب

<p>Book Zero/2: Intruding Tellers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bizarre Encounter Hooks an Immigrant, Police, and Dogs • A Raptor Intrudes on the Story 	<p>الكتاب الصفح ٢/ :الطارئون على الحكاية</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • مهاجر، شرطة، وكلاب طارئون على الحكاية • طائر جارح طارئ على الحكاية
<p>Book 2: The Second Kaf Chapter 1: My Mom...is an Airplane Chapter 2: Kaliska: The Coyote Chases a Gazelle Chapter 3: If Only my Mom Were a Man Chapter 4: The Muddy Lake Chapter 5: Once Again, I Wish my Mom Were a Man Chapter 6: Sedition's Aftermath Chapter 7: A Prophecy of the End Final Chapter: The Apocalypse</p>	<p>الكتاب الثاني :كاف ثانية الفصل الاول :امي...طائرة الفصل الثاني :كاليسكا :القيوط يطارد غزالا الفصل الثالث :لو كانت امي رجلا الفصل الرابع :بحيرة الطين الفصل الخامس :وايضا، ليت امي رجلا الفصل السادس :اثر الفتنة الفصل السابع :نبوءة النهايات الفصل الاخير :القيامة</p>

Al Awwad's helplessness is most obvious during his time in Kuwait, which is narrated in *Book 1: The First Kaf*. After establishing the background of each character in the first few chapters, chapter five marks the first time Al Awwad starts trying to make decisions and life-choices, after falling in love with Rasha. Each chapter is a new beginning—*Loose Beginnings*, *Baffling Beginnings*, and *Uncalculated Beginnings*—and each beginning is marked by another one of Al Awwad's failures as he tries to get a grip on his life. This insistence on beginnings characterizes the need to assume control over one's own life. However, this need is unattained as each beginning proves more disastrous than its precedent.

The novel's own opening chapter, as well, begins at the end. In the first chapter, Al Awwad is in his prison cell in Canada. The first line reads:

«وطني هو اعاقتي الابدية الوحيدة التي لن اشفى منها ابدا»

“My country is my only eternal impairment from which I'll never recover.” (11)

As the narrative progresses, we learn that Al Awwad says this to a fellow prisoner who had asked him about the hearing aid device attached to his left ear. To the prisoner asking

him the question, Al Awwad's answer does not make sense. To the reader, however, this opening statement paints a picture of the protagonist's homeland as a site of struggle and misfortune. The reader is unaware of the circumstances which led Al Awwad into prison in Canada. Even as he signs his confession, he writes the below ambiguous note:

أعترف، انا فهد غانم العواد، بأنني ارتكبت الجرم المشار اليه اعلاه بكامل قواي العقلية، ودون ان يحرضني احد، وأعترف بأنني جاهل بالقوانين التي خالفتها وكنت تحت وطأة الشراب.

I, Fahad Ghanem Al Awwad, confess that I have committed the aforementioned crime without anyone's incitement, and with my full mental capacity. I confess that I am ignorant of the rules that I broke, and I was under the influence of alcohol. (14)

Upon reading this, the reader might assume that the 'aforementioned crime' is that he mistakingly ran over someone while driving, or stole something from a store, or even assaulted a woman while he was drunk. Saying that he was 'ignorant of the rules' that he broke does not lead the reader to believe that he had wittingly lured Al Jazzaz into Canada, waited for him at the airport disguised as a random taxi driver, driven him to the muddy lake, stripped him of his clothes in the cold, and left him to die.

Although we know by the end of the story that Al Awwad kills Al Jazzaz in Canada, we are not sure whether he was convicted of that particular crime. The only two chapters that are told from Al Awwad's first person perspective are "A Bizarre Encounter Hooks an Immigrant, Police, and Dogs" in Book Zero/2, and the final chapter, "The Apocalypse". The two chapters present conflicting accounts. In "A Bizarre Encounter," Al Awwad presents himself as the innocent 'immigrant' who works as a taxi driver and is summoned to the lake by the police, where he is asked whether he is familiar with Al Jazzaz's body.

احسست بفرح داخلي حاولت الا اجعله ينعكس على عيني، ما الذي جاء به الى هنا؟ هل كان يتتبع ضحية
ينهيها بيده وما اكثر ضحاياه هنا.

I felt a great joy that I tried to conceal. What had brought him here? He might have
been following another one of his prey, and they are many here. (244)

In this account, Al Awwad's own internal monologue tells the reader that he had not known that Al Jazzaz was in Canada, let alone that he was dead. Upon reading this, the reader is led to think that Al Awwad is innocent, and that Al Jazzaz's death was perhaps a result of the fair work of fate. In the final chapter, however, we learn that Al Awwad was still at the crime scene when the police arrived, injured and unable to move.

سمعت اصوات سيارات الشرطة والاسعاف تسد البحيرة ومروحية تحلق بالقرب ثم اصوات كلاب تقترب .
تحاملت على جراحي وحاولت الخروج .كانت اصوات الكلاب قريبة مني والشرطة يتصايحون انهم عثروا
علي .

I heard the sound of police cars and ambulances around the lake. There was also a
helicopter hovering nearby and the sound of police dogs approaching. I tried to
escape despite my injury. Dogs were barking nearby and the police officers were
shouting that they had found me. (359)

Realistically, Al Awwad could not have been at the crime scene and in his room receiving a call from the police at the same time. The first account clearly conflicts with the second account. Interestingly, both accounts are the only first person perspectives we get from Al Awwad as a narrator. Even as we usually get insights into his thought process and emotions in the third person accounts, the reader is led to believe that the first person narration would reflect more personally the unfiltered and true thoughts of the narrator. Yet Al Dhafiri chooses the first person specifically for two conflicting accounts by the same character. It could be, since we know that he was jailed, that the events in "A Bizarre

Encounter” are mere hallucinations. Yet the story itself does not resolve this contradiction. Instead, it leaves the reader to wonder. The unresolved case becomes a riddle that can only be resolved outside the novel, in the reader’s mind and analysis. This ambiguity reflects a modern literary choice of distortion and unreliable narrators, which are not simply tricks or attention-catching devices. The message is philosophical. History is distorted, ambiguous, and arbitrary, and so is the narration. By ‘history,’ I mean the modern history of the nation-state—including the arbitrary ways in which nationality was given. The arbitrariness and distortion of history, the rise of nation states, and the resulting laws on citizenship, are built into the structure of the novel itself.

2. *Ghostly Prelude in n Qayd El Dars*

Written by Lebanese author and journalist Lana Abdulrahman, *Qayd El Dars* makes its main topic clear from the very beginning, starting with its title. In a Lebanese context, however, and for the common reader’s feeble eyes, the title does not immediately spark any connections with statelessness, literally meaning ‘under study.’ Following the title, the epigraph reads as follows:

الى الذين واجهوا اشباحهم بثبات...
الى الخاسرين كثيرا، الحالمين دوما،
الى الذين ربطوا اجسادهم الى سارية السفينة،
او صموا آذانهم عن الغناء الفتان .

To those who have steadily faced their ghosts,

To those always losing, always dreaming,

To those who have attached themselves to the mast of the ship,

Or shut their ears against the seditious⁶ singing.

From the very start, the novel makes references to ghosts. While ghosts could refer to a person's worst characteristics and their darkest thoughts, they could also refer to the person as a whole, as they are. In her recent publication, *Ghost Citizens: Decolonial Apparitions of Stateless, Foreign and Wayward Figures in Law*, Jamie Chai Yun Liew conjures the figure of the Pontianak in Malay culture in relation to statelessness. The Pontianak is a popular vampire-like figure in Malay folktales who, upon dying shortly after giving birth, haunts people and asks for repentance. She has been described as “a nebulous figure not only because of her existence as a being neither dead nor alive but also because of her ambiguous role as it is not clear if she is a villain or hero...On one hand, she could be seen as a villain or antagonist due to the chaos, destruction and murder of those regardless of their innocence; on the other, she could be read as a hero or the protagonist as she seeks justice for those who are oppressed” (qtd. in Yun Liew 2). Just like the Pontianak, stateless individuals can be seen as an embodiment of the ‘living dead’ who are present around and among us, but rarely seen. “Like the Pontianak, stateless persons have a bifurcated reception; while many view stateless persons as illegals, cheaters, and foreigners, some view stateless persons as kin, citizens, and resilient advocates” (3). Reference to the ghostly nature of statelessness is established from the very beginning of the novel, along with the theme of continuous movement symbolized by the ship. The seditious singing can be compared to the *sakhab* (noise) mentioned in Al Dhafiri's epigraph. Noise, in a way, can be political. Jacques Attali, author of *Noise*,

⁶ A note on translation: while *Fitna* in Arabic is directly translated into sedition, *Al Fattan* can have various meanings due to its diverse cultural and colloquial uses. It is often that *al fattan* and *al faten* are used interchangeably colloquially, both meaning ‘charming.’ Even ‘charming’ and ‘seditious’ are often used interchangeably in Arab culture, especially when describing the feminine. A charming woman is sometimes seen as a possible cause of fitna (sedition), and is therefore called *fatina* or *fattana*.

argues that the world “is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible. Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning, forgetting that life is full of noise and that death alone is silent: work noise, noise of man, and noise of beast. Noise bought, sold, or prohibited. Nothing essential happens in the absence of noise” (3). It is a fundamental authority for those in power to control and regulate noise, determining which types of noise are acceptable and where and when they are allowed. This further articulates the argument made earlier about the noise being symbolic of the city and the complex dynamics of authority and modern culture. It can also go beyond that, to symbolize the noise made by the stateless: through their literature, their political movements, or their music—a noise which is, as Attali puts it, subject to the control of the state. In muting the stateless through casting them outside literary, political, and social histories, the state controls their noise, turning them into ghosts.

C. Narrative Styles

1. *Literary Alterations: Intruding Tellers in Kaliska*

In addition to Al Awwad’s story, the beginning and middle of the novel have intruding tellers whose stories are narrated in the sections titled ‘Book Zero.’ Upon starting the novel, the reader first gets introduced to Al Awwad through the short Intro Chapter, after which the narrative shifts to the first ‘Book Zero’ where we learn about a terrorist bombing at a cafe in the chapter ‘A Bizarre Calamity Entangles a Stranger and Six Dead Victims’ and about Al Awwad’s neighbor in Al Jahraa in ‘A Girl Intrudes on the Story.’ If the reader wanted to understand Al Awwad’s story without tasting the literary tools employed in the novel, skipping these two chapters in Book Zero/1, which stretch from page 18 until 40, would have zero impact on the story’s main narrative. They are similar

to what Gérard Genette calls ‘Alterations’ in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Genette believes in ‘focalization’⁷ in literary narrative rather than ‘point of view’. Focalization is not only concerned with who is telling the story, but also with whose point of view orients the narrative. In other words, it distinguishes between two main questions: “Who is the narrator?” and “who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?” In that sense, an ‘alteration’ is a sudden change in focalization which is “isolated within a coherent context...[like] a momentary infraction of the code which governs that context without thereby calling into question the existence of the code—the same way that in a classical musical composition a momentary change in tonality, or even a recurrent dissonance, may be defined as a modulation or alteration without contesting the tonality of the whole” (195). These alterations are two types: (1) *paralepsis*, which is the inclusion of an event against what is expected in a given focalization; and (2) *paralipsis*, which is the similarly transgressive omission of such an event. Isolated at the beginning and middle of the novel, the ‘Zero’ books are a form of *paralepsis*—taking Al Awwad as the character on which the novel is focalized. In these chapters, the novel temporarily deviates from Al Awwad, and provides information that is not accessible to him. Genette’s theory explains the effect that this temporary shift has on the narrative better than the more traditional ‘point of view’ perspective. Since point of view is ‘from’ a specific character while focalization is ‘on’ a specific character, it is possible to have a third person narrator who nonetheless is telling the story with a specific focus on a particular character’s experiences. As Eagleton puts it, “a novel might unduly idealise one of its characters, just as it might angle its storyline unduly in favour of a certain standpoint” (91). *Kaliska* is predominantly told from a third person narrator, but Al

⁷ the term was first coined by Genette in 1972 in his series ‘figures’

Awwad remains its focus. The reader is not given insight about Al Jazzaz's perspective, emotions, and thoughts—which could be seen as symbolizing the powerful standpoint which stigmatizes the Bidun. Therefore, the chapters with intruding tellers constitute clear deviations in the narrative from its focus Al Awwad. In fact, these 'Zero' books only serve in disrupting the narrative's coherence and linearity: they confuse and disorient the reader. As they are situated at the beginning of the novel, they make the reader wonder: Whose story am I reading? And how are these incidents connected to it? They also disorient the temporal linearity of the novel. The events they narrate usually end up happening at the end of each of the two main books, Book 1 and Book 2. However, the references to these events at the end of each book are very subtle, achieving a nuanced *déjà vu* effect rather than a 'aha' effect. The reader does not seamlessly connect the events in the 'Zero' books with subsequent ones, but merely feels like the circumstances are familiar. The 'main' narrative—the story of Al Awwad—is delayed, although it remains the focus of the novel for the largest part. This delay achieves two effects simultaneously. On the one hand, it slows down the progression of the narrative, whereby Al Awwad's story starts on page 46 of the novel. In temporal terms, which many readers use when describing their experience of reading stories, the Zero chapters achieve a slowness that simultaneously builds up the tempo and tension for Al Awwad's story. On the other hand, the literary employment of these 'Zero' books serves in highlighting the complex interactions between a bidun and his/her community. In opening up the novel with these intruding tellers, Al Dhafiri highlights how his novel does not only tell one story, but a series of interconnected stories. He starts by placing the Bidun's story on the margin—focusing instead on those intruding tellers whose lives are impacted by the events in Al Awwad's life. In that sense, delaying the narrative disrupts the reader's expectations.

When reading ‘Bidun literature,’ the common reader arrives at the first chapter thinking that the story will begin in narrating the daily struggles of a stateless person. Delaying this expected narrative, thus, places the novel as a literary work before placing it as an account of a stateless person’s life. As Eagleton puts it:

One of the things we mean by calling a piece of writing ‘literary’ is that it is not tied to a specific context. It is true that all literary works arise from particular conditions.... Yet though these works emerge from such contexts, their meaning is not confined to them. (117)

Although written by a Kuwaiti Bidun writer who himself also immigrated to Canada, *Kaliska* is not only confined to the closed life of Al Awwad or those closest to him. It is also not only concerned with notions of homeland, citizenship, and belonging. It goes beyond such themes to touch on literary and philosophical questions of the reliability of history and narration, and of what constitutes good and evil in this world. It asks the question that was first stated by Al Awwad in the opening chapter: “*what about the person who starts good and ends up bad? And what about the bad person who ends up being good?*” (13). Can Al Awwad’s actions be justified by the events which shaped and led to them? Can love turn people to killers? And what are the things that matter...? *Kaliska* leaves the space open for the reader to decide on the answers in most cases, yet it does shape these answers through literary means.

In addition to the ‘Zero’ sections, the novel can be split into two main sections: Book 1 and Book 2. These two books are titled ‘The First Kaf’ and ‘The Second Kaf’ respectively—with ‘kaf’ standing for the Arabic letter K (ك). As most of Book 1’s events happen in Kuwait and Book 2’s in Canada, it is plausible that the ‘kaf’ in each book stands for Kuwait and Canada respectively. In Arabic, both countries start with the same letter

‘Kaf’, unlike the English ‘K’ and ‘C’. The two countries, the country of origin and that of exile, are reduced into their initials by the author. This ambiguity blurs the line between the two countries. The first Kaf is not directly distinguishable from the second kaf, which in a way is similar to how exile in the home country can be indistinguishable from exile in the host country.

Overall, the form of the novel helps in shaping it as a work of literature first, and as a work of stateless literature second. It shows that a Bidun’s life is not simply a set of events affecting one individual. It cannot be narrated fully in first person point of view, it cannot be linear, it is never crystal clear, it is full of riddles, and it will leave its mark on different people and places. It is relevant, comparable, pertinent, and it leads to universal questions that any person, stateless or not, can relate to. Turned into a fictional narrative in the form of a novel, this life can become part of a person’s belonging *and* belongings. It becomes a metaphysical space of belonging, similar to what Lukacs argues in his *The Theory of the Novel*, a space where the characters’ experiences of exile and displacement can be explored and understood. It can also be a belonging which, just like Jabra’s suitcase⁸, can say something about the person writing, reading, or owning it.

2. *The Journalist in Qayd El Dars:*

While the narrator in *Kaliska* is far from being omniscient, even being purposely misleading at times, the narration in *Qayd El Dars* takes it upon itself to explain and elaborate on the historical aspects of statelessness and the civil war in Lebanon in general. The narrator, at times, takes on the voice of a journalist, and the narration becomes

⁸ See Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, “The Palestinian Exile as Writer”

journalistic in style. The narrative, in such instances, explains historical events, referring to specific locations and dates. Below is an example:

يستمتع باسم في اعادة سرد ما قرأه في كتب التاريخ عن بلاد الشام في ايام الامبراطورية العثمانية، حين كانت العائلات في لبنان وفلسطين وسوريا موزعة عبر الحدود: بل لم تكن هناك حدود واقعية بين البلدان التي قسمتها معاهدة «سايكس بيكو»، ثم في عام ١٩٢٢، عقدت بريطانيا وفرنسا اتفاقية «بوليه نيو كامب...»

Bassem enjoys narrating the history that he'd read about the region in the days of the Ottoman Empire, when members of the same extended family lived across the borders of Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. In fact, there weren't any official borders between the countries before Sykes-Picot. Then, in 1922, Britain and France signed the Paulet–Newcombe Agreement... (45)

The narrative goes on to explain the outcomes of the agreement between the British and French colonial powers, the re-drawing of Lebanese and Palestinian borders which placed the seven border villages under British mandate, the 1932 nation-wide survey by the French colonists in Lebanon, the resulting Lebanese reactions, the 1948 Nakba and the resulting displacement of Palestinians into Lebanese land, followed by the establishment of the Qayd el Dars category in 1960...spanning over three pages of journalistic narrative explaining the history in detail. These sudden changes in the mood and voice of the narration are frequent in the novel, and are often masked by the literary employment of memory or dialogue, where a character is either remembering these events, reading about them, or talking about them with someone else. It is almost like the narrative is trying to find an excuse to speak about history, and to justify writing about the topic of statelessness. In that sense, the novel takes on a more informative role than a literary one, although Abdulrahman tries to balance both.

As it spans over four generations—Souad, Najwa, Najwa’s children, and her grandchildren—the novel is predominantly told from a third person omniscient point of view, with a few chapters in the first person. Going back to Genette’s concept of focalization, it could be argued that *Qayd El Dars* is focalized on time itself. It places history at the heart of the novel, either through the journalistic historical interjections mentioned above, or through the structure of the novel which is divided into four parts according to the year: Part One: Beirut 2012; Part Two: Beirut-Der Al Saro 1982; Part Three: Beirut, The return 1995; and Part Four: Beirut 2012. Part Two, when the family was in Der Al Saro, makes up the bulk of the novel. Within each of the four parts, the narration is linear and omniscient, leaving little space for the reader’s imagination. Abdulrahman often *tells* her readers instead of *showing* them. Questions of belonging and identity, although used to highlight the dilemma faced by the characters and their inability to anchor their sense of identity to one place in light of their statelessness, are nevertheless explained, elaborated, and even answered by the narrative.

Kaliska leaves its reader wondering: Can love really turn people into killers? And can good people be shaped by the bad things that happen to them? *Qayd El Dars* answers these questions with the certainty of a journalist. Najwa, Hassan, and Layla belong to Beirut. Hassan decides to stay in Beirut at the end of the novel. Bassem belongs to his gun and to the Palestinian cause. Hasan, Najwa’s third son, remains marginal for most of the novel, joins an Islamic Jihadist group, and disappears towards the end. In Part Four, a woman knocks on the family’s door and introduces herself as Hasan’s Iraqi wife, carrying in her arms his son Anas. She brings with her Hasan’s diaries, which open a window into a narrative from this absent character’s point of view. A narrative in which Hasan reflects on his own dilemma of belonging and identity.

حتى سن السابعة بقيت امشي ممسكا بثوب امي، ومنذ ان افلته، صرت تائها ابحت عن يقين اتشبت به .

Until the age of seven, I walked holding on to my mom's dress. Ever since I let go of it, I've been lost, searching for anything to hold on to. (244)

He narrates first finding himself in faith, and then being led into extremist behaviors in the name of that faith. He confesses to forcibly killing innocent civilians in the name of religion. Even in their journals, the characters present us with the truth of their actions, their deepest thoughts, and their full thought processes. They confront the reader with many questions, and then they fire their answers. The plot becomes predictable. The characters turn into stateless archetypes. For a Lebanese reader, the novel seems to be weaving all the typical stereotypes into one narrative. Najwa's children embody these stereotypes: Hassan, the stateless boy turned artist; Layla, the stateless girl turned housewife in a miserable marriage, turned divorcee, only to find herself in another unhappy marriage; Hasan, the stateless boy turned extremist; and Yasmine, the youngest member of the stateless family who ends up a dancer in clubs and bars, willingly giving away parts of herself in an effort to belong. Although the novel sympathizes with the victims of these stereotypes, it does not challenge them much. In fact, it seems to be trying to justify the fate and choices of each character through a closer look at the events in their life. Through the structure of questions followed by answers, and the historical input weaved into the narrative, the novel seems to tell its reader exactly what is needed: to read, to wonder, to understand, and to sympathize.

D. (De)Emphasizing Statelessness and Gender Dynamics

Based on the nuances in structure, mood, voice, and narration styles highlighted above, it is clear how the novels are different on several levels. Aesthetic concerns are subordinated in *Qayd El Dars*, in favor of a more informative narrative. Nasser Al Dhafiri, on the other

hand, has commented various times on how he was trying first and foremost to present a literary work. In one of his interviews, he stressed how he tries through his work to “present a work of literature first, before presenting a historical narrative of a nation’s struggle.” Abdulrahman writes from the perspective of a Lebanese citizen, in an effort to shed light on a marginalized topic and to express the mixed feelings of belonging and identity which haunted her throughout and after the Lebanese Civil War. Al Dhafiri, on the other hand, writes from the perspective of a Kuwaiti Bidun who migrated to Canada, sharing the same journey of exile as his main character Al Awwad.

Although both novels were written and published in the same time period, and both feature stateless characters, they have fundamental differences in the ways they conceptualize statelessness. The characters in both novels are not stateless throughout the narrative. In *Kaliska*, Al Awwad’s citizenship is revoked halfway through the novel. In *Qayd El Dars*, Najwa and her family are naturalized as Lebanese citizens following the 1994 naturalization decree. This similarity in plot highlights the structural differences in the conceptualization of statelessness in both novels. It allows the reader to see the way in which the lives of the same characters are painted as citizens and as non-citizens. In *Kaliska*, statelessness is not emphasized through the narrative as a crucial turning point in Al Awwad’s life. In fact, it is barely described in a few lines

كانت الاوراق معدة سلفا. طلب الرجل المدني من والد العواد، او عمه الان، ان يوقعها. كانت الاوراق كفيلة
بإسقاط جنسية الابن وانضمامه لقوافل البدون وكأنه خطأ كتب بقلم رصاص وأعيد تصحيحه .

The papers were previously prepared. The man asked Al Awwad's father—known to be his uncle now—to sign them. These papers were enough to revoke his

citizenship and add him to the Bidun caravan⁹ groups, as if his citizenship had been a mistake written in pencil and it was simply being erased and corrected.

(129)

Citizenship is not only de-emphasized in this section, but is also overshadowed by another event. When Al Awwad's uncle tries to stand up for his son, Al Jazzaz slaps him on the face, causing his *shemagh* and *iqal* (الشماع والعقال), which are the traditional headdresses worn by men in Kuwait, to fall to the ground. The scene of this slap continues to haunt Al Awwad throughout the novel, even more than his statelessness. He is reminded of it on many occasions. Upon witnessing a 'torturing session' in a detention center in Syria, the slaps on the prisoner's face conjure images of his uncle.

مع كل صفة يغمض عينيه على مشهد لا يود ان يراه، ليس مشهد الصفة التي فصلت الاذن عن الوظيفة التي خلقت لها، ولكنها الصفة التي اطاحت بكبرياء والده وشماعه وعقاله عن رأسه، الصفة التي سيتذكرها ابدا حتى لو ان اما صفت ابنها .

With every slap, he closed his eyes on the images that started playing in his mind.

Not the images of the slap which caused an impairment in his left ear¹⁰, but the slap which threw his father's dignity, *shemagh*, and *iqal* off his head. The slap which he shall eternally be reminded of. (206)

Such memories of this slap are emphasized in different parts of the novel. Dignity, as opposed to official citizenship, is what Al Awwad seems to have lost on the day that his citizenship was revoked. Consequently, it is this loss of dignity which turns Al Awwad into a vengeful character.

⁹ The word *kafila* can be translated into 'caravan,' a word which has historical connotation. Caravan comes from the Persian karwan meaning "group of desert travelers." A caravan can be a large group of people traveling together in one long line.

¹⁰ Upon being tortured in a detention center in Kuwait, the continuous slaps on Al Awwad's face cause an impairment in his left ear which blocks his hearing abilities.

In *Qayd El Dars*, naturalization is described as the “biggest transformation” in the lives of the characters (168). The narrative, once again, adopts a journalistic voice and explains the circumstances surrounding the naturalization decree of 1994. The aesthetic aspects of the continuous need to understand concepts such as belonging, exile, and identity are downplayed in an attempt to explain historical events, which is quite the opposite of what Al Dhafiri claims to do in *Kaliska*.

Other differences that are worth exploring include how each novel characterizes its characters depending on their gender, and the way in which statelessness is conceptualized in relation to it. In *Kaliska*, Rasha is given more autonomy and agency over Al Awwad. The storyline does not follow the traditional narrative of a guy falling for a girl and struggling to ‘win’ her. Al Awwad is lured into Rasha’s love, tortured because of it, and transformed by it. In *Qayd El Dars*, however, it is the women’s lives that are transformed by the men’s actions.

في بعض الاحيان، كانت نجوى تنهار، وتتكلم بصوت اقرب الى الشجار كأنها تخاطب الله، وتسأله لماذا لم

يوجد في حياتها رجل تعتمد عليه! لماذا ابتلاها بأب «نسونجي» واخ «اهيل» وزوج «مقاتل»؟

At times, Najwa would break down and argue, as if with God, asking why she never had a man in her life that she could count on. Why did God afflict her with a

Don Juan father, a gullible brother, and an absent fighter as a husband? (48)

The way in which each stateless male in *Qayd El Dars* copes with his statelessness has its effect on the women. Al Awwad—Najwa’s father, who shares the same nickname as *Kaliska*’s protagonist—was a seductive stateless merchant who convinced Souad to run away with him. Their marriage, despite Souad’s Lebanese citizenship, caused the start of a lineage of stateless generations. Najwa’s brother is born with a mental disability. In light of his special needs, his statelessness is de-emphasized. Her husband, Bassem, copes

with his statelessness through fighting with the *Fedayeen*, thus becoming absent from his wife and children's lives. Despite this, the novel argues, through one of its characters, that statelessness affects males more than females in the Arab world.

في مجتمع شرقي ذكوري، تكون قضية الهوية على الرجل اشد تأثيرا وعمقا منها على المرأة .

In an Eastern and patriarchal society, statelessness has more profound and complex effects on men than women. (169)

Although the statement is phrased in a way which places the blame on the patriarchal society, it carries an inherent assumption which in itself is patriarchal. This assumption is that a woman's level of accomplishment and social acceptance is directly measured by the quality of her marriage. Hassan says the above statement in light of a rejection that he had received, because of his statelessness, from the father of a girl he wanted to marry. Because a woman cannot pass down her citizenship to her children, marrying a stateless man would make her children stateless. The opposite is not the same. If a stateless woman marries a Lebanese man, her children would be granted the Lebanese citizenship. For that reason, women's statelessness is rarely seen as a hurdle in the way of marriage. However, their statelessness does stand in the way of education, work, and independence—the same way it does for a man. In that sense, such a statement confines the aspirations and ambitions of a woman, in addition to her achievements, in finding and marrying a good husband.

Nevertheless, as the Bidun literary scene is more diverse and mature in Kuwait, with several published female Bidun writers and poets, and since *Qayd El Dars* remains the only complete novel published on this topic in Lebanon by a Lebanese citizen, it is challenging to arrive to any conclusions about the way that gender is perceived in relation to statelessness in the literature of Lebanon and Kuwait.

In conclusion, the form of the novel emerges as a powerful literary instrument capable of encapsulating the totality of the human experience. Through an analysis of the two stateless literary works, *Kaliska* by Nasser Al Dhafiri and *Qayd El Dars* by Lana Abdulrahman, it becomes evident that while both texts explore themes of identity, displacement, and cultural belonging, they diverge significantly in their structural narrative approaches. *Kaliska* prioritizes the aesthetic dimensions of the novel, employing stylistic features and unresolved dilemmas to provoke the reader's thought, allowing for the "possibility to approach the phenomenon from within its own articulations outside of the ready-made impositions" (Alrabei 5). The narrative has a fast pace which places more emphasis on narrativity than on the inner workings of the character's thoughts and feelings. As Al Awwad is exiled from one place to another, the overriding question in *Kaliska* is 'what's next?' It remains up to the reader to answer the question of 'who is to blame for what comes next?' Is Al Awwad to be blamed for killing Al Jazzaz? What value judgements can we make when, as Al Awwad elaborates in the beginning of the novel, a goof person is turned into a bad person by circumstances? In contrast, *Qayd El Dars* adopts a more informative narrative style, focusing on conveying factual details and historical context, and largely conveying the lives of the stateless as typical archetypes. The narrative is focused more on the feelings and thoughts of the characters, allowing little to no space for the reader's imagination or analyses. The reader knows exactly how the characters feel in Der El Saro, can accurately guess what the family's future will look like, and knows for sure that Hassan will decide to stay in Beirut at the end of the novel. Despite their differences, both works underscore the novel's capacity to serve as a multifaceted vessel for expression, capable of accommodating diverse literary sensibilities and illuminating the complexities of human existence, capturing the nuances

of the human condition, and affirming the enduring significance of literature in shaping collective consciousness.

CONCLUDING WITH THE NEED FOR MORE

This research has highlighted the many approaches that exist in the study of statelessness, ranging from the historical, the social, and the political, to the ethnographic, and has argued in favor of the literary approach. In *The Pedagogy of Economic, Political, and Social Crises*, Knio and Jessop identify three traditional currents of crisis studies: 1) those invested in the cause and nature of the crisis, 2) those invested in crisis management, and 3) those invested in learning and lesson-drawing (3). However, the authors argue that there is a lack of synthesis among the different currents and approaches to crisis studies, which is both productive and limiting. On the one hand, it provides different perspectives from a lot of fields. On the other hand, it “can also lead to serious questioning about what gets lost or overlooked if crisis narratives and an inflationary use of the concept of crisis marginalize other ways of examining recent events and social processes that challenge established inherited routines and experiences” (4). Among the things that often get lost in political approaches to studying statelessness are the voices of the stateless individuals themselves. These individuals become seen as objects to be administered. They become reduced to individuals who need to be registered, numbered, fed, and sheltered. Reasons for their displacement are tackled but not resolved; instead, the focus is on administration and management. Very few studies, among them the literary and the anthropological, seek to humanize these individuals and their struggles. These studies are important because they shed light on how these individuals see themselves and how they understand their struggles, displacement, and assimilation—independent of the categories which international organizations force them into. Highlighting stateless literature allows us to excavate the silences and humanize the humans which have been turned into ghosts as a result of ‘rightlessness,’ as discussed in chapter 2. The tension between absence and

presence is symbolized by the ghostly figure in stateless literature, reflecting the contradictory notions of existing psychologically and philosophically but not legally. In “The Material Presence of Absence: A Dialogue Between Museums and Cemeteries” Morgan Meyer and Kate Woodthorpe present a threefold discussion of absence, arguing “first that absence can be spatially located; second, that absence can have some kind of materiality; and, lastly, that absence can have agency (it ‘acts’ or ‘does’ things)” (3.1). The study of presence and absence from the lens of spatiality in stateless literature merits a deeper analysis which focuses on the material remnants of legal absence, in both content and form. In terms of content, the analysis can uncover instances of ‘ghostly’ activities or encounters, focusing on agency and asking questions such as; to what extent is the stateless character acting like a ghost? What effects do they have on the world around them? How does their presence as human beings subvert their absence as legal citizens? And most importantly, how does absence manifest itself in these narratives?

These questions can also be answered linguistically, through a transitivity analysis of the verb phrases for a specific character. Halliday’s system of transitivity is mainly concerned with how language fulfills its experiential function by conveying to us, the readers, the ‘going ons’ of the material world; i.e. that which is being done, thought, felt, and spoken (Simpson 22). Therefore, transitivity analysis is mainly concerned with the verb phrase in the sentence, and it categorizes verbs into six types, called processes. These processes are **material** (action verbs), **mental** (sensory verbs), **behavioral** (behavior which has an aspect of both material and mental processes; such as ‘frowned’), **verbal** (like said, shouted, asked), **existential** and **relational** (attributing a specific description or state to a person or object). Stylistics theorists argue that linguistic style in any form of written discourse, be it a novel, poem, or academic article, is a choice. In other words,

the ways in which characters in the novel act and behave are encoded in the types of processes they engage with. However, transitivity analysis goes beyond just marking and categorizing types of processes. This type of analysis covers a broader semantic scope through analyzing who participates in these processes, how, how often, under what circumstances, and in relation to what. In that sense, the argument that stateless individuals can be seen as 'legal ghosts' or 'ghost citizens' can be linguistically tested through Halliday's transitivity patterns. Ghosts are not expected to have much agency in the material world; they exist around us, can see what we see, and can hear what we hear, but are unable to have a meaningful effect on the world. Their presence is equivalent to their absence. Linguistically, such lack of agency can be translated into a lack of material action verbs, and a proliferation of mental and sensory verbs. In order to illustrate how stylistic features can give either show agency or the lack of it, below is a simple transitivity analysis of an excerpt from *Kaliska*. In this excerpt, Al Awwad arrives in Canada and makes his way out of the airplane. Al Awwad's verb phrases are color coded in the following way: **Yellow** for mental processes, **aqua** for behavioral processes, and pink for existential and relational processes.

من الواجهة الزجاجية التي تفصل قاعة القادمين عن المدرج الذي ربضت فيه الطائرة كان يرى
السماء تمطر بنعومة حانية، تتساقط قطرات المطر على الواجهة ثم تختفي في مكان لا يراه .
يكاد يشم رائحة المكان من خلف الزجاج . يتبع خط البشر المتصل في سيره نحو منفذ الخروج
ويعيد النظر إلى جوف الطائرة العملاق الذي خرج منه،

"أمي طائرة، ليس لي اسم ولا أعرف من سأكون أو ماذا سأكون ولم يعد يهمني كل هذا، سحقا

لكل شيء"

يصل به الطابور البشري إلى حيث يجلس رجال الجوازات في المكعبات الزجاجية والتي تفتح أبوابها القصيرة من الخلف المواجه لممرات يخرج منها ٣ إلى حيواتهم يخمن أي الوجوه سيكون أكثر لطفاً به، ليس له أن يختار، سينتظر حتى يتفرغ أحدهم ويشير إليه أن يتقدم نحوه .

From the glass façade separating the arrivals hall from the runway where the plane had landed, he could **see** the sky showering gently, its drops falling on the surface and then vanishing into unseen places. He could almost **smell** the place from behind the glass. He **followed** the continuous line of people making their way towards the exit and **glanced** back at the belly of the giant plane from which he had **emerged**.

"I **am** a plane, I **have no** name and I **do not know** who I will be or what I will be, and none of this matters to me anymore, screw it all."

The human queue led him to where the passport officers sat in their glass cubicles, their short doors opening from the back facing the corridors leading people out to their lives. He **wondered** which face would be kinder to him, but he **had no** choice; he would **wait** until one of them becomes available and indicates for him to approach.(299)

It is clear that Al Awwad has little to no agency in this excerpt, which is a pattern that we see throughout the novel. In the excerpt, he is five times a sensor, three times a behavior, and three times a token in a relational process, which is often negating his relation rather than defining it. He is not a doer in any material process, signifying his lack of agency over the world around him. Even at the end of the novel, in the scene where Al Awwad lures Al Jazzaz into the lake in Canada and leaves him to die, he is not presented as an

active participant in material verbs. He literally ‘leaves’ Al Jazzaz to die, by ordering him take off his jacket and walk in the cold. Even in murder, he is ghostly. A closer look at transitivity patterns in the whole novel can help in proving or debunking certain claims about stateless literature. It can show us, through language, whether ghosts and absences really have material agency in the world, as Meyer and Woodthorpe argue. And if so, then what are the aspects of day-to-day life that the characters do have agency over?

It is, nonetheless, the agency of writing that this thesis has celebrated. Through writing, the personal experiences of the stateless are highlighted. They are given a face, a name, and a story. The term ‘stateless literature’ itself has not been widely accepted by critics and authors, and has been discussed by several Bidun writers in Kuwait. Some Bidun writers, such as Muhammad al-Nabhan and Sa‘diyya Mufarrih, rejected this label and considered it to be devoid of meaning, as it links creativity to citizenship or the absence of it, and might burden the writer with presupposed expectations (Mufarrih 109). Other Bidun writers, such as Dikhil Khalifa, welcomed the categorization of Bidun literature as a literary collectivity within national literature, which highlights the unique nuances of stateless literature.

While disputes over labels are never ending and inevitable, I argue for the productivity of the term ‘stateless literature’ as a genre which does not only include works by stateless writers, but also rejects exclusive nationalism in world literature. It is imperative for a writer nowadays to have a nationality, a point of reference to which they belong. International awards such as the Nobel Prize often institutionalize authors and label their literature, and nationalism plays an important role in such labeling. The laureate’s literature is either French, American, British, Egyptian, and so on...but never ‘stateless.’

Stateless literature does not only mean that the writer is stateless or that statelessness is the work's main topic, but rather that the literature itself is stateless. It is not confined to the borders of one nation-state, and is not merely 'multinational' or 'transnational' in that sense. The literature becomes independent of predefined places, spaces, and national aesthetics. It also highlights the way in which stateless individuals are present through their literature. Chapter 2 introduces the different ghostly terms which have been associated with statelessness over time, such as 'legal ghosts' and 'ghost citizens.' Such a ghostly presence is not allowed in literature. The novel, as both an imaginary space and a tangible object, screams "I have been written by a person who is absented from this world but presented in my words." The novel deconstructs the binary of presence and absence as two states which exist independently of one another. It shows how there is always a presence in absence, and there can also be an absence in presence.

In addition to deconstructing these binaries, the novel acts as a space of belonging that the stateless are legally denied in nation-states. As chapter 2 highlights, the novel serves as a site of 'transcendental homelessness' (Lukács 41). Chapter 1 has also challenged the narrative of belonging which crowds citizenship laws, drawing on concepts of legality, spatiality, and roots and routes. Going back to notions of belonging which prevailed before the rise of nation-states, we also find that routes played a more important role than roots. In *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, Dawn Chatty highlights the difference between modern conceptions of belonging and previous ones, with a special focus on the period of the Ottoman empire. "As migration within the empire had long been tolerated and even in some cases encouraged, for religious and economic purposes, belonging was rooted in the connections and links between and among a specific group of people as much as, if not more so than, in a

physical space or territory” (285). *Kaliska* and *Qayd El Dars* demonstrate—through Al Awwad’s unwavering connection to Al Jahraa and Najwa’s undoubted yearning and belonging to Beirut, in addition to Nasser Al Dhafiri’s continuous depiction and revisiting of Al Jahraa in all his novels—that *belonging* is independent of *belongings*. This paper argued for the role of stateless literature in challenging the relationship imposed by the modern state between citizenship and belonging. It uncovered stateless literature as a site of personal expression and literary aesthetics. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that once a human being is stripped of their right to have rights, their very humanity is challenged. In that sense, Arendt essentially equates the value of a human being with their rights. “A life without speech and without action...is literally dead to the world” (176). In *Stateless Literature of the Gulf*, which is one of the few publications which treat stateless literature as a collectivity, Alrabei argues that through their literature, the stateless are “*literally* alive in the world” (160). Stateless literature, therefore, not only challenges notions of belonging and nationality, but also—as this paper has shown—mediates between the states of presence and absence, and rearrange mental and geographic maps in the minds of their readers.

Broadening the scope of this study necessitates a closer look at other narratives of belonging and statelessness in the Arab world. I argue that the tendency to frame the crisis of statelessness as a crisis of belonging is perhaps subdued when it comes to Palestinian Literature, which is rarely—if ever—labeled as stateless literature. Instead, the abundant and wide-spread literary analysis focusing on Palestinian literature refers to it in many other ways: as resistance literature, exile literature, refugee literature, etc... Essential here is the difference between being stateless and being a refugee, and between citizenship and nationality. Palestinian refugees around the world are believed to have the Palestinian

nationality, but not citizenship. Nationality signifies the place from which a person or their ancestors came from, and to which they are thought to belong. Citizenship is legally acquired, it is the legal documents which prove this belonging, and which grant their holders legal rights and protection. Being a ‘present absentee’ in occupied Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, like many others who received this label, were essentially stateless. According to UNRWA, around 6 million Palestinian refugees reside in different areas around the world today¹¹. Those refugees, many of whom are second, third, or fourth generation refugees, are considered to be stateless as they do not hold official documents from an internationally recognized Palestinian authority, but merely have refugee IDs and temporary travel documents from their host countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. However, their statelessness is overshadowed by their status as refugees.

The labeling of Palestinians as refugees or stateless refugees has its own political repercussions. The United Nations conventions distinguish between refugees and stateless individuals, thus distinguishing between the rights and protection policies that each is expected to receive from the host country and international organizations. The refugee convention established in 1951 was followed by the 1954 Stateless Convention, followed later by the 1961 convention on the reduction of statelessness. However, while the convention on refugees was quick to receive support from the international community, the 1954 and 1961 conventions took much longer to secure the ratifications needed for entry into force (Edward & Van Waas 4). Why, then, are refugees given more attention and protection than stateless people? Statelessness is a result of a state’s active marginalization of a group of people who do not fit into its desired identity, whereby refugees are displaced due to other forces. In that sense, statelessness becomes a result of

¹¹ <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>

a sovereign state decision, while refugee-ship is a result of a person's decision—even if it is a decision to flee war and violence. Therefore, the international community is more hesitant to support and put limitations on the existence of stateless individuals than it is to support refugees, which is translated in the “absence of any obligations to grant nationality under international law to stateless persons” (2). Implicit in this hesitance is the idea that to support refugees is to merely provide humanitarian aid, while to fight against statelessness is to infringe on a state's sovereignty, since as the chapter highlights, “at the core of sovereignty [is] the unfettered discretion to set the terms of membership” (3).

Most studies shy away from the term ‘stateless’ when discussing Palestinian literature or cultural production. I propose that looking at Palestinian literature as stateless literature, and studying it in conversation with, and in comparison to, other works of stateless literature from the Arab world, is productive in several ways. When Palestinians are looked at as stateless persons, not refugees, the problem which has caused their forced displacement is highlighted: An apartheid state imposing its presence and legitimacy over another. By merely categorizing Palestinians as refugees, the focus is shifted towards the need to administer them: to provide them with shelter, nutrition, education, and protection. This problem is even further complicated by UNRWA being separate from UNHCR. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is meant to provide support and protection to all refugees except Palestinian refugees, who are the sole responsibility of UNRWA, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. This further accentuates the Palestinian struggle as a refugee crisis instead of an occupation crisis. Being displaced and stateless is what

Palestinians suffer from, while being refugees is what UNRWA and other international organizations claim to be the reason for suffering.

This simple difference in terminology not only affects how focus is shifted, but also how the crisis is shaped and addressed by the international community. The *Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* explains how “there is no protection from *refoulement* to a threat to life or freedom in the 1954 Convention, and second, there is no protection against penalization for illegal entry or stay. Presumably these rights were omitted as the ‘stateless person’ in which the Convention was interested was not necessarily outside their country of habitual residence, but rather was seen as requiring the legal remedy of nationality rather than protection” (p. 2). This shows how terminology affects the way the crisis is shaped, discussed, studied, and acted upon by international humanitarian organizations. While refugees are in need of protection because that is the reason they fled their country of birth, stateless persons are seen as in need of nationality and citizenship, along with the rights which this citizenship grants them. In light of the above reasoning, an interesting follow up to this paper would be a closer consideration of Palestinian literature within the collectivity of stateless literature from around the Arab world, including the Bidun literature from different gulf countries.

In light of the pressing need for more literary analyses of stateless literature from the Arab world, this thesis has analyzed two texts, one about stateless individuals by Lana Abdulrahman from Lebanon, and one by Bidun-Canadian writer Nasser Al Dhafiri from Kuwait. Just like the well-known question “what came first: the egg or the chick?” this thesis showed how reading these stateless narratives leaves the reader with a similar question, the question of “what comes first: citizenship or belonging?” The thesis was guided by three main concepts: spatiality, legality, and narrative structure. In terms of

spatiality, it paid close attention to the way that places are described and the importance ascribed to them, in addition to the effects that they have on their inhabitants. I agreed that statelessness leads to a rooted displacement into marginality and called for a revised conceptualization of roots and routes in relation to statelessness, showing how the novels supported the need for this revision. In terms of legality, my thesis negotiated the politics and poetics of belonging, highlighting how stateless literature can deconstruct hegemonic state narratives and redefine belonging. Finally, in terms of structure, I compared between the two novels, arriving at the conclusion that *Kaliska* mirrors the distorted history and reality of the Bidun experience through its aesthetic choices of distortion, unreliable narrators, and analepsis, while *Qayd El Dars* follows a more traditional storyline, possibly influenced by Lana Abdulrahman's background as a journalist. Overall, *Qayd El Dars* has not received much attention, and stateless literature in Lebanon remains understudied. The literary and cultural scene in Kuwait is much more mature, and some studies are already emerging on the topic and on Nasser's Al Dhafiri's books, which are expected to be translated soon into English. Positioning Al Dhafiri's novel next to Abdulrahman's is one step forward in widening the scope of literary inquiry into stateless literature in the Arab world and shedding light on Lebanese stateless literature through situating it vis-à-vis the more established Kuwaiti stateless literature.

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