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oscillating bodies

understanding

tunisian society through its novels

(1956–2011)

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Oscillating Bodies

Understanding Tunisian Society through its Novels
(1956–2011)

Charlotte Pardey

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For all Tunisian authors and publishers who work tirelessly for their literature.
In memory of Jean Fontaine who spent his life reading and researching it.

Content

VIII

A Note on Transliteration

This study's transliteration generally follows the guidelines set out by the International Journal for Middle East Studies (IJMES). Arabic names, concepts, and shorter phrases, as well as the titles of the works discussed, appear in transliteration. However, the titles include diacritical marks and letters, except for the initial ء which is dropped in accordance with the IJMES' style guide. The letters ع and ء are rendered with ʿ and ʾ respectively. The *iʿrāb*, or the full vocalization of the words' endings which indicate the grammatical cases, have been left out in the transliteration to facilitate reading.

Arabic script is used for longer quotes and is not fully vocalized; instead, it is quoted as printed in the original version and has been supplied with my own translation, except where otherwise specified.

Authors' names generally appear as they are written in Latin script – established either as they are spelled on the cover of their works (for authors who publish in French) or as established in secondary sources and elsewhere (for authors who publish in Arabic). In the latter's case, their names are also given in transliteration for the purposes of completeness.

The names of characters and places appear as they are written in the novels (or with regards to Arabic in transliteration). This means that various spellings of the same name can occur (e.g., Zaynab and Zèynèb, the first being my transliteration of a name from a novel written in Arabic, following IJMES, and the latter being the spelling employed by a francophone author in another novel).

Introduction: Laying out the Study of Bodies in Tunisian Novels

1   An Anecdotal Starting Point

Like so many other research projects focusing on Tunisia after 2011, the idea for this book came from Mohammad Bouazizi's[1] self-incineration on 17 December 2010. Bouazizi's act of self-effacement captures the immediate importance of bodies that this study examines. People from near and far were affected by the popular protests against the Tunisian regime that had begun to draw attention to Bouazizi's plight. There are and were no images of the self-incineration, but early protests were photographed and filmed, and these images and videos were widely disseminated.[2] Rather than claiming that Bouazizi was the match that lit the fuse for the uprisings throughout the Arab world in early 2011, I claim that he is a symbol for what was at stake in these protests: human dignity and vulnerability. Bouazizi showed how authoritarian politics can influence people and violate them, not just from a societal point of view, but by visiting harm on their bodies.

Figure 1: Ben Ali at Bouazizi's hospital bed. Photo by picture alliance / dpa | Stringer.

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1   I will use the established spelling of Arabic names throughout this book, except where no such name exists in any media articles or publications; in this case, I will favor the use of transliteration.
2   Compare Khatib, Lina. 2013. *Image Politics in the Middle East*, esp. 118; as well as Hostrup Haugbølle, Rikke. 2013. "Rethinking the Role of the Media in the Tunisian Uprising." In *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution*, edited by Nouri Gana. 169–174.

In contrast to the absence of visual evidence of the aforementioned incineration, the Tunisian Presidency attempted to officially disseminate another image. This image was taken on 28 December 2010, eleven days after the initial event, and showed then-Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali next to Bouazizi in his hospital bed at what seemed to be a press event (compare Khatib 2013: x, 177).[3] What is remarkable about the image is the role that bodies play within it. The bodies suggest aspects of absence, presence, and political (in)visibility. Bandages trace the shape of a body that does not have any visible features or signs of individuality. Allegedly, this is Bouazizi, yet at the same time, it is a placeholder for anonymous, common people. Even though Bouazizi is only visible in contours, and is absent as an individual, he has ultimately succeeded in gaining political visibility with his self-effacement. Conversely, Ben Ali is clearly present in the front row of visitors, looking at the bandaged figure. He stands out through the darkness of his suit and captures the attention of the medical personnel, as well as the interest of those who look at the image.

The picture is staged and political and it was disseminated in the hopes of appeasing the protestors. However, the image also symbolizes the sickness of common Tunisians who are under the observation of politicians in shiny suits. The medical staff seem to challenge Ben Ali with their arms crossed in front of their bodies, looking at him glaringly; however, this impression might just be a side-effect of hindsight. Ben Ali fled the country, deposed, just two weeks after this picture was taken.

The media used images of other people who had set fire to themselves (compare Kraidy's *The Naked Blogger of Cairo* 2016: 32), given that there were no images of Bouazizi's self-immolation. This suggests the public's curiosity to see Bouazizi's body burning.

Bodies carry meaning. Algerian psychoanalyst Malek Chebel alludes to a generic, common body that explains society in his *Le corps dans la tradition au Maghreb*. This body constitutes society's understanding or sense of self. It can be the code through which to understand society, but it also brings society into existence: "'Le corps explique la société.' Il est son sens, son code et une grande partie de sa raison d'être" (1984: 12). According to Chebel, society seems to be based on the body. While the present study does not agree with the positing of a generic body (compare *Chapter 1* below), it does share Chebel's belief that society can be approached through the various bodies that comprise it, including those that are presented in cultural productions, such as novels. The presences and absences of bodies in Ben Ali's hospital photo first inspired this thought. These presences and absences reflect the historically formed socio-political situation, as it breaks apart. This situation is about to move into new directions as can be known with hindsight. This study attempts to trace these developments in specific between 1956 and 2011, that is between the independence of Tunisia and the uprising that led to the departure of Ben Ali.

As a society, Tunisia is formed by diverse discourses, one of which is literature. At the same time, literature is formed by society. The two are in constant exchange and influence

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3   Khatib describes how the Tunisian regime's initial reaction was to ignore the burgeoning protests as state television "broadcast non-political programs, such as a documentary about the Seven World Wonders". Khatib argues that the scene with Ben Ali at Bouazizi's hospital bed was used to change this narrative and to present the president as a "'caring' leader", even though Bouazizi "was most probably already dead during Ben Ali's visit [...*which; C.P.*] was not disclosed to ensure a positive photo opportunity" (2013: 176–177). 28 December 2010 was also the date of Ben Ali's first televised speech to address the demonstrations (compare Kraidy 2016: 42).

one another to a significant degree. Bodies, and the diverse understandings that are attributed thereto, stand in a similar relation to society; they shape it even while they are being shaped. An analysis of all three (society, literature and bodies) through a reading of figurations of human bodies in Tunisian novels, therefore, promises to yield great insights into post-colonial Tunisia. This book proposes cultural knowledge instead of offering a litany of facts about Tunisia, such as figures on its population or its income average. A couple of examples of this kind of cultural knowledge include the analysis of gender relations throughout history or an elaboration of how disability was perceived after Tunisian independence. The result is an embodied understanding of the country that offers a relevant background from which to better understand a broad variety of issues, such as the uprising of 2010–11, questions about illegal immigration, Islamic terrorism, and the relationship between North Africa and Europe.

2   Material Outlines and Existing Research. The Scope of this Study

This study focuses on the genre of the novel. Like all literary works, the novel is a cultural product created in a historical and social setting. It reflects the individual author's experiences and aspirations, albeit to different extents, and these experiences are refracted in the work's narrator. Author and narrator are not identical, and they do not necessarily share opinions and perspectives, but it is the author who gives shape to the narrator. Realist modes in literature specifically claim: "to represent human reality in all its detail"; however, these modes cannot be entirely taken at face value as Samah Selim suggests in her "The Narrative Craft: Realism and Fiction in the Arabic Canon" (2002). Selim highlights how early novels were meant to shape and educate the future nation when discussing the beginnings of the novel in the Arab world – her focus is on Egypt. The realities depicted had to conform with the official understanding of what constituted a nation and what was the desired position of the individual in society (2002: 113, 117–118). These tendencies are present in some of the works that this study analyzes. Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui's *al-Tūt al-murr* contains a similar nationalist didacticism, Koelman's *Le Sadique* has the ambition to reflect the lived realities of the Tunisian labor market after the arrival onto the scene of women.

Selim refers to Lennard Davis' *Resisting Novels. Ideology and Fiction* (1987) who finds fitting words to express the relation of novels to the surrounding society:

> [N]ovels are pre-organized systems of experience in which characters, actions, and objects have to mean something in relation to the system of each novel itself, in relation to the culture in which the novel is written, and in relation to the readers who are in that culture. […] Likewise, fiction becomes, in turn, one of the ways in which the culture teaches itself about itself, and thus novels become agents of inculcating ideology. (Davis 1987: 24–25)

Davis describes how literature is produced in exchange with societies, not with the intention just to mirror, but also to influence. He argues that its suggestion of being "not art but life" is a part of how novels function and that they aspire to contain "the totality of a society at a given moment" precisely in order to influence readers (Davis 1987: 25–26). In the context of Arabic literature, the connection between the early novels and nation-building allows them to be used to read the (if nothing else, aspired for) nation and the ideologies that are meant to influence readers. This study looks out for ideological baggage in novels and reads very different narratives in dialogue with each other in order to follow Davis and Selim in not treating novels as directly sociological sources. Yet, I do not wish to suggest

that the collection of novels chosen can be free from ideological undercurrents and external economic influences.

Not all of the works analyzed were written as realist narratives. In fact, when put in order on the basis of the year of their publication, they suggest a development away from realism and towards its critique. More recent works pair realist perspectives with a disrupted certainty of representation: narrators are unreliable, parallel truths are presented, and texts are framed through other texts (e.g., novels are written in novels). This last technique is reminiscent of popular Arabic narratives and is something that is usually absent from realist fiction (Selim 2002: 125). This concept's distinct presence in the works I study indicates how Tunisian literature grapples with realist fiction's genre requirements, as well as with literature's representational function. It shows a refusal to directly mirror, while confirming the Tunisian writers' critical preoccupation with their surrounding society. This oscillation between different poles and aspects is a figure of thought ('Denkfigur') that will appear time and again in this study. Oscillation forms a way to address Tunisia's postcolonial situation, as well as issues of bodies in literature more generally, which makes it so relevant for this book.

The novel is this study's chosen genre because as a genre it does not per se hold a truth claim in contrast to other texts, such as sociological works (compare Massad 2007: 269). The novel offers insights into society through its fictionality. It teaches its readers how the individual is, or ought to be, perceived in relation to society. A novel suggests that its narrative contains living beings (most of whom have bodies) in order to be convincing and this is an assumption that is necessary for the functioning of the novel as a fictional genre (Davis 1987: 12, 103). The assumption is adopted throughout this study, while never forgetting that the novel's beings and bodies only exist in language.

Choosing fiction over autobiographies does not lead to more ideology. Rather, autobiographies also contain ideological representations (compare Massad 2007: 269). However, fiction highlights purposeful creation in specific. Fiction authors have made a wide variety of distinct choices and exclusions based on their specific agenda. Characters are created to move and behave naturally, following the laws of causality and logic from the text-external world just closely enough to make the fictional relatable and understandable (this does not mean that there are no fantastical elements within them, as *Chapters 2* and *3* show). The fictional world, the characters, and their bodies are actualized in the reader's mind in the act of reading, even though not all of the details are supplied by the writer. In contrast to poetry, novels necessarily contain a narrative, as opposed to expressions of feelings and ideas. In comparison with prose poetry, the narratives found in novels are more elaborate and greater attention is paid to the space that is both the literal and the social surroundings that interact with the characters' bodies. In contrast to short stories, a more complicated and parenthetically more complete storyline is presented; novels generally contain a development of the characters or of the issues at stake. In contrast to drama, novels are better equipped to present the interior state of the characters, which allows the characters to be read not only from the outside, but as individuals with mental processes, feelings, and an external materiality (compare Davis 1987: 105).

This book's main focus is on Tunisian literature. However, criticism that disagrees with the discussion of national literatures in the post-colonial context is not ignored, specifically for diverse and mobile regions such as the Maghreb (compare Kaiser 2015: 29). After all, Maghreb countries share central influences, such as the experience of previous French colonialism, multilingualism, and a peripheral position in academic research; their literary productions are similarly marginalized, particularly in terms of Arabic studies. Tunisian

literature, however, is specifically ignored, as will be addressed in the paragraphs to follow. This study's concentration on Tunisian literature is valid since it also acknowledges Tunisian literature's close connections to other arabophone and francophone literatures, as well as to other traditions. In order to address its plural influences, Tunisian literature is understood as being on the move and as difficult to territorialize. It oscillates around a center (Tunisia) and it cannot be fixed, due to various other contexts in which it might be localized (e.g., the arabophone or francophone literary fields respectively, the Maghreb as a region, the Mediterranean, or countries that were previously French colonies). This understanding of Tunisian literature borrows from Ottmar Ette's concept of a *Nationalliteratur ohne festen Wohnsitz* (a national literature without a fixed abode, see *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben. Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz*, 2005). Ette explores the central themes of these non-fixed and mobile national literatures, and these themes will appear in the analyses of the Tunisian works later in this book. Examples include the perception of progress as a storm, as well as the return to a homeland that has become foreign (2005: 160). Oscillation itself is a recurring theme in the analyses found throughout this book, as mentioned previously. The analyses contain journeys to France and back, moves from the village to the city, towards and away from one's partner, between layers of text, narrators, fact and fiction, absence and presence, and even between languages.

The concept of the nation needs to be considered with further care, however. Abdelmajid Hannoum discusses how the absence of the cultural concept of the nation, together with a perceived inferiority of the Maghreb's inhabitants, were used as justification for its colonization in his article "Notes on the (post)colonial in the Maghreb". In post-colonial times, the newly independent nations were imagined based on the colonial nation (2009: 329). Hannoum writes: "The concept of the nation, with its key categories of unity, territory, language, history, progress, modernity and even will, are all colonial modern categories, despite their restructuring in national narratives" (2009: 340). Despite this, the category of the nation cannot entirely be escaped here. Tunisia, as a nation state, influences the period of time that this study addresses (see below for further details regarding the time frame employed by this work). It does so both by providing a context for the literary productions and by influencing what is being published through subsidies and (indirect) censorship.[4]

My understanding of what can be considered Tunisian works involves a description, in some sense, of oscillation between the locality and the people (and not the nation) and it includes diasporic writing by authors who moved away. The works studied are not necessarily published in Tunisia or determined by the nationality, place of residence, or language of their authors in reflecting the history of Tunisian culture. Works by authors who either live in Tunisia or have Tunisian heritage, address a Tunisian readership, or tell tales about

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4   Jean Fontaine describes a practice according to which the Ministry of Culture acquired a fixed number of copies of a book after it had been published. This supported its production by guaranteeing a certain turnover, see Fontaine, "Le Champ littéraire tunisien. Introduction bibliographique", 1994: 386; compare also Abir Kréfa's "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes. Enjeux de reconnaissance, coûts, et effets de 'transgressions'", 2011: 114–115, in which she writes that although censorship did not officially exist in Tunisia, it was achieved through a notification that had to be given to the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Interior, and to the National Library through an official release permission that was required to distribute books. These details were confirmed to me in a personal conversation on 8 October 2015 with Moncef Chebbi, the director of Arabesques Édition/Dār nuqūsh ʿarabiyya.

Tunisia were chosen for inclusion. This selection criteria included works that are or were, at the time of publication, available on the Tunisian book market or that could be accessed through local libraries.[5]

The works chosen were written in either Arabic or in French. This choice reflects the Tunisian literary scene that, reminiscent of French colonial presence in Tunisia, mainly sees publications in these languages. The bilingualism is reflected and sustained, for example in the annual awarding of the literary prize COMAR d'Or, which since 1997 rewards the best novels of the year in both languages.

Tunisian works are given full attention here to build a basis for further comparative research and the exclusive focus on Tunisian works is motivated by the marginalization of Tunisian literature in research. Tunisian literature is under-researched in comparison with other national literatures, such as its Egyptian or Algerian counterparts, not just in Western scholarship, but also in literature departments throughout the region, even in Tunisia itself. This has been the impression of my research stays in the country since 2014. It is further reflected in the knowledge of Tunisian works and their authors abroad, or rather their lack thereof. Finally, there is an apparent limitation that is posed by the scarcity of works on Tunisian literature in general and of secondary sources for the novels discussed in this book in particular. Even the more famous examples of the works examined have not provoked much academic engagement to date.

The authors of existing studies can be grouped according to their departmental backgrounds in either Romance Studies, Arabic Literature, or Comparative Literature departments. These different research backgrounds contribute to a tendency for most studies on Tunisian literature to work monolingually; that is, these examinations deal either with francophone or arabophone texts. Only a small number of studies discuss both and it is especially rare that a non-Tunisian scholar addresses francophone as well as arabophone works. Researchers are not generally trained in the acquisition of both languages. This is the result of how literature departments are organized and is informed by the education they provide. Such departments are mostly circumscribed by languages that motivate scholars to focus on one language, thereby discouraging a bilingual education that a thorough study of Tunisian literature necessitates. This is the case in Europe, North America, and even in Tunisia itself. Arabic and French departments are separated, and they produce students (and scholars) who are proficient in only one of the two languages. In the German case, Arabic literature is taught as part of regional studies degrees, whereas French literature is taught at the Romance Studies department; this has resulted in separate disciplines between which there is hardly any collaborative exchange.

One researcher focusing on Tunisian literature in Arabic and in French immediately stands out in terms of the sheer volume of their scientific output: Jean Fontaine. Originally from France, Fontaine has lived in Tunisia from 1956 until his death in 2021. He has devoted his attention to the Tunisian literary landscape in an encyclopedic fashion. This is reflected in his three-volume *Histoire de la littérature tunisienne* (1988, 1994, 1999), in his *Le roman tunisien a 100 ans. 1906–2006* (2009), and in his many other articles, monographs, and edited volumes. Fontaine laid the groundwork for the organization and cata-

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5   Libraries have been included since the Tunisian book market is characterized by a number of problematic elements that influence the accessibility of books; see below for further details.

loguing of Tunisian literature, both as a researcher and in his position as librarian of the Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes (IBLA) in Tunis and as the director of its journal, the *Revue IBLA*. Another exception to the general lack of critical engagement with Tunisian literature is Svetozár Pantůček's study *Tunisskaja literatura kratkij očerk* (1969), which is available in a German version entitled *Tunesische Literaturgeschichte* that dates back to 1974. He also addresses Tunisian literature in both Arabic and French.

On the Tunisian side, Ali Abassi's more recent study *Littératures tunisiennes. Vers le renouvellement* from 2006 can be mentioned and which, in addition to prose, discusses poetry in both Arabic and French. Abassi's book, despite its title, lacks a stringent overview of Tunisian literary history (2006: 209). Instead, the work is comprised of a collection of individual essays and conference papers which address many important Tunisian authors; however, the work does not follow one concrete thematic argument.

Even more relevant to this study's purposes is another work that was published only after the dissertation on which this book is based, was written and defended. This work is Samia Kassab-Charfi and Adel Khedher's *Un siècle de literature en Tunisie. 1900–2017* (2019) which offers a literary history of Tunisian literature written by Tunisian literary scholars. It discusses not only Arabic and French works, but it also refers to publications in other languages that are present in the region, such as Italian and Sardinian, and takes note of the strong Jewish-Tunisian presence. It is an exceptional work of profound scope that was certainly overdue. Its mission differs from that of the present work, but it is a good reference point for those interested in receiving an historical overview of Tunisian literature, its topics and trends. It also offers short paragraphs about several of the authors studied in this work.

Some of the novelists discussed in the present study have written about Tunisian literature themselves. The novelists include Messaouda Boubakr, Fredj Lahouar, Hassouna Mosbahi, Aroussia Nalouti, and Kamel Riahi. Other Tunisian critics who discuss, review, and research Tunisian literature include Taoufik Baccar (e.g., *Écrivains de Tunisie. Anthologie de textes et poèmes traduits de l'arabe*, together with Salah Garmadi, 1981), Tahar Bekri (e.g. *De la littérature tunisienne et maghrébine, et autres textes*, 2002), Muṣṭafā al-Kīlānī (e.g. his two-volume overview of modern Tunisian literature *al-Adab al-ḥadīth wa-l-muʿāṣir* ['Modern and contemporary Literature'], 1990), and Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna (e.g., in his monograph *Naqd al-riwāya al-nisāʾiyya fī tūnis* ['A discussion of the Tunisian women's novel'], 2004).[6] Mohamed-Salah Omri needs to be mentioned as a writer from the younger generation who is based abroad (e.g. *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature. Sites of Confluence in the Writings of Mahmūd Al-Masʾadī*, 2010[2006]), as well as Douja Mamelouk (with her hitherto unpublished dissertation entitled *Redirecting al-nazar: Contemporary Tunisian Women Novelists Return the Gaze*, Georgetown University 2010).

Romance Studies' research tradition reads the francophone part of Tunisian literature by itself, in the context of other post-colonial francophone literary texts or alongside France's

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6   For brevity's sake, reference is made to monographs solely; however, all of the authors mentioned have also published a wide array of journal articles and chapters. Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna, in addition to being a critic and a prominent figure in Tunisian higher education in his field of comparative literature in specific, also writes novels and Tahar Bekri is a poet. Taoufik Baccar translated Messadi's *Mawlid al-nisyān* (discussed in the following section) into French (published in 1993).

literary production. Examples from Romance Studies include Susanne Heiler's *Der Maghrebinische Roman. Eine Einführung* (2005) and Jean Déjeux's *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (1980[1973]), or *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* by Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (2017). In many of the works that address literature from the Maghreb, Moroccan, and Algerian literary perspectives receive greater attention, such as for example in Julian Vigo's *Performative Bodies. Hybrid Tongues. Race, Gender, Sex and Modernity in Latin America and the Maghreb*, 2010). Albert Memmi's anthologies of Maghrebi writers, *Anthologie des ecrivains maghrebins d'expression francaise (1965)* and *Ecrivains francophones du Maghreb* (1985), also needs to be mentioned here. Memmi, a Tunisian sociologist and novelist, published these anthologies as introductions to the writers of the Maghreb; however, the great majority of authors mentioned are Algerian. In the first collection, for example, he presents seventeen Algerian writers, three Moroccan, and only himself as a Tunisian author, which is certainly not representative of the Maghreb. The following section of this introduction will offer further details about Memmi's work as an novelist.

Aside from the aforementioned monographs, studies can be found both in anthologies and journals that are published both in Tunisia and abroad. For example, there are the US-based *Expressions maghrébines*, the review of the Coordination Internationale des Chercheurs sur les Littératures Maghrébines (CICLIM), the Review *CELAAN* (*Revue du Centre d'Etudes de Littératures et des Arts d'Afrique du Nord*), or the French review *Les lettres romanes*. *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* or the *Revue tunisienne des langues vivantes* are Tunisian reviews that both publish in French primarily, featuring fewer contributions in English or Arabic.

This book makes use of articles and studies by Romance Studies scholars; however, it contends that a sole focus on one language alone falls short of presenting Tunisian literature in its multilingual nature. This is equally the case with studies that focus on Tunisian works written in Arabic solely or which discuss arabophone Tunisian literature only in the wider context of Arabic literature. The latter, however, is not very common. In contrast to Romance Studies, Arabic Studies has tended to exceptionally marginalize Tunisian literature and the Maghreb as a whole, while focusing on the literary production from the Arabic East and Egypt, resulting in even fewer publications that somewhat included Tunisian literature. As an exception, one might refer to issue 39 of the British periodical *Banipal. Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, which ran under the title "Modern Tunisian Literature" (2010) and which was edited by Samuel Shimon. The issue contains Tunisian prose and poetry that has been translated into English from both Arabic and French. One can also find collections of translated works, such as the aforementioned anthology *Écrivains de Tunisie* by Taoufik Baccar and Salah Garmadi. Generally, studies on arabophone Tunisian literature are published in Tunisia primarily, either as individual monographs, such as the referenced *Naqd al-riwāya al-nisaʾīya fī tūnis* by Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna, or as articles in journals or anthologies; examples of the former include *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfīya*, *Qiṣṣaṣ*, *al-Masār* and an example of the latter might be the anthology *Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī al-Maṭawī. Dirāsāt wa-shahādāt* ('Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī al-Maṭawī. Studies and testimonies') under the direction of ʿUmar bn. Sālim (1992).

This situation is similar to the state of Moroccan literature, as thoroughly described by Karima Laachir[7] in her article "The Aesthetics and Politics of 'Reading Together' Moroccan Novels in Arabic and French" (2016). Literary traditions in Arabic and French exist alongside one another, but without ever interacting in Morocco. They are studied separately and without acknowledging their shared historical, cultural, geographical, political, and aesthetic aspects. Laachir traces the situation back to colonial times and to an "unfinished Arabization policy" that continued the existing "divide between the Moroccan intelligentsia educated either in French or in Arabic Fusha (and rarely adequately in both languages)" (2016: 25). Novels written in French are oftentimes viewed within the French post-colonial field and without reference to the local Arabic production; some even consider that such works should not even be regarded to belong to the national literature. However, as Laachir notes, the francophone and arabophone novel developed almost simultaneously in Morocco in an effort to contribute to the national culture. The subdivision results in the weakening of the local literary field. Laachir suggests what she calls a 'reading together' in order to overcome this lack, that is a reading that acknowledges the cultural and linguistic intertextuality of the literary works. 'Reading together' involves a reading that attempts to analyze a "multilingual literary field in Morocco beyond the ideological language dichotomy or the 'national'/'foreign' language paradigm, existing hierarchies, divisions, and exclusions" (2016: 32). This book's approach follows her call to enable a dialogue between novels written in Arabic and in French, both in terms of the socio-political contexts they reflect and in terms of their aesthetics.

This is precisely the void that this book attempts to fill. It is not my goal to compare and contrast the two languages in terms of subjective notions of precision or audacity. Rather, it is my aim to establish a dialogue between the works in order to best capture Tunisia's literary production. In doing so, this book goes further than either the historical or encyclopedic/bibliographic approaches referred to above by discovering a narrative about Tunisian society.

The relative scarcity of research pertaining to Tunisian literature and the difficulty to access these works, both in Tunisia and abroad, reinforce each other.[8] The Tunisian book market does not guarantee the availability of even recently published books. Instead of selling local works, bookshop owners sell international bestsellers that have been translated into Arabic, as well as works by French authors. Books are mainly available for purchase directly via the publishers (or authors) and at the annual book fairs that are organized in Tunis, Sousse, or Sfax. In addition to the national library, IBLA's library – despite the horrendous destruction that a fire caused in 2010 – offers researchers access to large amounts of Tunisian literary production, journals, and newspapers and has done since its reopening in 2014. The strained access to literary works can be expected to not only influence research, but also the status of literature and of writers in Tunisia in general. This must

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7   For a thorough discussion of Laachir's approach and my use of it in the analysis of two Tunisian novels, see my forthcoming article "'Reading Together' for the Nuance. Gender Roles and Politics in Tunisian Novels by Women Writers From the 1990s", *The Journal of North African Studies*.

8   This difficulty is noted by Jean Fontaine's "Le Champ littéraire tunisien. Introduction bibliographique" in which he comments about the inaccessibility of the Bibliothèque Nationale as copyright library to researchers in the 1990s (1994: 383). This, in my personal experience post-2011, was entirely different and I was able to access all of the books that I requested in this library.

be the reason why many of the novels analyzed discuss the importance of the issue of writing, as will be shown throughout the course of the chapters that follow.

The divide between Arabic and French is also present on the part of the producers of Tunisian literature. The 'choice' of one of the two languages is often accompanied by an ideological refusal to consider literature written in the respective 'other' language. However, this perceived 'choice' is not really a choice; it is the result of personal experiences, colonial, and post-colonial language politics and is an issue that is closely connected to the author's sense of identity as a writer (Laachir posits a similar view [2016: 26]). However, the resulting disregard for authors who have chosen the other language dangerously limits any knowledge of Tunisian literature since it excludes large sections thereof. This selection process also produces images of Tunisian literature that fail to depict reality; instead, only imaginary chronologies are shown.

It is rare that an author publishes literary works in both languages, but Fredj Lahouar has to be mentioned here as one notable exception. His work will be addressed in *Chapter 5* of this work. The opposite perspective, selecting only one language in which to work, is more common. I was advised by some of the authors of the novels analyzed to limit my scope to one language as this would be the 'real' Tunisian literature. I believe, however, that this would be an unfair limitation. Ali Abassi agrees and addresses the marginalization of literature in one language as "suranné, risible et dangereux" (2006: 212), that is as 'old-fashioned, laughable and dangerous'.

The decision to write this dissertation in English – rather than in Arabic, French, or in my native German – might seem to complicate this book's linguistic situation further. However, works in English that present Tunisian novels written in both Arabic and French in specific are lacking in the field of Maghrebi literary studies. My goal is to occupy this lacuna. At the same time, this approach will allow me to address the widest possible community of academic readers and will serve to offer them an introduction to French and Arabic works, while also being a third way between the two, as opposed to simply describing one half of Tunisian literature in the language of the other.

3   Al-Masʿadī and Memmi as Points of Departure

Two authors provide suitable points of departure through which to dive into Tunisian post-colonial literature. Both authors were shaped by the colonial situation. That these authors are also the two who have received the most scholarly attention in the field of Tunisian novelists only makes them more relevant. The first author is Mahmoud Messadi (Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī), one of the most important Tunisian intellectuals of the 20th century who went on to become 'Minister of Education and Culture' after independence (Elmarsafy 2012: 66, Glück 2007: 101). As an author, he aimed to interpret modernity and its challenges differently and wanted to establish a shared Tunisian identity. This is reflected in his attempts to create a link between modern Arabic literature and its heritage by mixing both Western and Islamic influences (Omri 2010[2006]: 1, 73, and 2007: 435). The second author is the aforementioned francophone novelist, critic, and sociologist Albert Memmi. Memmi grew up speaking dialectal Arabic in the Jewish ghetto of Tunis. Through the merits he acquired as early as elementary school, he received scholarships and eventually studied in Algeria and Paris; he settled in Paris in 1956, the same year that Tunisia received its independence. In addition to his novels and his anthologies of Maghrebi writers, he has also published poetry and sociological studies including observations on racism and colonialism that I intend to address below (Brozgal 2013: xv–xviii).

These authors' importance, and the attention they receive, is reflected in the fact that their works are widely translated. *Mawlid al-nisyān* by Messadi ('The genesis of the oblivion', 1945[9]), which is discussed below, has been translated into French, Dutch, and German whereas Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* ('The Pillar of Salt', 1953) has been translated into English, German, Hebrew, and Japanese.[10]

The two novels predate Tunisian independence and, therefore, form the background of the novels analyzed throughout the main chapters of this book. The two works are drawn upon here since they lend themselves as an introduction of this work's focus on bodies. They discuss human beings, the body, and its limitations, particularly under colonialism.

Messadi, who is considered by some to be the first arabophone writer of Tunisian existentialist literature, abstains from realist modes in his fiction and, therefore, constitutes an extreme against which Albert Memmi's autobiographical novel forms the opposite pole. Similarly, Memmi's autobiographical novel serves as an act of remembrance, whereas even the title of Messadi's work alludes to the idea of forgetting. This seeming contrariness has to be rectified in what follows, albeit only to the extent that this is actually possible. Examining these two works will provoke the question of and consecutive search for what kind of novels were published in Tunisia afterwards.

Mawlid al-nisyān shows the human struggle against death. Its protagonist, Madyan, fights death as a doctor, but he resolves to collaborate with a sorcerer to create a potion that grants immortality after he himself becomes sick. This potion eventually kills him. The novel allows issues that will be addressed in the following two chapters to be highlighted in terms of circumscribing bodies and embodiment; these concern disease and death.

Mawlid al-nisyān is written in the style of a myth. It includes the creation of the first human through the deity Salhawā and the Earth. Adam's beauty in this scene, which initially was all light, is weighed down with a clay[11] body that causes Salhawā to despair (compare *Mawlid* 89–90). The novel explores questions that were existential for Messadi about man's identity, his origin, and his genealogy (compare Ṭarshūna 2009: 9). The exploration of human existence is a theme already present in *Mawlid al-nisyān*'s title, as Elmarsafy explores with reference to the homonyms *nisyān* (forgetting) and *insān* (human). On the

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9 In an interview with the author published in 2007, Omri offers a different translation of the title: 'The genesis of the oblivion'. He translates 'Genesis of forgetfulness' in Omri 2010[2006]: 73. *Mawlid al-nisyān* was published serially from April to July 1945 in the cultural journal *al-Mabāḥith* before it appeared in book form in 1974 as *Mawlid al-nisyān wa-taʾammulāt ukhrā*, compare Omri 2010[2006]: 177. The edition consulted is from 1984.

10 The continuous interest in these two writers is also reflected in recent publications, such as proceedings of a conference on Messadi's relevance for the 21st century under the title *Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī fī bidāyat qarn jadīd* (2009) with contributions by researchers from all over the Arabic world (compare al-Sālimī 2009: 7) as well as Lia Nicole Brozgal's study *Against Autobiography. Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* (2013). Summaries of the two novels are not provided in the present study, since they have received wider attention than the novels that the core chapters focus on. For a summary of *La statue de sel*, see for example Isaac Yetiv, Isaac. 1974. "Albert Memmi. The Syndrome of Self-exile." *The International Fiction Review* 1 (2): 125–134; for a summary of *Mawlid al-nisyān*, see for example Elmarsafy, Ziad. 2012. *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, especially: 73–76.

11 References to clay are contained in both the Old Testament and in the Qur'an as the material from which God creates life. According to the Qur'an, God created Adam from clay (*ṭīn*; Surat al-muʾminūn 23:12) or earth/dust (*turāb*; Surat Āl ʿimrān 3:59). Al-Masʿādi uses the word *ṭīn* in the novel.

level of content, the main issue at stake is the human endeavor to overcome the clay body and to return to the light. This is impossible, since human beings are both corporeal and mortal. As stated, the clay body and the light body are mapped onto remembrance and forgetting respectively (compare Elmarsafy 2012: 73–74).

Madyan's struggle to escape his body fails. He dies and only realizes the stabilizing function this body had for his soul after it is lost. He exclaims: "My body and my soul have betrayed me. Neither was capable of immortality" (Elmarsafy 2012: 76).[12] This highlights the necessary unity of both body and soul and the limits of human existence. Literature can address these topics; for example, *Mawlid al-nisyān* shows that the body cannot be overcome.[13]

Human finitude is also attributable to a superior Being that does not offer happiness in exchange for death. This superior existence can be read as religion, but also as science. According to Ṭarshūna, Al-Masʿādi doubted science's efficiency in answering existential questions, about the secret of life and the existence of the soul for example. He considered humans to be prisoners of a mind that they can neither overcome nor use to grasp what lies beyond matter (Ṭarshūna 2009: 13, 16–17).

Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* is a fictionalized account of what it is like to grow up in Tunis as a poor Jewish boy, who has a lot in common with the author. The novel gained prestige in both Tunisia and France immediately, winning the Prix de Carthage in 1953, the same year of its publication and the Prix Fénéon in 1954 (compare Fontaine 2004: 24). The protagonist, Alexandre Benillouche Mordekhaï, is described vividly as he escapes from humble backgrounds through his academic achievements. He succeeds, but still struggles with his identity. Despite the difference in both setting and approach, the key issue is one concerning human existence. Mordekhaï's goal resembles Madyan's in that he strives for harmony. Like Madyan, he feels torn between different influences. He also resembles Albert Memmi in terms of this alienation. Both Memmi himself and his intellectual work are described as alienated on various levels, on a cultural level as a Maghrebi intellectual whose mother tongue was Arabic, not French, on an ethnic level as a Tunisian Jew and, finally, on a social level as the son of an artisan who became an intellectual (compare Fontaine 2004: 27). This goal of harmony concerns an individual, as opposed to a shared discussion of human nature as in *Mawlid al-nisyān*; Mordekhaï is also focused on life and belonging instead of disappearance.

Mordekhaï's effort to reconcile the planes of his fragmented, alienated self is destined to fail. He struggles with the same questions as Madyan does and he wonders who he is and who he has become. His alienation is caused by his education, as Mordekhaï slowly realizes. These achievements are what has made it impossible for him to live life with his people: "mes études m'avaient rendu impossible une vie commune avec mon peuple" (*Statue* 309). The protagonist's connection to his family and background occurs through the sensual body. It suffers as Mordekhaï chooses rationality and becomes an 'other'. From the end of secondary school onwards, he strives not to be Jewish, Oriental, or poor, "ni juif, ni oriental, ni pauvre"; instead, he wants to be "transparent" (*Statue* 248). However, he realizes that

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12 Original quote:

"لقد خانني الجسد، وخانتني الروح. فلا هو استطاع الخلود، ولا هي..." (*Mawlid* 113)

13 For further reading, see Dāwd 1986: 88 and Skarżyńska-Bocheńska 1992: 119.

he is still perceived as an African and is, therefore, excluded. In terms of the colonial situation, the body and its outward appearance are used to make distinctions between people; this is a topic that will be explored further in the following section.

This scene also refers back to Messadi's description of humans' futile efforts to escape their embodied being. Both novels are connected by way of the concern for bodies in that they focus on their limits. The post-colonial texts discussed throughout this work continue this trend, but they also acknowledge bodies' potential to liberate or rebel.

Memmi and Messadi's narratives express different relations to text-external reality through the modes employed in their works (i.e., the modern myth and the fictionalized autobiography). This difference is also reflected in the presentation of their protagonists. Although Madyan is shown as an individual character, Messadi discusses human nature universally. Madyan gives what Messadi described in an interview as a "summary of the meaning of my [*his*, *C.P.*] experience in the world" (Omri 2007: 440). Messadi's novel is highly allegorical and does not seem to mirror a specific text-external reality; however, it does reflect the socio-political context of its production. The exploration of human existence and its potential contains: "[t]he search for self-representation in the face of colonial denial and for impact in the world in the post-colonial period" (Omri 2010[2006]: 50). A cultural agenda of budding Tunisian nationalism, and of the general struggle for autonomy throughout North Africa, is reflected in Messadi's effort to integrate both traditional and modern literary devices into his work. Memmi's protagonist struggles on a different, more personal level. References to text-external reality enter the narrative to a greater extent in places, historical events, and in the realist mode employed.

Both novels address colonial Tunisia. Their protagonists have agency and struggle to achieve their goals. In the following section, colonial Tunisia will be discussed so as to offer background knowledge with specific reference being made to the body; an analysis of post-colonial works follows in subsequent chapters. This book explores what has been published since Messadi and Memmi's time and what continues to fly below the radar of scholarly attention. The narratives will be contemplated through the lens of the body in order to explore the trajectory of a Tunisian subjectivity. The timeframe for this project stretches from early post-independence novels until the uprising of 2010/2011. This timeframe allows for a thorough examination of a period that is internally consistent, before the uprising brought a caesura both thematically and with regards to the field of publishing in Tunisia. After 2010/2011, interest in political publications and opinion pieces became more central and literature fell by the wayside somewhat. State subsidies were interrupted, and this had an effect on the field of publishing. Put simply, what happened in Tunisia after 2011 deserves an entirely separate study.

4 Colonial Tunisia and the Body in Colonialism

North Africa's coastal region became a point of interest for competing powers (Habsburg Spain and the Ottoman Empire) in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Ottomans eventually succeeded and brought North Africa under Ottoman rule. Tunisia, in a region that almost matches its borders today, was semiautonomous and led by a local bey who reported to the Ottoman sultan. Control of the Ottoman Empire weakened and by the 19th century the Ottomans had almost no control over its provinces in North Africa. The Turks seemed to intensify their military presence in the 1840s, so France sent its own military to strengthen Tunisian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and to prevent a Turkish presence in neighboring Algeria. The ruler in Tunisia, Ahmad Bey, sought the protection of a third external power, Britain, in order to avoid a confrontation. Ahmad Bey also embarked upon a mod-

ernization project that was mainly focused on the Tunisian army, but which included the establishment of Tunisia's first non-denominational school, in Bardo in 1840. The modernization efforts cost the bey greatly and in addition to other mishaps (theft, failed crops, disease), Tunisia's budget came under severe strain. The bey also felt obliged to send troops to support the Ottoman party in the Crimean War and his army was crippled (compare Masri 2017: 123–127).

The Europeans were interested in Tunisia for economic reasons, particularly for international trade and there was competition between France and Britain in this domain. Both powers were interested in financial cooperation with Tunisia that the then-ruling Muhammad Bey tried to prevent. However, in the early 1860s failed initiatives by the Tunisian government – some of which were driven by the French consul – led Tunisia to seek out an international loan. The loan's terms, negotiated with a bank in Paris, eventually brought the country into bankruptcy (compare: Masri 2017: 133–134).

At the end of the reign of Bey Muhammad III (Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq), the French invaded Tunisia under the pretext of protecting the country from an Algerian tribal attack. The Tunisian army was so weak that it was unable to defend the country and Tunisia became a French protectorate with the Treaty of Bardo (1881). The bey lost most of his powers and official acts needed to be approved by the French. Tunisian government ministers were kept in check by French directors and districts were reorganized, based on geography instead of clan structures, which essentially weakened local tribal influences (compare Masri 2017: 127, 140f).

French colonialism was reinforced by an increasing presence of French individuals living in Tunisia. They had been attracted to move across the Mediterranean with the promise of land that had been taken away from Tunisian individuals, as well as from *habūs* land (a charitable endowment under Islamic law). As a result, the French population grew from a few hundred people in 1881 to more than 10,000 within a decade. The French not only took land from the Tunisians and dominated decisions, but also increased taxes. Activism against the measures and against French rule in general developed and demands were voiced for equality between colonizers and colonized, for the admission of Tunisians to jobs within public administration, and for a wider access to primary education. The settlers mocked these demands, as Masri notes: "In an article dated June 16, 1907, the French colon Victor de Carnières demeaned calls […] for equal rights, asserting that the '[Tunisian] race has been rendered inferior by its depressing religion and a long hereditary tradition of laziness and fatalism'" (Masri 2017: 167).

This quote contains an element that Albert Memmi deemed essential for the description of colonialism; namely, racism: "Racism appears […] as a consubstantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist" (1991: 74). Race is a social construct based on an awareness of differences in appearance. These differences are the result of evolutionary adaption to various environmental conditions down through the generations. They are superficial and are not correlated to intrinsic differences. No appearance is any better or worse than any other. However, the body was commonly used to justify domination through what was perceived to be a higher racial order during colonial times. European expansion into Africa, America, and Asia brought Europeans into contact with non-Europeans. This resulted in the development of racial theories in which the non-Europeans were portrayed as less worthy. Physical features were understood as markers of intellectual and cultural characteristics of entire groups (compare DeMello 2014: 102–103).

Abdelmajid Hannoum offers examples of this attitude in his exploration of 19th century French race theorists. Referring to the Comte de Gobineau and Louis-Adrien Berbrugger, Hannoum highlights the importance of bodily features in their argumentations (2009: 325–327) and he quotes Berbrugger's description of the Berber:

> They are most bellicose and the most indomitable barbarians of this part of Africa. Their body is skinny, but very nervous and very robust. […] The roundness of the head is remarkable, the features of their faces are short, and it is especially this characteristic that distinguishes them from Arabs. The expression of their figure is rude and savage. Their eyes show some type of cruelty […]. [1843–5: 9] (Hannoum 2009: 327)

Tunisians hoped to gain independence on diplomatic terms after the First World War; after all, they had fought alongside the French during the war, but their petitions were refused, and their demands remained unmet. However, as Masri writes: "a pattern was […] established: the more France exerted its sovereignty over Tunisia, the more Tunisians […] opposed the protectorate" (Masri 2017: 170). This opposition was tempered by underpaid and badly treated Tunisian workers. It was not until the late 1920s and early 1930s that a Western-educated elite arose in Tunisia that was able to put their education in the service of their countrymen and to elevate the predicament of the masses. The future president of Tunisia Habib Bourguiba belonged to this elite. The French had shown off their disregard for Tunisian sentiments by burying French-naturalized Tunisians in Muslim cemeteries, while this naturalization meant a betrayal incompatible with being Muslim from the Tunisian perspective (Masri 2017: 170–174). Public protest rose and was steered by Bourguiba and his colleagues from the *al-Ḥizb al-ḥurr al-dustūrī al-tūnisī* (The Tunisian Constitutional Liberal Party or Destour Party). The French reacted strictly, closed nationalist newspapers and the Destour Party. The party was able to continue its activities, however, since the older or more conservative ranks had not participated in Bourguiba's initiative. Bourguiba himself was arrested and exiled to Southern Tunisia. Prior to this, however, he had had the chance to found a new party comprised of frustrated Destour members: Neo-Destour (Masri 2017: 174). Neo-Destour was more radical and anticolonial and eventually became the main driving force of the independence movement. Bourguiba was in charge, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War. Bourguiba shaped the party into an umbrella that connected all of the other mass movements interested in independence (parties, the *ulama*, labor organizations, etc.). He believed that independence could be reached through French-Tunisian cooperation. In 1950, he sent a petition to the French government proposing an independent country that would closely cooperate with France. Negotiations depended on the stance of the respective French president and the situation was favorable in 1954, under Pierre Mendès-France. Mendès-France announced his intention to grant Tunisia full autonomy. In 1955, first of all, Tunisia was granted internal autonomy. The threat of a more conservative leadership taking over from Bourguiba then moved the French to give full independence to Tunisia in March 1956. However, as Masri writes: "The struggle for independence dominated the public narrative, including in school curricula, and state-sponsored arts, for decades" (Masri 2017: 182–188).

The post-colonial is inherently linked to the colonial. Hannoum argues that colonial ideas and ideals remain influential throughout the post-colonial Maghreb (e.g., reflected in the elite's need to be educated in France that is widespread still). Instead of being overcome, the colonial ideal of a French education remains to be desirable in post-colonial times (2009: 330–331). Moreover, Masri describes how Bourguiba's agenda to educate his young

nation relied centrally on the presence of French teachers in Tunisia in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Masri 2017: 199).

Post-colonial Studies is the discipline that discusses the lingering aspects of colonialism and the body naturally forms one of its central subjects.[14] Bodies were central in the anecdote mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, as well as in the two colonial novels that the previous section has described; this is not a coincidence, but rather the result of the colonial experience.

Edward Said's influential post-colonial work *Orientalism* (2003[1978]) is full of references to the body. One aspect of this is the analysis of how orientalists focused on the corporeal to feed their construction of the Oriental as physical and the Orient as a world of flesh, as opposed to the Western world of the mind. Said traces this, for example, in the works of Gustave Flaubert which he describes as being "eminently corporeal" (2003[1978]: 184):

> Woven through all of Flaubert's Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. […] Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate. (2003[1978]: 188)

Said explains that the Orient, like the colonial lands that were used to banish prisoners, was approached as the place to experience sexual fantasies that were out of reach in 19th century Europe. Sexual exploitation demanded a certain view of the Oriental that Deanna Ferree Womack summarizes as follows: "To the Orientalist mind, corporeality and carnality signify innate Oriental inferiority to the Western world" (2011: 445). This inferiority feeds back into the perception of the Oriental other as sexually available, something which increases the seeming corporeality of the person (or entire culture) concerned. Elleke Boehmer summarizes this process of othering in her essay entitled "Transfiguring: Colonial Body in Post-colonial Narrative". The colonizer expresses fear and fascination through corporeal imagery: "opposed to the colonizer (white man, West, center of intellection, of control), the Other is cast as corporeal, carnal, untamed, instinctual, raw, and therefore also open to mastery, available for use, for husbandry, for numbering, branding, cataloguing, description and possession" (1993: 269). The corporeal is understood as unable to produce knowledge or to represent itself. Highlighting the Other's embodiment is part of colonialism's suppressive discourse. This book does not aim to highlight a specific or exceptional corporeality when discussing Tunisia or Tunisians in order to set them apart from other nationalities. Bodies are used to gain insight into post-colonial society.

According to Ferree Womack, Said not only lays open how colonial suppression was argued via the body, in *Orientalism* Said also restores "Orientalised bodies to meaningful life" (2011: 453) through his understanding of bodies as individual existences and physical experiences (2011: 453), as the bearers of individual perspectives that deserve to be heard. Said writes: "I wanted readers to make use of my work so that they might then produce new

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14 For reference, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995) edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin dedicates one of its fourteen parts to the subject of "The Body and Performance" and it presents a text written by Frantz Fanon.

studies of their own that would illuminate the historical experience of Arabs and others in a generous, enabling mode" (2003 [1978]: 340).

Albert Memmi directly addresses the Maghreb, the colonial situation, and the body in his non-fictional works *Portrait du colonisé précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (1957) – which is the source of the quote provided above – and in *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman et de quelques autres* (2004[15]). The colonial situation appears in the bodies of both the colonized and the colonizer. It is essentially an encounter that goes to the very bones of its participants: "Everything in the colonized is deficient, and everything contributes to this deficiency – even his body, which is poorly fed, puny and sick"; Memmi writes and continues: "[t]he body and face of the colonized are not a pretty sight. It is not without damage that one carries the weight of such historical misfortune. If the colonizer's face is the odious one of an oppressor, that of his victim certainly does not express calm and harmony" (1991: 117, 119). The colonial experience leaves traces that are negotiated with a vocabulary that belongs to the context of disease:

> To employ the language of medicine, we could say that Arab-Muslim society suffers from a serious depressive syndrome that prevents it from seeing any way out of its current situation. The Arab world has still not found, or has not wanted to consider, the transformations that would enable it to adapt to the modern world, which it cannot help but absorb. Rather than examining itself and applying the proper remedies, it looks for the causes of its disability in others. (2006: 65)

This choice of vocabulary is a topic that will be returned to in the first chapter.

Frantz Fanon also has to be mentioned among the theorists who saw the value of the body in understanding the post-colonial, specifically its racial (or racist) dimension. In *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952[16]), he highlights the role played by bodies in the discourse of race by describing himself as "a body in a spatial and temporal world" that is perceived as black: "It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world – definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world" (2008: 91). He adds that the: "black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man", his body inescapably locks him in (2008: 117, 200). Fanon suggests at the end of *Peau noire, masques blancs* that in order to overcome issues of superiority or inferiority, men should experience one another in their physical state by touching and feeling – and possibly discovering the shared humanity. He ends with a telling sentence that highlights the importance of bodies for his identity as a non-white researcher: "O my body, always make me a man who questions!" (2008: 207, 206). It has been read as an invitation to interrogate the (post)colonial world, starting from the corporeal experience (compare Vermeren/Ferdinand 2018).

French academia came late to the post-colonial party, in contrast to the aforementioned francophone thinkers in Africa on the basis of whose mid-twentieth century ideas post-colonial thought was founded (compare Mbembe et al. 2006: 121). Writers such as Emily Apter, Charles Forsdick, Robert Stam, and Ella Shohat note that post-colonial theory only found noticeable engagement in France in the late twentieth and twenty-first century (Apter

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15 The English translation quoted was published in 2006 under the title *Decolonization and the Decolonized.*
16 The English translation was published in 2008 under the title *Black Skin, White Masks.*

1995: 169f, Forsdick 2005: 525, Stam/Shohat 2012: 84). Fiona Barclay describes this disconnect with the metaphor of the ghost: "Haunting provides the apposite image for France's relationship to the colonial: the latter no longer exists, and yet its ghostly presence manifests itself throughout contemporary society, its influence apparent even when its existence is denied" (2011: 132). She suggests using literature as the realm in which ghosts can be engaged with and through which the issues that haunt us might be tackled (compare 2011: 133). This is one reason why this study looks at literature to understand post-colonial Tunisian society.

5   Body and Language. Approaches to Explore the Post-colonial

Bodies have always played a role in human thinking. This is archeologically documented by graves and burial rites that attempt to conserve or commemorate the body of the deceased (compare Boellstorff 2011: 509). As central research topics, the body and embodiment have been on the rise since the 1970s and 1980s. Thomas J. Csordas describes the scholarly interest in the body in his introduction to the edited volume *Embodiment and Experience. The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (1994) as the consequence of important transformations in the way bodies are seen:

> The kind of body to which we have been accustomed in scholarly and popular thought alike is typically assumed to be a fixed, material entity subject to the empirical rules of biological science, existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity and characterized by unchangeable inner necessities. The new body that has begun to be identified can no longer be considered as a brute fact of nature. (1994: 1)

In his *Soziologie des Körpers* (2004, 'Sociology of the body'), Robert Gugutzer attributes the increased interest in the body to the move from an industrial to a post-industrial or postmodern society, to consumer culture and social individualization (compare Gugutzer 2004: 34–40). In these instances, the body gains importance where an individual has the time, energy, and money to care for their embodied self that must be pampered, scrutinized, and optimized.

The observation that the concern for the body is linked to post-industrial, postmodern society connects it to the West (Csordas mentions this as well 1994: 1). This connection to the West will be challenged in the following sections, where studies from the Maghreb suggest a similar scientific interest in the body and a participation in philosophical debates so-called 'Western'.

However, central conceptualizations must be considered first. In his work, Thomas J. Csordas differentiates between the body and embodiment. He criticizes that embodiment is neither discussed nor distinguished from the body in many studies, even though this is necessary. For Csordas, the body is either an "empirical thing or analytic theme". He understands "embodiment as the existential ground of culture and self". Csordas describes our bodily "being-in-the-world" through embodiment (Csordas 1994: 10), as the condition that allows us to relate to what and who is around us. It "is a matter of shared, mutually implicating, and never completely anonymous flesh" (Csordas 2011: 137). Embodiment offers itself as the starting point to rethink culture and ourselves as cultural beings. Instead of a mind/body dualism, which tends to localize subjectivity in the mind, Csordas understands subjectivity as partly seated in both (compare 1994: 6, 9). Seemingly in agreement with Madyan's realization in *Mawlid al-nisyān*, the body cannot be shunned or separated from the mind. Both belong to humans as 'cultural beings'.

Csordas draws on previous work conducted by Pierre Bourdieu, amongst others, in his theorization. In his "Bodily Knowledge"[17], Bourdieu describes that the body is "in the social world but the social world is in the body" (2000: 152). The body suggests one's position in social space or strata. Bourdieu explains this through what he calls 'habitus', the effect that the objects and people with whom one associates have over time (compare 2000: 138, 150). The effects are 'incorporated' and they become part of body and life. They are related to certain social spaces or fields and thereby can be "collective, or transindividual – and so it is possible to construct classes of habitus, which can be statistically characterized" (2000: 157). The human being is, however, not unchangeably bound by social conditions that are internalized in the habitus; it also has the potential to change its habitus and, as a result, its social conditions. This creates an in-between stage for the subject (i.e., an oscillating position in between free will and determining outside forces). As noted above, this oscillation will be addressed in many of the aspects explored in the chapters that follow.

In Bourdieu's conceptualization, bodies necessarily need to be culture specific. Bodies contain a reflection of their cultural contexts as well as of historical changes. Other authors agree and describe this using various metaphors. Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols* argues that the body "is a microcosm of society" (2002[1970]: 77), Katharine Young's *Bodylore* states that culture "is inscribed on the body" and, therefore, that the body displays "our membership in a culture" (1993: xvii). The cultural context is post-colonial Tunisian society in the textual corpus that this study analyzes. Colonial society was heavily influenced by power relations that were negotiated via bodies. Post-colonial society inherits the centrality of bodies, as the previous section has explained. Julian Vigo confirms in the study *Performative Bodies. Hybrid Tongues* (2010) that the body is a node in which hegemonic and post-colonial power relations meet, according to her regional focal points North Africa and post-colonial Latin America. She argues that in the literatures and cultures of North Africa and Latin America subjectivity is articulated through an emergence of corporeality. Its exploration allows us to understand the respective cultural identities in a manner that is free from generalization. Vigo uses figurations of the body as:

> a critical landscape through which the various discourses of nationalism, gender, and sexuality converge in order to construct a reading of the social that neither amasses identity as singular under the rubric of the 'third world', nor couches the other within western identity. (2010: 1)

Post-colonial contexts can be analyzed through these figurations from a personal localized perspective.

The body is particularly important in post-colonial literature, as Claudia Gronemann and Susanne Kaiser explore in their respective works.[18] They both argue that the importance of bodies is caused by the disappearance of orally transmitted literature through the colonial influence and the rise of French as the literary language of choice (their key example is the Algerian novelist Assia Djebar). They argue that the presence of the body in

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17 "Bodily Knowledge" is the title of a chapter in his *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), published in French originally in 1997 under the title *Méditations pascaliennes*.

18 Referred to are: Gronemann, Claudia. 2002. *Postmoderne/Postkoloniale Konzepte der Autobiographie in der Französischen und Maghrebinischen Literatur;* and Kaiser, Susanne. 2015. *Körper Erzählen. Der Postkoloniale Maghreb von Assia Djebar und Tahar Ben Jelloun.*

oral literature is restored in descriptions of female bodies and the conceptualization of writing as a bodily technique in post-colonial literary works. This last aspect furthermore subverts the Western understanding of writing as removed from the body (compare Gronemann 2002: 158, 160–165; Kaiser 2015: 46–47). The novels analyzed in the coming chapters certainly compensate for the disappearance of the traditional storyteller through both references to the act of narration and writing. Central in these references is the subject of language, which can involve questioning whether the language employed is suitable for the narrative, for example.

Language is the medium in which stories are told or written, and bodies are created. Literary bodies and post-colonial Tunisia are connected via language.[19] Language also contains corporeal aspects (e.g., in the tone of a voice or in the haptic and visuality of writing). Language is connected to, and not in opposition with, embodiment. This interplay helps us to understand society. Language needs to be addressed by this study, due to the multilingual nature of both the Tunisian book market and the approach adopted in this study.

Multilingualism in Tunisia not only exists between Arabic and French, as well as a minority of speakers of Berber languages (lower percentages than in Morocco and Algeria), but also between the standard Arabic *fuṣḥā* and Tunisian dialect *tūnsī* or *dārija*. The majority of the Arabic novels analyzed in this study are written entirely in *fuṣḥā*, some make use of *dārija* in dialogical situations. Yet, the dual presence is nevertheless reflected in the texts. Memmi's aforementioned *La statue de sel* addresses the issue of different languages when the protagonist discusses his alienation. He states that he decided to choose between being faced with two sides of himself that could not be united, between Orient and Occident, between African beliefs and philosophy, between dialect and French: "Devant l'impossible union des deux parties de moi-même, je décidai de choisir. Entre l'Orient et l'Occident, entre les croyances africaines at la philosophie, entre le patois et le français" (*Statue* 247). The result of this decision to adopt French language and culture, however, renders the protagonist physically ill at ease in his home country. He does not find another home country. His culture is borrowed, his mother tongue impaired and he no longer has any beliefs, religion, or traditions and he is ashamed for their remnants that resist his actions from deep within him: "Moi je suis mal à l'aise dans mon pays natal et n'en connais pas d'autre, ma culture est d'emprunt et ma langue maternelle infirme, je n'ai plus de croyances, de religion, de traditions et j'ai honte de ce qui en eux résiste en fond de moi" (*Statue* 364). He continues to describe himself as culturally French, but as a Tunisian, speaking the language of the country with a specific accent ("parlant la langue du pays avec un accent particulier", *Statue* 364) that refers back to his poor Jewish upbringing.

A proximity to the language of the body is contained in the concept of the mother tongue ('langue maternelle') that Memmi mentions. This notion is present in the collective volume *Du bilinguisme* (1985) to which the Moroccan sociologist, critic, and writer Abdelkebir Khatibi and the Tunisian novelist Abdelwahab Meddeb, amongst others, have contributed. The latter, like Memmi, describes the Tunisian dialect as the mother language ("langue maternelle"; Meddeb 1985: 127), whereas the former notes its inaugural presence

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19 A similar observation is made by Malek Chebel: "Le Corps, le Langage, le Symbole. Du premier concept au second et du second au troisième, il n'y a de parenté que grâce aux offices du verbe" (1984: 91) – 'symbole' here ought to be read as a reference to the novels.

in the body of the child (compare Khatibi 1985: 178[20]). For Meddeb, standard Arabic forms the 'father language' ("langue paternelle"), a primarily religious language, which was equally learned through the body in the *madrasa*. He describes that one cannot help but be impregnated with musicality while the body sways, sitting on the floor and dancing to the sudden sounds of the holy text: "Ne te reste que l'imprégnation d'une musicalité, ton corps se balançant, assis au sol et dansant aux sonorités saccadées du texte" (Meddeb 1985: 127). Both Meddeb and Khatibi discuss the presence of one language in the other (compare Meddeb 1985: 126), which in Khatibi's contribution "Incipits", contains an allusion to the sexual nature of languages present in languages (compare Khatibi 1985: 183).[21] An Arab author who writes in French, Khatibi argues, transfers the alienation between the varieties of Arabic to French where the alienation continues (compare Khatibi 1983: 187–188, 200–201). This is not a discussion of one's 'own language' vs. 'language of the other', but is instead Khatibi's description of multilingualism in the post-colonial situation: *bi-langue*. In his novel *Amour bilingue*, he explains the *bi-langue* by turning it into a character: "La bi-langue! La bi-langue! Elle-même, un personnage de ce récit, poursuivant sa quête intercontinentale, au-delà de mes traductions" (1983a, 109). Winifred Woodhull describes Khatibi's *bi-langue* as "a space in which body and language, voice and writing, feminine and masculine sexualities, native and foreign languages, hegemonic and marginalized cultures mingle without merging to form a new unity", a "process of decolonization" (1993: ix). Vigo reads this critically and highlights that Woodhull pairs Maghrebi cultural expression with Western theory, thereby suggesting a hierarchy that favors the West (compare 2010: 137). It is not this study's intention to establish or reproduce similar hierarchies. For Vigo, it is precisely through the *bi-langue* that "Western and non-Western discourses interact" without ever merging, however (Vigo 2010: 144). For the purposes of this study, what shall be extracted here is that the *bi-langue* suggests an oscillation between these discourses that is particularly relevant when discussing Tunisia and its fluid identity.

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20 In *Maghreb pluriel* 1983: 187.
21 Winifred Woodhull notes in her *Transfigurations of the Maghreb. Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures* (1993) that Khatibi's contribution to *Du bilinguisme* is a reprint of a section from his *Maghreb pluriel* (compare Woodhull 1993: n.2, 201), which in the following will be quoted.

6   Previous Research on the Body in Arabo-Islamic Culture

Julian Vigo writes in her *Performative Bodies, Hybrid Tongues* that "at least fifty percent of French language literary production from the Maghreb deals with questions of the body, gender, sexuality, and women's political and social rights as discourses contiguous to a greater politics of cultural, national and linguistic identity" (Vigo 2010: 192). While Vigo does not indicate the sources for the percentage she cites, this quote certainly highlights the relevance of the body and this study's central concerns. This section attempts to provide an overview of previous research conducted on the body in Arabo-Islamic culture and literature as well as in the Maghreb. While studies have addressed these issues, there is no monograph that analyzes figurations of the human body, their relation to language, and writing in Tunisian literature nor in the novel, particularly since Tunisian independence in specific. However, research has been produced that somewhat overlaps with the scope of this study. It highlights in how far the latter extends the state of research.

Not mentioned here are works that focus on specific themes that are dealt with within the individual chapters. This section only aims to give an overview of the scholarly attention that has been paid the body as a concept.

The body in Islam and in the Maghreb has been addressed in sociological and anthropological works by scholars from the region. They highlight the view that the body is not a concern of Western scholarship exclusively. First of all, one has to return to the work of Abdelkebir Khatibi, the essay "La Sexualité selon le Coran" for example from his *Maghreb pluriel* (1983). One also needs to mention his *Le Corps oriental* (2002), a coffee-table book at first glance, in which shorter pieces of his writing such as "Lexique et symbolique du corps" (2002: 11–16) are accompanied by reproductions of "Oriental" as well as "Orientalist" paintings and photographs. Despite the presentation, his observations concerning the tripartite construction of the body, based on the Qur'anic terminology, are insightful. He addresses three Arabic nouns used for the body in the Qur'an: *jism, jasad*, and *badan*. These terms refer to the idea or concept of the human body, to the flesh as the place of the sensorium, and to the body's physical reality respectively (compare 2002: 11). My study follows the different nuances of these terms and shows how the body is both an idea and a materiality in the two chapters that follow, and which comprise *Part I* by exploring the conceptualizations of bodies and embodiment within Tunisian novels. The third nuance, that of the body as sensorium, plays into the engagement with problematic bodies that is examined in *Part II*.

When addressing scholarly work on the body that comes from the region, the importance of the aforementioned *Le corps dans la tradition au Maghreb* (1984) by Algerian anthropologist Malek Chebel should be restated. It presents the perspectives of hadith literature and social experience.

Tunisian sociologist Traki Zannad Bouchrara's work and her studies *Symboliques corporelles et espaces musulmans* (1984) and *Les Lieux du corps en Islam* (1994) discuss the role of the body in Islam. The author analyzes notions of the private and the public as well as spaces, such as the traditional Arabic house or the *hammām* in their relation to the body. Here the focus is on social roles, rather than on individual bodies.

In Tunisia, studies that address the body have been published in both French and also in Arabic; for example, Jalāl al-Dīn Saʿīd's study *Falsafat al-jasad* ('The philosophy of the body', 1993) or al-Shādhilī al-Sākir's *Mā falsafat al-jasad?* ('What is the philosophy of the body?', 1994). The latter succeeds in making philosophical and sociological thought by writers such as Barthes, Descartes, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre accessible to an arabophone audience.

These publications show that the theoretical interest in the body is far from being an activity that is limited to the West. Apart from monographs, an increased engagement with the body is perceivable in journals published in Tunisia from the mid-1980s, as well as in other countries in the wider region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In 1988, the Lebanese journal *al-Fikr al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir* addressed concerns about the body and sexuality in issues 50–51, containing a Lebanese researcher's ʿAlī Zayʿūr's contribution "Naḥwa naẓariyya ʿarabiyya fī al-jasad wa-l-insān" ('Towards an Arabic theory of the body and the human', 32–40). In it, the author addresses the problematic of mind and body and expresses a perspective that resembles Csordas' later view regarding the importance of embodiment in knowledge production. Zayʿūr employs the term "al-jasadāniyya" to render the concept of embodiment or bodiliness; this is apparently a new coinage by the author (compare 1988: 39, 32). The publication shows that this concept existed well before the end of the 1980s and had been discussed in Arabic publications. As for Tunisia, its *al-Majalla al-tūnisiyya li-l-dirāsāt al-falsafiyya/Revue tunisienne des etudes philosophiques* (No. 12, 1992) contains ʿAlī al-Shanūfī's text "al-Jasad" ('The body', 115–121). In it, the author contrasts Islamic concepts of the body with Platonic and Aristotelian understandings. He has a specific regard for the value of the body in comparison to the soul in Islam.

One year later, the Tunisian journal *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya* ('The cultural life', No. 66, 1993) published the proceedings of a seminar held that same year. It had been organized by the regional committee for culture in Monastir. The issue includes a piece by Abdelkebir Khatibi ("al-Jasad bayna al-ṣūra wa-l-dalīl", 'The body between the image and the sign', 64–69) as well as others that deal with diverse subjects, such as the body in pre-Islamic poetry (Munṣif al-Wahāybī's "al-Jasad fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī", 85–99). This heightened interest in the body parallels theoretical trends in the West and shows an active engagement with them (Fitouri-Zlitni/Gronemann describe the engagement with Gender Studies from the 1990s onwards as an additional catalyst, 2018: 4). This increased interest is also mirrored in a greater presence of bodies in fiction, as will be outlined below. As a consequence, the 1990s are the decade most represented through the novels analysed in this study.

The 1990s in the MENA region were commonly perceived as 'a-political', yet in fact they were a decade much more complex than such a simple ascription. They saw armed conflicts, such as the Gulf war in Iraq, violent internal confrontations between governments and Islamist militants in Egypt, Morocco, and in Algeria. The Tunisian regime was particularly authoritarian in their treatment of the opposition. Overall, the 1990s were dominated by people's disenchantment with political participation, with their respective state's role as leader in the achievement of progress. Upon close inspection, one can note the presence of the political in new forms in literary texts. To quote Zeina Halabi's *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual. Prophecy, Exile and the Nation* (2017), the texts contain "a move to redefine and recode the political in ways that are congruent with the contemporary political moment" (2017: 33). Political engagement began to be negotiated via the body.

The interest in the body does not end in the 1990s, but continues as Hafsi Bedhioufi's *Corps et traditions islamiques. Divisions ontologiques et ritualités du corps* (2000) shows. It explores the body from the perspective of religion, employing the work of scholars as diverse as Mary Douglas, Marcel Mauss, and Ibn Khaldūn (compare 2000: 11, 12). Tunisia post-2011 is equally interested in the body, as can be seen in Monia Lachheb's anthology *Penser le corps au Maghreb* (2012) which is an example of a scholarly work on the body in and from the Maghreb. Lachheb also edited a volume of the *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes IBLA* in 2015 under the title *Le corps* (No. 216). Both publications reflect the body's centrality in cultural studies and as a source of insight into culture and society.

However, they lack discussions of the body in literary works or cultural products in a narrower sense, thereby discounting Lilia Beltaïef's discussion of the body in Tunisian dialect. Instead, they analyze the body at religious rituals or in physical education, the veiled body, and social phenomena such as artificial skin whitening.

The body's metaphorical potential is highlighted in the aforementioned monograph *The Naked Blogger of Cairo* (2016) by Marwan M. Kraidy, as well as in his other articles that discuss the role played by the body in the uprisings of 2010/2011.[22] While the centrality of the body in these specific instances is apparent, the monograph provides a broad overview, not just of Tunisia but also Syria and Egypt. It focuses on the political context and provides a cursory overview of the topics that this study aims to unpack in full.

Abir Kréfa's article "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes. Enjeux de reconnaissance, coûts, et effets de 'transgressions'" (2011) is closer to the Tunisian context. However, Kréfa's attention is less on the content of literary works than on the literary field within which female authors act and on the repercussions they experience for addressing topics such as the body and sexuality. Following the uprising of 2010/2011, focusing on the more urgent socio-political situation in Tunisia as opposed to the seemingly less relevant 'fine arts' was trending. Kréfa's article is part of this interest. While she focuses only on one of the themes dealt with in the present study, and limits her observations to female writers, the chapters that follow will draw on her insights about society and will extend them.

Martina Censi's *Le Corps dans le roman des écrivaines syriennes contemporaines* (2016) shares many thematic issues that this study will address (such as violence, disease, language, and gender relations) while addressing Syrian female writers' literary production. Similar, with respect to the focalization on female writing, is Sanae Ghouati's article "L'écriture du corps dans la littéarture féminine marocaine. Cas de Soaud Bahéchar dans *Ni Fleurs ni couronnes*" (2014). In both cases, this focalization narrows the scope in comparison to the present study, while also referring to different national settings.

Closer to the interests of this study is Susanne Kaiser's aforementioned *Körper erzählen* (2015) because it addresses the Maghreb. It offers a valuable exploration of the body in the works of Assia Djebar and Taher Ben Jelloun and has served as an influence for this study. However, Kaiser neither widens the scope to include a francophone Tunisian or Libyan novelist to represent more of the Maghreb, nor does she include novels written in either Arabic or Berber. To that end, Morocco and Algeria's post-colonial language situation, the background against which Jelloun and Djebar are understood to write, cannot be fully explored. The anthology *Le Corps à l'épreuve du genre dans la littérature, le cinéma et le blogue maghrébins de langue française* edited by Sonia Fitouri-Zlitni and Claudia Gronemann (2018) is similar, with respect to the focalization on French cultural production, mostly from Morocco and Algeria. It is based on a workshop held in March 2013 at Université de Tunis. The anthology brings together studies by international researchers who

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22 These include: Kraidy, Marwan M. 2013. "The Revolutionary Body Politic: Preliminary Thoughts on a Neglected Medium in the Arab Uprisings." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (1): 66–74; Kraidy, Marwan M. 2013. "The Body As Medium in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10 (2–3): 285–290; and Kraidy, Marwan M. 2015. "The Politics of Revolutionary Celebrity in the Contemporary Arab World." *Public Culture* 27 (1): 161–83.

explore themes related to the body in French Maghrebi literature; however, only one of the twelve contributions discusses Tunisia. Chantal Marquardt addresses Tunisian female bloggers in her chapter "*Fifilles tunisiennes. Sujet, corps et genre dans le weblog tunisien*". Similar, with regards to the underrepresentation of Tunisian works, is Julian Vigo's *Performative Bodies, Hybrid Tongues* (2010), which was mentioned previously. Moroccan and Algerian writers are talked about more widely, whereas Tunisian works are commonly only touched on (e.g., francophone Abdelwahab Meddeb's novel *Talismano* (1979) and Traki Zannad Bouchrara's sociological work).

Another study that is relevant to this work is Fedwa Malti-Douglas's often-quoted *Woman's Body, Woman's Word. Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (1991). Malti-Douglas's chapters are influential due to her focus on bodies and gender in the wider Arab world, even though they do not mention Tunisian authors and the work pursues entirely different goals and paradigms.

While the existing works of scholarship form a fertile ground of inspiration, they also allow the present book to pursue its own fruitful trajectory. The gaps and blanks that remain from previous research point towards the necessary task at hand: to achieve an analysis of Tunisian literature and society via the body without a specific focus on one gender.

7   The Textual Corpus and Bodies in Novels

In the previous section, I established that no study conducted to date has explored Tunisian novels written in Arabic as well as in French by both male and female authors with respect to figurations of the human body, approaches a wide array of themes, and goes beyond the most obvious focus on gender and sexuality. These have to be the parameters of this book in order for it to accomplish its dual mission of reflecting on the novels that are produced in Tunisia and to generate insights into post-colonial Tunisian society through the bodies contained in these works. In this section, a few remarks will be made about the textual corpus[23] used for this exploration of bodies in novels.

That the body is suggestive of class, and is permeated by it, is something that has been stated by Bourdieu. This means that it is crucial to have access to different bodies in order to approximate Tunisian society as a whole through the representations of the bodies in literature. The chapters that follow, therefore, discuss bodies in the countryside, of the elite, the middle strata, and of immigrants in France and include the bodies of widows, unmarried pregnant girls, and wives, teachers, writers, artists as well as factory workers, farmers, and builders. What has to be considered is that all of these bodies are representations; they are the result of authors' choices and have been influenced by their various social backgrounds. The novels are, as the discussion of the genre above has suggested, ideological. Yet, in their being ideological they still make a point about Tunisian society. They present this society as it is seen from the perspective of the respective author and they partake in the production of society while they are also its product.

The novels targeted for this analysis came to my attention in various ways. I have included novels mentioned in interviews that I conducted between 2014 and 2017 with literary critics, researchers, and writers who are familiar with the Tunisian literary production.

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23 This play on the word "corpus", as both referring to the body in Latin and to a collection of texts, is unfortunately not my own, but has been borrowed from Kaiser's *Körper erzählen*, 2015: 7.

Among those who generously supported my research project with their time were, for example, Kmar Bendana, Jean Fontaine, Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna, Jalila Trittar as well as the great majority of the authors discussed throughout this study. Other works were highlighted in Jean Fontaine's *Le roman tunisien a 100 ans*, which is a bibliography of the Tunisian novel published between 1906 and 2006, complete with short synopses for the – according to Fontaine – best novels from the timeframe examined. These synopses allowed me to find works in which issues of the body were centrally important. This study's corpus consists of fourteen novels:

al-Tūt al-murr (1967, 'The bitter mulberries') by Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui (Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī al-Matawī);

Le Sadique (1970; 'The sadist') by Koelman;

Cendre à l'aube (1975; 'Ash at dawn') by Jelila Hafsia;

Un retour au pays du bon Dieu (1989; 'A return to God's country') by Ridha Bourkhis;

Hurlement (1992, 'Screaming') by Alia Mabrouk;

Tammās (1995; 'Mutually touching') by Aroussia Nalouti (ʿArūsiyya al-Nālūtī);

al-Jasad walīma (1999; 'The body is a feast') by Fredj Lahouar (Faraj al-Ḥiwār);

Ṭurshqāna (1999; 'Ṭurshqāna') by Messaouda Boubakr (Masʾūda Bū Bakr);

Ce Pays dont je meurs (2000[1999]; 'The country from which I die') by Fawzia Zouari;

Sombre histoire de cellules folles (2001; 'A dark story of crazy cells') by Alia Mabrouk;

al-Kursī al-hazzāz (2002; 'The rocking chair') by Amel Mokhtar (Āmāl Mukhtār);

Ḥikāya tūnisiyya (2007; 'A Tunisian tale') by Hassouna Mosbahi (Ḥassūna al-Muṣbāḥī);

al-Ightisāb (2008; 'The rape') by Hédi Thabet (al-Hādī Thābit);

al-Ghurillā (2011, 'The Gorilla') by Kamel Riahi (Kamāl al-Riyāhī).

All of these novels were written between Tunisian independence 1956 and 2011. Most of them (eleven novels total) were published during or after the late 1980s, paralleling the growing theoretical interest that the body received from philosophers and critics alike, as outlined above. Most of the works remain untranslated, which is why this study also functions as an introduction to these Tunisian novels for an Anglophone reader.[24] Eight of the novels were written in Arabic, six were written in French. This prevalence of Arabic reflects the situation that exists within the Tunisian book market (compare Fontaine's *Le*

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24   The two Arabic novels that have been translated from my corpus are Aroussia Nalouti's *Tammās* (which in its French translation by Evelyne Larguèche and Françoise Neyrod is entitled *Zaynab ou les Brèches de la mémoire* (2005)) as well as Hassouna Mosbahi's *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* which appeared both in English as *A Tunisian Tale* in Max Weiss's translation (2011) and in Boutheïna Ayadi's French translation as *Pas de deuil pour ma mère* by (2019). The only French novel that was translated is Fawzia Zouari's *Ce Pays dont je meurs* which exists in the German translation *Das Land, in dem ich sterbe: die wahre Geschichte meiner Schwester* by Antje Kaiser (2000). Summaries of the content of each novel and biographical information about the authors have been provided in the *Appendix* at the end of this study in order to facilitate access to the material.

roman tunisien a 100 ans that lists 383 novels written in Arabic compared to 206 novels written in French published between 1906 and 2006). Due to the central importance of language for my discussion, both French and Arabic original writing is quoted and has been supplemented with translations or paraphrases that have been conducted by myself, except where otherwise indicated.

The textual corpus contains some of the most important contemporary Tunisian authors as well as some who are lesser known or who possess lesser literary credentials. This is based on the opinion that only a mixed group of writers can produce diverse bodies. Neither this, nor the choice of focusing on the human body, has been done to expose bodies or to make a claim about differences between artificially defined cultural entities (such as East and West, or North and South) that might further the efforts and aims of cultural arrogance. While this study certainly makes choices and excludes certain elements, it strives to tell a meaningful story about post-colonial Tunisia. The bodies analyzed are produced in language, yet they refer to bodies that are external to the literary realm from which they result and towards which they project possibilities.

The relationship between the textual reality presented by the novels and text-external reality can be described as an oscillation of mutually informing discourses. I do not read the literary works as reliable mirrors of society, but instead as fragments that are in dialogue both with each other as well as with their historical context. They participate in shaping social reality while being influenced by it at the same time. It only seems logical, therefore, to include diverse examples of bodies. Text-external Tunisia consistently enters the texts in the form of references to current events and social issues. The relationship between text-internal and text-external realities is problematized in many of the novels in discussions about the act of writing. This telling self-awareness of literature to itself is reflected in the structure of this study, as the following section outlines. Additionally, other settings are referenced in the works, which means that my study does not strictly focus on the Tunisian nation state, but also that it extends across borders.

8   By Way of an Outline. Oscillating Theories and Themes

Instead of attempting to address the diverse bodies with a uniform approach, my proposition is to create an original perspective through a combination of theoretical aspects. The central approach is Csordas' theorization of *embodiment*. The guiding principle that links the other theoretical aspects is that of *oscillation*, as I will explain in this section. Oscillation is a motif that has appeared in the previous sections time and again. It was used to describe the relationship between the novels and the surrounding society. The novels influence society and are influenced by it, without ever directly mirroring it, however. Oscillation was employed to place the novels in a Tunisian locale without overly highlighting the nation state. The concept was also used to describe the novels themselves, that contain journeys back and forth between the Maghreb and Europe, switch between fact and fiction, and that even switch between languages. Oscillation was suggested to describe the processes behind Khatibi's *bi-langue*: the interaction of various discourses, traditional notions of "culture without reformulating a new, stagnant identity" (Vigo 2010: 142). The following section will describe the oscillatory fleeting nature of bodies further.

I am not the first scholar to employ the concept of oscillation in literary studies. John Francis Harty proposed it in his PhD study *Oscillation in Literary Modernism* in 2009. Harty employs oscillation to describe the antagonistic poles of despair and carnivalesque joy in the works that he studies; oscillation allows him to maintain the tension between both extremes without resolving them (Harty 2009: 36). He writes:

> The concept of oscillation describes a general swinging movement in a bound but fluid system. As an interdisciplinary concept it is employed differently within each discipline, yet always characterized by two forms of movement: on the one hand, a swing between two or more polarities, and on the other hand, transformation within these polarities. (Harty 2009: 38)

Oscillation cultivates an ambiguousness. "[P]aradoxical incongruities" can appear in oscillatory situations and are contained in the interplay of the poles (compare Harty 2009: 40, 47).

With regards to this book's theoretical framework, oscillation describes the relationship of primary (literary) sources and secondary (theoretical) works between which my writing goes back and forth. In each individual chapter, the theoretical input highlights different aspects of bodies and society. These theoretical approaches hail from a mixture of origins, neither exclusively 'Western', 'Northern', 'Christian' or 'foreign' concepts nor 'Eastern', 'Oriental', 'Southern', 'Islamic', 'local' or 'Tunisian', disregarding how ideological and futile these descriptions actually are with regard to theories and ideas. Instead, inspiration was taken from Tunisian writers and critics who refer to an eclectic collection of theories and ideas themselves (compare e.g., Samia Kassab-Charfi's interview with Messaouda Boubakr in *Expressions maghrébines*, 14:2, 2015, 11–23). Each approach contains the oscillatory move within itself that is so central to addressing the Tunisian context in between diverse influences (Western, Eastern, and others) and to achieve relevant insights into Tunisian society. Between these aspects, oscillates and thereby crystallizes the idea of bodies in literature, here with specific regard for the Tunisian context. This forms the core of the book. The different theoretical notions are necessitated by the novels; this means that their combination has the benefit of being adapted based on the novels, rather than imposed upon them externally.

The study is divided into two parts. *Part I* lays the theoretical groundwork by exploring the terms *body* and *embodiment*. It asks: *How can the body and embodiment be thought about in the context of literature?* It discusses the notions of the body as idea and materiality, as Khatibi suggested. It also takes Csordas' criticism to heart regarding the neglected discussion of embodiment and, in so doing, reviews some of the authors that he criticized, such as Susan Bardo and Elaine Scarry. Another of Csordas' criticisms is the problematic subsumption of the body under the text, a theme which is present in the interpretative 'reading' of the body. It is addressed through a reflection of language and the materiality that it supplies to literary bodies.

The disability studies approach employed in the first chapter facilitates an exploration of what human bodies mean in Tunisian novels. The theory calls into question the belief in a body as a general and unalterable system that exists outside of history. Instead, bodies are shown to be constructed between society and the individual. They are also discussed as productive of society by constituting and influencing it, both movements of which are oscillatory relationships in Harty's sense.

In the second chapter, Derrida's concept of *hauntology* explores that which is simultaneously present and absent. *Hauntology* is addressed to embodiment itself, which highlights literary bodies' oscillatory presence. This is the approach chosen to address bodies' materiality and to discuss whether or not bodies and embodiment are the same in literary texts.

Part II addresses the writing of bodies and explores the self-awareness of Tunisian novels to themselves. It inquires into how writing in general is problematized via the narration of problematic bodies. Problematic bodies are a focalization that the textual corpus suggests, in which the functions and repercussions of writing in society are addressed. The

problematic is more striking, and it creates a greater awareness for itself and for its writing. This is theorized through Drew Leder's concept of *dys-appearance* that argues that the negative or that which one does not want to notice often receives greater attention. Problematic bodies cause negative affects, such as disgust, shame, fear, and anger. Three concepts are drawn upon in this analysis: *abjection*, *unlivability*, and the idea of *fitna*. These concepts' backgrounds are completely different (post-structuralism, gender theory and classical Arabic language) and their combination might seem haphazard; however, each of them individually contains the movement of attraction and repulsion that the writing of bodies also turns out to contain. They share this oscillatory movement.

This is most definitely true in the first case; Kristeva's *abjection* is an oscillation between disgust and fascination with the physical as open or leaky. It allows the third chapter to address the difficulties that writing bodies contains, such as the violence possibly being committed by the description and the resulting textual anxiety. The analysis will show that this is solved by an increasingly pluralized perspective and the destabilization of literature's representational function. The refusal of definite truths turns writing into a place of criticism.

In the fourth chapter, which examines the notion of *unlivability* (Butler), the oscillation is between an attraction and an inability to understand. 'Unlivable' bodies cannot be read easily and are, therefore, present and not present at the same time. Being difficult to grasp attributes them with a dissenting presence. The writing of dissent and the role of the writer in this process are addressed in the fourth chapter through 'unlivable' bodies.

In the fifth chapter, which employs the classical term *fitna*, attraction immediately turns into its opposite, fear in the face of the power of that which attracts or provokes. The chapter explores discussions within literary works about how to write provocative bodies in a context of taboo, how to move between expressive wishes, and internalized constraints. The communicatory function of bodies in literary works is scrutinized.

Together, the three concepts examined in *Part II* show the various aspects of writing bodies in Tunisian novels, which appear as an oscillation between poles. Bodies in Tunisian literature, as this study intends to show, challenge authors. Their description easily enters areas that run counter to the core beliefs of large sections of Tunisian society. This involves bringing to the public eye that which is expected to remain private, to narrate that which is meant to be kept quiet. Describing this conflict of expectations opens up plural opinions, which includes an examination of the very meaning of the word 'dissent'. To listen to these different opinions is to hear, expressed in soft tones, what is happening underneath the surface of society.

9   Oscillating Trajectories

This work's general trajectories will be summarized here to bring the introduction to a close, after the previous section presented an outline of this study's theoretical trajectory. The central aim of my study is to gain insight into Tunisian post-colonial society at the brink of the uprising of 2010/2011 and dating back to the country's independence. The approach chosen involves analyzing its literary production and the figurations of the human body contained therein. The productive function of literature is reflected upon, and the often-unquestioned assumption of its mimetic role is critiqued. About Tunisian literature, Nouri Gana writes that it "constructs an alternative history of decolonialism, focused on downtrodden and ordinary Tunisians, and it juxtaposes it with the trajectory of post-colonial Tunisia whose leadership gradually internalized the practices of the colonizer" (2013: 17). His well-informed anthology, *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution*, does not

contain a thorough discussion of post-colonial Tunisian literature, however. Exempted from this are Gana's own passing remarks in the introduction to the volume (compare 2013: 15–17). They still leave a research gap wide open. Gana suggests that the study of literature allows to gain specific insight into society, while evading master narratives. The successful achievement of this aim is precisely the goal of this book.

The body is employed as a focal lens to structure the analysis of the literary production. It is developed and questioned throughout the course of the study. I follow the lead of Elizabeth Grosz and her *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994). Grosz highlights the value of the body as a viewpoint for post-colonial concerns. She suggests it as being uniquely suited to mediate "between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable" in rethinking binary pairs such as "the private and the public, the self and other". Grosz contends that the body is neither one nor the other, while it is also both at the same time (1994: 20–21, 23). Once again, this alludes to the oscillating position that the previous section described. It allows this study to question the aforementioned binaries, as well as others such as 'North' and 'South' or 'Occident' and 'Orient'.

The body will be questioned in the first part of this study and will be further destabilized in the second part. The goal of the variety of approaches adopted is to capture an oscillating body that defies simple categories and, therefore, that reflects upon how Tunisian society as a whole oscillates in-between various influences. This idea of oscillation is reflected in Jamāl Zawāgha's article "al-Jasad wa-l-ākhar" ('The body and the other') in the aforementioned periodical *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya* (No. 66, 1993). In this work, the author discusses the body as simultaneously being (between) the self and the other (compare 1993: 82). The speaking or writing or signing body is one that further contains the oscillatory presence. It is both bound in itself and open to others, an issue which will be further clarified in *Chapter 1* in its engagement with Thomas J. Csordas' notion of embodiment.

The body in the literature analyzed is not one but many, not permanent but fluctuating. These bodies defy social expectations and the beliefs that arise from the patriarchal structure of traditional Tunisian society. They act on text-external Tunisian society productively and negotiate certain subjects, as this study will uncover. Each of the second part's chapters discuss notions of dissent, of disagreement with expectations, a movement that is representative of the fluctuating nature of the body, but which also has the potential for the subversion of tradition and political oppression. By the end of this study, we will have returned to the scene in the hospital with former president Ben Ali at Mohammad Bouazizi's bedside.

PART I:

Laying the Groundwork. Literary Bodies, Discourse, and
Materiality

1 Perspectives of Impairment. Bodies and Embodiment in Tunisian Novels

1.1 Bodies, Impairment, and Society

Definite articles suggest the existence of a concept, such as when one addresses 'the human body' as a theme in literature, for example. Definite articles generate the expectation of a fixed collection of definite attributes. In the case of 'the human body', these attributes could be a human shape, distinguishable from its surroundings, with two arms and legs, a head, perhaps. However, when it comes to the specifics (is the shape male or female or somewhere in between those poles?), thinking a generic human body becomes problematic: is this theoretical human body without sexual markers? Is it automatically male? Or female? What is left out by this choice? The theoretical concept tends to exert pressure to conform with its definite attributes. It excludes everything that diverts from it. As outrageous as it sounds: would a human shape with only one arm qualify for instance?

The present chapter explores what 'the' body is, so that this study might address what is and what is not a body. It discusses how embodiment in literature can be thought about, especially since it forms "the existential ground of culture" (Csordas 1994: 6). This chapter addresses its relation to society as both productive and receptive, which means that it oscillates between these two poles.

To begin, the chapter describes and then critiques the existence of the human body as an ideal. It thereby follows up with Khatibi's observation in *Le Corps oriental* about the three notions of the body in Arabic, reflected in three nouns for the ideal, the sensorial, and the material body (*jism*, *jasad*, and *badan*) (2002: 11). It challenges the notion of the ideal body (*jism*) based on the analysis of the novels discussed.

Theoretically, the chapter draws upon disability studies. The assumption of a common, general body is critiqued within disability studies; the body, as a concept or ideal, symbolizes an (artificial) normalcy that excludes any diversion caused by disease or disability.[1] In his *Enforcing Normalcy. Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995, specifically in the chapter "Constructing Normalcy"), Lennard J. Davis argues that today's understanding of bodily deviations and disability is based on the very existence of this normalcy. In societies in the past, an 'ideal' body was often thought as divine, as something that could not be realized or attained by any human. In the present, however, a perceived normalcy is the ideal. This normalcy is understood as that which the majority shares, excluding and thereby disabling all those who differ from this majority. The change in society has to be attributed to the advent of industrialized society (Davis 995: 24–25) and the influence of capitalism (Erevelles 2001: 99–101). With both, the ability to work and to be productive became the desirable and aspired for norm and disability affected everyone who could not participate in the labor force. In this conceptualization, the differing individual is blamed for not conforming.

Disability studies moves away from locating disability in an 'afflicted' person and towards seeing it as socio-politically formed (Goodley 2011: xi): Disability is read as the overlap of impairment with society and space. Impairment is a key term in disability studies and describes an individual's functional (physical or mental) limitation. This understanding

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1   Compare Wilson/Lewiecki-Wilson 2001: 13; Michalko/Titchkosky 2001: 207–208.

of disability highlights the environment's disabling effect that, together with a pre-existing impairment, creates disability. It also escapes the idea that the victim must be blamed (compare Gadacz 1994: 5; Hamdar 2014: 8).[2]

Impairment, sickness, and disability all depend on their opposites (non-impairment, health, normalcy), pretending that each pair exists as solid poles of either-or dichotomies. Davis, however, challenges this; according to him, the artificiality of the binary has to be replaced with an awareness of the gradual transition from one pole to the other. This ends the exclusionary potential of normalcy (Davis 1995: 157). Accordingly, the individual is always oscillating between these poles, never arriving at one or the other.

The understanding of the opposites has changed throughout history, as we will see below. The aspect of time, however, is ignored in the definition of disability provided above. Disability studies were mainly developed by British and North American academics and activists. This resulted in the field adopting a Western focus that ignores fairly recent changes in other places of the world (e.g., changing understandings of medicine and the availability of treatment). Time is an essential factor when looking at 20th century Tunisia in specific as well as at its literature. Within the last century alone, the country experienced colonialism, independence, dictatorship, and upheaval. Additional factors, such as modernization, minority rights, and improvements in the medical sector are specifically relevant in the changing perception of physical impairment from the Tunisian perspective. To balance this oversight, additional sources are resorted to that describe disability from a local perspective in order to do justice to the Tunisian situation.

Some conclusions can be drawn regarding Tunisian society by exploring examples of the depiction of disability in literature. This chapter begins by analyzing what human bodies mean in Tunisian novels. It uses the bodies of impaired, sick, or wounded characters as its focal point. The aim is not to specifically highlight an exceptional presence of disabled bodies in Tunisian literature, but rather to analyze how impaired bodies are constructed, represented, and challenged. This construction of impaired bodies, as will be clarified, is identical to the construction of all bodies. Impairment and non-impairment fluidly blend into each other, and this makes the distinction arbitrary. Ultimately, this chapter explores how bodies are constructed by society and shaped through language. Tunisian society will feature prominently as the background against which the bodies appear. The bodies are also discussed in relation to their influence on society. This self-reinforcing relationship will be described as oscillatory, and it allows this chapter's bodies to offer an initial reading of Tunisian society.

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2   The conceptual separation of disability and impairment has provoked criticism. There are regional differences in disability studies with regards to preferred vocabulary as well as theory. One must not forget that impairment is equally culturally constructed (compare Goodley 2011: 11–20, 29). This chapter will view impairment and disability as two separate, yet interconnected, aspects.

1.2 Disease and Disability in Theory and in Fictional Literature

While disabilities are widely present throughout fictional narratives, they are rarely discussed in literary studies (see Bolt's introduction to the first volume of the *Journal of Literary Disability*, 2007: I; we should observe that his point of reference is the Western literary canon). To capture disability's "conspicuous absence" in criticism, Bolt refers to Jacques Derrida's concept of *hauntology*, "that describes the paradoxical state of neither being nor non-being", stating that "disability is neither denied not acknowledged" and, therefore, that it haunts literary studies (Bolt: i).[3] Regarding literature from the Middle East and North Africa, the situation is not much different: Despite the presence of sick and disabled characters in literary works, they are not widely discussed in critical literature. One exception is Abir Hamdar's study *The Female Suffering Body. Illness and Disability in Modern Arabic Literature* (2014), in which the author analyzes representations of sick female bodies in literature produced by Levantine and Egyptian authors from 1950 to the present. She notes a relative absence of the suffering female body, especially in earlier works by male writers (compare 2014: 1–3, 20). Hamdar sketches a historical development in the literature that describes sick female bodies as becoming more and more visible, gaining corporeal presence, and claiming a voice that can tell its own individual story (compare 2014: 21). These are tendencies that we will need to probe for Tunisian novels, especially since there is no seminal study about illness and disability in Tunisian literature at present. The presence of disease and disability in Tunisian literary works is unacknowledged and needs to be explored.

Davis highlights the strong connection between the novel as a genre and the normative expectations that lets a person with impairments seem disabled. The novel partakes in the production of normalcy and, therefore, disability (Davis 1995: 41–42; see also Snyder/Mitchell 2007: 10) even as it participates in the shaping and propagation of the idea of the nation (compare *Introduction*). Davis notes that novels only rarely contain disability as one of the central character's traits. The protagonist is commonly constructed on normative ideas, in order to encourage identification with his or her "universal quality". He or she is meant to reflect the middle, an average that is then propagated as normal (Davis 1995: 42). The opposite of this middleness, the "abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on" then occurs as the direct result and backdrop of normalcy (ibid.). The novel is well suited to reflect and reproduce deeply rooted social conflicts (compare Goodley 2011: 15) and some examples include the colonial situation or the role of men and women in society.

Novels have the potential to question stereotypes of disability and their stigmatization, they do not necessarily just reinforce them. This cannot be the case when disabilities are being used as metaphors to critique a wider social context, for instance, or to flesh out ideological convictions, such as by illustrating a decline in values more generally. This metaphorical use of disability in literature has been criticized (e.g., Davis 1995: 49) and it is debated in the analysis that follows.

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3 Other scholars equally employ the metaphor of haunting to describe the marginalization of characters with disabilities in literature (e.g., in Snyder/Mitchell "Disability Haunting in American Poetics" (2007)). Haunting as a concept will play a central role in the next chapter.

The novels that the present chapter discusses are *al-Tūt al-murr* (1967, 'The bitter mulberries') by Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui (Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī al-Maṭawī) and *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* (2001; 'A dark story of crazy cells') by Alia Mabrouk.[4] The chapter will refer to *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* (1989; 'A return to God's country') by Ridha Bourkhis and *Tammās* (1995; 'Mutually touching'[5]) by Aroussia Nalouti, albeit to lesser degrees, given that these works will be further analyzed in subsequent chapters.

The bodies that are at the center of this chapter are *impaired* in the broadest sense, which seems to be an appropriate term to describe characters with various diseases and disabilities[6]: ʿĀʾisha, a young woman in *al-Tūt al-murr*, is unable to walk after mysteriously falling ill as a small child. She enters El Metoui's novel as seen through the eyes of her older sister Mabrūka, who links her to their father's misery:

> Did he not live these bitter and painful years in worry and sadness? … If not but for the sake of my poor sister ʿĀʾisha. ʿĀʾisha, who does not walk on her feet like everybody, but she crawls on her knees and hands as if she were only a small child. (*Tūt* 11)[7]

Several aspects of disability and its perception are present in this quote that will be addressed further below. The most prominent themes are misery, infantilization, and the connection of impairments with misfortune, sadness, and pain. ʿĀʾisha, as the person with the disability, is spoken *for*. In the eyes of her sister, she is also represented solely by her body and how it differs from the norm.

The protagonist of *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*, breast cancer patient Alia, is not only speaking for herself, but she even dares to disagree with the surgeon's description of her. She is not complaining about a lump in her right breast, she is not feeling bad, she did not even find it herself: "je ne me plains pas, je n'ai pas mal, ce n'est pas moi qui l'a dévouvert" (*Sombre* 6). The breast is surgically removed during the course of the novel. When her doctor checks the healing process, and Alia sees the flat, naked place that was previously her breast, she is disgusted. She feels her lack – or one might say the *impairment* – and has only one wish: the reconstruction of her breast (*Sombre* 59–60, 66).

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4   Both books have gained acclaim in the Tunisian context: *al-Tūt al-murr* was compulsory reading at Tunisian schools (al-Kablūṭī, 2001, 82), while *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* was translated into Arabic and used to promote breast cancer awareness in Tunisia (interview with the author, 6 October 2015). For summaries of the novels, see *Appendix*.

5   Jean Fontaine translates the title as 'Tangence' and discusses its semantic ambiguity. One might translate it as "Touche" ('touch') with reference to the realm of sports or with "Interférence" ('interference') if one prefers the language of mathematics, with "ligne de demarcation" ('demarcation line') in a military context or even "caresse" ('caress') to highlight its erotic connotation. "Tangence" (point of touch, of a tangent) is chosen to reflect the role frontiers and borders play in the novel, according to Fontaine (1997: 62–63). Although I agree with his translations, I favor 'Mutually touching' since grammatically, 'tammās' is the verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of verb form six (*wazn tafāʿala*) which in its basic meaning contains the aspect of mutuality that is especially relevant for the novel's thematization of sexuality, a topic that will be the focus of *Chapter 5*. A point of touch does not contain the same mutuality.

6   Grouping together disabilities and diseases follows the general discourse in the MENA region by which both are conflated (Hamdar 2014: 9).

7   This is my translation. All translations from Arabic or French are mine, except where otherwise stated. They appear between '…' in the text; sections from published translations are quoted between "…"; original quote:
"هل كان يعيش في كآبته وحزنه هذه السنين القاسية الأليمة؟ … لكن من أجل أختي عائشة المسكينة … عائشة التي لا تمشي على قدميها كما يمشي الناس، إنّها تحبو على ركبتيها ويديها كأنّها ما تزال رضيعة في سنته الأولى."

To look at the characters as impaired allows me to discuss them in dialogue with each other; however, this is done without intending to diminish the specificities of their respective experiences. In the quote from *al-Tūt al-murr* given above, ʿĀʾisha's impairment itself is not addressed. Instead, its results are mentioned (crawling instead of walking). The results are due to the barriers that the environment features (spatial distances, no tools such as crutches or a wheelchair). This is reminiscent of the description of disability quoted previously, as the intersection of an impairment with a disabling environment. Exclusion is not only present in the environment, but also in society's view of difference: ʿĀʾisha's situation is compared with what is considered normal (quoted above, *Tūt* 11) and it does not live up to it. This means that a norm is in place in the village, on the one hand. On the other hand, the novel partakes in the propagation of this norm and therefore needs the non-normal as was described previously. Above all, this confirms that disease is a social phenomenon.

Tunisian perspectives on disease, such as Besbes's "Le corps, la maladie et les autres" ('The body, the disease and the others', 1988) and Khawāja's "Mumārasāt wa-taṣawwurāt li-l-marḍ fī al-mujtamaʿ al-tūnisī al-muʿāṣir" ('Actions and notions of disease in contemporary Tunisian society', 2010), offer further insights. Besbes and Khawāja highlight that sections of Tunisian society tend to see the reasons for disease and disability in terms of internal or spiritual faults. This is equivalent to what Goodley calls the "moral position", according to which disability is caused by a fault in the concerned individual's morality.[8] In the "moral position", biological and moral values are understood as belonging together. According to Besbes, the idea that a sick body reflects an unhealthy interior dates back to Babylonian medical thinking. It still remains part of cultural consciousness when female cancer patients experience exclusion, even though cancer is not contagious. In this moral position, the guilt for falling ill is placed on the sick person (1988: 217–218). The physical state obviously says nothing about a person's morality.

One variation on this perspective, inasmuch as it also seeks out a reason for disease outside of the body, is described by Khawāja. Disease, here, is a tribulation from God that has to be met with patience. This view is reflected in the Qur'an and ḥadīth literature that contains reports of the life and sayings of the Prophet.[9] The religious texts influence an individual's willingness to seek out medical support. In the same vein, and based on a strong belief in fate and destiny, is the view that disease is an in-between stage between life and death that cannot be reversed through worldly medicine. Others see a diseased body as one that – previously silent – begins to speak through the disease (compare Khawāja 2010: 94). All of these 'traditional' perspectives, as Khawāja calls them, attempt to explain the origin

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8   This position is one that is strongly refuted by disability studies (Goodley 2011: 6).

9   For example, Surat al-Baqara 2:155 announces that God will test humans with losses and bad things to find out who perseveres:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيءٍ مِنَ الخَوْفِ وَالجَوْعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِنَ الأَمْوَالِ وَالأَنْفُسِ والثَّمَراتِ وَبِشِّرَ الصَّابِرين

One of the prophet's widespread sayings suggests that the believers will be compensated by God who obliterates some of their sins in exchange for all the sorrow that they encounter (such as disease and sadness, or even the prick of a thorn):

"ولا يصيب المسلم من نصب ولا وصب ولا هم ولا حزن ولا أذى ولا غم حتى الشوكة يشاكها إلا كفّر الله بها من خطاياه"

(compare Bukhārī, *Marḍā*: 3; Muslim, *Birr*: 46, according to Wensinck's *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, 1988).

and cause of disease through factors that are external to the body (e.g., divine intervention, fate, or bad morals).

Khawāja also discusses the fluidity of categories such as health and disease, 'normal', and 'abnormal'. She argues that the lines between these opposites are flexible and differ due to changes in place or time (2010: 91). It is not just disability studies that reflect on the categories of disease and health, but also the narratives dealt with in this chapter; Mabrouk's *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* in particular makes clear how disease can be a question of perspective or even knowledge. As the above quote highlights, Alia's cancer was not found due to pain or discomfort. Rather, she felt perfectly fine before her treatment began. The treatment injected poison into her body to fight an 'imaginary' disease that Alia never noticed, even though the cancer had been growing for up to two years already (*Sombre* 35): "Il est dur quand on ne ressent aucun symptôme d'un mal d'aller se faire injecter des poisons pour soigner ce mal que l'on peut qualifier d'imaginaire" (*Sombre* 39).

Another influence on the fluidity of the terminology of healthy, diseased, and disabled is the possibility of a cure, as Davis mentions. He argues that just as easily as people develop disabilities (e.g., through a car accident), in theory, they can be cured (Davis 2002: 9–10, 23, 310).

Due to the elusiveness of the categories, Davis suggests that impairment, incompleteness, or a certain otherness should not be considered as exceptions, but rather as the rule. Everybody has shortcomings in this view and "normalcy is the fantasy" (Davis 2002: 31). This removes the exclusionary function in the binary of healthy and disabled that Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson critique (2001: 2). Healthy and disabled fall within the same spectrum and individuals oscillate between them throughout their lives.

Highlighting the fluidity of the concepts, and the oscillation of individuals between them, deconstructs the idea of the generic body. Normalcy does not exist as the ideal of perfect health, but instead there are varying degrees of impairment. This means that every body is individual and cannot be generalized.

In the remaining chapter, bodies from four different novels will be discussed to explore impairment and disability as a social experience. It analyses how changing social contexts influence the construction of disability and how these changing concepts of disability refer to various understandings of embodiment. The role played by language in both will be addressed. On the one hand, this is done to understand how bodies are thought, constructed, and represented in literary works. On the other hand, this shows Tunisian society across a time frame of over thirty years, were we to consider the times that are depicted, not just looking at the years in which the novels were published. Life in Tunisia changed in this period, allowing disease and disability to shift in the perceptions of the people.

1.3   Disability and the Production of Embodiment. An Analysis of *al-Tūt al-murr*

Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui's novel *al-Tūt al-murr* (1967, 'The bitter mulberries'[10]) begins with an absence. ʿĀʾisha is expected to arrive home by her worried father. In his eyes she is 'small' (*qāṣira*) and incapable (*ʿājiza*) and her older sister should not let her leave the house as much (*Tūt* 15). The absence allows for ʿĀʾisha's representation through her family

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10 The novel has not been translated in its entirety. However, a translation of its first chapter is part of Fontaine, Jean. 1968. "Mohamed Laroussi Metoui." *IBLA Revue* 31 (122): 239–254.

(her sister's description, which was quoted above), but it also indicates a certain amount of agency in ʿĀʾisha and a reluctance to stay behind at home. Through the absence, the novel begins with 'normal' village life in a poor family. The father works as a gardener, his daughter Mabrūka takes care of him, the household as well as the garden owner's donkey. The 'other' to this normalcy is present in its absence. Mabrūka counts among her usual duties the necessity to watch over her sister and does everything the latter is unable to do (*Tūt* 7–16). Mabrūka not only functions as the stereotype of a healthy daughter, but she also partakes in constructing ʿĀʾisha's disabilities in her attempts to 'help' or 'balance out'. From both perspectives, Mabrūka's and her father's, ʿĀʾisha is represented as impaired. However, the reader meets her anew as seen through the eyes of her peer Fāṭima and her brother ʿAbdallah, whose father owns the neighboring garden.

The aspect of space (the rural environment and gardens) needs to be addressed here since it partakes in the construction of the impaired body. Space is connected to presence and absence, to the question of being public or private, to visibility and invisibility, the latter of which were characteristic depictions of disability during the middle of the last century (compare Hamdar 2014: 21). Finally, space is relevant due to the fact that ʿĀʾisha's impairment is one that limits the spaces she has access to; alternatively, seen from the other side, the concrete specifics of space determine her mobility.

The novel is set in a village in the Tunisian South (*Tūt* 126).[11] It is a tightly knit rural community in which ʿĀʾisha's family is considered 'other', not just due to her difference from the bodily norm, but due to the fact that her parents fled from Libya during what her father calls the 'Italian War'. They have no family in the village and are considered outsiders, foreign enough for ʿAbdallah, who works in a shop, to ask ʿĀʾisha's father whether he is new to the village or just passing through upon their first encounter (*Tūt* 43). Village life creates certain freedoms for ʿĀʾisha since she is allowed to visit the neighbor's daughter Fāṭima. Their friendship began when Fāṭima went into the garden to look for a rose:

> That morning, she was surprised by something strange in their neighbor's garden, she heard someone speaking, then singing melodies and songs she had never heard before. When she looked attentively for the source of the voice, she witnessed something peculiar: she saw a tall girl crawl in the garden in the same way as little Aḥmad does. (*Tūt* 36)[12]

Fāṭima feels curious and is attracted to the 'strange sight' (*mashhad gharīb*). She carefully observes how the other girl moves; it seems to her as if she were watching birds or butterflies (*Tūt* 36) – all of these descriptions highlight the exoticization of disability in the eyes of the village girl.

Fāṭima tells her family about her experience and her brother ʿAbdallah in specific is distressed. He immediately reads ʿĀʾisha's impairment as a misfortune and concludes that the disabled girl's future will be miserable and that she will never experience marriage and

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11 Several authors highlight El Metoui's interest in depicting life in the Tunisian countryside and link it to a nationalist interest to show the 'reality' of the Tunisian people (see the discussions by Yaḥī, 2001: 75; Ibn Bilqāsim, 2006: 113).

12 Original quote:

"وفوجئت فاطمة في ذلك الصباح بشيء غريب في بستان جارهم. لقد سمعت كلاما. ثم سمعت صوتا ناعما يردّد نغمات وألحانا لم تسمعها من قبل، فتطلّعت إلى مبعث الصوت فرأت مشهدا غريبا؛ شاهدت بنتا كبيرة تحبو في البستان كما يحبو الطفل أحمد".

motherhood (*Tūt* 37). This alludes to society's expectations for girls and women and will be further addressed below. Later, and guided by a dream, he yearns to see ʿĀʾisha for himself. Eventually, he finds her under a mulberry tree:

> He stopped, stunned and amazed, while a beautiful sight took possession of his feelings, ʿĀʾisha was sitting on the ground, brushing and combing her hair. It was jet-black, open and hanging loosely so that it covered her face entirely and reached until below her shoulders and chest. The sun's rays shone from between the tree's leaves to draw small circles on the ground, her hair and her entire body as if someone had scattered golden coins, sprinkled them here and there so that they sparkled and made the beauty and magnificence apparent. (*Tūt* 66–67)[13]

He does not notice disease or disability, although he must have expected that, but instead what he observes first is beauty. The focus on ʿĀʾisha's hair contains an erotic notion in that it touches her shoulders and chest. Her body seems limited to its upper – non-impaired – half. Since ʿAbdallah does not notice the impairment, the oftentimes tabooed sexuality of people with disabilities (compare Goodley 2011: 40; for Arabic literature, compare Hamdar 2014: 25) does not play out and he can, hence, see ʿĀʾisha as attractive. The connection of the themes of hair and sexuality is standard according to Malti-Douglas (1991: 118).[14]

The environment plays a role in both his perspective as well as in Fāṭima's view of ʿĀʾisha as an exotic creature, as more animal than human. In the natural (or nearly natural) environment of the garden, ʿĀʾisha is also perceived as natural. The garden can be considered inside and outside at the same time, both private and public; it is secluded and access to it is limited, but ʿAbdallah can enter and watch ʿĀʾisha secretly. Yet, he must be aware that he is intruding upon the scene because he steps back before calling out his sister's name (*Tūt* 67). The garden is, in a way, an extension of ʿĀʾisha's home. That ʿAbdallah sees her in a stationary position leaves out any non-normative movement (e.g., crawling) that was present in both Mabrūka's and Fāṭima's defining accounts of ʿĀʾisha. The overall importance of the scene and of the garden is highlighted in the novel's title which refers to the mulberry tree, the place at which all meetings between ʿAbdallah and ʿĀʾisha happen.

ʿAbdallah has not yet seen ʿĀʾisha's face, given that it was hidden under her hair. When he calls Fāṭima's name, ʿĀʾisha 'immediately parts her hair and throws it over her shoulders. Her radiant face appears, nestled in her coal black hair. She gives him a wild look' (*Tūt* 67)[15] which makes him avert his eyes and lets him remember her image for months (*Tūt* 71).

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13 Original quote:

"وقف مأخوذا مشدوها... منظر جميل ملك عليه أحاسيسه وعواطفه... عائشة جالسة على الأرض تمشط شعرها وتسرّحه... كان شعرها فاحم السواد، مسترسلا مسدولا، يغطي كامل وجهها ويتدلّى إلى ما تحت منكبيها وصدرها. وكانت أشعّة الشمس المتسرّبة من خلال الأوراق تشكل دوائر صغيرة على الأرض، وعلى شعر عائشة، وكامل بدنها كأنّما نثرت في المكان كمّية من الدنانير أو "المحبوب" فتناثرت هنا وهناك تبعث بالبريق، وتوحي بالروعة والجمال."

14 Respectively, Joseph Sadan explores the symbolism of hair in classical Arabic poetry in his "Maidens' Hair and Starry Skies. Imagery System and *maʿānī* Guides; the Practical Side of Arabic Poetics as Demonstrated in Two Manuscripts" (1991) and explicitly analyzes the motif of hiding a woman's body under her hair and how it is present in the work of central classical poets as well as in medieval poetic anthologies (compare Sadan 1991: 77–80).

15 Original quote:

The body parts and poses with which ʿĀʾisha and her (non-)impairment are represented differ from scene to scene and offer further insights into the construction of (impaired) bodies in literature. They provoke the question of whether the impairment encompasses her entire body or only parts thereof. Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson write that most disability theorists agree that a disability pertains to the entire person concerned (compare 2001: 11). This is in line with ʿĀʾisha's family's view of her. Susan Sontag, however, offers a contradictory perspective. She argues in *AIDS and its Metaphors* that judgements about disease and disability are oftentimes based on aesthetics, "the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean" (1990: 129). Polio (a disease with certain similarities to ʿĀʾisha's impairment[16]) does not disfigure the face; it affects the limbs only. According to Sontag, it was never excessively resorted to in metaphorical rewriting (e.g., as a reflection of an inner emotional state). The face has a privileged status in definitions of physical beauty[17] and instead of the dualism between body and mind (compare *Introduction*), Sontag sees a dualism of body and face, of a sick body and a beautiful face to be precise. Accordingly, the face can be seen as unconnected to the rest of the body (1990: 127). This perspective suggests that, firstly, the body is a composite of parts and, secondly, that impairment can be localized by an onlooker in some, but not all, parts.

What is missing from the analysis so far is ʿĀʾisha's point of view, which is caused by the fact that she is mainly represented by other characters. This is a disabling tendency within the novel that is in line with the pre-independence period it describes. Colonial suppression, as the introduction noted, was argued through the assumed mental and physical inadequacy of the colonized. Bodies that were perceived as not functioning as expected brought suppression, powerlessness, and absence (or silence) upon themselves. Hamdar makes a similar observation regarding novels by male writers from Egypt and the Levant in which the ill or disabled female body "even when it is present is rendered absent", without "an individual body, affect, subjectivity, or consciousness", without a voice (2014: 63). ʿĀʾisha is allowed to express her own view of her impairment in two instances. She hears from Fāṭima that her brother had experimented with a drug called *takrūrī* (synonym for cannabis, Bulletin on Narcotics, Bouquet 1950, 1951) that lets the consumer forget reality:

> The reality!... My reality… Could I forget it only for a moment? Could it be possible that I live the other reality? So that I walk on my feet, like everybody does? That I straighten up to my full height and stand tall and beautiful like Fāṭima… or Maḥbūba … or Maryam … as tall as the other girls of my age from the village! (*Tūt* 30)[18]

ʿĀʾisha's dream is to escape her reality and to overcome her impairment to behave 'like everybody', suggesting that she does not compartmentalize her disability, but rather con-

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"أمَّا عائشة فما إن سمعت النداء حتى فرقت شعرها ورمت به على كتفيها، فبَان وجهُها الصبوح المشرق في إطار من الشعر الأسود الفاحم. ونظرت إليه بطرف كاسر."

16 The similarities with polio are that both occur spontaneously, are accompanied by fever, and affect and deform the limbs.

17 This is valid for the Arabo-Islamic context as well; compare pre-Islamic poetry and the ideal of the round-faced girl (compare Sadan 1991: 79).

18 Original quote:

"الواقع!... واقعي!...هل أنساه لحظة؟... أيمكن أن أعيش الواقع الآخر... أمشي على رجلي كما يمشي الناس...أن تنتصب قامتي فارعة جميلة كقامة فاطمة... محبوبة... مريم... كقامة أترابي من بنات القرية."

siders her entire reality to be enveloped by it. From her perspective, her being-in-the-world is determined by her disability. She wonders whether or not she might escape it with *takrūrī*. A while later she has the opportunity to ask ʿAbdallah to give her some. He is shocked and denies the request; however, he listens to her reasons. She describes that she has heard that *takrūrī* brings one to a fascinating magical world. She does not ask ʿAbdallah for a cure, but rather for the possibility to experience, if only for a moment, how it feels not to be disabled (compare *Tūt* 135). For her, this feeling is identical with walking 'like every-body', upright and on her feet, which shows how closely her understanding of her impairment is influenced by what she considers 'normal' (i.e., 'the other reality') and her divergence therefrom.

Disability studies scholars agree that social conditions determine what it means to be disabled (compare Wilson/Lewiecki-Wilson 2001: 10; or Goodley 2011: 29). Society makes disability feel like exclusion, as divergence from a majority and its activities that are perceived as 'normal'. In Mabrūka's quote, provided above, the implications of ʿĀʾisha's disability were mentioned, making very clear that disability is not only conceived as a misery for the person directly concerned, but for the entire family.

Disability studies describe society's influence on the creation of the category of disability: Davis, for example, claims that the norm first developed in an industrialized society (compare 1995: 49). Erevelles describes capitalism's influence and how it created the disabled subject in her "In Search of the Disabled Subject" (2001):[19]

> [T]he historical materialist framework reads the subject – its body, consciousness, and meanings – as produced by and through labor. [...*It; C.P.*] is able to map out the dialectical relationship of individuals to social structures as determined by their locations in the social divisions of labor emerging from the social organization of the economy in specific historical contexts. (Erevelles 2001: 99)

Erevelles explicitly links the construction of disability, as an institutionalized category, to "the transformation of Western feudalism into capitalism" and connects its emergence to the beginning of modern society, science, medicine, and the economy (Erevelles 2001: 100). While work became institutionalized and standardized, a norm formed and divergence from the norm was regulated through the constructs administered by science and medicine. According to Erevelles, the concept of disability, as a divergence from the norm, is the same that was used to argue for other exclusions. Her examples are the division of labor on the basis of sex which formed gender as a socio-economic category, the differentiation in classes, castes, and races, and the prescribed heterosexuality in the name of 'the traditional family'. All of this effort was required to keep and spread the oppressive mechanisms that support capitalism and its accumulation of riches (compare: 2001: 105).

Views, such as the one just quoted, cannot be simply applied untested to a context that differs in time and place from the Western context to which the theory was originally applied. The novel *al-Tūt al-murr*, for example, depicts rural Tunisian society. The village economy is based on agricultural production (gardens and the growing of *takrūrī* are men-

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19 In her argument, Erevelles refers to Victor Finkelstein, Michael Oliver and David Nibert who worked on the connection between capitalism and the exclusion of sections of society that were deemed unproductive (compare 2001: 100).

tioned specifically) and not industrialized. Infrastructure seems scarce, especially with regards to medical care. No doctor is mentioned as consulting ʿĀʾisha. While medical services were professionalized at the time, they are not shown as being readily available in the setting of the novel.[20]

Despite capitalism's noticeable influences (e.g., ʿAbdallah's work in the shop or Ibrāhīm's father's grocery store[21]), the village cannot be thought of as modern. However, the village's division of labor is constructed on the basis of divergence. Women's tasks are shown as being different from men's; while the men have specific jobs (e.g., ʿAbdallah and ʿĀʾisha's father), women work in their households by caring for the family and by bearing children. Women's work is institutionalized and regulated through social expectations, not through contracts. ʿĀʾisha, however, is not shown as doing anything at all.

What Erevelles explains is, therefore, not directly transferable to Tunisia. While she argues that institutions were established to single out those who, due to their mental and physical impairments, were unable to work and deserved charity in 17th and 18th century Europe, the novel shows that this was and could not be the case in a Tunisian village in early 20th century. ʿĀʾisha's family, as well as other members of the village community, care for her and there is no direct localized segregation. The aspect of charity, however, does play a role, when ʿAbdallah's and Fāṭima's mother insists on inviting ʿĀʾisha for lunch for example. In these instances, ʿĀʾisha is shown as being specifically infantilized, since whether she leaves or stays for the meal is decided for her (*Tūt* 15).

Another difference lies in the understanding of disability as a social fate, not just as a personal tragedy (described as such by Snyder/Mitchell 2007: 9). The fact that the first is the case shows that embodiment as being-in-the-world focuses on society and the individual's place in it within the novel. ʿĀʾisha's father accordingly describes the repercussions her disability has, not only for herself but also for her sister Mabrūka: 'Her life stopped with us, she forgot her youth and ignored it. Girls of her age are now married and have children. But she lives in grief and deprivation'[22] (*Tūt* 128). These lines do more than document the expectations for young women, they also produce and propagate these expectations further. ʿĀʾisha, if she were healthy, would be expected to marry, bear children, and care for both her family and the household. However, she is not considered to be able to fulfil these tasks and is, therefore, seen as "unproductive" (Erevelles 2001, 106).

This becomes especially clear when ʿAbdallah expresses his wishes to marry ʿĀʾisha, despite her impairment. Instead of trying to understand her son, his mother first thinks that he is speaking about another girl named ʿĀʾisha, then that he is joking, and finally that he

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20 For Western medicine's beginnings in Tunisia during the times of the protectorate, see Khawāja 2010: 91–92; see furthermore Angel M. Foster's dissertation *Women's Comprehensive Health Care in Contemporary Tunisia* (2001, unpublished) that explores Tunisian health infrastructure and notes a lack of access to medical services in the South. In the 1980s (i.e., a considerable amount of time after the events of the novel), Foster notes that only 8 per cent of the country's physicians practice in the South where almost 15 per cent of the country's population live. In comparison, 34 per cent of the population live in the North-East with 57 per cent of the physicians at their service (2001: 91).

21 ʾIbrāhīm's father lost a leg in the war; however, he is not shown as being disabled, but merely as a successful entrepreneur. Only when the generational conflict between him and his son peaks is he shown as having difficulties fetching his prosthesis (*Tūt* 189).

22 Original quote:

"لقد وقفت حياتها علينا، نسيت شبابها وتجاهلته... أتراب مبروكة متزوجات ولهنّ أطفال. أما هي ففي اللوعة والحرمان!"

has gone insane (*Tūt* 200–201): 'Her eyes were bulging, she feverishly spat out heated words: - A lame girl… a cripple… a scabby goat… a crooked camel, oh good-for-nothing…'[23] (*Tūt* 202). Her husband joins her in her concern:

> Listen, ʿAbdallah, considering that you marry this woman… Do you think that you will reach comfort and happiness with her?! No, never! Who will see after her affairs, let alone yours? Will you give her a servant or a second wife? She is crippled, lame… she crawls on the floor… she sweeps the courtyard with her bosom, she rakes the earth with her belly, she crawls… open your eyes widely, and distance yourself from this tragedy! Oh may God help you! (*Tūt* 206)[24]

Both parents do not want their son to marry ʿĀʾisha, despite the fact that she was accepted as Fāṭima's friend and guest during lunches. She was granted charity, but is not accepted as an equal to their children. Moreover, she is seen as a danger for ʿAbdallah's future. The productive function of language becomes apparent in the parents' reactions. The quotes suggest not only a walking impairment but scabbiness, crookedness, ill morals, and overall animalism with sexual undertones, especially in the description of her sweeping bosom and raking belly. This eroticization is in line with what Goodley highlights as the contradictory ways in which disabling culture sees people with disabilities: "as appalling/appealing, [*with; C.P.*] fear/fascination, hate/love, genocide/paternalism" (2011: 131). ʿĀʾisha's proximity to the floor and the earth and her traits and spaces are linked to mental and physical uncleanliness and ugliness. She is equated with disability understood in this way, a disability that is not only different, but which is a tragedy that demands one to keep a distance. Her embodiment, as represented by her prospective parents-in-law, is entirely characterized by the impairment. It is seen with a focus on the community and the places that she can or cannot take up due to her impairment.

The treatment of people with disabilities reflects back on overall society and its own "precarious position". Society forms and consolidates itself by excluding others, for example by "demonising dis/abled bodies" (Goodley 2011: 15). This shows the productive function of embodiment; excluded, impaired bodies are the negatives that shape society. Embodiment is, therefore, not only produced by society, but it also produces it.

ʿAbdallah's parents have to expect weakness in old age, when family has to function as social security and provide for the elder generation. Their behavior can, therefore, be seen as an effort both to keep the non-normative from entering their family and to safeguard their future. The quotes show that social expectations form barriers that prevent an individual's integration when the individual's ability to meet their expectations is considered non-existent. ʿAbdallah's mother did not even think about ʿĀʾisha as a bride that her son might suggest and when he does marry her, the mother moves out of the family home in protest (*Tūt* 211).

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23 Original quote:
"فجحظت عيناها، واندفعت تقذف كلماتها ملتهبة. ـ ... مقعدة... كسيحة... عنز جرباء... حدبة بعير... يا خيبتي".
24 Original quote:
"اسمع، يا عبد الله. لنفرض أنّك تزوجت هذه المرأة. هل تعتقد أنك ستنال معها الراحة والهناء؟! لا... أبدا... من سيديّر شؤونها قبل شؤونك؟ ...هل ستأتي لها بالخدم أم بالضرائر؟ .. إنّها كسيحة، مقعدة... تحبو على الأرض... تكنس القاعة بصدرها... تجرّ التراب ببطنها... تزحف... افتح عينيك جيدا، وابتعد عن هذا المأزق يصلح الله حالك."

ʿĀʾisha is not given a voice or even an opinion with regards to the marriage. It is entirely narrated from ʿAbdallah's perspective, an issue which further reflects her position in the village as an infantilized receiver of charity. This is also part of ʿAbdallah's argument for why he must marry her. The other girls face less difficulties in finding a husband and if he does not ask for ʿĀʾisha's hand in marriage, no one will (*Tūt* 204–205). However, this does not entirely reflect ʿAbdallah's own perspective as Jannāt analyses (1970: 99). ʿAbdallah has romantic feelings for ʿĀʾisha and his insistence to marry her for rational reasons is only used as a pretext.

A large part of the novel's action is linked to ʿĀʾisha and her disability as well as society's manner of dealing with it. However, ʿAbdallah is given more attention in order to show how he, as a part of the village society, reacts to her in what could be considered a non-normative way. As a result, ʿĀʾisha's embodiment is perceived and constructed from the outside through a reading of her body from two perspectives, that of ʿAbdallah and that of the other people in the village. It is discursively produced by society and its idea of normalcy. Her own perspective is marginalized and is also influenced by society's reading of her impairment.

Following ʿAbdallah and ʿĀʾisha's marriage there is a gap in the narrative that catches up with the couple when ʿĀʾisha gives birth to a son, fulfilling expectations from which she was previously excluded. This gap highlights another absence that haunts the novel, namely the lack of a reference to her (most likely tabooed) sexuality that was only alluded to in ʿAbdallah's father's eroticization of ʿĀʾisha's disabled body. ʿĀʾisha miraculously recovers from her paralysis after giving birth and can stand on her own two feet again. Overjoyed, ʿAbdallah runs to regain his mother's approval and bring her back to the family home. Along the way, he has an accident that leaves him unconscious (*Tūt* 213–214), which is when the narrative abruptly ends.

This turn of events influences the construction of disability in the novel. First of all, ʿĀʾisha's 'cure' can be read metaphorically in addition to its literal meaning. As was described previously, disability is thought of as a diversion from norms and expectations. Since childbearing was identified as one of the key expectations for women in the rural society of the novel, ʿĀʾisha claims the norm for herself by having a baby boy. Even without being able to walk upright, one might argue that she would have overcome her disability by proving herself to be productive according to her society's expectations. She has not defied or criticized society's prescriptions for her, but has instead proven that she is 'normal' in society's terms. That this pressure to comply is destructive can be found in the end when ʿAbdallah wishes for his mother's forgiveness and gets injured, possibly resulting in a permanent impairment. Potential disability is shown to haunt all characters. From one second to the next, it is possible for humans to develop a disease of an impairment or even to disappear due to the vulnerability of existence and the fluidity of the categories of healthy and impaired. Although this is only alluded to, one might read the end as a reversal of roles between ʿĀʾisha and ʿAbdallah with the latter getting more dependent (or even becoming disabled) and the former recovering.[25]

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25 Commentators have not paid much attention to the end of the novel, perhaps because it complicates ʿAbdallah's reading as a good person who has to suffer inexplicable misfortune. Ibn Bilqāsim, for one, com-

While the specifics of space have been discussed above, the issue of time deserves further attention to read how the bodies being depicted relate to a text-external reality. The village shown is one that is at the brink of modernity, yet traditional structures and gender roles remain. The historical context is the French protectorate and the popular resistance against it. While some members of the parental generation collaborate with the French, to enrich themselves, the youth are more critical (Ibn Bilqāsim discusses the generational conflict in this context; 2006: 114). The youths' resistance is concentrated in ʿAbdallah's insistence to marry ʿĀʾisha against his parents' wishes and in a non-compliance with the consumption of *takrūrī* that develops throughout the course of the novel. Jean Fontaine accordingly describes the novel primarily as a testimony of the struggle against the cultivation and selling of the drug during the protectorate (Fontaine 1968: 240). ʿAbdallah's friends plan to fight against *takrūrī* and to save their country from colonial influence. Behind their initiative stands the refusal to be kept docile by way of a drug the consumption of which the colonizer bans at home, even while it is allowed in the protectorate (compare *Tūt* 150). Muḥammad al-Mukhtār Jannāt writes that the general resistance of the young against the colonizer begins in the novel with the resistance against *takrūrī* (1970: 97). Safwan Masri mentions the novel as an example of literary works that highlight the importance of the nationalist movement in Tunisian identity. Masri notes how these post-independence works offered an alternative view and wrote against Bourguiba's effort to take all the credit for the independence movement. Masri highlights how, instead, they underscored the important role played by ordinary Tunisians in ending colonialism (compare Masri: 212).

The friends' initiative forms the second main issue that the novel deals with after disability. The two are connected through the exchange between ʿĀʾisha and ʿAbdallah, quoted above. Both issues place the narrative strongly within debates about Tunisian modernity and suggest El Metoui's effort to educate the young nation.[26]

After he was initially irritated that ʿĀʾisha asked him for drugs, ʿAbdallah promises her that he will save her from her reality. He will not save her with *takrūrī*, he announces, and she will have to be patient (*Tūt* 135). Apart from the paternalism contained in the fact that he does not let her choose her own treatment, instead claiming to know better, the exchange contains a saviorist metaphorical element. He wants to 'save' her, and this can be read both positively and negatively in relation to Tunisian politics, independence, and the role of president Ḥabīb Bourguiba. The strong male figure can be either protective or patronizing. However, such a critical reading is not discussed in Tunisian analyses of the novel. Instead, ʿAbdallah's behavior is read positively as a commentary on the Tunisian people under the French protectorate and the budding Tunisian nationalism.

Disability studies criticize metaphorical readings of disability in literature. They argue that such readings foreclose the possibility to experience disability through literature by turning the subject into a placeholder for another concern (e.g., the crippling effect of colonialism). Attention is drawn away from the discussion of disability for the benefit of other

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ments upon it and merely calls the end "mīlūdrāmiyya" ('melodramatic'), but does not explore its implications for the narrative further (2006: 118).

26 Ibn Bilqāsim critiques the plot regarding its inclusion of the marriage. He argues that ʿAbdallah would have to be an intellectual to decide against his parents' wishes and suggests that the choices El Metoui makes reflect his wish to educate his readers more than anything (Ibn Bilqāsim 2006: 117, 113, 120).

issues (compare Snyder/Mitchell 2007: 5). However, a reading that at least recognizes the political tones of the narrative is strongly suggested by *al-Tūt al-murr* and was attempted here, despite the caution called for by disability studies. The inclusion of metaphoric meaning is supported by Nouri Gana who touches on the novel in his comments about the tendencies of dissent in Tunisian literature in his introduction to the edited volume *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution* (2013). For Gana, *al-Tūt al-murr* presents "both the struggle against colonialism and the misery of subaltern Tunisians" (2013: 17).

Ultimately, the analysis of *al-Tūt al-murr* leads to the hypothesis that social expectations in the text are gendered and depend upon a construction of normalcy that reflects text-external ideals, while also reproducing them. Expectations appear to determine the text-internal understanding of disability which, as a consequence, is gendered and becomes a reflection of text-external issues. Embodiment in the novel was shown to be discursively constructed through society by creating demands for the individual's being-in-the-world (in the form of expectations). The novel suggests that the individual's embodiment is dominated by society as the status quo for text-external Tunisia. In the following section, the consistency of this construction of embodiment will need to be probed in more recently published texts, especially with regards to the individual's position towards society and how the construction of embodiment and the position of the individual might be both products of and productive of text-external society. How far embodiment is historically changing within the texts, as a prescription for text-external reality, will be discussed. This line of argument returns us, by necessity, to the critique of the positing of 'the human body' as a generic ideal.

1.4   Intermission: Impaired Embodiment, Gendered Embodiment?

How embodiment is thought in Tunisian literature, particularly whether embodiment is gendered, needs to be explored further. In order to do so, the close connection between disability and sexuality will be analyzed in two other Tunisian novels before the chapter continues with the second main case study. *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* (1989; 'A return to God's country') by Ridha Bourkhis and *Tammās* (1995; 'Mutually touching') by Aroussia Nalouti were chosen for analysis because they offer almost opposite images of 'impaired' sexuality by focusing on a male and a female character with an impairment, respectively.[27]

The novels were published roughly 20 years after *al-Tūt al-murr*; one of them is set in Tunis while the other once again takes place in a village community. However, in both novels, and quite unlike in the older novel, there is a distancing twist in the narrative perspective. In *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, the narrator returns to his village after he has spent 20 years abroad. He solves old mysteries about disease and death as someone who does not quite belong to the community anymore. In *Tammās*, a detached perspective is created through a generational difference that allows a daughter to critically narrate her mother's health issues and her parents' relationship. She does so both directly and indirect-

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27 It is interesting to remark that both authors have engaged with the body in literature as a topic of criticism themselves. Bourkhis wrote an article on "La connotation du corps dans l'œuvre de Tahar Ben Jelloun", 1992. In 1994, Nalouti received her "Certificat d'aptitude à la recherche" for a study about the body in the contemporary Arabic novel ("Le corps dans le roman arabe contemporain" according to Fontaine 1997: 55).

ly throughout the novel she writes in the novel. It is not just time that is different though; place and perspective are different too, as the references to sexuality in both novels are bolder than the allusions made in *al-Tūt al-murr*.

All novels share a connection between disability or disease and sexuality that is based on society's expectations. The gendered nature of disability was noticeable in the previous section. Non-impaired men were those who worked and provided for their families; Ibrāhīms's father was not considered disabled, even though he lost a leg in the war. Meanwhile non-impaired women were expected to bear children and care for their family and home; ʿĀʾisha's case showed how her disability was constructed based on her failure to fulfil social expectations.

In the following examination, the effects of reproductive impairments will be explored for men and women respectively in order to analyze how the reproductive function differs in its relevance for men and women and their construction as able or disabled. Through this, we find an answer to the question of how embodiment is gendered. The characters highlighted throughout this section are minor characters in their respective novels. However, they themselves and their impairments are central for the course of the narratives and function as mirrors for values and gender expectations that are present in the sections of society depicted.

In *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, the officer Mohamed Salah is unable to have sexual intercourse with his wife. The officer describes his problem to the narrator of the novel, his wife's former lover. Although he desires and caresses her, he is not aroused and his penis remains in an interminable slumber. 'I admired her body that I could not possess, penetrate, kiss, make more beautiful and hotter, that I could not transform into an ocean of pleasure and in whose meandering ways I could not unload my anger, my misfortune and my inhibited desires'. The officer assumes he was the victim of a witch, a she-devil, who has condemned his penis to death (*Retour* 132).[28]

A sense of disconnect between body (penis) and mind is perceivable in the officer's description. This separation renders the officer's embodiment problematic; he cannot be in the world as an integrated individual of mind and body. Instead, he marginalizes his entire body, its desires, and passions. By positing this negative example, the narrative turns the integration of body and mind and, most importantly, the realization of desire into an aspired state. This recovers the importance of sexuality, a topic which was ignored in the previous novel.

While the officer believes that he is under a spell, it is debatable whether his sexual dysfunction can be called a disability or a disease and whether it even has to be; it is an impairment in any case. It is reminiscent of the previous section's examination in which disability for women was at least partly defined via the ability to reproduce or its impossibility. The crucial difference between this and the earlier case, however, is that this time a man is concerned. Men's productivity, based on the standards of the society depicted, is not (only) determined by their ability to reproduce but, as explored in *al-Tūt al-murr*, by their ability to work and to provide. Despite the fact that the impairment does not form a disability in

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28   Original quote: "J'admirais son corps que je ne pouvais posséder, pénétrer, baiser, rendre plus beau et plus chaud, transformer en un océan de plaisir et décharger dans ses méandres ma colère, mon malheur et mes désirs freinés. […] Mon sexe ne réagit pas. Il était comme toujours plongé dans un sommeil interminable."

the village context, or renders the officer as unproductive, it does jeopardize his wellbeing; he is excluded from a fulfilling marriage. However, it is the question of whether the impairment itself (and the fact that he cannot sexually satisfy his wife and give her a child) excludes him or whether it is his manner of dealing with the dysfunction. He is aggressive towards her and refuses to strive for another form of intimacy. His impairment only becomes apparent in private, which is why it does not influence how he is perceived and how his embodiment is understood by others. The impairment does not envelop his entire body. His virility is supported by other external markers (he is a respected officer, a masculinizing position in direct contrast with his privately contested masculinity[29]; *Retour* 41).

His wife would like to escape her marriage, but she cannot ask for divorce, her parents would not support it: 'They do not want to believe that there is something wrong with him physically and that he has a shortcoming that he carefully hides behind being a married man' (*Retour* 68).[30] Interestingly, here it is not his violent behavior that is given as the primary reason for divorce, but his 'flaw' ("tare"), his erectile dysfunction. The description is taken from a letter to the narrator, the wife's lover. The letter is written by her friend, and it calls upon the narrator to use the sexual dysfunction as leverage to free the wife from her unhappy marriage: 'Go to her husband and ask him to let her go in dignity. As soon as he finds out that you know everything, he will do it to keep you from telling everyone about *it*' (*Retour* 68, my emphasis).[31] The word 'it', or "en" in the French original, here refers to the dysfunction which shows the amount of shame it contains and the influence it could have on the officer's perception once the village society becomes aware of it.

While the officer presents himself as a victim of magical forces, his behavior shows him as a key driver of the narrative. He tells the narrator that he hit his wife to punish her for his own inability (*Retour* 132) and that he killed her out of jealousy when he found out about her affair (*Retour* 136). Again, the officer replaces sexual potency with violence.

In *Tammās*, the problem is turned on its head. Nalouti plays with two levels of fictionality since her protagonist, Zaynab, writes her own novel featuring a female protagonist, also called Zaynab, and events that are very similar to her life.[32] In the novel-within-the-novel Dīja has peritonitis, an inflammation of the tissue that lines the inner wall of the abdomen. Zaynab overhears the diagnosis:

> 'We opened the abdomen and closed it again without taking anything out. It was impossible to differentiate the organs since the womb had developed into a spongy mess that made the shapes blurry and decomposed everything that was around it.' […] The doctor walked past her and left her in total paralysis. From afar the rest of the conversation between the surgeons reached her: Une péritonite – un uterus méconnaissable.[33] The definite verdict discouraged her although she did not understand the details. (*Tammās* 93–94)[34]

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29 This masculinization through being an officer, however, can be read as a replacement of his 'impaired' masculinity, which turns it into a symbol of his anxiety about his masculine identity.

30 Original quote: "Ils ne veulent pas croire que l'officier manque de quelque chose dans son corps, qu'il a une tare qu'il couvre avec vigilance par son statut d'homme marié!"

31 Original quote: "Va à son mari et demande-lui de la libérer dignement. Lorsqu'il apprendra que tu sais tout, il s'exécutera pour que tu n'ailles pas en parler aux autres".

32 For more details, see the novel's synopsis in the *Appendix*.

33 The diagnosis is given in French in the original.

34 Original quote:

The condition can be caused through internal injuries (e.g., a perforation of organs) and Zaynab understands that it was caused by her mother's self-administered abortions. These were undertaken due to a lack of access to professional abortions. Amnesty International's report *Assaulted and Accused. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tunisia* (2015) notes that although Tunisia was the first Muslim country in 1965 to allow abortions in the first three months of the pregnancy if the woman already had five children or more, and despite the general right to abort until the end of the first trimester of a pregnancy since 1973, the situation is different in practice. The report notes that oftentimes the clinic staff does not accept unmarried women, on the basis of the argument that the father's consent is necessary. Abortions are also hindered by the staff through delays until the procedures are no longer permitted (compare 2015: 65). Zaynab's mother never told any details about the abortions, as if they 'belonged to her numerous household chores. Only the womb knew what had happened between them. It alone carried her secrets until it corroded and dissolved' (*Tammās* 100).[35]

The impairment described is not a disability, but instead in Dīja's case a fatal disease. It is presented from within medical discourse, and it is precisely diagnosed by doctors; their objectifying and dehumanizing tone lets the patient disappear, all that remains are the deformed organs – again the impairment envelops the entire body. Further distance between the patient and the condition is achieved by giving the diagnosis in French. This allows otherness to enter the text by creating a visual and linguistic obstacle both for the reader as well as for the characters in the novel who do not necessarily immediately understand the diagnosis. Zaynab's mother is blamed for her condition by associating it with the self-administered abortions. However, the social aspects of these abortions are not discussed directly (e.g., the reasons causing the unwanted pregnancies, the role of the father and the possibility of marital rape; access to contraceptives and safe abortions).

It needs to be repeated that the disease is narrated as part of a novel-within-the-novel. While the protagonist's actual mother, Khadīja, was also ill for weeks (compare *Tammās* 52), it is not clarified whether she is suffering from the same impairment. Through the novel-within-the-novel, a fictionalized daughter narrates a fictionalized mother's disease. This is a version of a narrative situation that Abir Hamdar addresses in her study *The Female Suffering Body*. According to Hamdar, many works written by women between 1950 and 2000 feature the trope of the sick woman being narrated through her daughter while the diseased finds her own voice only slowly and in slightly later works (compare 2014: 73, 92, 96).[36] Accordingly, the mother is shown in Zeynab's representation as passive and without

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"قالت لها الطبيبة بعد العمليّة الجراحيّة [...] 'لقد فتحنا البطن وأعدنا إغلاقه... لم نستأصل شيئا، لم نتعرّف على أي جهاز في الداخل... إن الرحم غدا غابة... غابة اسفنجية... انطمست أشكالها وتعفّنت مجاريها.' [...] تجاوزتها الطبيبة تاركة إياها في حالة شلل كامل. وكانت تصلها من بعيد بقيّة حديث مع الجراحين
'Une péritonite – un uterus méconnaissable'.
أقعدها الحكم الباتّ وإن لم تتبيّن تفاصيله".

35 Original quote:
"وكأنّه شغل من ضمن أشغالها المنزليّة المتعدّدة. وحده الرحم يدري ما دار بينها وبينه. ووحده حمل أسرارها إلى حدّ التأكّل والذوبان..."

36 Hamdar discusses as her primary examples: Ḥanān al-Shaykh's *Faras al-shayṭān* (1975), ʿĀliya Mamdūḥ's *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* (1986), Salwā Bakr's *al-ʿAraba al-dhahabiyya lā taṣʿad ilā al-samāʾ* (1991), and Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī's *al-Khibāʾ* (1996).

agency, silent even: 'She concealed its [*her womb's; C.P.*] pain, as well as hiding its screams, until it broke and spat out all that it was no longer able to carry, so that it over-flowed and was torn apart' (*Tammās* 101)[37]. The mother's only agency is to be found in what eventually caused the peritonitis, the repeated abortions. The impairment can be thought as acquired due to a compliance with social expectations (the female sexual avail-ability) in combination with her natural fertility that ran counter to personal interests (as re-flected in the pregnancy interruptions). Integral elements of the construction of femininity at the time are shown by alluding to the availability required of the female body. It – in Hamdar's words – "exposes and denounces the cruelty and hypocrisy of patriarchal authori-ty" (2014: 91). This forms an oscillation between "opposing forces" in combination with Zaynab's own experiences, her active sexuality in particular (an issue that is analyzed fur-ther in *Chapter 5*). Hamdar describes this oscillation with regards to the novels that she studied as the tendency to "*both* internalize patriarchal representations of female physical illness *and* offer a radical counter-history which gives voice to suffering" (2014: 91). Ac-cordingly, the mother is partially responsible for her impairment. Zaynab, even though she is independent, struggles to find her personal agency.

The fictional impairment, together with Zaynab's descriptions of her actual parents' marriage and her mother's difficult relationship with her body, highlight the older genera-tion's estrangement from the physical and from bodily pleasures in general. It resembles the issues that the officer experienced with his body. Zaynab's mother began to cherish her body only at an advanced age. She developed a keenness to go to the *hammām* where she learned, from other women, how to care for her body that had not been cared for before (*Tammās* 61).

A comparison between the two novels shows a separation of female and male diseases (penis vs. womb). Social expectations dictate what is 'normal', gender-conforming behav-ior (sexual prowess vs. sexual availability). A gendered way of dealing with the disease (violence to cover up one's incapabilities vs. silencing the pain until the damage is irrepara-ble) also follows the lines of established male and female stereotypes of active and pas-sive.[38] The analysis further confirmed the connection between reproductive issues and dis-ease/disability in the novels studied.

It can be noted that society's involvement in disease has changed since the time of *al-Tūt al-murr*: There is only an indirect involvement in the form of general expectations with regards to assumed gender roles, but no direct confrontation as in the earlier novel when ʿAbdallah's parents warn him not to marry ʿĀʾisha. In both *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* and *Tammās*, only the closest family members know about the impairments; this might be due to the fact that the issues are intimate and invisible in standard social contexts. Intimate contexts are required to bring them out, such as sexuality, confidential conversation among friends, or a medical context.

However, the impairments are reflected in the narratives. First of all, there is the aspect that the past leaves wounds. Zaynab's mother was abused by her mother-in-law and fails to

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37 Original quote:
"كانت تكتم أوجاعه كما كتمت نداءاته، حتى انفطر ولفظ كلّ ما لم يعد قادرا على حمله ففاض وانفلق".

38 These were reflected in *al-Tūt al-murr*'s conceptualization of male and female productivity outside and inside the home in terms of wage work and housekeeping.

see her husband independently from his mother (*Tammās* 54–57). The narrator in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* solves decade-old murders and brings the officer to tears when the latter speaks about his impairment and the killing of his wife (*Retour* 134–136). The narrative structures of the novels themselves seem wounded or impaired in that they do not follow a chronological order. In *Tammās*, as we have seen, two narratives are intertwined in a way that lets them overlap and irritate the reader, not unlike a character that does not fulfill social expectations. In *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, chronology is suspended while the narrative oscillates between the narrator's memories, his experiences upon returning to his village, old letters, and ghostly apparitions of former companions.

Embodiment in the two novels is constructed more from the perspective of the individual than from society, as was the case in *al-Tūt al-murr*. However, it is still established through a narrator and is not represented by the individual. This continues the relative absence of the diseased character, particularly in *Tammās*. The sick mother's embodiment was not portrayed from her own perspective, thereby limiting access to her embodied experience of the world. Both the officer and the mother were enveloped by their diseases. There was, however, a difference to be noted between men and women. Despite the absence of sexual prowess, the male character was able to replace potency in his self-representation as a functioning male. In contrast, the sick woman was unable to distance herself from her disease and became entirely the sick body (compare the scene quoted above involving the surgeon). In both cases, we find characters with specific and not generic bodies. This challenges the notion of the ideal body, not only because it is problematic to think, as has been outlined, but also because it does not exist in literature. In its place, literature contains individual bodies.

1.5   Disease and Embodiment in the First Person: *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*

The intermission explored the interconnections of gender, disease/disability, and embodiment, after *al-Tūt al-murr* had highlighted the relevance of these topics. In this section, disease and embodiment will be explored from the perspective of a female, first person narrator to get access to a patient's experience of the world and to analyze her construction of embodiment. First of all, we need to return to Csordas' critique of the 'reading' of bodies. For him, the attempt to read bodies suggests a primacy of textuality over embodiment as the "mode of presence and engagement in the world". He criticizes this and argues that embodiment should be textuality's "dialectic partner" (1994: 12; compare *Introduction*). In analyzing literary works, this study most certainly reads bodies and bodies represented in language in particular. However, in reading narratives written in the first person, access is granted to the central character's perspective on his/her embodiment. A written embodiment, in narratives with autobiographical elements, is understood to be connected to the author's body. This highlights the primacy of the body over the text, which evades Csordas' criticism and suggests a dialectic between body and text.

Alia Mabrouk's *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* (2001) will be discussed in this section. The novel offers a contemporary view of disease in its dealing with cancer. Cancer has

been termed the disease of the century; however, awareness of it has existed since premodern times (Sontag 1978: 70–71[39]; Sontag 1990: 122).

In *Fractured Borders* (2005), Mary K. DeShazer gives an overview of women's cancer writing and argues that while in Western contexts it existed since the 1960s, it has grown in volume especially since the beginning of the 1990s. In this time, it has overcome the silencing that was practiced around cancer (compare DeShazer 2005: 1–2). *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* fits into this trend that can also be noted, for example, in the Lebanese writer Evelyne Accad's account *The Wounded Breast: Intimate Journey Through Cancer* (2001).[40] Similarly, *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* is a record of Mabrouk's experiences as a breast cancer patient. The autobiographical aspect is not noted in the print edition consulted, but Mabrouk explicitly highlights it.[41] The disease is in the foreground and the narrative follows the protagonist from the diagnosis to the end of treatment. There are no intermissions, intersections of parallel narratives, or retrospectives.

DeShazer highlights feminist inclinations in literature about cancer. Evelyn Accad, for example, belongs to a group of engaged feminist writers. She is not sparse in her criticism of the medical establishment, as well as the power structures that do not protect consumers against exposure to carcinogens. In comparison, *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* is less politically engaged or socio-critical and might, therefore, be more closely aligned to the mainstream of the genre that does not voice critique or complaints too directly (cf. Ehrenreich 48, DeShazer 2005: 4). However, agency is nonetheless developed in Mabrouk's positioning towards the medical realm, and in claiming the ultimate narrative authority in telling her own story, as will become clear below.

The difficulty to comprehend one's cancer is suggested in the very first quote from the novel (see *Section 1.2* above). The diagnosis is usually not a relieving explanation for a previous physical symptom, but instead arrives to the patient unannounced; it is a verbal statement that is relatively unconnected to the patient's body. Language and metaphors play an exceptional role in the effort to bridge this disconnect and to better grasp cancer. The novel's title suggests this already; *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* alludes to the experience of cancer as chaotic, the work of cells that have gone mad ("*cellules folles*"). The madness implies irrationality, a lack of control. Sontag describes the language that is employed to address cancer as evoking an "economic catastrophe: that of unregulated, abnormal, incoherent growth". The cancer cells are unrestrained and "continue to grow and extend over each other" (Sontag 1990: 62–63). This is an anarchy that is not desired in the context of capitalism, as outlined above, as it strives forward and (re)produces the category of normalcy. The story's darkness ("*Sombre Histoire*") adds a sense of strangeness and mystery as well as tragedy, sadness, and fear of the unknown. The title creates a distance by suggesting that it is the story of 'crazy cells' (and not one about the author herself or herself as a cancer patient) which contradicts the autobiographical elements. This can again be

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39 The first mentioned source, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) is Susan Sontag's reflection of her own experience with cancer, a theoretical exploration.

40 Although published in the same year as Mabrouk's account, sections of it already appeared in English language women's journals in the mid-1990s (compare Hamdar 2014: 18).

41 In a personal interview with the author on 6 October 2015. The protagonist is called Alia like the novel's author. To avoid confusion, in the following Alia will be used to describe the protagonist while Mabrouk refers to the author.

illuminated by Sontag, who writes that: "[i]n cancer, non-intelligent […] cells are multiply-ing, and you are being replaced by the non-you" (1990: 67). The invasive element of cancer that is alluded to in this quote is present in Mabrouk's account:

> For crying out loud, it is not shitty cancer that is going to get me. I see it threatening in front of me, I will serve it hit after hit. I will kill it before it kills me. It is an orderly fight. Cancer is the traitor, it crept into me. The doctors who follow up with me were unable to detect it. It is therefore down to me to deliver it the vengeful blow. (*Sombre* 24)[42]

War rhetoric is certainly present in this quote (*coup pour coup*, *tuer*, *traître*, *combat*, *coup vengeur*). It expresses the patient's view of the disease as the enemy, as the 'other' (com-pare Sontag 1990: 97–99, 112). Unlike Sontag, Mabrouk does not scrutinize these meta-phors of cancer. Instead, she uses them as a backdrop for what Alia struggles for and can never reach, 'normalcy'. Waking up after the surgery, she goes for a walk and then decides to change her clothes, not allowing herself to think about the cancer: 'I feel better and de-cided to chance. I have excluded the word cancer from my mind, I do not attempt to know why I am there […] I put on a blouse and jeans, it is out of the question that I stay in my pajamas.' Not only does the protagonist take off the pajamas or gown that a patient com-monly wears in hospital, but she also hides the post-operative drains in her clothes (*Sombre* 15).[43] The concealment of the fact that she has cancer is not unusual; the wish to pretend everything is normal is related to the severity of the disease and the resulting stigmatization of cancer patients (Sontag 1990: 97–99, 112).

The act of writing about the cancer experience itself is not addressed in the novel pre-cisely because the narrator is aware of the potency of language; she bans the word 'cancer' from her mind, keeping the diagnosis at a distance from her body. This suggests that lan-guage can not only produce disease, but also participate in the effort to ignore it. Alia is shown to work on other pieces of writing instead, which again is attributable to her desire to maintain a normal life.

Normalcy, which the introduction to this chapter has developed as an ideal, is striven for as a "privilege". According to Garland-Thomson, the "visually unobtrusive body", and therefore 'normal' body, which goes unnoticed is exceptional and is the goal of modern men and women: "Beauty, then, dictates corporeal standards that create not distinction but utter conformity to a bland look that is at the same time unachievable, so as to leash us to consumer practices that promise to deliver such sameness" ("Integrating Disability, Trans-forming Feminist Theory", 2002: 4, 11–12). An amputated breast has no place in this standard of beauty, given that it forms an exception to the rule and thereby creates attention that is averted with the demand that "the amputated breast must always pass for the norma-tive, sexualized one either through concealment or prosthetics" (Garland-Thomson 2002:

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42 Original quote: "Nom d'un chien ce n'est pas un cancer de merde qui va m'avoir. Je le vois là devant moi menaçant, je lui rends coup pour coup. Je le tuerai avant qu'il ne me tue. C'est un combat en ordre, lui c'est le traître, il s'est insinué en moi sans que les médecins qui me suivaient n'aient pu le déceler donc c'est à moi de lui porter le coup vengeur."

43 Original quote: "Je me sens mieux et décide de me changer. J'ai exclu le mot cancer de mon esprit, je ne cherche pas à savoir pourquoi je suis là […]. Je mets un chemisier, un jean pas question de rester en pyjama et j'accroche à la ceinture les deux redons, j'enfouis les tubes plastiques dans un pan du jean."

11–12).[44] The very same struggle to pass unnoticed is reflected in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* as Alia resorts to wigs and turbans, a short new haircut, and the restructuring of her breast to cover her disease's corporeal repercussions. It is part of what DeShazer describes as "an oppressive politics of appearance" that asks women to hide the consequences of their cancer treatments behind what is perceived to be 'normal', such as having two equally shaped breasts (2005: 37, 33–36).

Cancer, in Susan Sontag's words, is first and foremost a "pathology of space", which is indicated by the metaphors of invasion referred to previously: "cancer 'spreads' or 'proliferates' or is 'diffused'; tumors are surgically 'excised'" and body parts can be amputated as its result (1978: 14–15). Besbes highlights a different perspective on space and the (sick) body which is influenced by Arabo-Islamic considerations of space and reflects a lifestyle that is much more tied to the home and to one's immediate connections. What is addressed are the private and public spaces in which bodies appear and are seen. The body can be more individual and moves freely without interference in a private, enclosed space ("l'espace cloisonné", "privé"). The public realm is meanwhile described as "un espace ouvert sur le social représenté par la famille dans son ensemble et le voisinage", that is, as a space open to the social that is represented by extended family and by neighbors. The diseased female body is made the object of commentary in such a public space (1988: 216–217). As a consequence, the disease has an influence on the spaces that can be accessed.

The influence of public and private spaces on Alia's individual creation and shaping of disease will now be addressed in order to illuminate further the concealment that she practices around her disease. *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* replaces private and public places with medicalized and normalized spaces. Alia is only known to be ill in the medical realm; outside of it she pretends to be alright, to be 'normal'. Medical institutions, however, neither entirely become her private places, in which she does not need to hide the cancer, nor do they become public places given the intimate nature of her body being on display for the medical staff. Alia takes her disease with her everywhere she goes. In the restaurant after the first session of chemotherapy, she has the impression of being filled with an oily liquid: 'I started eating. With every piece, with every drop of liquid that fell into my stomach, the oily liquid wavered. Splat, splat, my mouth is filled with a nauseating smell. I can therefore confirm that the effect of the medicine is evolving in my body' (*Sombre* 40).[45] Although in this scene she is outside of the medical realm, and projects normalcy outward, she realizes the foreign presence of the medicine inside her upon reflecting on her body, on how it feels to herself. This renders her body foreign to her as well, suggesting that more than just her breast is impaired. Suddenly, her effort to ban the word cancer from her vocabulary no longer matters; the experience of disease is physical and not textual. That this effect is created in writing returns the argument to Csordas' conceptualization of embodiment, as textuality's "dialectic partner" (1994: 12). Embodiment and textuality are actually partners in representing Alia's being-in-the-world.

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44 This understanding of beauty and the demand for breasts to 'pass' post-surgery, has been challenged by feminist writers (compare Garland-Thomson 2002: 12).

45 Original quote: "Je commence mon plat. Chaque morceau, chaque goutte de liquide qui tombe dans mon estomac fait vaciller le niveau huileux. Floc, floc, ma bouche est éclaboussée d'odeur nauséabonde. Je constate donc l'évolution de l'effet du produit dans mon organisme."

What the quote also shows is the importance of the individual perspective in creating Alia's embodiment. Society's understanding of her body is no longer the most relevant, but her being-in-the-world is becoming determined from the inside. The first-person narrative gives access to this position and the autobiographical elements suggest a relation to the author's own being-in-the-world which lends her representation of Alia's embodiment more weight.

From the first-person perspective, the exchange with the medical staff is specifically relevant. After all, their diagnosis produced the impaired body in the first place. DeShazer describes that an active/passive dynamic existed between doctors and patients up until the 1970s and 1980s. This binary of active and passive is reminiscent of traditional gender expectations. The medical encounter has become increasingly transformed into a dialogue between two parties (compare DeShazer 2005: 16). The narrative voice or protagonist can, accordingly, be portrayed with humor and wit, defiance, and stoicism in confrontations with the medical staff. The patient claims agency in precisely these interactions (DeShazer 2005: 223). This is the case when Alia shares her opinions with regards to the medical system that tries to discipline her. Despite thinking that the treatment causes more pain than the actual disease, there is never any indication that she considers abstaining from chemotherapy (*Sombre* 39). When she is disappointed by the results of her breast reconstruction, she is careful not to show her anger in front of her doctor (*Sombre* 76).

Alia's agency focuses on controlling her own body as efficiently as she can. However, the façade does not always hold, when she goes to a restaurant while still carrying her surgical drains for example. She trips and the plastic drainage bags burst, spilling blood everywhere (*Sombre* 99). According to DeShazer: "leaks signal subversion: they reveal secrets, challenge hegemony, and put the lie to the pretense that all is under control" (2005: 26). Alia cannot control everything. Disease cannot be contained in the medical space and it affects more than just the removed organ.

The cancerous body itself can be conceived as a space, just as the invasion metaphors highlight. Alia claims ownership of this space and its representation by hiding its sickness, unless with family. The concealment, however, cannot hide her alienation from her own body and its sudden 'incompleteness'. This irritation is what cancer literature is essentially about (compare DeShazer 2005: 86). Alia deals with it in a conformist fashion: she wears a prosthesis, a wig, and insists that her breast be reconstructed. All of this reflects the social expectations that are imposed on a breast cancer patient to present a 'normal' body. The most daring thing that Alia does is to leave her wig off when her hair has sufficiently grown back to cover her scalp (*Sombre* 69). While Alia's wish to have reconstructive surgery can be interpreted as another way of concealing the fact that she has (had) cancer, and conforms to the above mentioned "oppressive politics of appearance" (DeShazer 2005: 37), it can also be read as an act of reclaiming the body by regaining control over the "cellules folles".

In the novel, the aspect of attractiveness has replaced the centrality of reproduction (or sexuality) that previously defined women's diseases through social expectations. Sexuality and reproduction are ignored in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* in the same way that the protagonist tries to repress the thoughts of her cancer, while nevertheless focusing on her breast. Alia is introduced as a middle-aged woman of 54, having had two children and a miscarriage early on in pregnancy (*Sombre* 6). Due to the lack of references to sexuality, this might indicate that the protagonist has fulfilled reproductive obligations and is, therefore, not expected to have any additional sexual interests. This would conform to the stereotypical view of middle aged and older women. The lack of sexuality could also indicate that while openly describing her experience with cancer and body image, a story many women

share, sexuality is something too intimate to discuss openly. Lastly, it could illustrate the same denial in granting women with diseases or disability a sexual life, an issue explored in the previous sections. While Alia's sexuality is not mentioned directly, it is present in the connection of her breast with female attractiveness and outward appearance. Alia is concerned about not only losing one breast, but about her entire 'décolleté' as well as her attractiveness, something she had always tried to protect: 'I return sad… I always had a chest that held itself up, I went to the gym regularly, I walked, I watched what I ate, I always paid close attention to my looks, since it forms the image that others see first' (*Sombre* 57–58).[46] This not only highlights beauty standards (breasts that do not sag), but also emphasizes the close connection between the "discourses of medicine and appearance" that inform social pressures to look a certain way for others (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10). After surgery, Alia inspects the result and sees that there is only a fine line that scars her ribs, while a nipple is missing. That nipple, together with its 'colleague', she thinks, was one of the most feminine adornments of her body (compare *Sombre* 60). Her focus on the appearance of the results suggests that she has very concrete, gendered expectations of how she should appear.

Throughout this section, it appears as though the individuals in the literary works examined have gained influence in shaping their embodiment; society's influence seems to have declined. Part of this development is that disease is experienced more individually and privately. Alia prefers to deal with her cancer by herself, goes for her chemotherapy session alone, does not want her family to travel to France for her treatment, and is not even willing to speak to a psychologist whose support is offered to her (*Sombre* 11–12, 18, 32). Society previously either suffered with, or because of, the sick or disabled person. Here, Alia is mainly concerned individually and tries to hide her suffering. Privatization and concealment are elements that are specific to cancer, according to Sontag. This is due to the nature of the body parts that cancer generally attacks. They seem to belong in the intimate or embarrassing category, for example "colon, bladder, rectum, breast, cervix, prostate, testicles" (1978, 17). The impulse to hide cancer, Sontag argues, is connected to the myths surrounding it, such as the projection of evil things onto the disease. Historically, patients were also blamed for their conditions. Cancer was considered to be a punishment for unhealthy behaviors (Sontag 1978: 58 and 1990: 26–27). Besbes, as mentioned above, describes the same phenomenon in her study among Tunisian female cancer patients in which she notes that individuals with cancer were excluded from their group (Besbes 1988: 217–218).

Society in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* exists in the protagonist's head. It dominates Alia's imagination of what others might think about her health. The internalized society motivates her struggle for 'normalcy' and her tactics of concealment. This 'normalcy' – it needs to be noted – is also shaped by what Alia considers to be the social expectation of her. Otherwise, there are no direct interventions by social authorities. The relative absence of these interferences, in comparison with the other novels discussed, might be because Alia is the only character who belongs to the Tunisian upper class. Her background is indicated by her access to medical treatment in France and by the affordability of frequent flights across the Mediterranean. Her financial independence allows for a greater autonomy

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46 Original quote: "Je rentre triste, […] j'ai toujours eu une poitrine qui se tenait toute seule, je fais régulièrement du sport en salle, de la marche, je surveille ce que je mange, je fais toujours très attention à mon physique comme étant l'image de moi qui arrive la première à l'autre".

from the norms and expectations of Tunisian society. It also means that *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* cannot be generalized or used as a representative placeholder of breast cancer experience in Tunisia; instead, it has to be seen as one variation of the story that is influenced by the patient's social standing. That said, it still brings the issue forward and into public debate. By being read as inspirational literature, it puts forward the way Alia dealt with her cancer as exemplary. This gives certain aspects of her experience a lot of weight, such as her efforts to conceal her cancer. These tactics of concealment both belong to and perpetuate the oppressive politics of appearance. They marginalize the body in an effort to ignore cancer and might not be successful in all cases.

There is hardly any concern for other, external events in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* which limits the novel's discussion of its Tunisian context, given that the disease is the main focus. This is very true to the experience of hospital stays or extended health issues; the importance of the outside world recedes behind the concern for one's body. However, one exceptional event appears in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*; Mabrouk describes the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba's funeral, which Alia attended. The funeral not only situates the narrative in a specific historic moment (April 2000), but it also highlights the story's specifically Tunisian context. Through the funeral's inclusion, Alia's fate is linked with that of the former president who critically influenced modern Tunisia. Alia's experience of the funeral is also reminiscent of the country's patriarchal culture. Men appear active and women passive. The description of the funeral further highlights the volatile nature of human life and of its finality. This is something that the majority of the novel evades since it is explicitly an account of a cancer survivor.

Death has a haunting presence in all disability and death narratives. In *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*, the theme is isolated to Alia's participation in the national event. We only see her thinking about her own funeral once (*Sombre* 46–47). Death is written back into the story through Bourguiba's funeral, albeit as a very formal and pompous procedure. This death is not portrayed as an individual death, but rather as a social experience for the Tunisian people. Its inclusion prevents the novel from being too light-hearted and too aware of the author's fate: recovery. It is the author who survives her breast cancer, indicating that her body has primacy over the textuality that is produced.

The outcome for Alia in the novel is not experienced as entirely positive. After her surgeries, she calls her reconstructed breast a melon, a ball of slush ("une boule de flotte") (*Sombre* 75, 77). She expresses an awareness of her body's new hybridity and realizes that she cannot attain normalcy. The fact that there is no feeling in her new breast (*Sombre* 100–101) underlines this further. It illustrates that the reconstruction was done to lessen the discomfort of others upon viewing a woman with one breast, a scar, or a removable prosthesis. The benefit for Alia herself is in keeping up appearances, not in feeling her two breasts as before. She participates in the struggle to fulfil "prescriptions of normative femininity" (DeShazer 39), which can be seen in her reaction to the lost nipple, as referred to above.

Alia overcomes her alienation from the new breast and reflects on the integration of the prosthesis into her body at the end of the account. She is no longer getting worked up about it and instead considers it to be an accessory, a tool to adorn herself, a trinket that she can add to her collection: "Mais je ne m'insurge plus. La prothèse deviant en fait un accessoire qui servirait à parer ma personne. Je l'intègre dans mon armoire à colifichets" (*Sombre* 113). Alia here interestingly repeats the description that she used to characterize her lost nipple ("ornements", 'ornament' *Sombre* 60; "accessoire", 'accessory', and "parer", 'deco-

rate' as quoted above). The artificial breast is accepted as a replacement decoration and Alia makes her peace with the result of the reconstruction.

Alia's body was shown to undergo different stages of treatment throughout the course of the narrative. This highlights the changing nature of the body that defies fixity. It renders the concept of a generic body (see *Section 1.1*) ever more unattainable.

Although the present section has attempted to 'read' Alia's body, efforts were also made to emphasize embodiment before textuality. I have explored the specifics of an embodiment produced by a first-person perspective and with autobiographical elements. The author's personal experiences with cancer can be expected to influence the narrative and Alia's embodiment. An individual perspective is shown that significantly differs from the works analyzed previously; here, the disease is presented from the inside. Embodiment is shown as the connection between the sense of self and of the surroundings. It appears as an actual embodied being-in-the-world. However, there is no distinction between this 'sense of self' and the body. One fades into the other, which is precisely why an abrupt change to the body (such as in the removal of a breast) causes the patient to be alienated.

This insight into Alia's embodiment, as it is affected by her breast cancer, is not unclouded. The narrative constantly oscillates between the urge to document the experience and its protagonist's efforts to conceal the disease in daily life. As a consequence, her bodily state appears and disappears constantly. It can be expected that there are physical aspects that the narrative leaves out or changes in the name of artistic freedom and the possibilities of fiction or to protect the author's privacy.

1.6   From Impaired Bodies to Bodies and Embodiment

This chapter has shown how impaired bodies are constructed, represented, and challenged in Tunisian literature from the 1960s until the 2000s by analyzing four very different narratives. This was carried out to enter into an analysis of how bodies and embodiment are thought about in Tunisian novels. It followed Garland-Thomson's reasoning that "understanding how disability operates as an identity category and cultural concept will enhance how we understand what it is to be human, our relationships with one another, and the experience of embodiment" (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5).

Disability and impairment were constructed mainly by society in the novel *al-Tūt al-murr* (1967). ʿĀʾisha's body and her impairment certainly played a role, but not one that was comparable to the importance afforded to it by society. Both the body and its being-in-the-world were seen and presented from society's perspective, not from the individual's. Disability was depicted as a social experience, the burden of which was carried by the entire community. Disability appeared as the inability to fulfill social expectations of normalcy. As a consequence, these turned into barriers that included the impaired individual, ʿĀʾisha, as the 'other' of this norm. ʿĀʾisha's own perspective, especially her sense of her embodied being-in-the-world, was marginalized. Where it was represented, only occasionally, it reflected expectations of normalcy that were identical with those of society. Her embodiment oscillated between herself and society, but had a strong tendency to identify with the latter, especially through the narrative perspective that kept ʿĀʾisha's voice quiet. Most of the novel's characters shared the view that disability means misfortune and a miserable life. This stigmatization was not directly questioned through *al-Tūt al-murr*; instead, ʿĀʾisha's impairment was resolved with a miraculous cure that allowed her to fulfill social expectations. Reproduction was seen as a key element of female productivity and accordingly ʿĀʾisha gave birth to a son.

Disability was understood to be gendered. This is a notion that was further explored in the intermission with reference to the novels *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* (1989) and *Tammās* (1995). Disability, sexuality, and reproduction appeared connected and social expectations for male and female bodies differed greatly. The direct comparison of a male and a female patient with sexual health issues suggested that access to the individual perspective was limited for the female patient. Her perspective only appeared mediated via her daughter or the doctor's descriptions, and she was further removed by being framed in a novel-within-the-novel. The male patient, in comparison, described his impairment himself. This suggests that a different degree of agency is attributed to men and women. In addition, in the case of the male patient, his sexual function was not shown as centrally determining his masculinity. From the perspective of society, it could be compensated through his job and his violent behavior. The dysfunction might have led to an estrangement from his penis, but as long as society did not know about this, it would not affect how he was perceived. This was a different predicament regarding the mother in *Tammās*; here, the impairment took over her entire body, as the surgeon's description showed. The mother also experienced a more pronounced disconnect from her body. In addition to the gendered nature of the disease that was observed, the intermission showed that social involvement in diseases had decreased in the late 1980s and 1990s. This might be due to the nature of the health issues examined and their connection to sexuality and reproduction. However, it might also show a tendency for the oscillating embodiment to move away from the social and towards the individual perspective.

The influence of society on the experience of disease and disability was further explored in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* (2001). The protagonist, Alia, attempted to compartmentalize her breast cancer in order to think of the disease as only concerning her breast. She aimed to conceal the cancer altogether. As a result, society was almost totally absent in her account. It only ever existed in her head, in Alia's thoughts regarding its expectations and standards. The medical discourse defined the disease in the novel. The definition no longer depended on the individual's social functionality. The concealment demanded this functionality though. The disease can be concealed only if it does not cause any social dysfunction. This suggests that the remnants of the definition of disease, as a dysfunction in the social context, were still firmly in place in the novel.

Sexuality was almost absent from the novel and surfaced only as an interest in physical appearance. The necessity that Alia felt to comply with standards of appearance was not questioned or criticized in the novel. However, the narrative acknowledged the fluidity of the status of 'diseased', as well as the hybrid nature of the human body post-treatment. The fluidity appeared in Alia's comments about her initial diagnosis and the hybrid nature of the body was alluded to when she addresses her reconstructed breast. The novel contained the first narrative that granted direct access to the impaired individual's experience of her body's being-in-the-world, even more so since it is an autobiographical account. Alia's efforts to conceal the disease, and thereby parts of her embodied being, betrayed the importance of the surrounding society and showed that embodiment is discursively produced and is a process. Even in the near absence of embodiment, it continues to oscillate between society and individual.

When read together, all of the aforementioned novels were shown to share an occupation with the struggle for normalcy and for the fulfilment of social expectations. The novels partake in the construction and prolongation of a perceived normalcy. None of the novels openly critiqued the pressures created by the notion of the normal.

The impaired bodies analyzed in this chapter illustrate how embodiment is shaped in between the individual and society and examined how far the novels take the increased importance of the individual through processes of modernization into account. The chapter noted a changing perception of physical impairment from the Tunisian perspective and as reflected in the novels. It aimed to refrain from pursuing an overly simplistic reading of the progression from a less medicalized society to a more medicalized one, even though medical discourses had gained importance between the release of *al-Tūt al-murr* and *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*. For all four texts the analysis abstained from such a reading in order to instead note that other aspects, such as paternalistic views of sexuality and gender roles, remain apparent to various extents.[47] A development in the understanding of disease needs to be noted; it follows a trajectory that evolved from a social tragedy into an individual problem. In parallel, the bodies portrayed seem to be owned by the person and less by society. This change was manifest in the understandings of embodiment that were proposed. The emphasis in embodiment as being-in-the-world shifted. Being-in-the-world initially focused on the community or the world. The viewing direction turned to the individual, to the being. This means that the viewing direction shifted away from society through the understanding that embodiment oscillates between society and the individual.

Language was shown to play a role via similes in the construction of impairment, (e.g., in *al-Tūt al-murr* when ʿĀʾisha's animalism was constructed in language), metaphors (e.g., in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* where cancer was grasped via the metaphor of invasion), and specific terminology (e.g., in the diagnoses that created the disease in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* and which enforced an objectifying distance between the sick individual and her body in *Tammās*). These are indicators for the construction of bodies in language that the following chapters will explore further.

The changing construction of impairment reflects evolving social contexts. It suggests that bodies in general are historical and are determined by their precise cultural contexts. This observation refuses the existence of 'the human body' as a generic ideal and instead highlights this study's necessity to look for bodies in the plural; 'bodies' in Tunisian literature and not 'the body' after all. The materiality of the body shall be analyzed in the next chapter to understand the corporeal limits of embodiment in order to gain further insights into these bodies. All four of the present chapter's novels have shown instances in which aspects of the body's materiality became marginalized. In *al-Tūt al-murr*, for example, ʿĀʾisha's sexuality and her pregnancy were left out, while Alia attempted to ignore the cancer and thereby marginalized her body in *Sombre histoire de cellules folles*.

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47 *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* and *Tammās* will be further addressed in *Chapters 2* and *5,* respectively.

2 Hauntologies: The Materiality of Bodies and Embodiment in Tunisian Novels

2.1   Literary Bodies and Materiality

According to Abdelkebir Khatibi, the Arabic word *jasad* in the Qur'an connotes the fleshiness of bodies (compare Khatibi 2002: 11). This fleshiness of bodies, or rather their materiality and their physicality, will be explored throughout this chapter. What happens to the materiality of 'physical beings' when they enter into the realm of language? Is there a materiality that is constructed in language? How is this aspect of bodies explored in Tunisia's literary production? How do the answers to these questions influence the understanding of literary embodiment? Ultimately, how can the interrelation of textuality and embodiment, which Csordas problematizes under the notion of the 'reading' of the body (compare *Introduction* and previous chapter), be explored further? The present chapter will address narrative perspectives and narrative voices with regards to their capacity to produce the materiality of bodies in literature to answer these questions. By clarifying these notions, the stage will be set for this book's second part.

Death is a suitable theme to explore the fleshiness of bodies in literature, as this chapter will show, precisely because it highlights and questions the materiality of bodies at the same time. Bodies, as living organisms, are determined and limited in their existence by life and death. One can once again use the metaphor of oscillation to describe bodies as moving in-between two poles. The focus on death and dying follows Csordas' suggestion to explore what happens in "circumstances of corporeal flux and bodily transformation" (Csordas 1994: 3). While the materiality of bodies does not immediately stop after death, the end of life certainly marks the process of a body's undoing. After death, embodiment (as being-in-the-world) must cease; the 'being' as an active existence ends (see *Section 2.2* below). In literary works, an analysis of embodiment in death or after death (the possibility of the latter has yet to be discussed) allows for a broader examination of the general materiality of bodies in literature, and the status of their embodiment. Embodiment is perceivable and analyzable in literary works, even though there are technically no bodies contained within them, apart from their reflections in language. This embodiment is not determined by the laws of physicality. However, it depends on a materiality that is produced and can be undone in language. The conditions of this are explored in this chapter. To exemplify the previous ideas, we might quickly return to Dīja, the sick mother from *Tammās*, who is on her deathbed:

> Ruqiyya[1] gave a sign to the daughters gathered in a circle around their mother. She hinted at the soles of the mother's feet and whispered: 'These are shoes of death!' The girls however remained silent and did not understand a thing from her cryptic words. (*Tammās* 102)[2]

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1   She is not introduced in the novel prior to that and seems to be a nurse or woman instructed in easing the struggles of the dying.

2   Original quote:

"أومأت 'رقيّة' للبنات المتحلّقات حول امّهنّ وأشارت إلى أخمص رجليْها وهي تهمس 'صَبَّاط الموت!' ...لكنّ البنات بقين واجمات لا يفهمن من طلاسمها شيئا."

The mother in *Tammās* is dying but is not yet dead. Death appears as a process; its signs can be seen by the initiated. The body starts to change from its extremities, the soles of the feet. The announcement of the mother's final departure alarms her carers and they prepare her body by spreading honey on her lips and by perfuming her neck with rosewater (*Tammās* 102). Death itself is described as: 'a spectacle during which the living assures himself of his life' (*Tammās* 103)[3], which suggests that it is not about the dying person. Accordingly, the narrator Zaynab cannot find death in her mother's body, neither as she is dying nor after her death. Her face is still familiar with half-closed eyes that seem to talk to Zaynab. She finds her mother's death in a group of men, led by her father, who carry the funeral bier dressed in grey cloaks: 'They appeared to be threatening scarecrows or bats who carried on their yellow empty faces the mark of actual death' (*Tammās* 104)[4]. The mother's body remains after death; it continues to *be* in the world. However, its active being-in-the-world – the previously supplied definition of embodiment – has ended and it is narrated as still.

Death is presented from the perspective of an onlooker. Society is shown to participate in the production of death by attributing its arrival to aspects of the body, the funeral bier, and solemn faces. The absence and presence of disability was discussed in the previous chapter. Materiality and death in literature have similar presences and absences, a topic that this chapter aims to explore. They will be addressed through Derrida's concept of hauntology.[5] Haunting describes that which has both departed and lingers, that which has a presence and no-presence at the same time, much like a ghost.[6] This choice of theory is motivated by the themes of materiality and death in literature. It is borne out by the content of the novels that are analyzed, in which people and issues that were considered to be long gone return. This contradictoriness, of something that is returning and yet appearing for the first time, is precisely what constitutes haunting or spectrality for Derrida.

The aspired outcome of the questions, themes, and approaches that have been outlined is a deeper understanding of bodies and embodiment in literature. Embodiment will be described further through the figure of oscillation as being based on a simultaneous absence and presence of bodies in literature, which in turn is based on the notion of materiality. Bodies will be shown to carry insights into society through the specific literary embodiment that will be highlighted. Reading the novels through the concept of hauntology, undercurrents of Tunisian society are brought to the fore that have left traces on the literary characters' bodies.

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3   Original quote:

"فرجة يتأكّد فيها الحيّ من حياته".

4   Original quote:

"وقد بدوا لها كالفزاعات المخيفة أو كوطاويط الليل يحملون على وجوههم الممتصّة الصفراء أمارات الموت الحقيقي."

5   The concept is developed in his *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (1993).

6   Presence in absence and absence in presence appears as a theme is reminiscent of the penultimate collection by the great Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish entitled *Fī ḥaḍrati l-ghiyāb* (2006, published in English as *In the Presence of Absence*, 2011). This is, however, coincidental.

2.2   Death in Different Discourses

Death is made a part of life through the established and inherited procedures that society displays towards death, such as funerary mores and mourning. It is an integral aspect of everyone's living existence – both directly since life stretches out through time until it ends in death and indirectly since most people witness the departure of others. In the scene quoted above, death is not manifested in the body of the deceased, as seen by her daughter; Zaynab does not perceive of the corpse as foreign or essentially different. Malek Chebel writes, in his *Le corps dans la tradition au Maghreb*, that death in the Maghreb does not signify a being that is separate from the rest ("[l]e mort, dans la conception maghrébine, n'est pas un être à part", 1984: 120). In the novel, the continuity between the body of the dead mother and its previous living state is highlighted, thereby making death truly a part of life. This contradiction in terms, a concept that contains its own opposite, is reminiscent of Derrida's understanding of hauntology, a topic that will be further explored below (*Sections 2.3* and *2.4*).

The mundaneness of death, something which the scene from *Tammās* suggests, is contradicted in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982). Kristeva writes that: "[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva 1982: 4).[7] Yet, the novels examined in this chapter do not reject death's materiality or show corpses as abject. Analyzed in greater detail are Fawzia Zouari's *Ce Pays dont je meurs*[8] (2000[1999]; 'The country from which I die') and *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*[9] (2007; 'A Tunisian Tale') by Hassouna Mosbahi. *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* by Ridha Bourkhis that was already partially examined in the previous chapter will be revisited to introduce haunting through a literary work before exploring Derrida's conceptualization. While dead bodies are almost absent from the narratives, they are present in their absence insofar as they drive the stories. The memories of the deceased are central in two of the novels; in the third novel, *Ce Pays dont je meurs*, a young woman remains by her dying sister's side until the end. This encounter of approaching death does not cause aversion. It does not chime with the quote from *Tammās* either, where death is witnessed from within a web of religious traditions and thereby not "without God", as Kristeva suggested.

Ce Pays dont je meurs and *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* have been chosen for this part of the discussion because they offer almost contrary narrative techniques and allow for an exploration of the impact of the narrative voice on the creation of materiality. In the first novel, a young anorexic woman starves to death. She refuses to articulate her pain verbally and is represented by her sister. The sister seemingly dies alongside her from poverty-induced malnutrition or at least gets very close to starvation. In the other novel, a dead mother speaks from beyond the grave after she was burned to death by her son. While the two sisters let their bodies wane, the mother no longer has a body from which to speak.

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7   The concept of the abject will be discussed in *Chapter 3*.
8   *Ce Pays dont je meurs* was translated into German by Antje Kaiser and published as *Das Land in dem ich sterbe* (2000).
9   *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* is the only book in the corpus that has been translated from Arabic into English (under the title *A Tunisian Tale* at Cairo University Press in a translation by Max Weiss, 2011) as well as into French (in Boutheïna Ayadi's French translation *Pas de deuil pour ma mère*, 2019).

These descriptions already suggest that death within the literary realm differs from death beyond it. In medical discourse, it is agreed upon that death involves the permanent failure of vital body functions (such as brain activity or heart and lung function). However, the decision about which bodily functions are vital has been under debate ever since the development of respirators, defibrillators, and other medical innovations that can support vital functions and extend activity in the organs that they address (see DeGrazia's article "The Definition of Death" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011). Consequently, the medical discourse offers several definitions of death. However, none of these definitions is definite in that there may be activity left in certain regions of the body, whereas the organism as a whole is already considered to be dead. DeGrazia highlights that death is misunderstood as a single event and not as the process it actually is; this misunderstanding leads people to look for precise indicators that confirm its occurrence (2011: n.p.). Regardless, it is safe to say that the dead person can no longer have a voice after the gradual arrest of all vital functions, nor can it be considered a bodily being-in-the-world. In fiction, however, there are no such limitations as will be addressed below.

Other conceptualizations of death abound that are quite apart from medical discourse and are influenced by cultural factors, such as religion and personal beliefs. Especially insightful for our present concern is Ira M. Lapidus' article "The Meaning of Death in Islam", which explains death not as "the end of an individual's life but rather a transition into a new phase of existence." Similarly to Christianity, the author describes that: "[i]n the Muslim view the human body is being composed of both spiritual soul and material body" and that the soul is considered to remain alive after death. According to Lapidus, some believe that the soul goes to heaven temporarily, only to then return to the body in the grave. Body and soul are thought to be reunited for the Last Judgement (1998: 149, 157, 152). Despite efforts of Islamic orthodoxy to curb this belief, Muslims all over the world, Lapidus writes, expect that the dead are able to participate in the lives of the living and communicate with them, which "may reveal the future, [*or; C.P.*] result in miraculous help" (1998: 150, 156–157). Malek Chebel describes that the deceased is considered to be part of the same community as the living and visits them in their dreams (compare 1984: 119–120). The motif of haunting is laid bare in these beliefs, reinforcing the suitability of Derrida's concept of hauntology for this analysis.

What the beliefs highlight is a separation of the spiritual, eternal soul and the earthly and finite material body. This dualism of the mind (or soul) and the body was precisely what Csordas refuted with his understanding of embodiment as being-in-the-world (see *Introduction*). It concerns both mind and body, but Csordas' concept of embodiment, however, clearly refers to life. It neither addresses embodiment after death nor does it include literature as its frame of reference. In this chapter's analysis, it will be relevant to ask how the novels both present and produce the material and immaterial aspects of bodies and embodiment. Specifically, the question is: how they do so both before and after death? This insight will then need to be linked back to Csordas' concept in order to conceptualize how embodiment is realized in Tunisian novels. To that end, the present chapter concludes the groundwork that the first part of this study attempts by exploring the body and embodiment in Tunisian literature, before the subsequent three chapters go into greater detail regarding problematic and provocative bodies.

2.3   *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*. From Death to Hauntology

Un retour au pays du bon Dieu is revisited here for several reasons. Apart from introducing the concepts of haunting and spectrality, by way of a literary and not a theoretical text[10], the novel also promises central insights into the interrelations of materiality and narrative voices in literature.

The narrator, Abdallah, returns to his parents' village after an absence of twenty years during which he completed a doctorate in France. He attempts to solve mysteries surrounding the deaths of his cousin, Zèynèb, his former lover Jamila, and his grandfather, all of which occurred in his absence. It cannot be said that he remembers the deaths, given that he was away when they took place. Instead, he experiences them for the first time by reconstructing them. This effect is emphasized by the ghosts and visions that return to Abdallah and which take him to the past. Abdallah finds out that only his grandfather died of natural causes. The two women died prematurely for reasons related to sexuality and female suppression, suggesting not only the gendered nature of death, but also the haunting presence of patriarchy in Tunisia. That death is experienced gender-specifically is not surprising, considering the previous chapter's analysis of the gendered nature of disease and disability. Death is the continuation of disease or the result of an extreme version thereof in some parts. The theoretical observations of this chapter continue from the aspects discussed in *Chapter 1* in which impaired bodies allowed insights into bodies more generally. Here, the specifics of literary bodies are further examined.

After his many years abroad, the returnee Abdallah becomes a personification of Khatibi's *bi-langue* (compare *Introduction*) both in a linguistic as well as in a cultural sense. Abdallah takes up a positionality that oscillates between the discourses of France and Tunisia, as the following scene illustrates. Upon his return, even before greeting his parents, he is met by a "silhouette"[11] or ghostly appearance in his parents' garden (*Retour* 11). He wants to run away, but the silhouette is much faster and corners him:

> The silhouette was huge and scary! Little by little, its features became clearer and I suddenly recognized my grandfather's face! The same dark complexion, the same chestnut coloured eyes, the same gentle gaze […]. But I was told that he had died, already five or six years after I left! […] Had he come back to reproach me for my absence at his funeral when the entire village was present?! (*Retour* 12)[12]

His grandfather (the apparition is no longer called 'silhouette') is described as looking at the narrator earnestly. His mouth opens and a tired voice escapes that seems to come from the afterworld. It brings along the smell of death and corpses: 'Here you are back! Which

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10   For a theoretical elaboration, see *Section 2.4* below.

11   Later on in the narrative, Abdallah is met by a revenant of his former fiancé Zèynèb and also refers to her as a "silhouette" (*Retour* 18). He uses the word "fantôme" (*Retour* 72; ghost) only once to refer to his grandfather. His father, conversely, calls the grandfather's haunting presence in the garden cabin his "âme" (*Retour* 105; soul). The question of terminology will be revisited in the following section.

12   Original quote: "La silhouette était énorme et effrayante! Petit à petit, les traits de la silhouette s'éclaircissaient et j'y découvris soudain le visage de mon grand-père! Le même teint légèrement basané, les mêmes yeux châtains, le même regard doux […]. Mais on m'avait dit pourtant qu'il était mort, cinq ou six ans déjà après mon départ! […] Etait-il revenue en vue de me reprocher mon absence à son enterrement au moment où tout village était présent?!"

plagues are you carrying in your suitcases?... They tamed you, isn't it so?' The narrator loses his nerve and is overcome by dizziness (*Retour* 12).[13] The grandfather alludes to Abdallah's prolonged stay in France and the (cultural) baggage he might have brought with him. What the grandfather is really interested in is whether Abdallah was brainwashed to despise their God, religion, and customs. They start a discussion about Western values and tolerance that is taken up again in several instances throughout the novel. The ideas that Abdallah has potentially brought back appear as a central concern. The grandfather is aware of Abdallah's *bi-langue* position and the influence the French might have had on him. Abdallah expresses how his absence has changed him in his commentary on the journals that his grandfather filled. He suggests that the latter's language and rhetoric reflect classical Arabic literary style and, therefore, lack the higher value of scientific neutrality. He describes the writing as 'talkative, filled with rhetorical figures of all kinds'. It reflects the force of language: 'a bewitching language that is like the incantations of a sorcerer in a marabout that is filled with fear and loneliness (*Retour* 113)'.[14] Although some of the ascriptions might be read positively, the overall impression is negative and almost agitational. This is augmented when he addresses the notebook's contents, such as the essential inequality of men and women for example (*Retour* 113–114). Abdallah feels strongly in favor of the situation of women in the West and discredits the grandfather's opinion, further discrediting the language in which this thinking has been developed. This adds an element of conflict to Abdallah's *bi-langue* position that is not present in Khatibi's rendition. For Khatibi, the discourses mingle in a positive exchange (compare *Introduction*).

Un retour au pays du bon Dieu stages a struggle between cultures of knowing. On the one hand, this involves an encounter between traditional North African values and newly acquired Western values. On the other hand, it describes the confrontation between people who know what happened in the village and attempt to gloss over events, and those who wish to explore them from a position of ignorance. Abdallah is in an in-between position, stuck amidst his ignorance about the details of the deaths and between what he knows about the past; once again, he is shown as *bi-langue*. His interest in the women's deaths reflects an effort to rewrite history, especially since both deaths contain an element of protest against patriarchal society. Jamila, as it turns out, was killed by her impotent husband because she had an affair (see previous chapter) and Zèynèb committed suicide to hide her pregnancy outside of wedlock. The deceived husband and father influenced how these events were remembered. The murder was covered up as a suicide and the suicide was staged as a natural death from leukemia. Abdallah uncovers hidden views and understands himself, Zèynèb and Jamila are connected in the struggle against patriarchy (*Retour* 143).

According to Erickson, there is a connection between the *bi-langue* and haunting. He describes Abdelkebir Khatibi's writing, the archetypical *bi-langue*, as "a disordering noise, a counterdiscourse, at the heart of the ruling linguistic/cultural systems/discourses of the West and East, the corrosion within the engine of system that admits the exceptional, the supernatural, as a coexistent alongside the natural or 'real'" (2000[1995]: 432). This is

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13 Original quote: "Te voilà de retour! Quelle peste apportes-tu dans tes valises?... Ils t'ont dompté n'est-ce pas?!"

14 Original quote: "volubile, riche en figures rhétoriques de toutes sortes", "un langage ensorceleur comme les incantations d'un sorcier dans un marabout occupé par la peur et la solitude".

reminiscent of Abdallah's acquired outsider position and highlights his particular receptiveness to hauntology. The very first encounter with a ghostly presence, quoted above, not only establishes the position of the narrator as *bi-langue*, but it also offers insights into the experience of haunting itself: The "silhouette" has a certain materiality and carries a deceased family member's bodily features; it even has a smell and a voice that comes out of a mouth. The narrator reacts with a bodily response (dizziness) which further emphasizes the materiality of the experience.

This first encounter with the specter of his dead grandfather is not his last. While his grandfather's haunting presence is frightening for the narrator, seeing an old letter reappear in the smoke from a cigarette has a different effect. He reads that his sister did not believe in Jamila's suicide and reacts with an eagerness to find out who killed her: 'I feel animated by the spirit of a new prophet with a special mission' (*Retour* 44).[15] He immediately reads the information as a nod towards the archaic social structure that remains in place in the village. He criticizes the destructive influence of patriarchy and is motivated to end its haunting of individual lives (*Retour* 71). What is remarkable in the quote is the use of the expression "un nouveau prophète" which runs counter to Islamic beliefs in Muhammad as the final prophet. It underlines a departure from tradition while referring to it which suggests the oscillatory movement of the absence-presence that Derrida associated with haunting.

Upon visiting Jamila's tomb, Abdallah reacts differently again. The grave opens. Behind a huge cloud of amber and frankincense appears a stunning 25-year-old body wrapped in a thin blue lace robe (*Retour* 49). It is Jamila and Abdallah feels a huge hand pushing him down, and he throws himself onto the grave. The tomb as a site is interesting. As places of remembrance, tombs keep the dead amongst the living. At the same time, burial rituals counter this by consigning the dead "to their own domain, to keep them separate from the living" (Davis 2007: 4).

Abdallah reacts physically to the encounter with the new ghostly presence. This time, however, it is pleasurable for him. It lets him remember and relive a scene in which he was visited by Jamila in the bath:

> She gently took me by the hand, in her eyes a lascivious look and fiery tears. We stepped over the threshold of the forbidden!... The steam was still rising in the hammam. I became more and more detached from myself. I broke the rusty chains of the present and set off even further into the time of the murderous flame! (*Retour* 73–74)[16]

The narrator feels drawn towards Jamila whom he seems to touch or touch again in his memory. He immerses himself physically in the relived encounter.

All three of the scenes cause a physical reaction in Abdallah (dizziness, energy to take action, and arousal). This gives the grandfather, the letter, and Jamila a material presence in Abdallah's narrative. This presence, however, differs from Abdallah's own presence, as is

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15 Original quote: "Je me sentais animé par l'âme d'un nouveau prophète chargé d'une mission spéciale!"

16 Original quote: "Elle me prit doucement par la main, avec dans les yeux un regard lascif et des larmes enflammées et nous enjambâmes le seuil de l'interdit!... La vapeur montait encore dans le hammam. Je me détachais de plus en plus de moi-même. Je cassais les chaînes rouillées du présent et je partais encore plus loin dans le temps de la flamme meurtrière!"

apparent in his description of the detachment from himself that is necessary to relive the memory. The detachment suggests different levels of existence.

Rehbock discusses one's personal status after death philosophically.[17] She argues that whether dead or alive, an other is always seen as a person with a previous living presence, not just as a corpse or even as a thing (2012: 163, 165). In a similar way, when narrating (and reading) characters in literature certain aspects are immediately implied, such as their (at least partial) presence and a materiality that supports this presence, in order to make them understandable. This is particularly obvious in Abdallah's narrative when Jamila is remembered. It shows how insightful a comprehension into dead bodies is for the general narration of bodies.

The entire village functions as a storehouse of memory. Abdallah (re-)discovers letters, notes, and diaries in addition to the graves of the deceased and locations of encounters from long ago. According to Rehbock, written traces are the incorporated linguistic expression of a deceased's thinking, wishing, and acting. They can be a medium of communication between dead and living (2012: 169). In their context, the course of time can be upset. Despite his years of absence, Abdallah has the feeling that his previous life had continued in parallel, without disruption, upon his arrival (*Retour* 17). This is an illusion since his absence is repeated in the haunting. Events return to him that he was unable to witness while he was in France. He both relives the past and experiences these events for the first time. This is haunting, as Buse and Stott describe in their introduction to *Ghosts. Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (1999): "haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality" (1999: 1). The upsetting of time is reflected in the narrative's fragmentary character. Accordingly, haunting not only occurs at the level of content within the novel, but also in its structure. Flashbacks, quotes from old letters that appear as visions, and other apparitions disrupt the chain of events in the village upon Abdallah's return. They reflect the narrator's perspective of being present in multiple temporal contexts.

The "deformation of linear temporality" also suggests the possibilities available to ghost stories. Anderson writes that they offer alternatives to the dominant account of history (compare *Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison* 2013: 1). While this is true on a national level, it is even more true on a personal, familial level. In the novel, family history is dissolved and retold, even if it is not being rewritten: Although the apparitions lead Abdallah to establish their version of the truth, in opposition to the previous writing of village history that befitted its patriarchal context, there is no justice re-established; no murderer is punished or even socially ostracized.

Before closing this section, the materiality of the body should first be addressed in this novel where the dead have lost their corpses long ago to decay. The specters appear to have bodies, faces, and odors, even as they are able to go through walls (*Retour* 37). Their material presence is the result of Abdallah's narrative. His memories of Jamila, Zèynèb, and his grandfather in life give them an embodied presence. For example, when he reminisces about sexual adventures with Jamila, her young body appears. His own embodiment and his physical experience of the specters lets their embodiment appear as an actual being-in-the-world by telling the narrative from his point of view. His position as narrator and the resulting influence over the story is considerable since the entire narrative is configured as an

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17 Compare her essay "Person über den Tod hinaus? Zum Moralischen Status der Toten" (2012).

oral narrative. Abdallah tells his story to a student the day before this student leaves to study in France. All ghostly presences are expressed in language. For the listener and thereby the reader they exist on the same plane as Abdallah's narrated encounters with living contemporaries.

The setting of the narration, including Abdallah and his student, suggests a circularity. The story can start anew with the student. The haunting continues, if not necessarily through Zèynèb, Jamila, and the grandfather, then through the patriarchal tendencies that haunt the characters' fates. This forms the second layer of haunting as it is portrayed in the novel. In addition to the apparitions' direct visitation, issues that influence the village subconsciously also haunt it and determine the characters' individual values and their behaviors. In Zèynèb's case this meant that patriarchal society motivated her suicide.

2.4　　　Interrelations of Haunting and Materiality in Literary Works

The key observation made regarding *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* was the simultaneous bodily absence and presence of specters and ghostly apparitions that suggested a certain materiality. These aspects – spectrality, absence and presence, materiality – will be further explored with reference to the central theoretical texts that make them accessible for literary analysis. They are important aspects of embodiment in literature.

Since the 1990s there has been a heightened interest in the spectral that can be attributed to the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx* in 1993. The work is considered to be Derrida's answer to the end of the communist regimes and the fall of the Berlin wall.[18] Through the figure of the specter, Derrida argued for the lasting relevance and continued 're-turn' of Marx (Derrida 2006[1994]: 15–16, 38). While these details are less important for my chapter, the figure of the specter itself will prove essential. According to Colin Davis:

> in literary critical circles, Derrida's rehabilitation of ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved to be extraordinarily fertile. Hauntology supplants the near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. (2007: 8–9)

In this way, it is involved in "making established certainties vacillate" (2007: 11). Embodiment was defined above as being-in-the-world. Haunting addresses and changes the very 'being' that is contained within the concept. In haunting, being is no longer an unclouded presence, but rather acts as the oscillation between presence and absence that already influenced the interpretation of *Un retour a pays du Bon Dieu* provided above. The consequence is a specific kind of embodiment.

Derrida's work signaled a move away from a solely literal understanding of the haunting in 'ghost stories'. Instead, the specter was considered as a way of thinking, "a figuration that does theory", or as a "conceptual metaphor" for the discussion of social undercurrents (Del Pilar Blanco/Peeren 2013: 9, 21). This shows the second layer of haunting that was also found in the novel.

18　See "Editors' Introduction" to the English version *Spectres of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* that was published a year later in 1994 (2006[1994]: vii, xi).

Derrida explains the spectral in the following way: The specter is characterized by "the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh, but still the body of some*one* as some-*one other*". While one does not see it "in flesh and blood this Thing that is not a thing, this thing that is invisible between its apparitions", it "looks at us and sees us not see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry" (2006[1994]: 6). This encapsulates the experiences that Abdallah had in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* quite closely. Essential to Derrida's specter is the repetition that it contains through a returning that is in conflict with its appearing for the first time. Derrida remarks:

> *What* is a ghost? […] Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. (2006[1994]: 10)[19]

Martin Hägglund explains this in the following way:

> Derrida's aim is to formulate a general 'hauntology' (*hantologie*), in contrast to the traditional 'ontology' that thinks being in terms of self-identical presence. What is important about the figure of the specter, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is *no longer* or *not yet*. (2008: 82)

Both directions – the *no longer* and the *not yet* – will be addressed in the two remaining novels selected for examination in this chapter. With the specter, time is "out of joint" (Derrida 2006[1994]: 1, 20) as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, from the meeting between Prince Hamlet and his father's ghost. The disruption of time occurred in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* and will be noted again in the other two novels. The spectral simultaneously is the reason that upsets time and also its personification. The spectral reflects the materiality of the body in literary works that share similar contradictions such as the no longer/not yet, absent/present, body/no flesh. *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* showed bodies of ghostly apparitions as not real or entirely present, but as the result of the perspective adopted by the narrative, spectral bodies that oscillate between presence and absence. The materiality of actual bodies in literature is similar and their being-in-the-world is not a physical immediacy that the reader can access or touch. Instead, the reader can be 'touched' by them, as will be further described in the chapters that follow. Reading the novels through the concept of hauntology allows us to gain insights into bodies in general. This is similar to the approach taken in the previous chapter. The interconnection of the perspective of disability and impairment with hauntology has been alluded to previously – both contain aspects of oscillation.

We observed a social aspect of haunting in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, its meaning for the representation of Tunisian society. Avery F. Gordon's study *Ghostly Matters*

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19 Derrida uses the word ghost ("fantôme" in the French original 1993: 31) here, despite establishing a difference between ghost and specter in his interview "Spectrographies" in Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler's *Échographies de la télévision. Entretiens filmés* (1996). Here, I will quote from the English translation by Jennifer Bajorek, *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*: "In the series of more or less equivalent words that accurately designate haunting, *spectre*, as distinct from ghost [*revenant*], speaks of the spectacle. The spectre is first and foremost something visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood" (Derrida/Stiegler 2002: 114).

(2008[1997]) allows us to address this. According to Gordon, "[h]aunting is a constituent element of modern social life". It describes the influence of "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us" yet it also influences "everyday life" (2008[1997]: 7, 19). What I mean by this is that it refers to social pressures that latently dominate individual existences, even though they might seem overcome. A ghost highlights the social undercurrents and relations that dominate our lives. By bringing these to the fore, ghost stories have the ability to rewrite history and to explore the reasons for and conditions in which a memory or written history was initially produced (compare 2008[1997]: 22, 25). The previous section indicated this parallel structure of haunting in *Un retour au pay du Bon Dieu* by highlighting it as both literal (in the apparitions) and metaphorical (in the haunting presence of patriarchy that steers Zèynèb to commit suicide). The parallel structure of haunting will be further explored with regards to *Ce Pays dont je meurs* and *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*. This allows to read the novels for insights into Tunisian society and, at the same time, it permits us to continue the discussion of materiality in literature more generally.

Materiality, as noted previously, is linked to haunting and spectrality through the aspects of presence and absence. The spectral's simultaneous presence and absence produces a questionable materiality. This reflects the general material status of bodies in literature. After all, there is no physical matter in literature and, as a consequence, bodies in literature seem unable to have materiality. However, with hauntology, embodiment can be thought along the lines of a specific being-in-the-world, a haunted being that is constituted by both presences and absences. As a result, the peculiar embodiment of bodies in literature can be described as including a materiality that exists at the level of language, as non-physical matter. It is a materiality that oscillates between presences and absences, it is a specter which is why hauntology is such a fruitful concept for this study to deploy.

In *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, the written word had the potential to bring back haunting memories and to appear as a spectral sight (e.g., the letter in the cigarette smoke). The novel itself works in a similar way by bringing the deceased's previous bodily presence to the awareness of the reader – think of the scene with Abdallah and Jamila at the grave. This materiality is closely connected to the bodies described in the literary work and to their embodiment, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have highlighted (2000: 63). Within a narrative, the description of any body "functions as a textual and cultural other" that cannot be controlled by the text. It belongs to a world outside or behind the text and possesses its "own undisciplined language" (2000: 49). This world behind the text enters into dialogue with the reader, who brings yet another outside world to bear on the text. The fictional world is created in between these worlds, including the characters and their bodies. In literature, embodiment forms the dialectical partner of textuality, as was suggested by Csordas. The embodiment of bodies in literature is based on their oscillating materiality.

Bodies in literature are produced by the narrative voice. This position will be filled by voices that are marginalized and haunted by power relations and hierarchies throughout the novels analyzed in the following sections of this chapter. The figure of the specter draws attention to these voices, as well as to the realms from which they come. Social and cultural spaces that are disavowed and neglected. *Ce Pays dont je meurs* will be addressed as a novel in which an immigrant family in France is haunted by the absence of their homeland of Algeria. The materiality of the protagonists' bodies is entangled with the narrative perspective and the narrator's voice; this entanglement makes the novel essential to this chapter's argument. The consecutive section analyses *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, especially the materiality the narrative voice constructs for itself. Through both, the materiality and the narrative voice, the specific embodiment of bodies in literature shall be further understood.

2.5   Materiality and the Narrative Voice. *Ce Pays dont je meurs*

Despite containing neither ghosts nor revenants, Fawzia Zouari's novel *Ce Pays dont je meurs* (2000[1999]) is haunted by the constant approach of death. Nacéra describes how the police and an ambulance come to their house to fetch them. She anticipates the assumptions of the neighbors who will think that they have experimented with drugs. What else could have happened to two young women of 26 and 33 years (compare *Pays* 9)? Nacéra recalls how she had begun early one morning to recount their lives to her sister Amira in order to pass the time while waiting for death (*Pays* 11). Both sisters are malnourished; the younger Amira has been anorexic since she was twelve years old and refuses to eat. Nacéra can no longer financially support herself and is unable to buy food.

Starvation illustrates the processual nature of death, as noted above. It gradually deprives a body of the resources to live and to keep up its physical constitution; as a result, it withers away. The retelling of their life-courses bears witnesses to the un-becoming of their bodies. This is reflected in a narrative that undoes itself, insofar as Nacéra's voice stops abruptly at one point, indicating that the first-person perspective is problematic in narrating death. Operating under the assumption that death ends consciousness, narrative can only bring the reader right up to the threshold of death, not beyond it. Nacéra's voice breaks off after she indicates that no one remains: 'Who is going to say a prayer at Amira's grave dug by misery?' (*Pays* 148)[20]. Nacéra implies that she is no longer able to do so. This outline suggests how physical materiality, and its interrelation with the narrative voice, are problematized in the novel. The present section explores this further and interprets its implications regarding the materiality of bodies and embodiment in literature.

Apart from being haunted by the imminent approach of death, *Ce Pays dont je meurs* enacts the haunting experience of immigration. It shows their parents' estrangement, who left Algeria for France.[21] Their mother was disillusioned with life in France, a place she had longed to live in. She feels obliged to pretend to live a luxurious life in Europe in front of her extended family. After a work accident paralyzes her husband[22] and his employer refuses to pay compensation, he loses hope. The situation for the children is no easier; their elder daughter, Nacéra, was born in Algeria and feels out of place in France. She feels gigantic next to her French peers and tries to fit in by being motionless and silent so as not to attract attention. She feels that only by stopping her growth can she win the esteem of her classmates and be 'normal' (*Pays* 64–65). The family expects that the younger sister, Amira, will fit in immediately because she was born in France. However, Amira feels her 'otherness'. As a child, she hid her background, calling herself Marie and claiming to be of Italian descent (*Pays* 73). Amira is haunted by the traces of an immigration that she did not experience herself. She neither feels like a French citizen nor like an Algerian and her family in Algeria does not accept her (*Pays* 26–31).

If anything, Amira's identity is anorexic. Self-starvation tends to involve becoming a surrogate identity for the afflicted (Heywood 1996: 51). The starvation is resorted to in

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20 Original quote: "Qui dira une prière sur la tombe d'Amira creusé par la misère?"
21 The 'Tunisianness' of this novel will be discussed below.
22 While the novel offers further examples of disability and disease, it pays greater attention to the subject of death which motivates the decision to include it in the present discussion and not in the previous chapter. However, as was noted, the themes are closely connected.

order to escape from a body that causes feelings of anxiousness and powerlessness, especially during adolescence when physical changes occur on the way to adulthood (compare Brumberg 1988: 28).[23] In *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Susan Bordo criticizes how Brumberg fails to highlight the explicit presence of gender in this fear of a changing and, possibly increasing, physicality. It is reflected in the refuge that woman or girls seek in a body that minimizes its feminine markers. Bordo emphasizes that self-starvation reflects a contempt for the feminine body. This in turn links anorexia back to patriarchal traits in society. The anorexic body shows the continued presence of patriarchal tendencies (1993: 32–33, 54, 68).[24]

More relevant here are the implications that Zouari's novel offers with regards to the materiality of the bodies that it depicts. Self-starvation reduces the flesh, that which causes anxiousness. Starvation contains the un-becoming – this is the mirror image of the specter's "becoming-body" in Derrida (2006[1994]: 5). Like the specter, the anorexic body is 'no longer and not yet'. Insightfully, and also regarding the anorexic body, Derrida writes about the specter that:

> [I]t is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed. (2006[1994]: 5)

There is also something "departed" in Amira as she is presented by Nacéra. Her body slowly disappears, both from her consciousness and from the world, until it is merely a 'tiny tree' ("un arbre nain", *Pays* 147), a plant and not a human body. This 'departed-ness' is further emphasized in Nacéra's representation of her sister. The representation is necessarily incomplete, as will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

Nacéra and Amira were the "sœurs étrangères", the foreign sisters, at school (*Pays* 65). Nacéra's sense of estrangement was described above as depending on her self-proclaimed corporeal difference. She reads her sister's eating disorder as part of Amira's struggle for normalcy and interprets it as the wish to be 'like the French girls' and 'not-other'. In Nacéra's view, thinness is not the primary motivation. The mother's employer, however, argues that many girls Amira's age share the same behavior because they all want to look like models from fashion magazines. This does not convince the mother who is, instead, irritated and confronts Amira that if this were true, she cannot truly be ill (*Pays* 106). Ultimately, the narrative cannot answer the question of what the goals of Amira's self-starvation are since she is represented by her sister and remains silent herself.

The narrative perspective highlights that the reading of Amira's body is difficult for her family and for the reader alike. Nacéra comments that in the absence of an organic reason, the cause of Amira's loss of appetite must be a 'spoilt piece within their mother's soul' ("morceau d'âme pourri", *Pays* 70): Amira was conceived to distract the mother from her exile, from the heartbreak that leaving Algeria had caused her. Amira – as Nacéra reads her – refused to cure her mother from her past ("guérir sa mère de son passé"; *Pays* 16). The

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23 Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. 1988. *Fasting Girls. The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease*; Heywood, Leslie. 1996. *Dedication to Hunger. The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture*.

24 This study does not intend to imply that only women suffer from anorexia. Boys and men are equally concerned; however, they often have different reasons and suffer in a different way.

mother's heartbreak or the "morceau d'âme pourri" is passed on to the daughter and this puts a strain their relationship.

The characters do not realize the disconnect between themselves. Although Amira is eventually diagnosed with anorexia by a doctor, this doctor merely explains that it is a problem common among girls her age and that it will pass. Nacéra comments that while the doctor did well in labelling Amira's problem, no one in the family understood what her condition meant, neither regarding its causes nor its implications. Their mother, for example, wondered how her daughter could suffer from anorexia despite being a solid Algerian. After all, it is a disease that only befell Westerners for their lack of heart and faith (compare *Pays* 77). This understanding oddly mirrors traditional research about eating disorders that considered anorexia to be a disease that mainly affected young women from affluent Western societies (Brumberg 1988: 12). Wider research shows it to be a phenomenon with an international scope and with specific prevalence among immigrants (Bulik 1987; Meuret 2007: 38, 43–44; Heywood 1996: 13). As such, it has found entrance into literary works from a wide range of backgrounds as Meuret discusses in her *Writing Size Zero. Figuring Anorexia in Contemporary World Literatures*. Alongside works from Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Pakistan she also mentions several Algerian novels, some of which address issues of French-Algerian identities in specific, such as Farida Belghoul's *Georgette!* (1986) and Malika Mokeddem's *L'Interdite* (1991) (2007: 67–68, 241). Anorexia has, furthermore, been used metaphorically to think and describe culture, in particular by Leslie Heywood who calls the majority's preferences for "thin over fat" and "masculine over feminine" the "anorexic logic" and traces anorexia as a pattern in literary modernism (1996: xii, 64).

Amira used to be an outspoken child, but she turns silent with her disordered eating (*Pays* 66, 70). According to Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, silence is characteristic of the foreigner's experience of being stuck between mother language and acquired language (1991: 15). Kristeva attributes this to the impossibility of ever speaking the second language perfectly. Yet, Amira's silence is chosen. She has difficulties speaking her identity. Her culturally difficult situation is ignored or downplayed while the experience of estrangement infiltrates her body.

In Amira's silence, the only expression that is left is via the body. In eating disorder research, the questions of whether anorexic bodies express themselves and what they say are hotly debated. In feminist readings anorexics are granted intention and control. The refusal to eat is understood as a protest or critique of society and the disorder's addictive traits are ignored. For Brumberg, this constitutes a "romanticization" of the problem (1988: 36–37). Traces of the feminist position are present in Susan Bordo's work who argues that the emaciated bodies of anorexics communicate and reflect values "in a meaningful and powerful way" (1993: 67). Bordo refuses to pathologize the pursuit of thinness. Instead, she describes eating disorders as a condensed version of underlying cultural attitudes by both men and women that favor slenderness (1993: 32–33, 54, 60, 65).

Debra Ferreday asks: "how can the anorexic subject speak?"[25] She argues that the anorexic cannot speak because of a double silencing. The medical discourse looks with an "objectifying gaze" (Ferreday 2012: 144) that sees the anorexic as an emaciated body, not

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25 This is an allusion to Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern speak?" (1988).

as a whole person. It also does not listen to anorexics when they attempt to speak and considers their words to be the "ramblings of hysteria" (2012: 142). Amira is similarly silenced by her sister's representation that only highlights her passivity further. Nacéra's narration contains an 'objectifying gaze'. Although silencing, the anorexic depends on this gaze "in order to be read" in the first instance, according to Ferreday (2012: 142). This is precisely the case in *Ce Pays dont je meurs*. Without Nacéra's representation, it is unlikely that Amira's story would be told at all.

The novel does not clarify whether or not Amira remains in control as her disease progresses, whether she decides to starve herself to death[26] or loses the ability to care about alternatives. What Amira's body communicates remains unclear since no access is given to Amira's own perspective. In this way, Amira is both absent from and present at the center of the narrative, much like a specter.

Nacéra's desire to retell their story to her sister creates the impression of an oral narrative. Nacéra gives her sister a certain embodiment through her own voice, no matter how fleeting this embodiment is. This emphasizes the importance of words and language in producing embodiment in narration that was suggested in the previous sections. Nacéra supplies Amira with materiality, but she also reads a message into her sister's withering body: Amira's wish to fit in.

Death approaches and it is foreshadowed by the narrative. When it stops, the embodiment it contains ends as well. There are parallels between the narrative situation of the sisters in *Ce Pays dont je meurs* and that of Shahrazade from *The Arabian Nights*. The novel itself refers to these parallels: While Shahrazade narrated in order to stay alive (compare Malti-Douglas *Woman's Body, Woman's Words*, 1991),[27] Nacéra says to Amira that her story is not meant to prolong life, but to pass the time while waiting for the end. She even distances her account from Shahrazade's. Shahrazad had reasons to stay alive while they only have reasons to die (*Pays* 81).[28] On a meta level and in her essay collection *Pour en finir avec Shahrazade*, Fawzia Zouari has expressed that she refuses to identify with the story-teller whom she describes as someone who only narrates to entertain men and make them forget (1996: 11, 90). Zouari states that Shahrazade is dead and that her voice has fallen silent (1996: 98, 135). This denies Shahrazade all of the agency that she might have otherwise possessed. Her stories, as the *Arabian Nights* themselves make sure to mention, were not written by Shahrazade, but by a scribe (compare Malti-Douglas 1991: 23). By highlighting the legendary storyteller's silence, Zouari promotes her own writing as an alternative, as one that is neither silent nor is it meant to make forget or to entertain men.

The confrontation of voice and silence is a central element of *Ce Pays dont je meurs*. Amira's ghostly state is not only the result of her refusal to speak, but is also reinforced through Nacéra's representation. Colin Davis suitably writes about haunting in general that: "the dead are killed again as the text ceaselessly rehearses its desire and its inability to

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26 A desire for death according to Meuret is not typical for anorexics who play with the dangers of self-starvation (2007: 13).

27 For a discussion of Shahrazade, gender, and story-telling, see the first chapter of Malti-Douglas' book.

28 Original quote: "Je te raconte ces choses non pas pour vivre encore, comme cette folle de Shéhérazade, mais pour tromper l'attente de la fin. La conteuse des *Mille et Une Nuits* avait des raisons de rester en vie. Nous, nous n'avons que des raisons de mourir."

make them speak" (Davis 2007: 142). This is true for Amira, even though she is not yet dead.

While Nacéra claims to narrate in order to pass the time waiting for death, she betrays her own reasoning. She does not want to accept that her sister might have already passed away before she has finished telling their story. She resolves that her words are powerless ("impuissants", *Pays* 147), which indicates that the narration and her sister's existence (embodiment, materiality) are interrelated for her. In what follows, we will return to the sisters' respective behaviors: narration and starvation.

Nacéra's narrative reclaims her story. She wants to tell it because their remaining belongings would not explain anything (*Pays* 10–11). Amira's self-starvation could also be seen as an effort to regain control over her body against external interpretations, against those who do not see her as French. However, Nacéra's narrative does not allude to any kind of agency on Amira's part. Instead, she highlights her lethargy and depression. Amira cannot reclaim her body through starvation, because she ultimately destroys this very body by starving it. Amira does not comment on the goals of her refusal to eat or is not allowed to comment. She does not protest against a known cause and her death does not promote a greater idea through the self-sacrifice; instead, it appears linked to an absence of reasons to live.

Ce Pays dont je meurs is not only haunted by impending death but much more fundamentally by the experience of immigration, a notion suggested at the beginning of this section. Immigration is shown to be a breeding ground of problems. It forms a subcurrent that drives the narrative and can be described as a social haunting. The repercussions of immigration become particularly apparent in the context of identity. Both Nacéra and Amira fail to assign themselves a national or cultural identity and are unable to see identity as a multitude of layers or partial aspects. This struggle is linked to spaces and environments as the sisters go to school and return to their family apartment. The teachers educate them to be 'children of the republic' and ignore France's problematic colonialist past. Amira and Nacéra arrive back at home after school and are met with the father's prayers and the mother's henna-stained hands (see *Pays* 68–69). Here, what is outside of the flat is perceived as hostile. The family doubts institutions, such as the police and social services (*Pays* 10–11, 130), which is what eventually allows the tragedy of starvation to happen, because no one gets help. Not only is the family seen and constructed as foreign, but they also feel estranged from their environment and withdraw.

The flat is Nacéra and Amira's mother's preferred space. Inside, she can pretend her family were still village dignitaries. She can take long baths like a princess from the *Arabian Nights* while her daughters dry off her back and bring her drinks. Nacéra thinks her mother's behavior is suitable for a traditional *hammām* (*Pays* 13). In their flat, it is a lonely, exiled version of the communal bathing culture in which women not only cleanse themselves and find relief, but enjoy their common corporeality and exchange gossip.

Despite the separateness and privacy of the apartment, the family fails to impart the sisters with a distinct sense of identity. Their mother taught them about their home country only through her silences. She never imagined that her children would feel anything but Algerian, given that they had purely Algerian blood ("pur sang", *Pays* 71). Amira suffers from the 'almost likeness' of her looks with the French girls in her class. When back in Algeria for a visit, her grey eyes cause whispers that she is not her father's child. She also does not speak Arabic well and when she is unable to recite the *Fātiḥa* at her grandmother's funeral, she resolves to say a prayer for virgin Mary in French (*Pays* 26–31). Amira is haunted by an ambivalence that is comparable to the children of mixed Franco-Algerian

heritage. Barclay links them to the spectral: "their uncertain state […], reminiscent of the ontological uncertainty of the specter, means that they haunt the boundaries of national identity" (2011: 106). What Barclay does not mention is that the boundaries of national identity also haunt them. Nacéra assumes that Amira is actually the most Algerian person of the family. While the rest of the family tried to find a place for themselves in France, she, the one who was born there, can see the impossibilities of blending in more clearly and more acutely than the others (*Pays* 107). A generational aspect of haunting is apparent in these reflections; it is also a topic that is addressed by Derrida: "[B]eing-with specters", he argues "would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (Derrida 2006[1994]: xviii).

The family is certainly "with specters" and dies of melancholia, one after the other. The parents' demise is described throughout Nacéra's account. The reasons behind their deaths share a lot in common with the causes for the two sisters' loss of hope. According to Nacéra, the father died as a result of his wife's unhappiness, rather than the cerebral bleeding that was diagnosed (*Pays* 80–81). The mother's death is given a twofold explanation. It was caused both by her inability to help Amira and by the Algeria that she left behind. 'Her love of Algeria, compressed in her very depths, had poisoned her body' (*Pays* 127)[29] describes Nacéra, referring again to the deathly piece of spoilt soul. Nacéra describes her own death as well as her sister's in terms of (national) identity. While Amira dies of France, just as the mother died of Algeria, she herself dies as a result of the impossibility to make up a country for herself (compare *Pays* 146). This has to be read as a reference to the title, *Ce Pays dont je meurs*, as the country from which the speaker dies.

Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* describes the melancholia of the immigrant. She highlights the importance of time in this context that seems to prioritize only space: "Melancholy lover of a vanished space, [*the foreigner; C.P.*] cannot, in fact, get over his having abandoned a period of time. The lost paradise is a mirage of the past that he will never be able to recover" (1991: 9–10). We ought to read this together with a section from Fawzia Zouari's *Pour en finir avec Shahrazade*. According to Zouari, exile and migration mess with the experience of time. Migration is not so much a change of place, but rather a rupture of time. Those living abroad have a past, instead of a future, and this constitutes them in a way that can never be put aside or taken off: 'the past is in us; it is like the skin for the body, you cannot take it off' (1996: 46, 52, 62).[30] This is what describes the "morceau d'âme pourri" or the piece of spoilt soul in Zouari's *Ce Pays dont je meurs* (*Pays* 70). Interestingly, Zouari employs imagery that connotes the body as well as the soul or mind to describe migration's haunting influence in both the quote from the essay and in the quote from the novel. This suggests that embodiment, developed as a concept to encompass both mind and body (see *Introduction*), is implicated by the social haunting of immigration and estrangement.

Time is 'out of joint' in several instances in the novel. It is contained in the experience of migration and its haunting presence in the novel. Haunting itself was described as upsetting time. The novel's interference with time can be observed from the very beginning of *Ce Pays dont je meurs*. After all, Nacéra announces that she tries to fit the retelling of a life

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29 Original quote: "Son amour de l'Algérie, comprimé au fond d'elle, avait empoisonné son corps."
30 Original quote: "le passé est en nous et comme la peau pour le corps on ne saurait nous en dévêtir".

in the final hours before death. The retelling is not chronological, and the characters are shown to live in the past (e.g., the mother who is haunted by her previous life in Algeria). Several timelines exist in parallel as a result.

Melanie R. Anderson argues that one has to be aware of "one's personal hauntings to survive in the present and move into the future" (2013: 80–81). This is also Zouari's position in *Pour en finir avec Shahrazade*, in which she suggests an 'active memory', a 'memory of becoming' ("mémoire active", "mémoire en devenir", 1996: 67), instead of passive nostalgia. Her protagonists in *Ce Pays dont je meurs* fail to achieve this. They remain passively entangled with the past which causes them to always be partially absent. For example, they are unable to ask for social support because they do not trust the world outside of their flat. There is an estrangement at the foundation of their very existence in France.

One issue that the previous analysis ignored is the novel's own identity. It is stated in the title pages that it is based on a real event taken from the news. The names of the characters and their circumstances, however, are entirely imaginary.[31] There is no identity (as in sameness in all aspects) between what is being narrated and the real event. The family's Algerian background influences the characters' specific identities and the narrative. However, what does it say about the novel, about its relevance for Tunisian readers? *Ce Pays dont je meurs* was written by a Tunisian author living in France and was published both in Tunisia and in France. The fact that it describes the fate of an Algerian family does not make it any less Tunisian. Instead, it calls the perception of literature as tied to national boundaries into question, a concern that was previously expressed in the *Introduction*.

The novel should be seen as an exemplary enactment of the experience of immigration and post-coloniality (for the body and colonialism, see *Introduction, Section 4*). While the 'Algerianness' of the family described is not negligible, it functions as a placeholder for the diverse partial identities that haunt modern day France, its former colonies, and its protectorates.[32] The novel relates to Tunisian society indirectly. Its discussion of the experience of immigration, exile, and estrangement is universal. *Ce Pays dont je meurs* also relates to Tunisia by discussing an identity crisis that is the result of a proximity to French culture in the absence of a strong sense of original identity. Anorexia can be read as a mark of the immigrant's acculturation (compare the mother's confusion about her daughter catching a 'disease of Westerners') at the same time as it is a sign of failed integration (see its entanglement with Amira's struggle to belong among the French girls). These are poles between which anorexia oscillates in the novel. Its in-between state and that of the sisters can be read as a description of Tunisia's collective identity. Tunisia is an Islamic country from France's perspective and is a 'westernized' country from the Arab world's perspective.

In its exploration of the materiality of bodies in literature, this section has presented an example in which materiality depended on the narrative voice. Nacéra's narrative voice gave presence to Amira's body while she was silent and relied on her body to tell her story.

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31 The German translation's publisher offers more details in the included publicity notice. The events are dated to November 1998 and placed in Paris's 14th arrondissement. The notice states that only one of the sisters was found dead while the other was saved from starvation. The French original does not add to any of these explanations.

32 See Fiona Barclay's *Writing Postcolonial France. Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (2011) for a thorough analysis of France as being haunted, much like its previous colonies and protectorates.

This body, however, was misread by her family. Amira's bodily materiality was dominated by presences and absences that are representative of a literary embodiment produced in language. The spectral was analyzed to understand the materiality of bodies further. It became apparent that haunting does not require ghosts or deaths, which exemplified social haunting. Instead, Amira and Nacéra's family was shown to be haunted by the experience of immigration and the resulting estrangement, both from the receiving culture as well as from the homeland.

Death shaped the narrative of *Ce Pays dont je meurs* from the very beginning. It had a presence even when it had not happened yet, constituting a haunting element within the narrative. The analysis showed death as something that is difficult to represent. The first-person perspective in *Ce Pays dont je meurs* failed to narrate the perspective of a dying person. The narration suddenly ends, and the reader does not know whether Nacéra died as well. This leaves the question of how death can be narrated in literature from a first-person perspective open. The following section explores this further and continues with an analysis of materiality without bodies. This time, however, bodies are completely absent, even literary bodies.

2.6   Voices from Embodiment and Beyond. *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*

Leslie Heywood argues in her *Dedication to Hunger. The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture* that anorexia as a theme represented within the arts is connected to the imagery of burning female flesh. Both starvation and burning reflect the assumption that the bodily needs to undergo transformation and disappear to become art. Only when the bodily is overcome can an "originary purity" be reached that is impossible in life. This purity is the goal of literary modernism that, therefore, follows an "anorexic logic" (Heywood 1996: 80–81).

Heywood's observations address the Western literary canon. The following section will not attempt to ascribe the same 'anorexic logic' to Tunisian literature. Rather, it explores how one work deals with bodily flesh, since flesh is the epitome of the materiality with which this chapter is concerned. Heywood's observations connect this section with the previous one. In the pivotal moment of the novel that is discussed in this chapter, Alaa al-Din burns his mother to death to calm an anger, that smoldered inside him: "Those conflagrations that for many years used to eat away at my body have been extinguished and nothing remains of them but clumps of ash" (*Tale* 1).[33] He burns female flesh to quench the fire within him and attempts to purify himself. In the previous section, Nacéra read her sister's self-starvation as her attempt to purify herself from her Algerian background. Hassouna Mosbahi's *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* ('A Tunisian tale', 2007) is very different from *Ce Pays dont je meurs*, which featured a dying girl who hardly spoke. In Mosbahi's work, the dead mother insists on telling her story after death and she takes turns with her son to narrate. Both novels, apart from being narratives about consumed bodies, discuss and stage the importance of the narrative voice, a concern that will be further explored. This section's

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33   All quotes and references in the text are taken from Max Weiss's English translation *A Tunisian Tale* (2011) referred to in short as *Tale*. Arabic originals of direct quotes are given in footnotes, as indicated by *Ḥikāya*.
"وتلك الحرائق التي ظلّت تأكل جسدي على مدى سنوات طويلة، إنطفأت، ولم يتبقَ منها غير كتل من الرماد."
(*Ḥikāya* 7)

central concerns are whether or not literature can create the embodiment of a voice without there being a body that is at least described and narrated in the act of telling the story. The answer to these concerns will provide insights into the production of bodily materiality in literature.

In her study *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry writes that the voice is "a final source of self-extension; so long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body" (1985: 33). The voice, in this description, seems to be a tool of embodiment, of the embodied being-in-the-world. Scarry continues that "in death the body is emphatically present while that more elusive part represented by the voice is so alarmingly absent that heavens are created to explain its whereabouts" (1985: 49). Death or what is after death is characterized by the absence of the voice. If, in literature, there is a voice in the absence of a body, does this mean that there can be instances of embodiment or materiality despite there not being a body?

In *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, the dead mother has no body and is not a ghost; she is merely a narrative voice. In her first chapter, she clarifies that her body was consumed by flames (*Tale* 3–7). However, whether she conveys a certain level of embodiment through her narrative voice, following Scarry's assertion that the voice extends over the boundaries of the body, is a topic that will be explored further.

What is remarkable about incineration, about turning into "clumps of ash", is that it leaves a remainder of the body. This remainder is reflected in the mother's voice. It speaks despite having no material origin to come from. This is certainly a trick of fiction. It is reminiscent of the belief in popular Islam that there is an intermediary phase after death during which the soul of the deceased returns to the grave to await resurrection (Lapidus 1998: 150), as indicated above. Although the novel does not express religious ideas, it does suppose the existence of a consciousness or an immaterial soul that can address the living after death. The medical definitions of life and death, referred to above, do not focus on consciousness as an indicator of the absence of death, but instead contain weaker criteria (e.g., brain activity or organic function). Consciousness is a much stronger characteristic of human life. The mother's voice – although it never claims to be alive, instead asserting the opposite – is an expression of consciousness; it narrates memories and reflects the character's personality. While the voice itself is disembodied, the mother describes her body in life – her beautiful figure that brought her the affection of men and the jealousy and gossip of women. Her voice gains materiality through descriptions like these.

The voice is spoken within the narrative. This can be seen in its allusions to listeners, a collective who are not described further. The mother's voice does more than what Rehbock allows for, namely that communication and thinking can only be affected by the medium of language that is tied to signs that are articulated or produced by a body. Rehbock argues that communication after death requires the mediation of graphic characters, or other carriers of meaning, that were produced by bodies in life (her examples are writing, artistic production, and buildings) and are considered to be a part of the deceased's bodily presence, even after death (compare Rehbock 2012: 168). Fiction can disregard these limitations; this means that bodies in literature have to have a specific embodiment and a specific materiality. This is a materiality that is not bound to the presence of a body as *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* shows. It is a materiality that is produced in language and that oscillates between presence and absence. It is more present when the mother describes her previous body, for example, and less present when she addresses the fact that her body was consumed by flames.

Her death is equally present and absent in the novel; after all, the mother has died prior to the beginning of the narrative: "I speak from beyond the grave" (*Tale* 3).[34] Her fiery death is only described in further detail close to the end of the novel. Death both frames the narrative and forms its present-yet-absent center by letting the reader wonder, from the very start, how a son ended up burning his mother. Time is brought 'out of joint', in Derrida's sense, in this delay of the actual description of the murder.

Meanwhile, the mother's son is awaiting his own death in prison (*Tale* 1–2). He comments that he is not afraid of death; in fact, he already likens himself to a corpse in life: "Here I am now, as cold as the dead. This cell is as narrow as a tomb and just as cold". Prior to his execution, he states that he will be without emotion and "will have already departed this life some time before" (*Tale* 1–2).[35] This suggests another version of the absent-yet-present paradigm that this chapter has so often noted throughout the narratives explored.

Both mother and son speak from places of absence. Their voices do not haunt the novel, since neither of them makes a direct effort to influence the lives of those who remain alive. A dialogue between them is indicated, which alternates between mother and son, through the narrative structure. However, this dialogue does not actually take place. The son mentions that, despite sharing a roof, they hardly spoke to each other (*Tale* 108). Neither of them addresses the other, even after the murder, but it is the crime that brings their voices into an artificial conversation. There is no dialogue with the collective addressed either and there can never be one, as the mother states: "Your response doesn't matter much to me because I can't hear it anyway" (*Tale* 3).[36] After all, she does not have ears to hear with.

The idea to rewrite history was strong in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*. *Ce Pays dont je meurs* focused on retelling family history. In *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, we find the accounts of two marginalized individuals, a young man without perspective and a widow with a discredited reputation. They produce parallel, sometimes disagreeing accounts. Both voices try to promote their own version of the story, especially with regards to the mother's morality and honor (a topic discussed further below). It is impossible to agree with only one of the accounts, since both voices are presented on the same level and do not have any formal differences. They are not distinguished as dead and alive, for example. Since there is no strict separation between life and death, death cannot infect life as Kristeva assumed (1982: 4). As a result, the dead mother does not haunt the story. Instead, it is the gap that the dialogue leaves that is alluded to, but which does not happen, that haunts the novel. This is more so the case, given that it was precisely this kind of dialogue that might have prevented the murder.

The position of death in the narrative is different than in the novels examined previously, since *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* promises a first-hand experience. The mother states that she will discuss all of the details of her story (compare *Tale* 3), she begins to narrate from a point in

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34 Original quote:

"من العالم الآخر، أنا أتكلّم". (*Ḥikāya* 7)

35 Original quote:

"وها أنا بارد مثل كلّ الأموات. والزنزانة الضيقة مثل قبر، باردة هي أيضا"، "وما دمت قد فارقت الحياة قبل الأوان".
(*Ḥikāya* 7)

36 Original quote:

"لا يهمني جوابكم إذ أني لست قادرة على سماعه". (*Ḥikāya* 8)

time after her death, tells the stories of her life, and concludes her account with her death. That death ends the last of her chapters corrects the course of time. The narrative, however, contains gaps. The son hits the mother on the head to make her unconscious. When she regains consciousness, she is bound and gagged and her son drenches her in gasoline before setting her on fire with a match: "As the fire raged, I felt as though it wasn't going to consume my body but the entire world along with it…" (*Tale* 129).[37] In the mother's description of the fire, not only is her flesh burned but the world of her being-in-the-*world*. What is around her is consumed in addition to her body, but not her consciousness, the being of the *being*-in-the-world.

Another significant thing of note is that the mother's final chapter, which leads up to her death, does not end in a full stop. Instead, another continuation is indicated with three dots,[38] which lead the reader back to her first chapter in which she speaks from a position after death. The dots refer to another gap since death itself is not narrated in its entirety, once again highlighting the difficulty of its representation. Death retains a moment that cannot be represented from the first-person perspective. It describes the result of a process in which mental and physical functions grind to a halt. Even a literary work's consciousness has to stop momentarily in order for the process to be understandable as death. Therefore, there can be no first-hand testimonial. The mother's consciousness only returns after death in the novel. In this, the dots allude to the remainder that is being left or returns, consciousness. They could also refer to the haunting that results from the death and how it shapes the narrative.

In order to understand the instances that haunt the novel and its characters, in addition to the missing dialogue between mother and son and the murder itself, attention needs to be given to the role played by society in the mother's murder. The following analysis explores society as a driving force of the events through its system of honor and shame that is particularly concerned with the female body and mind. The discourse of honor and shame will be shown through the work of Avery F. Gordon, as a social haunting that informs the study's understanding of Tunisian society (which has been examined in *Section 2.4*).

In general, matricide is considered to be a "very rare event" (Heide/Frei 2010: 3).[39] A gendered aspect tends to motivate the murders when sons kill their mothers. Heide and Frei refer to murders that are described as defenses of the perpetrator's masculinity or caused by "extreme emotions triggered by the mother's behavior" (2010: 7). In the novel, the son's crime is likened to an 'honor killing'.[40] The mother compares her fate to a story about a girl

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37 Original quote:

"اندلعت النار، فأحسست أنها لم تكن تأكل جسدي وحده وإنّما الدّنيا بأسرها.." (*Ḥikāya* 156)

38 Two in the Arabic original.

39 The main focus of Heide and Frei's study "Matricide: A Critique of the Literature" is on the United States of America (2010: 3). In Muslim societies, the favored position of mothers has a preventative impact. This position is discussed by Hachimi with reference to Qur'an and *ḥadīth* (Hachimi 2001: 43).

40 The World Health Organization defines 'honor killings' as murders in which a girl or woman is killed by a family member "for an actual or assumed sexual or behavioural transgression, including adultery, sexual intercourse or pregnancy outside marriage" (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2012: 2). The prevalence of these murders is reflected in a lenience within the penal code for perpetrators of such crimes. The concept of honor killings is not specific to Arab or Islamic culture; until the 1970s, the French penal code contained a passage that granted those who killed or injured a woman of their family a possible exemption (Article 324 of the French Penal Code as quoted in Abu-Odeh 2010: 914) when they had caught their victims in illegitimate situations. With

that was almost burned to death. The girl was the target of gossip that questioned her honor and she was only saved because an olive tree spoke up for her (compare *Tale* 99).

The discourse of honor is certainly "gender-based" and focused on closely controlling the morality of women and girls, even as it justifies "the males' violations to the cultural ethics" (Alhawamdeh 2015: 105). A woman's sexual conduct is considered to influence her male relative's masculinity and her hymen is conceived to be the "locus of *his* gender".[41] "If a man doesn't intervene by killing his sister/wife once she shamed him, he suffers a loss of his gender: he is no longer a man" (Abu-Odeh 2010: 919).

It is unusual that an honor killing refers to a mother, where most sources mention "sisters, daughters, or wives" (Alhawamdeh 2015: 105). However, Alaa al-Din sees himself as the household's responsible 'senior male'. That a (formerly) married woman is punished is not unusual. Abu-Odeh argues that expectations regarding the biological virginity of women change after marriage; they are replaced by what she calls "social virginity" which is continuously expected of women (i.e., an unblemished social conduct and reputation) (2010: 919). Doubt regarding the mother's propriety is precisely what motivates the murder though.

The discourse of honor and shame has a haunting effect insofar as it forms a subcurrent that influences society. In this operation, space plays a central role, precisely because the narrowness of city space leads to an intimate knowledge of other people. This, in turn, is what enables gossip. In *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, the neighborhood M Slum[42] is described in negative terms as a place of squalor and violence. The mother is targeted with harassment there: "The men constantly insulted me, seeking revenge because I had always despised them, loathed their filthiness, and recoiled from their vile ugliness. […] As for the women, they intentionally tried to hurt me and tarnish my reputation out of sheer jealousy" (*Tale* 4).[43] Despite the already confrontational context, the mother attempts to free herself from social control; she finds a job outside of M Slum and enjoys wandering around in the city center by herself.

Alaa al-Din claims to have burned his mother to death "with the nonchalance of someone lighting a cigarette" (*Tale* 109)[44] because he felt rejected by her. Allusions throughout the novel, however, highlight the impact that his mother's bad reputation has on his sense of honor, as well as on his decision to kill her: The burning feelings from his first chapter reappear when he describes how the people stirred doubt in him with "indecent words and

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reference to the Tunisian penal code, Abu-Odeh writes that leniency provides the husband with "a reduction of, not exemption from, punishment" (2010: 915). Abu-Odeh's article is based on materials she collected in 1993; however, she highlights that the basic argument remains the same (2010: 948–949). The prevalence of honor killings in Tunisia is unknown, especially since it is in the country's interest to distract from their occurrence, due to its orientation towards Europe and modernity.

41 Gender roles will be further explored in the forthcoming chapters, in which the gender binary and heteronormativity will be addressed in the context of Tunisian novels.

42 M Slum stands for Melassine which is a poor neighborhood in Tunis.

43 Original quote:

"وكان هدف الرجال من الإساءة الدائمة إليّ هو الانتقام منّي لأنني كنت أحتقرهم احتقارا شديدا، وأعاف وسخهم، وأنفر من وضاعتهم ومن قبحهم [...] أما النساء فكنّ يتعمّدن ايذائي، وتشويه سمعتي لأنهن يغرن منّي." (*Ḥikāya* 9)

44 Original quote:

"ببساطة من يشعل سيجارة" (*Ḥikāya* 134)

slanderous rumors" about his mother (*Tale* 64).[45] He ignores his doubts until his father dies in a fight that was caused by gossip about his mother. Alaa al-Din blames his mother and sees her loose morals confirmed (compare *Tale* 107). He finds the ultimate proof in a dream that he has a week before the murder. In the dream, his father's "specter"[46] (*Tale* 125; "shabaḥ", *Ḥikāya* 152) leads him to a big hotel where he sees his mother dancing half-naked for men. Alaa al-Din hears his father saying: "You've got to know what your mother does on the sly" (*Tale* 126).[47]

Knowledge, and more precisely "public 'knowledge", is an important factor in honor crimes (Korteweg 2012: 145). It is expressed in gossip, which suggests the knowledge of intimate details and rumors that spread uncontrollably among the public. Gossip as a factor of honor-motivated violence is mentioned in Kulczycki and Windle (2011) and Glazer and Abu Ras (1994). According to Abu-Odeh, the "institutions of social gossip" serve the aim of keeping girls and women in check and thereby of protecting them. Gossip can, however, also lead to honor crimes (Abu-Odeh 2010: 919, 927). In the novel, society's criticism causes doubt in the son. This doubt has a function that is very similar to the 'spoilt piece of soul' in *Ce Pays dont je meurs*. The doubt forms an internal insecurity that corrodes his sense of self. Alaa al-Din, accordingly, feels permanently discontent with his life and, ultimately, decides he wants to end it with a "monstrous act" (*Tale* 53; "faʿla shanīʿa", *Ḥikāya* 64,). The labelling of the murder as 'monstrous' ("shanīʿa", other possible translations are 'atrocious' or 'abominable') occurs in several instances in the novel, which suggests an estrangement and repulsion that Alaa al-Din feels for himself. One scene conveys this specifically. Alaa al-Din is walking outside when suddenly he feels a tail growing out of his behind. People stare and laugh. He runs away in panic. Catching his breath, he is repulsed by the sight of the "rough tail, covered with thick hair" (*Tale* 118).[48] He runs further and realizes that the tail is gone. He calms down only to find out that his head has turned into that of a donkey. Again, laughter follows him as he runs away:

> Away from the city that had become a terrifying ogre, from the mocking and cursing laughter, from the black nightmares that had started tormenting [*him, C.P.; …*] at night and during the day and from the people of M Slum, from their lies, their false rumors, and the poison of their deadly resentments […]. (*Tale* 119)[49]

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45 Original quote:

"كلماتهم النابية [...] وشاياتهم المغرضة". (*Ḥikāya* 78)

46 The father is not analyzed here as a haunting presence since his appearance is depicted as a dream that only happens once in the novel. The father does not have a presence throughout the novel.

47 Original quote:

"لا بد أن تعلم ماذا تفعل أمك في الخفاء." (*Ḥikāya* 153)

48 Original quote:

"ذيلا خشنا، مكسوّا بشعر كثيف". (*Ḥikāya* 145)

49 Original quote:

"هاربا من المدينة التي أصبحت غولا مخيفا، ومن القهقهات السّاخرة والشّامتة، ومن الكوابيس السوداء التي أصبحت تعذبني في اللّيل وفي النّهار، ومن أهل حيّ 'م'، ومن أكاذيبهم، وإشاعاتهم المغرضة، ومن سموم أحقادهم القاتلة". (*Ḥikāya* 146)

When he stops running, he arrives at the eventual site of the murder and the donkey head is gone. This alludes to a reason to kill his mother; namely, to get rid of the metaphorical ass's head that society makes him wear as a result of his mother's transgressions.

In the novel, the son is susceptible to gossip because he lacks a strong sense of self and feels inferior. The truth of the gossip does not matter, neither in the novel, nor in real life. According to Glazer and Abu Ras, it is irrelevant whether discrediting rumors are true or not; their existence is enough to condemn a woman (1994: 282). An inferiority complex similar to Alaa al-Din's can be found in the novels that Alhawamdeh analyzes in his study on honor crimes in literary works, Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* and Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (compare 2016: 111). Kulczycki and Windle highlight the importance of honor in the context of poverty, where people have very little left to lose, save for their honor (2011: 1451; also compare Abu-Odeh 2010: 912).

In *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, honor and shame form a haunting discourse that influences Alaa al-Din's behavior. The novel indicates patriarchal values when it presents male violence and female victimhood. It does not transcend expected gender roles in its portrayal of an honor crime. However, the narrative structure puts the perspectives of son and mother in parallel which equalizes them and shows that both are shaped by their personal shortcomings and insecurities, as well as by the reality in Tunisia. Through this presentation, the gender inequality depicted is corrected towards a balance that shows individuals of both genders as victims of their circumstances.

The world around Alaa al-Din is Tunisian, as the title *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* highlights. Does that mean that a youth's lack of a stable identity, matricide, and a scrutinizing society are essentially Tunisian or more Tunisian than they might be Algerian or Moroccan or French? Not necessarily; instead, this is *a* Tunisian story, *an* aspect that haunts Tunisia. The novel accordingly reflects central problems in Tunisian society, such as the various degrees of modernity experienced throughout the country with their resulting divergent understanding of gender roles and the challenges these pose for both men and women. The novel allows insights into the experience of an underprivileged young man who turned to fire.[50] It also gives access to the memories of a woman who yearned for freedom, despite social repression. The confrontation of modernity and tradition, which has been discussed in the previous sections, reappears in a different fashion here. The younger generation wants to return to traditional values and social mores, and it is not the older generation that is unable to let go of them. A similar development is observable in the recent return of orthodox Islamic tendencies in Tunisia.

The goal of this section has been to discuss *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* with regards to questions of voice, materiality, and haunting. The narrative organization was shown not to structurally differentiate between mother and son, victim and murderer, female and male, not even dead and alive. The son in his living body was described as feeling dead already while his mother, despite being actually dead, retains her voice and consciousness. In this way, the novel questions the separation of living and dead. The analysis showed that despite the absence of the mother's body after death, she still narrates her body and presents herself as embodied by recounting her previous life in her own voice. She portrays herself as the body that she once was, the body that experienced the world. She thereby demands to be read

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50 Similarities to Mohammad Bouazizi's case are incidental given the publication date.

with embodiment. This is in keeping with Rehbock's point that whether or not the other is dead or alive, he or she is always seen as a person with a certain back story (2012: 165). In supplying her back story, the mother is seen as a person and as a person who is considered to have a body. The haunting elements that this novel contained were identified as the mother's murder, the missing dialogue between her and her son, as well as the honor discourse through which society justifies its demands for female propriety.

How the understanding of embodiment in literature reflects the insights yielded from the previous sections will be explored in this chapter's concluding section.

2.7   The Presence and Absence of Literary Embodiment

A central aspect of bodies is their fleshiness, their materiality. The introduction to this chapter began with this notion, which comprises a part of Csordas' conceptualization of embodiment. He describes it as the bodily being-in-the-world where both the 'bodily' and the 'being' refer to the material. When bodies enter the realm of language, which they necessarily do in literature, materiality needs to be questioned and explored. This chapter has done this to further understand the characteristics of bodies in literature. It completes the ground on which the second part of the study stands.

Embodiment, to reiterate, describes the interaction between the body and its physical and social context for Csordas, which also draws upon the capacities of the mind. This embodiment is determined by the materiality of the body that forms its basis. Materiality and embodiment should not be conflated; instead, the latter needs to be understood as depending on the former. Therefore, the materiality of bodies in literature was explored in order to understand embodiment in literature. This was done via the theme of death because death concerns the materiality of bodies in the most uniquely existential way. Accordingly, both the materiality of bodies in and after death, as well as the question of their embodiment in literature, were analyzed in order to generate insights into literary embodiment in general.

Death was shown 'in-life' in the novels analyzed, often through the life of another, such as the narrator of *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* (1988). In *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* (2007), it appeared as a gap, one indicated by a sentence that ends in three dots, whereas it remained a question mark in *Ce Pays dont je meurs* (2000[1999]). Death can only be assumed, given that the narrative voice stops. Death is sad, gendered, violent, or accepted in the three novels, but it appears neither as abject and disgusting, nor as transcendental and victorious. Death cannot be described as "death infecting life" (Kristeva 1982: 4) in any of the narratives, given that it was never entirely absent therefrom, but remained present as either *not yet* or *no longer*. Death thereby – similar to disability, as examined in the previous chapter – was a haunting element that was both present and absent. It formed the starting point of the narratives. As such, it had to be chased, approached, and understood and the narratives took shape as death got closer. In *Ce Pays dont je meurs*, Amira's body gradually diminished, whereas in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, the narrator solves mysterious deaths and uncovers social haunting and in *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* more and more clues are given about the mother's violent end. Meanwhile, none of the dead characters die in the name of a cause greater than themselves. Telling their stories and solving their mysteries is more about acquiring and sharing knowledge, than about justice.

Ultimately, the materiality of bodies in literature was characterized by a simultaneous presence and absence. Despite being described in physical detail, the bodies' existence remained limited to language (i.e., to a non-physical existence). Language's effectiveness in producing embodiment was particularly evident in *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*. In this, the mother's

materiality and, therefore, her embodiment are created solely based on her voice and the memories that she shares. The aspect of a simultaneous presence and absence is not only a form of oscillation, but is also part of what Derrida refers to as 'hauntology'. Hauntology, as this chapter has discussed, describes the haunting influence of that which is present and absent at the same time. Since the materiality of bodies in literature is based in language, as this chapter argued, it is independent of the actual presence of a body on the content level of the narrative, and can be constructed through the narrative voice alone (e.g., with reference to a past body or as a presence that is formed by the opinions of other people, such as in Alaa al-Din's donkey head).

Embodiment is based in the narrative voice via materiality. While the textual nature of embodiment in literature has to be accepted, since texts are being dealt with, this allows for an understanding of literary embodiment as textuality's "dialectical partner" (Csordas 1994: 12). As a concept parallel to textuality, it has a presence that goes further than what is there textually. Created between the reader and the text, literary bodies oscillate between absence and presence. One might describe them as having a haunting presence.

These literary bodies were shown to be dependent upon the narrative voice. Being Tunisian, and engaging with the post-colonial situation, the narrative voice can be – and was in the case of Abdallah in *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* – understood through Abdelkebir Khatibi's *bi-langue*. Winifred Woodhull described the *bi-langue* as "a space in which body and language, voice and writing […] mingle without merging to form a new unity" (1993: ix). The presence of voices in writing that remain distinct as voices and which stand out is precisely what shapes embodiment in the texts of this chapter. All three of the novels retain a strong aspect of orality that is reminiscent of traditional storytelling. The act of telling stories and the discussion thereof is characteristic of many of the novels that are analyzed in this study. The significance of this theme will be explored further in Tunisian literature and society in *Part II*.

Here, haunting grants insight into Tunisian society. *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* and *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* showed the haunting presence of tradition through the influence of the long-established patriarchy and the effect that it had on the lives of the female characters. *Ce Pays dont je meurs* explored how the loss of the homeland and the resulting estrangement and lack of identity derailed even the later-born generation. All three of the narratives were shown to deal with the post-colonial context, questions of identity, and otherness; these themes proved to be characteristic of contemporary Tunisian experience.

Together, the novels cover almost the entire reign of former president Ben Ali (1987–2011); the oldest novel discussed in this chapter was published in 1989 and the most recent was published in 2007. While none of the novels engages with state politics directly, they do address the social undercurrents that haunt Tunisia. All of the narratives stage the issue of representation and explore what it is like to speak for someone else. They illustrate different levels of agency and manners of making one's voice heard. While the ghostly apparitions required the narrator to solve their mysteries in the oldest of the three works, the mother speaks (even after death) and overcomes patriarchal society's silencing in the most recently published work. This indicates an increasing dissent communicated in Tunisian literature from the 1980s onwards that is directed against society's suppressive tendencies, as well as against those in power. Suppression is a theme that is further explored in the remaining chapters.

This paragraph closes out this book's first part and provides a brief summary of its findings. *Chapters 1* and *2* have explored how bodies and embodiment are thought in Tunisian novels. Following Thomas J. Csordas' work, embodiment was described as being discur-

sively shaped between the individual and society and as determined by change (i.e., reflecting developments in society). It was shown to oscillate between different poles and bodies were highlighted as historical entities that are determined in part by their contexts. The first chapter, therefore, refuted the existence of 'the body' as a generic ideal in literature; instead, it suggested 'bodies' as the object of research. In the second chapter, these bodies were explored further. Their materiality as bodies in literature was addressed in order to gain insight into the specifics of literary bodies and embodiment. Materiality was shown to be oscillatory in literature and to exist as a simultaneous presence and absence produced in language (via the narrative voice). Materiality is independent of the actual presence of bodies in the narrative. Embodiment is based on materiality and this proves that bodies and embodiment do not necessarily overlap.

PART II:

Writing the Body. Problematics, Possibilities and Politics

3 A Search for the Problematic. Writing Abject Bodies

3.1   The Difficulty of Writing Bodies

The first part of this study explored how bodies and embodiment are constructed in Tunisian literature, and the second part will explore how the writing of bodies is discussed in literary works.

As the *Introduction* indicated, literary works are specifically aware and vocal about the writing of 'problematic bodies'. The problematic is more striking than the unproblematic. The problematic body's heightened presence is discussed by Drew Leder in his *The Absent Body* (1990). Leder states that while: "the body tends to disappear when functioning unproblematically, it often seizes our attention most strongly at times of dysfunction" (1990: 4). This is echoed in literary works.

Writing reflects on itself and explores how bodies are written and to what ends. This is particularly the case in the thematization of problematic bodies. Through it, the implications and repercussions of writing are discussed and writing itself is problematized. The following three chapters explore how narration brings into the open that which is expected to remain quiet, not by presenting one truth, but by presenting several. By narrating parallel truths, the novels allow us to glance at Tunisian society's internal workings. These working, as was indicated above, oscillate between modern and traditional influences.

First of all, which bodies are perceived to be 'problematic' in Tunisian novels needs to be addressed. The term 'problematic' can be understood in several ways. Bodies and their states can cause problems on the content level (i.e., within the novels). For example, they can interfere with a given character's goals and aspirations. Zèynèb's pregnancy out of wedlock comes back to mind, a topic mentioned briefly in the previous chapter's discussion of *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*. Pregnancy out of wedlock is a bodily condition that is made problematic in contexts in which society expects a woman to be a virgin when she gets married. As a result of this expectation, Zèynèb decides to commit suicide to evade punishment. Bodies can also be perceived of as problematic by authors and readers at the extra-textual level. Audiences bring certain preconceived moral, political, religious, or social beliefs to their writing and reading that influence their interpretation of a character's body and bodily behavior. These complicated feelings can be reflected in their reading as well as in their writing about a work.

'Problematic bodies', as a term, shall be understood in the following three chapters more specifically as those that cause negative affective responses including disgust, shame, and anger or irritation at one or on both of these levels. This accounts for the final aspect that Khatibi noted about bodies in the Qur'an, their sensory abilities that react to stimuli. Not only do the described problematic bodies react, but the focus will be on the repercussions in the social environment within the text as well as beyond it, in the reader and the writer.

The textual corpus contains different kinds of problematic bodies. Firstly, there are those bodies that are overly physical. The integrity of these bodies has been implicated so that they are 'open' or 'leaky' and they are thought to spill their insides. Secondly, there are those bodies that do not conform to gender norms and which defy expectations. Thirdly, there are those bodies that fight suppression and taboos, bodies that are both sexually and politically active.

This chapter addresses the first type of problematic bodies. These bodies are overly physical in that they expose aspects that are meant to remain private or hidden, according to social norms. These bodies are referred to as abject bodies throughout this chapter and the concept of abjection is thoroughly introduced during the analysis. In discussing bodies as abject, the concept's entanglement with notions of the female and the effeminate will be addressed. This connection of the physical with the female is a topic explored by Fedwa Malti-Douglas in her *Woman's Body, Woman's Word* (1991). The author states that woman "represents physicality in its most rudimentary form" (1991: 30). Referring to Medieval *ʿadab* literature, which often dealt with women and the body in the same breath, she writes:

> Amalgamating and embedding all these various physically circumscribed topics under the heading of 'Women' redefines the nature of woman, as well obviously as the nature of the physical characteristics. The physically normal and healthy female subsumes in her essence the body, including the male body, especially as the latter becomes deficient or abnormal. (1991: 30)

These female associations are due to the close connection of specific physical experiences, such as childbirth, intercourse, and marriage in medieval times (ibid.). Female bodies are rendered problematic through society's influence. Society invents norms to sanctify processes of conception and birth that might otherwise seem problematic (e.g., the transgression of corporeal boundaries through bodies and bodily liquids). Exemplary norms include marriage rites and the importance of the virgin bride that strives to protect the lineage from the sperm of unknown men. Virginity is connected to concepts of honor and shame (see below for a further exploration of this idea). A female body that has been transgressed is problematic outside of the institution of marriage. A male body that is raped is problematic in a different, but connected, way. It was 'feminized' by being transgressed in the fashion of a female body; however, this is a problematic view that highlights the close connection of 'rapability' and femininity. This is why rape and sexual violence are central themes throughout the novels analyzed in this chapter.

The texts that have been chosen for a close reading are *Le Sadique* (1970; 'The sadist') by Koelman[1], *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* (2002[2]; 'The rocking chair') by Amel Mokhtar and *al-Ightiṣāb* (2008; 'The rape') by Hédi Thabet. It should be noted that rape and sexual violence are not uncommon literary topics, neither internationally nor with regards to Arabic literature. Sexual violence is present in other novels that have been selected for this study[3]; however, the three novels examined in this chapter focus on the topic specifically and lend themselves to being read alongside each other. The intention is to show transgressive aspects of Tunisian literature and to explore how Tunisian authors deal with problematic

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1   Koelman is the penname of an unknown Tunisian author. The little information that is available about this individual is discussed below.

2   According to Abir Kréfa, the novel could not be made available until 2008 since it did not immediately receive the necessary official permission that publications required (compare 2011: 115, also see above, *Introduction*). Kréfa attributes the unwillingness to publish *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* to critics who might have considered the novel to be pornographic, due to the narrated sex scenes or due to the description of child rape (compare Kréfa 2011: 115).

3   Further scenes of sexual violence can be found in the previously discussed *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, *Tammās*, *Ce Pays dont je meurs*, *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya*, as well as in the novels examined in the chapters that follow *Cendre à l'aube* and *al-Ghūrila*.

bodies and their writing. The purpose of the chapter is to enter into the discussion of the writing of bodies. What is happening just under the surface of Tunisian society is analyzed through this discussion of bodies.

One concern that arises in the writing of violated bodies is the violence of representation. What is meant here is twofold and includes the question of whether it is possible to depict coercion without repeating the initial assault and, more basically, whether representation always contains violence (see Noys 2013: 12). All three novels grapple with these questions in one way or another. This is not surprising, given that themes of rape and sexual violence are said to "epitomize the difficulty of representation", especially since they are determined by different perspectives and perceptions (Horeck 2004: 129). Rape's presence and absence will be shown as another instance of oscillation, an oscillation that feeds back into the understanding of bodies in literature and into the problematic of their writing. In this way, the possibilities of representation are challenged.

Additionally, the chapter explores the development of the discourse about gender in Tunisia since independence on the content level of the novels, intertextually, and through the narrative perspective adopted. This compensates for the gaps left by the previous two chapters, which attempted to anticipate an examination of Tunisia's gender roles.

A general note is necessary regarding the concept of gender in a study about Tunisian literature. Tunisia is at least partially dominated by Arabic, a language in which the concept has no linguistic origin. The concept of gender was introduced to the Arabic world via the Western theoretical tradition and through its vocabulary. The concept's transposition highlights the validity of its application to the present context. A Tunisian example of this is Amal Grami's (Āmāl Qarāmī) *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya al-islāmiyya. Dirāsa jindriyya* ('The difference in arabo-islamic culture. A gender study', 2007; submitted as Grami's doctoral thesis in 2004). The author's discussion of her terminology is particularly interesting. The arabized version of the word gender, "jindr" is adopted ('jindriyya'), instead of other suggestions such as "nawʿ" ('kind', 'type', 'mode'), "jins" ('sex'), or its derivative "janūsa". The latter would be a neologism, much like "jindr" is. While "jindr" does not have a root in Arabic, because it was introduced through a foreign word, "janūsa" derives from the same root as "jins", meaning biological sex. According to Amal Grami, this is precisely why "jins", and its derivatives, would cause such confusion. "Jindr", however, like 'gender', refers to culture's shaping of the individual's social and cultural role (Grami 2007: 27–28). It is precisely this view of gender that will be explored further in this chapter; however, the concept will be examined in three Tunisian novels, rather than through the extant academic approaches.

3.2   *Le Sadique*. The Changing Roles of Women in Society

The discussion of gender roles in Tunisian society forms a thread that runs through the different narrative layers of the novel *Le Sadique* ('The sadist', 1970) by Koelman and is a topic that is discussed in the speeches and articles that have been included in the novel. The general tone is that women ought to be hated because they hinder progress.

The novel's central story line is told from the first-person perspective and describes an incestuous relationship between the narrator Hichem and his sister M'nê; this attraction

turns into torture, rape, murder, and necrophilia and is mixed with general misogyny. The account is surrounded by other narrative layers. The reader enters the novel via a preface, which follows a dedication.[4,5] The preface's writer mentions the outrage that the narrative caused in Tunisian society. The intention behind writing the story of "mes patients" (i.e., his patients) was 'to study the behavior of three lost psychopaths in the middle of a cross-road where the ancient structures of an underdeveloped county interfere with those of a county that joined quickly the socio-economic and industrial organization of advanced countries' (*Sadique* 8).[6]

This is followed by an introduction signed by "Dr SA", who quotes a speech by president Bourguiba in which he addresses mental transformations in relation to national progress (see below). The actual narrative begins with a murdered girl next to whom her assassin has left a message blaming women's struggle for liberation as the root of all social evil. A female narrative voice, referred to as Leila in a footnote (*Sadique* 22), comments on this and begins to read her diary. Leila describes her struggle to acquire the most recent book by popular author Zoubir, a book entitled *Le Sadique*. When she starts reading this book, a novel-within-the-novel begins that contains the aforementioned account of incest and necrophilia. The diary resumes after this novel has ended. Leila recognizes herself in the novel that she has just read and she sees a former lover of hers in Hichem. A newspaper article that Leila reads serves as the closing section of the book. It confirms that Hichem and Zoubir are the same person, and were responsible for the murder of several women, including the one who was found with the misogynistic message from earlier. Here the narrative is brought full circle. Accordingly, when in the following argument, Hichem is mentioned this has to be read as Hichem/Zoubir.

Le Sadique moves backwards in time and returns readers to the 1960s when read against the backdrop of the historical context set out in the novels explored in the previous chapter. The beginning of the novel-within-the-novel is dated to 1960, but the speech given by Bourguiba, quoted in the introduction, goes back to January 1964. This corresponds to four and eight years after independence, respectively, at the height of national consolidation.

The 1960s in Tunisia were dominated by Bourguiba's regime's effort to educate the Tunisian people and to modernize them. His government attempted to remove religion from the public sphere. Religious activities had to be limited and had to conform to the country's goals at that time. For example, Bourguiba openly criticized fasting as a hindrance to the country's economic development. After all, work stops and productivity is low during fasting. Bourguiba promoted the view that fasting should be limited to holidays, for the good of

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4   "A mon confrère M..M.., ce grand espoir National et maître à penser, auquel je voue une admiration sans reserves, je présente mes essais" ('To my colleague M..M.., this great national hope and master thinker, to whom I vow unreserved admiration, I present my essays') – most probably M..M.. stands for the literary innovator and politician Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, see *Introduction*. An indicator for this is that al-Masʿadī was Minister of Education in the 1960s, which is a fact to which Bourguiba's quoted speech, see below, also refers (1977: 310).

5   The dedication is signed "Tunis, 17 January 1970".

6   Original quote: "j'ai voulu étudier cependant le comportement de trois psychopathes perdus juste auch milieu d'un carrefour où interfère une double causalité: celle des anciennes structures d'un pays sous-développé et celle d'un pays rejoignant rapidement l'organisation socio-économique et industrielle, complexe des pays avancés."

the country. He argued for this in 1960 by referring to a hadith that states that believers should eat in order to defy an enemy. He openly drank a glass of orange juice on a TV broadcast during Ramadan, which won him the criticism of the religious establishment (Masri 2017: 240–241). At the time, Islamic scholarship was repressed through the nationalization of religious schools and their closing (Masri 2017: 241).

Education is an example of the regime's effort to modernize. From the 1950s onwards, an emphasis was placed on the education of girls and the establishment of mixed classrooms (Masri 2017: 247). In 1967, secondary education was made accessible to a larger group of students by lowering the grades required in the entry exam. The University of Tunis was built during the same period on the basis of a number of affiliated colleges between 1958 and 1964. In addition, vocational training centers were set up together with the *Office de la formation professionelle et de l'emploi* to oversee them for those who did not pursue higher education (Masri 2017: 250–251).

In the speech quoted in *Le Sadique*,[7] Bourguiba argues that economic and intellectual advances, modernity, and transformation must never be paid for through the loss of morality. Despite the struggle for progress, man's 'lowest instincts' ("les plus mauvais instincts", *Sadique* 10) must not be liberated. The novel's introduction links these 'lowest instincts' to the moral degeneration in the novel-within-the-novel caused by the changing position of women in society.

Women's new position in society was achieved through the Code of Personal Status (CPS or, in Arabic, *Majallat al-aḥwāl al-shakhṣiyya*) which was introduced in August 1956. This code modified the status of women in front of the law by replacing the previous *sharīʿa* family law. It regulated marriage as well as divorce, alimony, custody and adoption, filiation and inheritance, and thereby touched upon every aspect of family life (compare Charrad 2001: 219). Women and men were granted equality in marriage and divorce and polygamy was abolished (Termeulen 1995: 59). The CPS made women's emancipation a central element of Bourguiba's plan for nationalist reform. According to Termeulen, his initiatives were more filled with symbolic gestures than with actual changes. Bourguiba's personal understanding of women's role in society was entangled with traditional ideas (Termeulen 1995: 59). The improvement of women's status was not desired in its own right, but was instead motivated by the assumption that it would help the country to emancipate itself (compare Charrad 2001: 220).

Bourguiba was aware that social reality did not correspond to the law (Termeulen compare 1995: 59). There was no mass-based feminist movement calling for women's rights and so this reform was prescribed from above (Charrad 2001: 201). To that end, the CPS led to an "ambiguity" among the population regarding the behaviors that were suddenly

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7   The text is authentic. It corresponds with a transcript of Bourguiba's address "Priorité à la Conscience Morale", which was reprinted in a collection of his speeches published by the Presidency, *Discours*, Vol. 11, 1977: 304–316. According to the reprint, the speech is from 19 January 1964, not the following day as the novel's introduction states. On the topic of the collection itself, Norma Salem notes that Bourguiba's speeches were generally given in a Tunisian dialect. Two teams of translators (one French, one Arabic), prepared the texts for publication, somewhat implicating their historical authenticity (compare 1984a: 16–17). The speech quoted addresses how morality contributes to continuous progress of a nation. Science and conscience should go hand in hand, because without the boundaries of morals, everything is allowed and danger results (1977: 306, 308).

prescribed or permitted (Abu Odeh 2010: 936). Bourguiba's speeches after 1956 mentioned women and modernization (Mahmoud Chida 2006: 73) without describing women and men as equal. Each gender was shown to have specific capabilities (Termeulen 1995: 59, see also Abu-Odeh 2010: 932).

Although changes were introduced abruptly through the CPS, the ideas that lay behind them have a longer history in Tunisia. Tahir Haddad's (Al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād) book *Imra'atunā fī al-sharīʿa wa-l-mujtamaʿ* (1930, 'Our women in law and society'[8]) called for the reform of family and personal status, the role of women, and education for the benefit of Tunisia a whole 25 years before the CPS (Charrad 2001: 216). The book caused protests because Haddad suggested that Qur'anic principles "were not eternal but subject to historical contingency" (Salem 1984b: 143–144). The book was banned, while its author was discredited and dismissed from his post as professor at Zaytūna University. Although his ideas eventually influenced the CPS (compare Salem 1984b: 142, 151, Charrad 2001: 217–218), Haddad was forgotten. Interest in him and in his works only returns at the beginning 1960s and 1970s (see *Chapter 5*).

The lack of ground support for the CPS is reflected in *Le Sadique* in several instances. Hichem is against women's emancipation. He remarks that the existing emancipation is superficial; Tunisian women, he states, are less emancipated than they pretend to be (*Sadique* 58). His overall argumentation does not contain Bourguiba's link between women's rights and national advancement. For Hichem, women actually endanger progress. They either slow down economic growth, by dropping out of the workforce to take maternity leave, or by distracting the men; this is why Hichem wants their rights to be limited once again (*Sadique* 15). Women should return to hearth and home and raise the future generation that might otherwise turns into delinquents as a result of a lack of attention (*Sadique* 18–20). For Hichem, it is only man who reforms and enriches the county: "à l'homme seul de refaire et d'enrichir la Tunisie" (*Sadique* 127).

National progress is a central goal for Hichem. He opposes underdevelopment and ignorance and is willing to accept inconveniences to overcome these (compare *Sadique* 121, 124). He justifies 'monstrous' behavior for social advancement: 'The Tunisian is a man and this man must incorporate […] even monstrosity, if necessary' or 'let's be sort of ferocious beasts' (*Sadique* 121)[9]. In his approval of monstrosity, he diverges from Bourguiba's opinion in the speech, where progress was promoted, but not at the expense of morals. The topic of the monstrous is not only resorted to in the context of national effort in *Le Sadique*, but it also allows Hichem to transgress internal boundaries. His incestuous desire for his sister is described as being akin to an animal that gains possession of him (*Sadique* 98–99).

Although Hichem says that he is promoting modernity and condemning underdevelopment, the meaning of these concepts remains opaque in the narrative and this leaves room for his misogynistic observations. Modernity and underdevelopment were key terms in Bourguiba's discourse, and the narrator suggests that they were so familiar in Tunisian

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8   The book was published in English translation by Ronak Husni and Daniel L. Newman under the title *Muslim Women in Law and Society: Annotated Translation of al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād's Imra'atunā fī ʾl-sharīʿa wa ʾl-mujtamaʿ, with an Introduction* (2007).

9   Original quote: "Le Tunisien est un homme et cet homme doit incarner […] même la monstrosité s'il le faut", "[s]oyons en quelque sorte des bêtes féroces".

society that it was not even unnecessary to address their prerequisites. His socio-political observations claim allegiance with Bourguiba's discourse. Hichem considers Tunisia to be exceptional, while Bourguiba coined the term *shakhṣiyya* or *personnalité* to render Tunisia's specificity in the process of founding and consolidating the modern nation state. The term *shakhṣiyya* was meant to give the process a legitimizing narrative. Bourguiba was keen on proving that "a special Tunisian identity or 'personality' existed before the arrival of Islam in North Africa" (Termeulen 1995: 58, 60). Hichem also highlights that, for him at least, the country is not comparable to any other country. Its mores must not be defined by God, nature, or man. In the name of progress, they must follow the demands of work and improvement (*Sadique* 125).

It is noteworthy that Hichem's perspective mainly differs from Bourguiba's on the issue of women. Hichem reflects traditional perspectives in his demand to remove women from the public arena. This illustrates the Tunisian debate surrounding modernity in the 1960s and highlights the presence of female bodies at the center of the debate. While the country is permeated by new ideas (e.g., the female secretary as the epitome of the modern working woman), the deep structure remains traditional and concepts such as honor and shame continue to be relevant.

The bodily and the female coincide in Hichem's affair with his sister M'nê, and she is reduced to her body. Hichem realizes his incestuous desire when he catches M'nê masturbating and sees her exposed genitals (*Sadique* 97). She is equated with her vagina and is no longer viewed as a person, but as an object, a single body part: 'Her sex alone was there' (*Sadique* 112).[10] The vagina forms a powerful metaphor in the novel's depiction of the debate about modernity and the role of women. It is not only at the center of M'nê's search for pleasure, through masturbation, but it also appears as the main justification of Hichem's attraction to her and for her abuse thereafter. While Hichem attempts to deny responsibility here,[11] it is also suggested that M'nê is targeted for her independence. The novel illustrates the confrontations that the introduction of the new personal status law in 1956 caused in the social arena. It does so with a story of sexual violence against women that is based in a discontentment with the changing situation of the discourse surrounding gender. Women's entry into the work force in particular is shown as problematic. It challenges the traditional perception of men as active and women as passive, men being in charge outside and women managing the inside of the house. The following section explores how the change in these dynamics of active-passive, outside-inside, motivates the abject body and transgression in the novel.

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10 Original quote: "Son sexe seul, était là".

11 This also suggests that the victim ought to be blamed for the violence, which is neither addressed nor challenged within the work.

3.3   *Le Sadique*. Female Bodies, Abject Bodies?

The incidence of the female with the excessively physical needs to be further explored with reference to *Le Sadique*. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection will be introduced for the analysis and its connection to the previous theoretical observations will be outlined. Foucault's notion of transgression will be added, in order to highlight the movement necessary to render a body both attractive and disgusting. This duality of attractive and disgusting is precisely what constitutes abjection (compare Kristeva 1982: 9). Abjection is also an oscillatory move and allows us to follow up with the active-passive dynamics that the previous section's gender discourse examined.

Both abjection and transgression are called for by the novel's content; incest and necrophilia are the ultimate transgressions and torture, rape, and dismemberment are instances of abjection. They also originate from the same intellectual climate as the novel. *Le Sadique* was written by a Tunisian author and was published under the penname 'Koelman' in Paris in 1970.[12] It can be seen as part of the renewed preoccupation with the works of Marquis de Sade which were rediscovered by the French literary and philosophical scene in the 20th century. As a consequence, critics such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, and Gilles Deleuze all engaged with the controversial writer and his themes (Allison et al. 1995: 4, Philipps 2005: 118).[13] The review *Tel Quel*, with which they were associated, dedicated an entire issue to the "pensée de sade" (Roger 2013: n.p.) in 1967 with texts by Sollers, Klossowski, and Barthes (compare Allison et al. 1995: 4 and Greenman 2013: 297). This led to the omnipresence of Sade's name and themes of libertine sexuality, torture, and pain in academic as well as artistic endeavors from around the time of *Le Sadique*'s publication (compare Roger 2013: n.p.). By the late 1960s, Sade had been turned into a social and political revolutionary even though, as Roger notes, his works were utterly and deliberately unpolitical. Sade was versatile as a stand-in for the counterculture of the time (compare Roger 2013: n.p.).

In *Le Sadique*, the title is the only direct reference to its notorious literary ancestors, such as *Les cent vingt journées de Sodome* (1785) and *La nouvelle Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1799) by Sade. However, I assume that Koelman was invested in Sade's resurgence in France and in French literary debates and that this occurred alongside the publica-

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12 In Jean Déjeux's *Dictionnaire des Auteurs maghrébins de langue française* (1984), 'Loqman' is given as a second penname. Regarding the person of the author, only the year of birth is given (1938) for the "romancier et correspondant de presse" (a novelist and correspondent). The author's gender is indicated as male (1984: 308).
     In Jean Fontaine's *Le roman tunisien a 100 ans. 1906–2006*, this reference to the two pennames is repeated (see 2009: 169–170). In the introduction to *Le Sadique*, the 'wrong' penname is furthermore referred to as the name of the author which confirms the connection. All in all, however, this exhausts the information that can be found about the author.

13 Foucault's 1963 essay "Preface à la transgression", written on the occasion of Bataille's death, referred to Sade while Deleuze's *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* from 1967 discussed the differences between sadism and masochism, based on the works of the two authors who gave their name to the respective sexual preferences. Barthes followed this up in 1971 with *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. Some precursors in the engagement with Sade in the late 1940s and 1950s were Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, and Simone de Beauvoir. Overviews of Sade's rediscovery can be found in Allison, David B. et al. 1995. *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*, Noys, Benjamin. 2000. *Bataille. A Critical Introduction*; and Roger, Philipps. 2013. "Sade 66." *LhT*.

tion of his own narrative. This shows the novel's second orientation in addition to its entanglement with Tunisian gender debates. Both aspects increase the relevance of this marginal[14] literary work for the current project because they hint at Tunisian literature's positionality as something that oscillates between discourses.

Le Sadique's intricate narrative structure is reminiscent of some of Sade's works – Foucault describes the latter's method as "parcelling out of philosophical discourse and descriptive scenes" (1977: 39). *Le Sadique* repeats this in its inclusion of elaborations on women and modernity in sections that are separate from the main narrative. The different narrative layers (preface, introduction, the female reader's perspective) form thresholds that the reader has to overcome to enter Hichem's account of incest and sadism. The overall structure enacts the transgressions that form his account. The positioning of these narrative layers distance the sadist's brutal account. The publisher, Dr. SA, and the female reader refuse responsibility for the material and make sure that they are not perceived to be its author. Hichem uses a penname (Zoubir) to publish the novel-within-the-novel, which reflects the entire work's publication under the pseudonym 'Koelman'. Pennames can be conceived as thresholds; not only do they attempt to hide the identity of the author, but their use is also interpreted as an act of defiance against one's forefathers by the refusal of the hereditary name (compare Surya 2002: 89). References to *Le Sadique*'s literary forefathers are included in the novel, by referring to Baudelaire, Lautréamont, and Abu-Nuwās in addition to Sade.[15] Another effect of the penname and the novel-within-the-novel as such is that both turn Hichem's account into literature. These strategies change the way that it is meant to be read and defies any claim to objectivity.

The narrative layers suggest a move further and further inside, from non-involved newspaper reports about murdered women towards the internal perspective that the perpetrator has on the victims, even on the insides of one victim's body. The narrative transgresses thresholds. Foucault describes transgression as being not simply "related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside […] Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" (Foucault 1977: 35). This spiral is illustrated in the narrative of *Le Sadique* which attempts to push and extend limits, rather than to cross them once and for all. The taboo of incest, accordingly, is not overcome only once. Hichem goes further and further in his experiments with rape and physical torture from the first, seemingly mutually motivated, sexual encounter between the siblings, until he finally murders his sister (*Sadique* 112–113). After her death, Hichem explores her vagina with a burning lamp, turns the inside of her body out, and examines what was hidden from his view. He transgresses her body's external boundaries and dismembers her, which is an extreme version of the first transgressive incestuous

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14 The book can be understood as marginal since there is hardly any engagement with it in terms of theory and criticism, and the author is almost unknown. In Susanne Heiler's *Der maghrebinische Roman. Eine Einführung* there is a reference to the second novel that is attributed to Koelman/Lok-man, *L'Esclavage de l'homme* ('The enslavement of man'). Heiler describes it as part of an antifeminist trend of works written by male authors in Tunisian literature, but there is not more information or discussion of this topic (2005: 219).

15 The author was familiar with French as well as Arabic literary history. The reference to Baudelaire and Lautréamont also forms a link to the themes and writers discussed in relation to Sade after the Second World War (e.g., Blanchot's *Lautréamont et Sade*, 1949).

desire (*Sadique* 112–114).[16] The vagina here is a liminal space, both the site and the facilitator of transgression. Hichim kills M'nê for fear that she might limit his access to her genitals. While the sister is approached by Hichem, closer and closer, she is further and further removed from the reader as a person and becomes turned into an object.

Foucault explains his concept of transgression in "A Preface to Transgression" as the opening of a space at the heart of the limit (compare Foucault 1977: 34–35). This is a different way of rendering the spiral. The first sexual encounter between the siblings enables the transgressive acts that follow. While the boundaries of the sister's body are transgressed, the space that opens is her very body itself. Despite Hichem's effort to explore and appropriate her, M'nê remains 'other'. Transgression is enacted in the novel by crossing and recrossing physical (rape), moral (incest, necrophilia), and textual boundaries (different narrative layers). The act of reading forces the reader to experience another kind of transgression, approached in the following sections through the notion of abjection.

M'nê's otherness for both the protagonist and the reader is increased by turning her into an abject body, a body that oscillates between being morbidly attractive and repulsive at the same time, as Julia Kristeva conceptualizes it. It is mirrored in the following scene. After violently indulging in M'nê's body, Hichem no longer recognizes her corpse when he takes it out of her grave to look at it again. He had imagined M'nê to still be beautiful and then he is disgusted by her body's sudden ugliness, which bears the traces of the violence he exerted on it (*Sadique* 115).

Julia Kristeva develops the notion of abjection in her *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980; engl. *Powers of Horror*, 1982) as a dissociation from a threatening or disgusting 'other'. In its first instance, this other is often the mother – Kristeva's background in psychoanalysis is noticeable in this (1982: 10, 13). She offers examples to clarify the concept, one of which is the loathing of certain foods that one feels forced to spit out in disgust when they enter the mouth. This spitting out constitutes a confirmation of the individuality of the self. But, Kristeva writes, "since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (1982: 2–3). The importance of the differentiation between an inside and an outside within abjection is perceivable, as is the return of an ambiguous oscillatory moment. There appears to be a necessary fascination with what is condemned or loathed.

Kristeva describes corpses as "the utmost of abjection" (1982: 4), the leaking of death into life: "refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (1982: 3). In the novels discussed in this study, however, it is not death that is, or renders, abject. Instead, as this chapter explores, abject bodies are produced in the novels through violence and through (violent) sexual relations; they are bodies that narrate that which should, according to cultural codes, remain unsaid. These bodies trigger aversion as well as interest, as is apparent in Hichem's reaction to his sister's body (*Sadique* 115). The abject is the overly physical, the leaking, the spilling of the inside, the overly revealing. Like 'rapability' and maternity, these coincide with the female, a connection that is present in Kristeva's concept. Kristeva is criticized for this connection in her theory. Imogen Tyler, for

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16 The wish to explore a female body reflects the suspicion with which it is met from the male perspective. A fear of female bodies will be further explored in *Chapter 5*.

example, complains that the concept "risks reproducing histories of violent disgust towards maternal bodies" in "Against abjection" (2009: 77–78). Tyler highlights that the connection is a "historical condition and not an unchangeable fact" (2009: 91). In order to end it, she suggests that women should overcome their position as victims of violence, as people who are produced through violent acts, and should instead see themselves as subjects (compare 2009: 93). This is not achieved in *Le Sadique*, neither by its narrator nor by M'nê herself. However, while M'nê remains passive and objectified, the self as subject is precisely what the next novel to be analyzed *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* aims to achieve. *Al-Kursī al-hazzāz* overcomes the focalization on the male perspective, which shows the female as abject, a view shared by both *Le Sadique* and Kristeva (compare Tyler 2009: 90). First, however, *Le Sadique* will be further explored to create a basis for the critique that *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* contains.

Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, apart from being a psychoanalytic work, also discusses abjection in literature, referring to works by Dostoyevsky, Lautréamont, Proust, Joyce, Borges, Artaud, Kafka, and Celine. Sade is intentionally excluded as Kristeva writes that "the orgy in Sade, meshing with a gigantic philosophy […] had nothing abject about it", since it "allows for no other, no unthinkable, nothing heterogeneous" (1982: 21). According to her, abjection needs an ambivalence, the oscillation between different modes of morality, as found in *Le Sadique*. A critical perspective remains part of the narrative through the different narrative layers, with instances such as the female reader, the doctor, and the publisher. In the novel-within-the-novel, this is achieved through the inclusion of the siblings' father. Hichem and his sister are under the impression that he saw them in bed together (*Sadique* 101–104). Despite their uncertainty, this suspicion introduces a judgment, a reflection of social morals that their incestuous relationship violates. They decide to kill him, 'at first for the pleasure of killing and then to revenge us' (*Sadique* 105)[17]. Yet, the position of the critical onlooker remains.

Kristeva observes that literature is "both the abject's judge and accomplice" (1982: 16). Literature might seem abject itself by participating in its production, while it is at the same time critiquing the abject. In *Le Sadique*, this is particularly highlighted through the novel-within-the-novel that is being read by Leila. Hichem's account becomes literature through her. Leila, like the actual readers of *Le Sadique*, partakes in the consciousness of the torturer Hichem through the first-person perspective that imparts his joy in committing violence. An easy critique of Hichem's behavior is complicated through Leila's reading. In Zoubir's description of Hichem, she recognizes a former lover of hers and feels sexually aroused by the novelist's assertiveness, a novelist who eventually turns out to be identical with Hichem, the sadist (*Sadique* 123). One has to ask the following question about whether the novel is generally arousing, which leads to a central problem in writing about sexual violence: How can something like sexual violence be shown in a non-arousing manner that does not further or repeat the violence? The novel-within-the-novel fails to find a solution as Leila's reaction shows; for her, it remains arousing.

While *Le Sadique* can certainly have the effect of inciting arousal, I believe that this is precisely an instance in which the novel causes abjection. The reader is thrust into the arousal ofLeila, the 'model reader'. Reading her delight at the gory details – whether one

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17 Original quote: "[d]'abord pour le plaisir de tuer. Ensuite pour nous venger".

agrees with her pleasure or not – heightens the effect of simultaneous repulsion and fascina-
tion. The suggestion of being thrust into abjection or arousal, respectively, is Becker-
Leckrone's attempt to explain Kristeva's understanding of the working of abjection. In her
example of food loathing, the food "that makes me gag does not *represent* abjection; it
thrusts me into it" (2005: 34). Accordingly, the novel not only represents abjection, but also
thrusts the reader into it. While in previous chapters, oscillation took place on the level of
the narrative, here it is also the reader who oscillates between different affective responses.

Abjection is provoked in the novel through female characters from two sides. Firstly,
M'nê is objectified and shown to be only a body, a body that is spilled. Secondly, there is
the female reader Leila who reports her arousal at reading the atrocities of the novel-within-
the-novel, while also being a female body that openly experiences this arousal. Despite
Hichem's actual transgression and his behavior, which can be perceived as abject, that is as
provoking the reader's curiosity as well as disgust, it is the female characters who thrust the
reader into abjection. It is them who coincide with open bodies.

The way the entire work is written, featuring graphic detail and explicit content such as
descriptions of male and female masturbation (*Sadique* 36, 91), makes its interpretation as a
warning against man's lowest instincts (see above) unrealistic. The narrative revels too
much in the details of these instincts and in the female reader's enjoyment at reading the
novel-within-the-novel. This provokes the question of whether the narration of abjection as
an experience of oscillation between disgust and fascination is not the author's own reflec-
tion on the early post-colonial discourse of state-building in Tunisia. Tunisian society
appears in a crisis that resulted from the simultaneity of modern and traditional influences.
This simultaneity ought not to be understood as entirely negative, but as both a danger and
a possibility for Tunisia to find its very own way.

3.4   First Person Narratives of Violation. *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*

In the previous analysis of the character Leila, the female position that speaks about what
should remain silenced was shown to produce abjection. This occurs despite the fact that
Leila, as the reader of the novel-within-the-novel, was not responsible for the sexual vio-
lence being described. This speaking female position will be explored further through a
reading of the novel *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* by Amel Mokhtar (2002; 'The rocking chair'). The
novel is narrated in its entirety from a female voice in the first-person and suggests the
perspective of a victim of sexual violence, Mūna. However, this perspective does not victi-
mize her, as the subsequent description of her narrative position and its relative power
shows. Through its analysis, the writing of bodies in Tunisian literature will be explored
further.

This novel is transgressive in breaking the silence that a sexually abused woman might
be expected to hide behind by containing and questioning a victim's perspective.[18] It also
reflects the doubts that a victim of sexual abuse encounters. The narrator, Mūna, even ques-
tions her own accounts. She tells contradictory stories of the abuse that may or may not

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18 In Amnesty International's 2015 report *Assaulted and Accused. Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Tunisia*,
    underreporting is named as one of two key obstacles in combating violence against women in Tunisia (2015:
    51).

have happened to her in order to overcome her initial silence. Mūna taps into classical Arabic traditions by presenting several versions of her story. Textual variants, play a crucial role in classical Arabic literature, particularly in scholarly writings, historiographical, and religious works (compare Malti-Douglas 1991: 70). What is interesting in Mūna's narratives is that despite all of the variation, the word for 'rape', 'ightiṣāb', is never mentioned. This is not atypical. In her *Körper erzählen*, Susanne Kaiser describes how in Assia Djebar's *L'amour la fantasia* rape is euphemistically called the 'pity' ("dommage") as something that just happened to some women. This is not only linguistically careful, but also meant to ease the situation for the women affected (2015: 111). It draws our attention to the presence and absence of rape in the narratives that follow. The analysis of Mūna's different accounts will allow for an exploration of a divergence from traditional gender roles, such as those outlined in *Le Sadique*. The novel will lead the argument to a discussion of both narrative violence and further complications involved in narrating bodies by suggesting the difficulties of narrating sexual violence.

A small part of Mūna's body occupies the center of the narrative; she does not have an intact hymen. The novel contains several explanations for the absence of this socially constructed sign of virginity.[19] One of the explanations is not even a loss, as she tells her husband before she offers her body to him after the wedding:

> As a proud woman I can tell you, that I am not a virgin. I am saying this with arrogance because I did not neglect my virginity in a moment of weakness or ignorance or fear. I opened my eyes to a tunnel that did not possess a door. [...] I asked a specialised doctor [...] and he said after the examination: - Don't be anxious my girl, for you belong to a rare group of women who are born without a door, or more precisely with half a door, or we could say a stretchy door that conforms to the form of the inside so that it feels as if it was not there. (*Kursī* 84)[20]

Women are expected to be virgins when they get married more often than not. According to Abu-Odeh, the hymen is equated with virginity, virtue, and morality in the Arab world (compare 2010: 917). Equally, until recent decades, brides in the West were expected to be virgins, and this was reason enough for Freud to explore the phenomenon as Fatima Mernissi notes in *Women's Rebellion & Islamic Memory*. She paraphrases Freud's assessment of the reverence of virginity as "a manifestation of man's fear of woman, a fear arising in the first place from her crushing superiority – only she could create life in and through blood – and in the second place from his suspicion that woman, behind her veil of obedience, would be plotting her revenge" (1996[1988]: 37) for being under his control. Abu-

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19 It is socially constructed since not all women are born with a hymen that breaks during their first penetration. In her "The Very Fine Membrane Called Honour", Nawal El Saadawi estimates that "11.2% of girls are born with an elastic hymen, 16.16% with so fine a membrane that is easily torn, 31.32 % with a thick elastic hymen [*i.e., one that does not break during intercourse; C.P.*], and only 41.32% with what may be considered a normal hymen" based on an Iraqi study from 1972 (1980: 25–26).

20 Original quote:

"أعلمك بكبرياء الأنوثة وشموخها أنني لست عذراء... أقول بكل كبرياء وشموخ لأنني لم أفرط في هذه العذرية أثناء لحظة ضعف أو أثناء لحظة جهل أو أثناء لحظة خوف، أبدا. لقد فتحت عيني على نفق مفتوح لا باب له [...] السؤال. ووجهته إلى الطبيب المختص [...] قال: ـ لا تجزعي آنستي، فأنت من صنف نادر من النساء، صنف يولد بلا باب، أو بأكثر دقة يولد بشبه باب، أو فلنقل بباب مطاطيّ يتأقلم مع حجم الداخل فيعطي الإحساس بأنه غير موجود."

Odeh ascribes the hymen with the construction of female bodies themselves since it characteristically belongs to them (Abu-Odeh 2010: 917). This, however, needs to be questioned because it gives the impression that only bodies with hymens can be considered female. This impression is problematic because it excludes non-biological women, as well as all women who have a hymen that does not conform to expectations as explained in footnote 19.

Khaoula Matri's article "La construction sociale du corps féminin vierge en Tunisie" ('The social construction of the female virgin's body in Tunisia') is relevant for the Tunisian context. In it, the author discusses the almost sacral status of the hymen based on interviews that she conducted (2012: 61). While her conclusion is that the importance of virginity crucially depends upon the individual background and upbringing, as well as the financial and social autonomy of her interlocutors, the majority of Tunisian women care greatly about keeping their virginity intact until marriage. Non-conformist behavior is still peripheral, but is slowly gaining ground according to Matri (2012: 62, 70–71, 79).

How the reverence of female virginity is a manifestation of male interest and power has been indicated above (compare Combs-Schilling 1989: 209; Matri 2012: 70; Mernissi 1996[1988]: 34). However, at the same time, it relocates responsibility for the honor of men to the bodies of women. Matri emphasizes the collective aspect of reputation and the symbolic power women have over their family's honor in this respect (2012: 67; similarly, also in El Saadawi 1980: 31). The rape of virgins, therefore, can be seen as stealing or polluting another man's possession (compare Diken/Laustsen 2005: 117).

By placing her virtue between her legs, a woman learns to see her body as a danger or as being in a danger from which she herself has to protect it. This, in cases of rape, morally blames the victims. *Al-Kursī al-hazzāz* disagrees with this assumption in so far as it describes two instances in which very young girls are molested who clearly cannot be held responsible.

The novel was published more than thirty years after *Le Sadique*, which allows us to ask how gender concerns have evolved. The answer is that they have moved into the private domain and are lesser in the public realm that was on display in Hichem/Zoubir's misogynist communications about women's role in society in *Le Sadique*. *Al-Kursī al-hazzāz* shows the conflictual relationship between a father and his adult daughter, Mūna, and their different ideas about gender dynamics and life choices. These crystallize a central breaking point of their relationship, a situation to which Mūna alludes throughout the novel. Her father caught her in a moment of intimacy with one of her university students on a rocking chair. The chair, as Abir Kréfa analyzes, belongs to her father. This specific insight turns it into a symbol for the patriarchy (2011: 126). The symbol has come under attack through Mūna's behavior. The resulting conflict is never addressed directly, which turns the relationship between father and daughter into one of mutual shame and disappointment. The father, who is also suffering from poor health, is silent and refuses any interaction with his daughter (e.g., he removes his hand, when Mūna tries to press it, *Kursī* 111). Mūna blames him for being liberated, but only in his thinking and specifically regarding her education. His emotional side remained conservative, she thinks, if not outright reactionary (*Kursī* 115). This repeats a similar complaint found in *Le Sadique* and in which Tunisian women were criticized for not implementing modernization completely (*Sadique* 58). Partial modernization appears to be a general criticism, one that comes easily to mind.

According to Mūna, her father was afraid of her body and femininity and, eventually, this made her despise them herself (*Kursī* 128). Instead of raising her to be free-spirited, he put her inner-most existence into chains (*Kursī* 113). She employs a political vocabulary to

describe her father and her upbringing, which is reminiscent of the modernity discourse present in *Le Sadique* and shows its continued prevalence in the Tunisia of the early 2000s. The modern woman exists in a context of work in which the body is absent in *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*. Meanwhile traditional aspects of womanhood prevail in the private realm where the female body also finds its place. Tunisian society, and the people who find themselves within it, can be said to oscillate between modern and traditional positions. This is reflected in the oscillatory presence and absence of bodies in certain realms.

Mūna's approach to her father's silence is to replace it with multiple narratives that illustrate her shame. Instead of describing one rape scene, she leaves open the possibility of whether or not there is a "true" account. She does not even clarify whether she conceptualizes all accounts of violent sexuality as rapes. After almost every account, she states that she did not remember what she narrated or was uncertain that she really did describe what had happened (*Kursī* 108, 116, 125). She adapts her accounts to her interlocutors, and their interests, which moves her to change the elements of her story (*Kursī* 125). She attributes it to the difficulty of remembering: "During a storm, during the chaos of movement and in fear", she argues, "I could not take pictures for remembrance. [...] During a storm, the only thing one does automatically is to run towards safety" (*Kursī* 86).[21] This inability to remember is not exceptional, according to El Saadawi, who argues that small girls who experienced abuse often forget what happened or are haunted by the experience in the form of nightmares, without knowing that what they are dreaming about are events from their past (1980: 21).

The truth value of Mūna's narratives is uncertain. The first story is the one of her father walking in on her while she is on the rocking chair with her student. It is not narrated by Mūna herself, but appears as a reflection of her words via her platonic friend Muḥammad's reaction after she told him about it (*Kursī* 14). References to the event recur throughout the novel. The second narrative is the explanation that Mūna gives to her husband Munjī after their wedding to explain why she will likely not bleed during intercourse (this has been quoted above). After sleeping with her lover, Majdī, for the first time, she tells him how she lost her virginity (*Kursī* 102–107), and this forms the third account. She describes that she played with the other children in her father's village during a summer vacation with her family. As part of the play, the children touched each other intimately. They were discovered by an uncle, who then abused Mūna sexually and tried to penetrate her. Mūna tells a different version of the story, but one that also contains child abuse, while sitting at her father's bedside (*Kursī* 114–115). According to this story, she was molested by her kindergarten teacher's brother and was forced to satisfy him orally before he violently penetrated her, causing her to bleed. The fifth and final account is narrated after Muḥammad asks her what she told her father. She replies that she told him how she seduced a Syrian student to find out whether she is (or then *was*) a virgin. It is uncertain whether or not she did in fact tell her father this story or the previous one with the kindergarten teacher and whether she actually described the seduction to Muḥammad or whether she merely wanders in her mind. She reminisces about her childhood and the uncertainty she felt at the time, wondering

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21 Original quote:

"في العاصفة، أثناء ازدحام الحركة وأثناء الفزع، لم يكن في وسعي أخذ صور الذكرى. [...] في العاصفة أنجز فعلا
واحدا تلقائيا هو الركض نحو النجاة."

whether her body was normal. The language employed in the memories is metaphorical and could reflect the concepts that Mūna was raised with: "She put a finger into the tunnel, but could not feel the gate of honor. The honor that is only a thin layer of skin, lying between her thighs" (*Kursī* 120).[22] This description repeats the uncertainty that was perceivable in the scene quoted with the doctor. This time, however, she resolves that her life would not end, even if she were no longer a virgin. She finds a foreign student and has sex with him. Since she bleeds, she feels assured that she had previously been a virgin, which once again highlights virginity's fleeting nature. Mūna's initiative in this scene, and in the earlier one where she offers up her body instead of letting her husband take possession of it, indicates her refusal of traditional expectations. She is not the subdued bride who is dominated by her husband in the consummation of marriage (Combs-Schilling 1989: 207); instead, she displays agency. In what follows, I will argue that she conquers her shame and even 'shames' this shame itself (compare Burrus 2008: 151). It allows her to transgress specific expectations for women.

In changing the stories about her lost hymen, she gives shame its place; put otherwise, she opens a space at the heart of the limit in Foucault's understanding of transgression (Foucault 1977: 34–35) that lets several versions of the story exist alongside each other. This keeps the accounts at a distance from herself and from what 'actually' happened. The assumed rapes or scenes of sexual violence only have a limited or oscillatory presence, even though they occupy the center of the novel; these scenes reflect the problematic of their writing in that they are present and absent at the same time. Mūna also alludes to the suspicion that there is no 'actual truth'. This highlights the difficulty of their narration. It contains another transgression which is that of narrative conventions. The reader's desire to be presented with one, unambiguous truth is disappointed.

The only account that Mūna does not change, or at least for which she does not reflect on the changes that she made, is the one including her father and the rocking chair. It is also the one that she does not directly tell in the narrative. That the novel does not provide the reader with a definite answer regarding what happened reflects the difficulty of representation, a topic explored in *Section 3.5*. The novel contains no closure, but instead is characterized by an openness. This openness is reflected in a body that is overly exposed, in its materiality as well as its narration, an abject body. It is also an oscillating body that reflects the difficulty involved in narrating it.

Another technique that renders representation unstable is narrating from a position that is removed through time. Several of Mūna's accounts are told by her child-self and from a child's horizon of experience. This is evident in the description of unfamiliar actions and body parts that forgoes adult terminology and resorts to what the child sees and feels (e.g., describing the molester's penis as 'that thick thing that appeared at the opening in his pants', *Kursī* 114[23]). The child's perspective suggests innocence and purity and refutes any responsibility on the side of the victim.[24]

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22 Original quote:
"أضع الإصبع في النفق فلا أعثر على بوابة الشرف. الشرف الذي لا يعدو أن يكون مجرّد غشاء يرقد بين الفخذين."
23 Original quote:
"ذلك الشيء الضخم الذي يطلّ من فتحة سرواله."
24 Compare this below to the Tunisian Penal Code's position on the required age to consent to sexual activities.

Mūna's plural narratives replace a previous silence. She mentions that she did not even tell her mother about the abuse when she was a child. This is addressed regretfully only once, which is when she tells her father the version with the kindergarten teacher (*Kursī* 115). An explanation for Mūna's silence as a child might be offered by a piece in Nawal El Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve. Women in the Arab World* (1980). The chapter "The Grandfather With Bad Manners" recounts the sexual assault of a young girl by her grandfather. Only when the girl has become a woman can she tell her story. She states that as a child she had thought "what my grandfather was doing was wrong and immoral, and that if my mother found out, she would be angry with me and would scold me". Saadawi comments that it is a common occurrence that the abused child remains silent for fear of punishment or shame (El Saadawi 1980: 17, 19).

Shame occupies the heart of the revelatory moment of telling an intimate secret. It is part and parcel of all of Mūna's narratives. First of all, shame characterizes Mūna's relationship with her father, with her self, and with her body. This was alluded to above in Mūna's complaints about her father's superficial liberalism that only just covers his fear of her femaleness, nothing more. Once it comes to the fore, as in the situation with the student on the rocking chair, a rift between them emerges. Virginia Burrus writes in her *Saving Shame. Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (2008) that while shame "is typically viewed as a quintessentially public affect", it "is also the most intimate and internal of emotions" (Burrus 2008: 2). For her, it is at "the boundary between the public and the private, the political and the personal, the inter- and intrasubjective [*...; and, C.P.*] constantly traverses those boundaries – even very nearly dissolves them" (Burrus 2008: 152). Shame thereby oscillates between the self and the other(s): It is an emotion that is the result of the interpersonal. Its public side resides in the fact that it is felt and is based on the awareness that we are being seen by others. It forces us to scrutinize ourselves and to see ourselves through the eyes of others. We form our private side to compensate for being seen as a consequence (compare Shah 2015: 51, 57; similar in Probyn 2005: 32). This is the case in the novel: Mūna is found in a compromising situation by her father. His disapproving reaction lets her see herself through his eyes which causes her shame. Since shame according to Probyn reflects our very individual "values, hopes, and aspirations" (2005: x), here it shows the acute importance of the father for Mūna.

Shame is present throughout her narratives. Each story reveals an instance of her past (albeit in variations) but also a feature of her body. This opens up both her body and past to the scrutiny of others, who might judge her as abject for her frankness in telling her story as well as for the lost virginity. Mūna shares the accounts with the men in her life. She tells them in intimate contexts, in bars and bedrooms and in personal conversation. The settings in which she tells her stories reflect the situations they describe. The scenes of abuse occur in moments where Mūna was also alone with the men who hurt her.

The body that is shamed or sexually shaming is female and abject, both in novels and more generally. The words for shame and pudendum or genitalia in Arabic (ʿayib and ʿawra, respectively), are very close with regards to their basic meanings, but they do not share the same root. They both refer to a 'defect', 'fault', or 'blemish' in addition to the connotations mentioned above. *ʿAwra* furthermore is understood as that which needs to be covered by observing Muslims when they are in public. It is especially contested when it concerns women, which means its application to women has received greater attention. The term does not just refer to women, yet it is particularly connected to them. The different local understandings of its content will not be addressed here. However, it is interesting to

note that *'awra*, in describing both that which needs coverage and a defect, suggests a negative view of the intimate; it needs to be covered and must not be revealed.

El Saadawi in her *The Hidden Face of Eve* quotes an Arab proverb and interprets it: "'Only the pocket of a man can bring him shame' For our society, therefore, shame is only the result of poverty, where men are concerned" (El Saadawi 1980: 29). The same proverb is referred to in the novel when Mūna discusses Munjī's qualities as a future spouse with her mother's ghost. For the mother, Munjī's well-filled purse designates him as a suitable husband (*Kursī* 17), despite Mūna's disdain for his lack of appeal (*Kursī* 83). The scene suggests that it is precisely not the body of a man that shames him. In a different scene, the novel casts doubt on the proverb. Muḥammad, Mūna's platonic friend, surprises her completely naked because she tricked him into thinking the sexual desire is mutual. She understands the situation as shameful for him (*Kursī* 42), represents him and their relationship as essentially non-sexual, and makes Muḥammad appear effeminate. The scene proves the proverb to be erroneous, since here a man can be shamed by something other than poverty. However, one could argue that what enables this shaming is that she lets Muḥammad appear effeminate.

Khaoula Matri writes in her aforementioned article that society leaves its mark of identity via female bodies: "À travers le corps féminin, la société inscrit l'empreinte de son identité" (2012: 61). Tunisian society shows itself as patriarchal by leaving traces on Mūna's body, no matter which narrative is true. The shaming of a body with a hymen that does not bleed is already the effect of patriarchal domination, as discussed above. However, Mūna acts against this major streak of her society. The (supposedly) lost virginity functions as a motivator for further sexual experiences and transgressions that eventually lead to the scene on the rocking chair, the only one for which Mūna feels remorse. Shame can have an empowering potential when it is accepted with the "embrace of the stigma". This opens up the possibility to overcome one's identity and become another (Burrus describes shame's "erasure"; 2008: 152). Accordingly, Mūna argues that what happened on the rocking chair was her effort to cure her sick soul of its complexes (*Kursī* 116). Interestingly, though, throughout the novel it is precisely this incident that keeps creeping back into her thoughts, much like a complex. Both this and the repetitive nature of the different accounts bring an aspect of haunting into the novel, one that is reminiscent of trauma. Unlike an actual trauma,[25] memories of the initial event do not overcome Mūna spontaneously; instead, she chooses to 'remember' it for the sake of her interlocutors. However, Joshua Gunn connects haunting and trauma and argues that: "[e]very haunting can be characterized as a loss, as the recall of an event of losing, and in some sense, as a melancholic inability to let go of the *thing* that is lost" (2006: 91).

It is not clear, what it is that Mūna has lost. It could be her hymen, this symbol of virginity that she might have never even had in the first place. Her encounter with the student on the rocking chair would, in turn, be an attempt to end the haunting and so would be her affairs with both the foreign student and Majdī. Another attempt has to be seen in the narration of her shame that results in the multitude of versions. Through it, she actively trans-

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25 Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (see her: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 1996: 11).

forms her stigma into a strength that allows her to enter into love affairs that are pleasing to her and to enjoy a friendship with a man that allows private meetings without seeing him as a danger or threat to her honor. The reasons for her freedom from the code of honor, which requires unmarried women to be virgins, can be found in her stories of shame. In Burrus' words: "[t]he defiant appropriation of the stigma […] both contests shaming – *shames shame* – and renders it unexpectedly productive, for the stigma opens the site of a yet-to-be-defined identity" (2008: 151).

A second aspect that she lost is the relationship that she used to have with her father. This would explain why the incident on the rocking chair haunts her, as the narrative shows repeatedly. Mūna's father dies after, or while, she speaks to him by his bedside and talks about abuse. She wonders whether or not he heard her tale, which draws attention to the question of the effectiveness of communication and storytelling, a topic that will be analyzed in the following section. The scene with her father is the only account for which Mūna receives no feedback. This is because his death suggests the end of an older generation that also brings an end to this generation's concepts, at least those that were not already passed down. Yet, something still remains; *Al-Kursī al-hazzāz* is dedicated to the protagonist's father (not the author's father). The father has left an impression on Mūna psychologically through what she describes as his fear of her body. Mūna refers to the 'complexes' that she is struggling to overcome, such as her estrangement from her femininity. The centrality of the body for her self and her experience of the world become apparent in the context of the social expectations that it does not always meet. Yet, through her embrace of shame, Mūna refuses to be abjected and instead reads her body, as well as her behavior, in ways that suit her, something inspired by her interlocutors. This is a form of dissent with the double silence that is expected of her, first as a woman who was sexually active before marriage and as a woman who has likely experienced sexual assault. According to Tyler's above discussed suggestion, she rehumanizes herself and perceives of herself as a subject of violence, not "the abject Thing that violence produces" (Tyler 2009: 93). This suggests greater activity than the previously ascribed passivity expected of women. The gender expectations have seemingly changed since the publication of *Le Sadique*.

3.5   Writing and Narrative Violence

A narrative situation is always influenced by its concrete setting and by attitudes of both narrator and listener. Stuart Hall in his *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) writes that: "[t]he 'taking of meaning' is as much a signifying practice as the 'putting into meaning'. Speaker and hearer or writer and reader are active participants in a process which – since they often exchange roles – is always double-sided, always interactive" (1997: 10). Mūna's scrutiny of her accounts in *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* contains an element of doubt. Her frustration with truth or with the accurate retelling of events highlights the problems of representation. It should not only concern the narrator of *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*, but should rather lend itself to a moment of general re-evaluation of writing, especially in the writing of violence and abject bodies.

Representation can be thought to describe the relation of cultural objects to the world, as objects *representing* this world. According to Stuart Hall, representation or: "[t]he relation between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language" (1997: 19). However, representation itself is not innocent or transparent. Representation is not only about standing in or replacing something (e.g., in a political sense, such as with the representative in parliament, or the word 'cat' for an animal with pointed ears and whiskers). Representation also produces, shapes, and influences meaning. According to

M.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1994), it: "not only 'mediates' our knowledge […], but obstructs, fragments, and negates that knowledge" (1994: 188). As a consequence, representation simply cannot be neutral and meaning "can never be *finally* fixed" (Hall 1997: 23). Both are produced. Every reading, every interpretation, and every piece of writing are no more than *an* interpretation, *a* reading, and *a* writing. Mūna's different explanations for her absent hymen are, consequently, simply different interpretations. Her allusions to the productive influence that her shame had on her individual development offers a counter-reading to the predominant discourse of virginity in Tunisia, but it also remains only *a* reading.

Every reading misreads, misrepresents, and thereby does violence to what is being described. According to Burrus, in establishing their meaning of a text, readers leave "traces like invisible fingerprints" on the pages (2008: 7). The readings presented by this study are no different, despite every effort being made for the purposes of academic objectivity. They are and cannot be neutral or transparent. The readings choose certain literary works over others and decide to put them in dialogue in certain ways and not in others. Armstrong and Tennenhouse write in *The Violence of Representation* (1989) that: "[t]here is no position of non-power from which we can write and teach". As an escape, they suggest developing an awareness of the nature of representation as well as the processes that influence a given work (Armstrong/Tennenhouse 1989: 26). This section attempts to do this by exploring the power structures of representation with reference to *Kursī al-hazzāz*.

According to Foucault, representation describes the production of knowledge through discourse (compare Hall 1997: 42–43; 46). The subject is implicated, since it "must submit to its [*i.e., discourse's; C.P.*] rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge" (Hall 1997: 55). Mūna as a narrator, for example, is partly produced through Tunisian society's discourses about gender roles, virginity, and shame. However, she can distance herself from these discourses through her privileged position as an educated, independent, financially secure, and employed Tunisian woman. She can talk about the breaking or absence of her hymen in private, thereby creating representations without repercussions that could threaten her existence. However, she shows herself as an innocent child or ill-informed teenager in several of the narratives. These narrative perspectives are precautions against being judged harshly. Generally, Mūna shows herself as free from personal faults, which is the result of her control over the material that she is narrating. This shows that representation is closely linked to power.

As the narrator of the novel, Mūna has power over the other characters, and she is aware of this. She pitilessly presents her husband as clumsy and patronizing, especially during their wedding dinner (*Kursī* 56–63). Mūna married Munjī at the age of 39 to fulfill social expectations. She represents him as less of a man than her lover Majdī, which reinforces the power of her own narrative. While she feels the need to get married, the wedding takes place on her term. She clarifies that she agreed to Munjī's proposal only to appease her father (*Kursī* 78, 116). She puts herself above Munjī, which is an instance of violence of representation (for the analysis of a similar narrative situation in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, compare Armstrong/Tennenhouse 1989: 8). Mūna's power to exert narrative violence results from the first-person perspective from which she narrates. She has a position of power towards both the narrative and the reader. She shapes the narrative and makes choices about what to tell readers and how, which she reflects upon openly. There are omissions, though, such as any detailed account of what happened on the rocking chair.

While Mūna shows her younger self as the victim of sexual abuse through older men, her adult self is strong and refuses to be cast as a victim. She produces a certain image of a

woman who was abused, an image that differs distinctly from the one that *Le Sadique* offered, in which the first-person narrator was the abuser and not the (formerly) abused. Both narrators narrate violence; however, both are guilty of exerting violence on the narrative. Mūna, to reiterate the example given above, presents her husband as a coarse figure who falls victim to his long-standing infatuation with her. This is how he must appear to the reader because Mūna's perspective on him is the only one that is available. The influence of her specific representation does not become too apparent or is ever questioned as being biased. Laura Tanner describes this effect in her *Intimate Violence. Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (1994) as: "[t]he seductive power of representation [...] to naturalize its own conclusions". It means that the readings presented are rarely questioned, manipulations are obscured, and ideological assumptions are veiled (compare 1994: 10).

Rape, but also sexual violence, epitomize "the difficulty of representation", as was quoted in the introduction to this chapter (Horeck 2004: 129). Their occurrence and narration contain the same non-transparency of language and unfixed meanings that characterize representation. The oftentimes contradictory perspectives of victim and perpetrator show this, as well as the fact that 'no, means no'-debates are still an issue. Due to this similarity, this chapter's narratives are especially well-suited to address general issues of representation that concern the entire study.[26]

Narratives that describe sexual violence and rape contain a second layer of narrative violence that lies in their potentially arousing effect. This topic has been addressed in *Section 3.3*, where the pleasure that Leila experiences reading the novel-within-the-novel in *Le Sadique* was discussed. I will return to this concern in the following section, in the discussion of the novel *al-Ightiṣāb* ('The rape', 2008).

Narratives either strive to evoke an erotic effect in the reader or accept that they do so accidentally. This is problematic where narratives that show rape and sexual violence are concerned since the violence is actualized in each reading. In the case of *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*, the repetition does not occur in the scenes that portray sexual violence. Their narrative perspective does not support this since they are told from the perspective of the victim. However, when one reads Mūna's representation of the male characters, their degradation is repeated, something that has already been described as an instance of narrative violence (see Gana/Härtling's "Narrative Violence: Africa and the Middle East", 2008: 1). In *Le Sadique*, by contrast, an identification with the perpetrator is provoked and the violence against M'nê is repeated in the act of reading.

The previous two chapters contained a relatively straightforward approach to literary representation, whereas it was necessary to complicate this view for this chapter's purposes. To repeat the insights from this section, there is no neutral representation, neither in literature nor in criticism, something that should certainly be borne in mind when literary works are read as textual sources to gain insights into a society. The absence of neutral representation complicates writing, as was shown with reference to *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* by discussing Mūna's different narratives. As a result, writing appeared as something plural and without an ultimate truth. This suggests that it contains a dissenting moment within itself. Writing

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26   See also Higgins' and Silver's *Rape and Representation* (1991) about the entanglements of both.

also appeared to be the result of power structures and discourses that influence it; this means that it can be guilty of committing narrative violence.

In the following section, a narrative written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator will be analyzed to explore how this influences the writing of abject bodies, after victim and perpetrators were told from first-person narrators previously.

3.6   Challenging Gendered Narratives of Rape. *al-Ightiṣāb*

Al-Ightiṣāb literally means 'the rape'. It is the title of a novel by Hédi Thabet (2008) that forms his section's central focus. While the title only mentions a single assault, Thabet's novel contains more than one scene involving rape.

Al-Ightiṣāb[27] narrates the male protagonist Al-ʿĀti's rape in prison. It also addresses how his girlfriend Warda is forced into have intercourse with her cousin. This double perspective guides the analysis that follows. This section continues to explore the issue of gender and looks for differences in the depiction of the rape of male and female victims in literature, especially with regards to the presence and absence of rape in the narratives. The omniscient narrator's position becomes a central concern in this endeavor and how this is constructed and addressed within the novel is analyzed. This forms an instance of writing commenting upon itself.

Legally, the issue of rape used to be addressed in the Tunisian Penal Code in articles 227 to 229 under "Attentats à la pudeur" (lit. 'crimes against decency or modesty', 'sexual offence'). This focus on decency was criticized in Amnesty International's report *Assaulted and Accused* for example, since it missed out on the most crucial aspect of sexual violence; namely, that it forms "a violation of an individual's bodily integrity and sexual autonomy" (2015: 53). The penal code suggested a model of rape that was influenced by the honor and shame of the community. Rape was defined[28] as "the non-consensual penetration of the vagina by the penis". This was changed in July 2017, when the Tunisian parliament passed *Loi organique no. 2017-58 relative a l'élimination de la violence à l'égard des femmes* (Organic Law No. 2017-58 related to the elimination of violence against women). The law tackles three areas: prevention of violence against women, their protection and support, and prosecution and changes in the legislation. The law adapted the definition of rape to international human rights standards by changing it to include all acts of sexual penetration of any kind and with any object committed on a person of either feminine or male sex without their consent. It is punishable by 20 years of prison (*Loi organique no. 2017-58*: 2608). The law now also offers legislation against sexual harassment in public places and the required age to consent to sexual relations rose from 13 to 16, meaning that non-consent has to be assumed for below the age of 16 (*Loi organique no. 2017-58*: 2608, Blaise 2017). It also

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27 It needs to be mentioned that the novel shares its title with other literary works, such as the Syrian dramatist Saʿdallāh Wannūs's play published in 1990 which forms a reading of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (compare Pannewick *Der andere Blick. Eine syrische Stimme zur Palästinafrage*, 1993; the study includes a translation of the play into German).

28 One important detail that the old article 227 contained was that it would drop the charges if the perpetrator were willing to marry the victim (Tunisian Penal Code, version 9 February 2015). This practice was abolished when the Organic Law No. 2017-58 from 11 August 2017, related to the elimination of violence against women, was brought into force in February 2018 (Loi organique no. 2017-58: 2607–2608). The law was discussed and adopted by the Tunisian Parliament on 26 July 2017.

takes the idea that rape victims are not only women into account, something not previously covered by article 227. Male rape used to be addressed by article 228 on indecent assault without consent and it was never actually called 'male rape' (see Amnesty International 2015: 54). While the law is considered to be a huge success for the rights and protection of women, it remains lacking according to human rights advocates, even three years after being brought into force. The sources of funding to pay for the prevention measures and the establishment of support services announced (counselling, shelters, etc.) are not indicated. The scope of relationships covered by the law does not include violence committed in non-marital intimate relationships. Developments are slow with regards to the actual effects of the law. There is not enough awareness, especially in rural communities, regarding the new law and the protection that it gives (Advocates for Human Rights and MRA 2020 in the report *Tunisia's Compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. 128th Session of the Human Rights Committee*). However, some efforts have been made, such as the Ministry of Education announced the introduction of sexual education in schools to teach the students about their bodies as part of the effort to prevent sexual violence at the end of 2019 (Doelker/Scheicher 2020). The Tunisian government has also created 128 specialized police units to investigate allegations of violence against women (Human Rights Watch 2020).

Both the theoretical conceptualizations of rape (compare Ferguson 1987: 91) and the Tunisian judiciary highlight the issue of "non-consent" as that which characterizes the crime of rape. It is also the primary meaning of the Arabic word *ightaṣaba* which is rendered in English as 'taking away by force', 'seizing unlawfully', 'coercing', 'forcing', all of which clearly suggest the absence of consent on the side of the targeted object or person. On the meaning of *ightaṣaba*, Kecia Ali notes in her *Sexual Ethics and Islam* (2006) that early Islamic jurists considered it a "property crime". Husbands could not commit it against their wives since they held the "proprietary interest" over their wives' sexual lives (2006: 12).[29] Rape as a violation of another's property, according to a notion that was already mentioned above regarding the deflowering of another man's woman. Apart from violating a third party's property, rape also harms the victim's personal property, if one assumes that the victim is in possession of her (or his) body. The victim's non-consent is disregarded by the rapist, which is paralleled by the transgression into the interior of the victim's body that rape involves. The victim is therefore violated both physically in the body and mentally in the "vulnerability of the subject accessible through that body" during acts of rape and instances of "intimate violence" (Tanner 1994: 3). Rape and intimate violence have to be understood as assaults on an individual's embodiment, the bodily being-in-the-world that encompasses both mind and body. The fact that our being is an individual's most fundamental ground is precisely why its corruption through rape has existential repercussions. Both the material violence and the mental violence can find its way into literature.

In this section, I intend to explore how a depiction can render the violated individuals abject and how writing these individuals is a challenging task in literature. The presence and absence of rape narratives will be shown as an oscillation that problematizes writing.

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29 Although *Loi organique no. 2017-58* does not have a specific provision on marital rape or domestic violence, according to the Tunisian government, these are "criminalized within more general articles prohibiting violence against women, irrespective of the perpetrator" (Advocates for Human Rights and MRA 2020).

Al-Ightiṣāb was written in the 1980s, but Thabet failed to find a publisher at the time. It was published with a delay of over 20 years, not just because of its topic of sexual violence, but also because of its political references. Sayyid Rizq argues that the novel was not published initially due to the depiction of the political and ideological scene of the 1960s (Rizq 2008: np). However, Hédi Thabet thinks that it was due to the novel's intimate concern with the body. He edited the text and rewrote the ending for the version that was published in 2008 (personal conversation with the author; 8 October 2014, Tunis). The complications in both the novel's production and publication make the interpretation of its socio-political references difficult, since the novel mixes references to the 1960s with events from the turn of the century, such as Tunisia's involvement in international Islamic terrorism. Conversely, though, the impossibility to find a publisher for the work in the 1980s might be read as an indicator that the novel was believed to deal with events relevant for the socio-political context of the time of its production. Potential publishers must have thought that the novel would fail to receive the official receipt that was necessary to publish a book (compare *Introduction*). The common thread that links the decades mentioned is a popular discontentment with government policies. It connects the student protests in the late 1960s and 1970s (Wolin 2010: 292; Rhinehart 1988: 64–68), with a general strike organized by the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) in 1978 that caused bloodshed and arrests and "[a] new wave of incidents [*that; C.P.*] erupted in 1984, when the government increased the price of bread" (Borowiec 1998: 35). The government's hold on any oppositional movement was so strong that any open critique of the regime was impossible from the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Tunisian people were becoming disenchanted with political participation (compare Alexander 2010: 3, 64). Then, however, protests in the mining area of Gafsa in 2008 set the stage for what followed in 2011. However, these earlier protests remained localized and underreported due to state repression (compare Haugbølle 2013: 168–169).

Oppositional views are alluded to in the novel by presenting both Warda and al-ʿĀtī as political activists from an organization with Marxist leanings (see *Ightiṣāb* 10–19, 41–44 respectively). Historically, the Tunisian regime met resistance with pressure and organized state violence. One indicator of the scope of state violence is the establishment of the Truth and Dignity Commission in 2014, where the victims of human rights violations, dating back to 1955, could seek public recognition for what they endured and did so in the thousands (Amnesty International 2015: 12; see also Ahmed Zaki 2016; Gall 2015).[30] The novel addresses state violence by describing al-ʿĀtī's imprisonment and torture.

Al-ʿĀtī was arrested after a funeral march that took place in his neighborhood. The regime's security forces saw an instance of unrest during the march. The situation escalated, youths threw stones and Molotov cocktails at the security personnel who replied with teargas and bullets (*Ightiṣāb* 21–22). In prison, al-ʿĀtī's interrogators wanted to find out where he had been during the clashes between the people and the security personnel, clashes for which he was detained. He is whipped and battered. His clothes are removed from his upper body. With a smile that al-ʿĀtī does not understand, 'the warden begins to touch his naked breast with his coarse hand. Al-ʿĀtī shivers and is overcome by nausea, but the warden

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30 Zaki and Gall respectively focus on state-organized sexual violence that targeted women and leave out the fact that rape was also part of the torture that men underwent.

continues to touch him indecently and moves his hand to his back' (*Ightiṣāb* 36)[31]. Al-ʿĀtī forgets his fear and tries to defend himself. He is hit even more brutally. When the overseer orders him to take of his pants, he is unable to do so. The warden rips them down. Al-ʿĀtī is completely naked. The warden keeps looking at him with both irony and delight. Later, the warden comes to get al-ʿĀtī from his cell: 'He leads him to the interrogation chamber, and ties him up, then he rapes him in all hideousness…' (*Ightiṣāb* 37).[32] Despite the torture, al-ʿĀtī remains silent, confesses nothing, and gives no names away. Internally, he is broken. 'Al-ʿĀtī's wish for annihilation is bigger than his wish to remain, to let them kill him before he would be his own murderer' (*Ightiṣāb* 38).[33] When the investigator realizes that he would not get a word from him, the interrogations stop, 'but the warden continued to rape him for the entire duration of the imprisonment' (*Ightiṣāb* 38).[34]

The novel's double perspective on rape allows for a comparison between the representation of male and female violation, victimhood, and its repercussions. Warda's rape follows al-ʿĀtī's, only much later. Meanwhile, al-ʿĀtī leaves Tunisia for France. Warda also lives in France and goes on a date with her cousin Ḥasīb:

> She drank cognac, danced with him and was not bothered by his touch. He ran his hand over her naked back and rubbed himself against her. He whispered sweet talk to her. The cognac was strong and made her drunk again, but she was unaware of what was happening. […] He took her out of the taxi and she was half-asleep. He helped her over the threshold of the building, then through the door of the lift. He opened the door of his small flat on the top floor and carried her in his arms to the bedroom and laid her on his bed. He removed her fancy dress as well as the high heels. She was only half-conscious. When her body appeared, all naked, luscious and white, he raped her. When she felt him, she tried to struggle against him, but he continued until the end. She did not completely realize what happened until the next morning (*Ightiṣāb* 208)[35]

While there are obvious differences between the descriptions, in terms of their lengths and details, both share an opacity regarding the exact moment of rape. The text says "ightaṣabahu" and "ightaṣabahā" (he raped him/her, respectively), the only difference being in the personal pronoun employed. Both the events in the prison cell and in Ḥasīb's bed-

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31 Original quote:
"وأخذ يتلمسه حاطأ يده الغليظة على صدره العاري. تملكت العاتي قشعريرة وغثيان، لكن الجلاد واصل لمساته الوقحة، انتلقت يده إلى ظهر العاتي".

32 Original quote:
"قاده إلى غرفة الاستنطاق، ثم وبكل فظاعة اغتصبه...".

33 Original quote:
"كانت رغبة العاتي في الفناء أكبر من رغبته في البقاء، فتركهم يقتلونه قبل أن يكون هو قاتل نفسه."

34 Original quote:
"لكنّ الجلاد تمادَى في اغتصابه كامل الفترة التي قضاها في الاعتقال."

35 Original quote:
"شربت الكُنياك، ورقصت معه، ولم تتأثر للمساته، وهو يمرّر يده على ظهرها العاري، وهو يحتكُّ بها، وهو يهمس لها بكلام معسول. كان الكنياك قويًّا فسكرت من جديد، ولم يعد لوعيها من وجود. [...] أخرجها من التاكسي بصعوبة، وكانت شبه نائمة، ساعدها على تخطي عتبة العمارة، ثم باب المصعد، وفتح باب شقته الصغيرة في الطابق الأخير، وحملها بين ذراعيه حتى غرفة النوم، وضعها على سريره، انتزع منها فستانها الأنيق، وحذاءها ذا الكعب العالي، وهي في شبه غيبوبة. عندما ظهر جسدها عاريأ، غضاً أبيض، اغتصبها. ولما أحسَّت به، حاولت دفعه لكنه تمادَى حتى النهاية. لم تع ما حصل لها إلَّا عند الصباح".

room are reduced to a single expression, giving the illusion that all necessary information has been supplied with it. However, there are hardly any physical details or descriptions of how the respective character experiences his or her body. There is no ripping or pushing, no pain of overstretching or intrusion, no blood or other bodily fluids. In this way, the rapes are not embodied in their materiality in the novel in the same way as the violence was in *Le Sadique* or as the abuse narratives were in *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*. The rapes are present and absent at the same time. This is an effect of the narrative voice, and it creates an absence of the materiality of Warda's and al-ʿĀtī's bodies. The positionality of the omniscient narrator does not allow for the same intimacy that the first-person perspectives of the other two novels grant. The absence of material detail can be read as an effort not to repeat the violence through representation, thereby exposing the protagonists further. It is not just the bodies of the victims that are absent; so too are the bodies of their rapists. This suggests that the absence of the bodily materiality of rape is also a deference for the sensibilities of the novel's expected readership.[36] It draws attention to the problematic of narrating rape and sexual violence in Tunisian literature, including all of the physical detail. This is, however, not in conflict with the noted prevalence of the theme of rape in cultural production. Here, the emphasis is on the physical details' oscillatory absence and presence.

Laura Tanner argues, in her *Intimate Violence*, that it is common in literature to "efface rather than unveil the materiality of the victimized body" (1994: 9). She continues that by leaving out the details, the responsibility to fill in the gaps is pushed onto the reader. This absence of bodies, however, hinders an awareness of the actual consequences and physical implications of rape (compare 1994: 18–23, 75).

In a direct comparison of the scenes, it is remarkable that Warda's rape is narrated in a context in which she brought herself: a date. Meanwhile, al-ʿĀtī's experience is framed as torture and involves no voluntary decisions. The description of Warda's rape is more detailed than the two sentences that address al-ʿĀtī's violation and, therefore, allows for an actual analysis to take place. The female rape victim's body is materially present prior to the rape, it is even aestheticized ('luscious', 'white'). Here, almost unnoticed, the narrative perspective zooms in on the victim. The omniscient narrator's viewpoint suddenly overlaps with that of the rapist and, therefore, gives the reader access to this point of view. The narrative is contradictory here by excluding how the characters experience rape from within their bodies, while focusing on Warda's body from the outside. Her body is clearly seen as closed, not open. The reference to whiteness is a reference to Warda's skin that encloses her entire body. It suggests a body that is free of abjection, of the leaky or open. Warda's purity, and therefore her 'value' (compare the above discussion of the link between purity in terms of virginity and value), are highlighted. Her cousin reads these features as comprising her seductiveness.

The fact that the title of the novel only refers to one rape has been mentioned previously. This might indicate that the author/narrator does not perceive of Warda's situation as a rape, but as a 'misunderstanding' between her and her cousin after a lot of flirtation and alcohol. Sexual intercourse could be seen as a possible outcome that she might have expected. One might argue that Warda was seduced, not raped. A perspective such as the one just

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36 The necessity for deference for his readership is what the author indicated in a personal conversation, 8 October 2014.

outlined, illustrates rape myths – stereotypes about rape and its victims and perpetrators abound and tend to hold the victim responsible (compare Lonsway/Fitzgerald 1994: 134–135). Among the most common myths is that victims cause rapes through their behavior or as a result of how they are dressed (compare Kahlor/Morrison 2007: 730). The way Warda's rape is told in the novel suggests that this is a possible reading. This closely reflects the situation in Tunisia where women are commonly blamed for being raped, as is expressed in many individual cases discussed by Amnesty International's aforementioned report *Assaulted and Accused* (compare 2015: 10). The report shows that rape myths are active in Tunisian society.

In Warda's situation specifically, blaming her clashes with the fact that she was actually unable to consent to what happened to her. She was unconscious when the rape began, when her cousin took possession of her body by undressing it and penetrating it with his gaze. Once she regains consciousness, she tries to stop him but fails, only to sink back into unconsciousness (see the scene quoted above). Given the description of the articles of the Tunisian penal code, the situation is rape because Warda is either unable to consent or shows her non-consent at all times when she is physically able to do so. She is shown as silenced in that her non-consent is overheard, which seems to be a stereotypical representation of female rape victims. In this, the novel neither overcomes rape myths and gender stereotypes, nor does it seize upon the opportunity to critique them. It contains narrative violence precisely because it does not present Warda's physical experience, something that would have highlighted the violation of her bodily integrity.

Gender stereotypes are also emphasized in al-ʿĀtī's rape, and which mirrors Warda's. Al-ʿĀtī is forced into a passivity that is contrary to stereotypical expectations of masculine behavior. By being penetrated, a gender difference between the male warden and the male prisoner is constructed that functions as a stand-in for the power of the regime and for al-ʿĀtī's vulnerability. His body is used like a woman's body and he becomes feminized in the process (compare Tanner 1994: 115; Plaza 1981: 28–29). The humiliation of the prisoner is the aim, and this aim is successful.

The feminizing that al-ʿĀtī experiences through the rape produces shame. He expresses again and again that he was dishonored and that he feels worthless ("muhān fī karāmatihi", *Ightiṣāb* 50). He is unable to look other people in the eye (*Ightiṣāb* 70) suggesting that the violator has usurped not only his body but al-ʿĀtī's entire being. That he feels his masculinity was implicated is expressed in his reasoning for revenge (discussed below). Here, the feminine is connected with being shameful and abject via the feminization and through associations with humiliation and victimhood, which alludes to a questionable understanding of gender roles in Tunisian society. Cahill notes that rape "is instrumental in the construction of the distinctly feminine body" (Cahill 2000: 43, 56). Al-ʿĀtī's masculine identity is destroyed. He feels that he cannot behave as freely as he would like to with Warda, even in his private life, due to his blemished honor. Unlike his physical pain, his psychological pain finds its way into the novel. This imbalance, according to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, is due to the fact that psychological pain is easier to put into words and, therefore, to convey in literature. As a result, it is a common element of literary works (1985: 11).

Al-ʿĀtī resolves that he needs to take revenge in order to re-establish his honor, to re-turn to being active, and to confirm his masculinity. He explicitly states that he does not want to take revenge on the system, but 'to let a person of flesh and blood taste torture' (*Ightiṣāb* 74).[37] Elaine Scarry analyses torture – rape and sexual violence are recognized as such by international human rights law – in the context of power production. Scarry explains that in an instance of torture, such as al-ʿĀtī's rape, there is not only the internal experience of pain, but there is also an external demonstration of power. An enemy is crea-ted and becomes the human embodiment of atrocities (compare 1985: 52). This position is filled by the warden and the novel leaves it open as to whether he was ordered by the inter-rogator to rape al-ʿĀtī or if he acted of his own accord. One gets the impression that the warden enjoyed himself in the above scene; however, he is also portrayed as an executive part of the system. The 'indecent touches' that happened under the eyes of the interrogator were neither shown to be directly ordered by him nor prevented by him. In any case, one has to read al-ʿĀtī's rape as part of organized state violence. This is not at all far-fetched, as the Truth Commission and the number of filed complaints show. Being raped or threatened with rape through the police is not an invention of the novel, as a case that received press coverage in autumn 2015 proves when a homosexual youth was made to confess to having had same-sex relations precisely through the threat of rape (compare Amnesty International 2015: 37).

According to Scarry, torture creates a pain so immense that it destroys language and it fills the entire consciousness of the tortured person, who is then only able to produce ut-terances of pain as the awareness of the world fades (compare 1985: 19, 35). Torture aims to "deconstruct the prisoner's voice" in the accompanying interrogation. This interrogation, for Scarry, is used as an excuse for torture in the first place. The answers given to the ques-tions do not really matter. The setting allows the torturer (and the state or regime that the torturer represents) to exert violence and to gain power from the vulnerability of the tor-tured individual (1985: 20, 29). Once the torturer has succeeded in prompting the prisoner to confess, "the torturer and the regime have doubled their voice since the prisoner is now speaking their words" (Scarry 1985: 36). In the novel, however, al-ʿĀtī does not confess.

Al-ʿĀtī is haunted by the shame of his experience in prison and he feels marked and ex-periences himself as abject. The proximity of feeling haunted and traumatized by an event or experience was noted previously (compare also Pilar Blanco/Peeren 2013: 11). I suggest looking at the haunting aspects of abuse as an alternative to the inflationary use of the label of trauma, something that already did not seem to fit for *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*. Al-ʿĀtī's and Warda's respective experiences of rape are, therefore, understood to have caused a haun-tedness. In order to overcome it, both protagonists of *al-Ightiṣāb* feel the need to react.[38] The reference to haunting furthermore highlights how the different theoretical notions employed in this study interact to enlighten bodies in Tunisian literature.

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37 Original quote:

"يريد شخصا لحما ودما، يذيقه العذاب".

38 Koopman also discusses the haunting effect of abuse in her article "Incestuous rape, abjection, and the colo-nization of psychic space in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*" (2013); while LaCapra mentions hauntedness through shame in his *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001).

Abjection, as discussed above, causes a concurrent aversion and fascination that is reminiscent of the haunting's simultaneous presence and absence and an oscillatory relationship in general. This is reflected in the novel inasmuch as al-ʿĀtī both refuses to speak about his violations to repress the memory,[39] and feels the immediate need to take revenge. This means that the reason that motivates his revenge occupies the center of his attention. Revenge is shown as a life-saving measure and is cast as the re-establishment of masculinity through masculine activity.

Al-ʿĀtī finds his way back to the site of his rape, despite the regime's efforts to rob the prisoners of their sense of orientation and to hide the prison's location. He catches the warden – although how it is that al-ʿĀtī identifies him is not clear. The narrative states that he stands before his rapist ("waqafa amāma mughtaṣibihi", *Ightiṣāb* 91). He strings the warden up on a tree with his head down – a strenuous procedure that is described in greater physical detail than the initial rape; it takes all of al-ʿĀtī's strength, since the warden weighs over 100 kilograms and the effort leaves him sweating, exhausted, and in need of a break (ibid.). He tells the warden with the tip of his knife pressed against the other's neck:

> I don't think you recognize me. I am al-ʿĀtī. When I was incarcerated, you tortured, you assaulted me. Now I will take my revenge on you. But, if you help me find out who your boss is, the one who ordered you to torture me, perhaps, I will pardon you. You were ordered, therefore the one who commanded you has to pay the price, isn't that so? (*Ightiṣāb* 91)[40]

Al-ʿĀtī leaves once he has acquired all of the information, well aware that it will take hours before the next change of guards discovers the now dead warden (compare *Ightiṣāb* 92). Readers can observe that the revenge is also set up as an interrogation of sorts. Again, the answers given are not important, since they do not improve the warden's situation and the setting is solely created to give power to the torturer. The revenge forms a mirror image of the rape and al-ʿĀtī becomes the oppressor of the person that he blames for causing his pain. By focusing on his revenge, instead of on the rape, the narrative allows al-ʿĀtī to return from passivity to activity. After he has exacted his revenge, he 'felt a transformation in his personality. He felt that he reclaimed his masculinity and that a different man burst out of him […], the raped al-ʿĀtī had come to an end' (*Ightiṣāb* 93)[41].

Warda also thinks about revenge immediately after discovering what has happened to her, but she changes her mind, goes into the bathroom, throws up, and cries (both bodily reactions that self-purify). When she is about to leave the flat, she remembers the red plastic water bucket in the bathroom, empties it on her cousin's head and then runs away (compare *Ightiṣāb* 213–214). Yet, for her, nothing is redeemed or repaired through her reaction. She feels that 'it will never be possible again to see herself walk in the streets with her head held high'. She considers herself to be sullied and unable to return to al-ʿĀtī which is why she disappears and moves to another city without ever informing him or leaving behind any

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39 The only instance in which he puts his experience into words is during his revenge when he tortures the warden, yet again it disappears in a single expression ("iʿtadayta ʿalay", *Ightiṣāb*: 91; 'you assaulted me').

40 Original quote:

"لا أظنك تعرفت عليَّ. أنا العاتي. عذبتني عندما كنت معتقلا، واعتديت عليَّ. سأنتقم منك الآن. لكن إذا ما ساعدتني على معرفة سيدك الذي أمرك بتعذيبي، ربما أصفح عنك. كنت مأموراً، ولذا لا بُد أن يدفع الثمن من أمرك. أليس كذلك؟"

41 Original quote:

"وأحس بالتحول في شخصيته. شعر أنه استعاد رجولته وأن رجلاً آخر ينبثق منه [...]، انتهى العاتي المغتصب!"

contact details. The narrator suggests that '[S]he was so afraid that she might see in their relationship an instance of rape and that all men might have become rapists in her world view after that night' (*Ightiṣāb* 214–215).[42] This points towards an important difference between Warda's and al-ʿĀtī's reading of their respective rapes. Through rape, the man feels that his manliness has been implicated by the passivity that was forced upon him. He re-establishes it with a "manly" (i.e., a violent) act. For the woman, her femininity has not been destroyed, but rather confirmed. Her existing passivity is furthered by being made a victim. However, her view of men as loving partners has been ruined and replaced with the image of men as violent usurpers. This cannot be undone by revenge, but is evaded by leaving. Leaving is another way of cleansing herself, just as her initial reaction to throw up and cry did. These efforts to self-purify are expressions of her shame and abjection (see the initial discussion about abjection in *Section 3.3*, where the spitting out of the abject was discussed). Her resolve to distance herself from all men can also be read as a criticism of gender roles in relationships. It illustrates her disagreement with society's accepted structures, which are epitomized by rape, such as in patriarchal dominance. The novel not only continues to propagate traditional concepts of feminine passivity and masculine activity, with Warda it introduces a somewhat critical perspective. Meanwhile, there is no mention of whether or not she reported what happened to the police, in order to make her cousin accountable for what did. This course of action does not matter to her, even though she is in France, where her allegations might have better chances of being heard than in Tunisia.

The rape narratives can be read in a different fashion through the inclusion of the critical position. They can be understood as political metaphors that concern society as a whole. Viewed this way, the narratives reflect how instances of power exert violence in their respective spaces, such as in prison or among one's extended family. The repercussions of authoritarianism and patriarchy are put under the spotlight. They illustrate actual trends in Tunisian society, namely illegal immigration to France and Islamic radicalization. Al-ʿĀtī becomes embroiled in an Islamist network after Warda leaves him. Without moral support, he becomes radicalized as an illegal immigrant in France (*Ightiṣāb* 159–169, 209–221). The younger generation in *al-Ightiṣāb* falls victim to authoritarian and patriarchal structures. Its turn to Europe and Islamism for possibilities and guidance reflects a rift that draws society in different directions, since the older generation remains behind. This rift is at odds with Bourguiba's vision for the country and its people that was addressed in this chapter's second section as the specific, shared personality of Tunisia. The rift, however, highlights the forces that are at work in the country and between which it oscillates, specifically the lure of the West and the stability of tradition, both understood as each uniting positive and negative aspects.

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42   Original quote:

"ولم يعد ممكناً أن ترى نفسها تسير في الطريق مرفوعة الرأس [...]. كان خوفها شديدا من أن ترى في علاقتها به نوعا من الاغتصاب، وقد أصبح كل الرجال مغتصبين في نظرتها للدنيا بعد تلك الليلة".

3.7 Discussing the Writing of Abject Bodies

'Problematic bodies' promise the most insight into how Tunisian novels themselves comment upon the writing of bodies. These bodies provoke an awareness and reflection precisely by bringing difficulties to the fore in their writing, as well as on the level of content in the novels. Bodies that provoke negative affects are discussed as 'problematic bodies' in the second part of this study and include disgust, shame, and anger or irritation. The first kind of these bodies are physical in a way that transgresses what is acceptable in Tunisian society and in its literary production. These include bodies whose boundaries are crossed, that are opened up to show their insides, or that narrate features considered to be too intimate. These bodies were described through Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection that she develops in *Powers of Horror*. In this work, abjection is understood as a reaction that oscillates between attraction and disgust. This forms precisely the effect that the texts ascribe to these bodies and the reaction that the novels themselves provoke in readers. They fascinate and horrify the readers at the same time. Their narration is understood as problematic, but it also feeds our curiosity. In this, bodies in literature are once again oscillatory, which appears to be one of their central characteristics.

Abject bodies, it was quickly realized, are closely connected to female or feminized bodies. The female has been understood to epitomize bodies dating back to classical Arabic literature. In Kristeva's concept, the female is associated with leakiness and unstable bodily boundaries; this is due to its connection with birth and motherhood. This aspect of Kristeva's concept encountered criticism. However, it also appeared throughout the novels discussed. A central element of being female was shown to be culturally constructed as the possibility of violation and this establishes the link between rape and abjection. Bearing the idea in mind that it is not just women who can be raped, the present chapter has described rape as an assault on an individual's embodiment. It was noted that both mind and body are transgressed through the act of rape. The only male victim described in the novels analyzed experienced rape as an onslaught on his manhood through the feminization that his penetration meant for him. For the women, however, the cultural understanding of femaleness (passive, silent, liable, 'rapable') was confirmed.

The abject bodies that this chapter addressed exist in language: They are being represented in a way that suggests as well as stipulates self-abjection, e.g. in *al-Ightiṣāb*. In being read, these bodies are actualized and cause readers to experience abjection. The abjection can be directed towards the provocative bodies and their acts of transgression. It can also concern the literary works as such, in the form of a curiosity to devour a narrative that is mixed with horror for the explicitness of the narration. The narrators seemed aware of literature's productive function, a function that provokes affective responses. One example is *al-Ightiṣāb*, a story that safeguards the sensibility of the reader and leaves out physical details; however, this intentional omission diminishes the bodies' materiality and their presence. Rape thereby acquires an oscillatory presence that is comparable to the presence of death in the works analyzed previously. It targets the character's embodiment and, in several examples, produces haunting which highlights the close connection of the different concepts employed throughout this study. These concepts enlighten the writing of bodies in literature.

Texts reflect textual anxiety in their omission of details, but they also reproduce anxiety in suggesting what can and what cannot be written. Part of this anxiety is reflected in the fact that some of the novels and narrators discussed in this chapter were torn between 'telling the story' and protecting its protagonist (or themselves) from exposure. In this endeavor, the narrative voice (that was addressed in the previous chapter) remained important

and was analyzed with regards to the precise narrative perspective that the victim assumed. Speaking from the points of view of victim, perpetrator, or onlooker allowed for different kinds of (self-)censorship. While the narrative of *Le Sadique* did not leave a lot to the imagination, both of the more recent novels were shown to employ means that blur the 'truth' about what happened by offering multiple versions (in *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*) as well as one-word explanations (*al-Ightiṣāb*). While hardly any details about the violated bodies are provided in the more recent novels, those that are alluded to remain individual bodies and are not turned into objects, as was the case in *Le Sadique* with M'nê.

Both the effort to protect the reader's sensibility and the victim's privacy is somewhat in conflict with the story's narration. It forms yet another oscillatory move. Abject bodies have a purposefully oscillating presence in Tunisian literature as a result. The question is, what they are meant to express and effectuate. The analysis of the parallel narratives offers conclusions regarding the ideas that abound in society, such as about virginity or the state of gender roles for example. Conversely, the reduction of details to one-word explanations allows further insights into the same social beliefs since they offer a snapshot of how they are to be viewed. Both offer the opportunity for further discussions of writing in a more general sense. Writing itself appears plural and does not offer an ultimate truth in the narration of abject bodies. This actually needs to be extended to the writing of all bodies – they oscillate – which destabilizes the representational function of literature. To suggest that there are no simple or ultimate truths forms a dissenting moment in the literary works. This shows literature and writing as a site of criticism, especially in authoritarian regimes in which ideology dictates meaning. In the literary works analyzed in this chapter, bodies dissent by not conforming with traditions and social rules. They defy simple categories and reflect Tunisian society with its in-betweens. Bodies' dissenting presence needs to be explored further, and this will be undertaken in the following two chapters. This will allow us to generate further insights into society. Here, the rift in Tunisian society can be highlighted and the influences between which it can be seen to oscillate. Especially in the last work analyzed this became apparent which examined the lure of the West and the stability of tradition.

When read comparatively, the novels attribute varying levels of attention to writing and narration. In *Le Sadique*, writing, involved the production of the self as well as the medium to do politics (speeches, essays, etc.) especially for Hichem/Zoubir. In *al-Kursī al-hazzāz*, narration was a way to understand the self and its violation, while in *al-Ightiṣāb* writing was suspiciously absent. In the novel, everyone dealt with their own pain by themselves. The loss of hope in writing repeats the lost sense of self that results from the sexual violence and rape that both al-ʿĀtī and Warda experience. It could suggest the difficulties of writing and publishing in Tunisia at the time, a question that will be dealt with in the following two chapters that look more closely at the state of expressive freedom in recent decades. Since *al-Ightiṣāb*, *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* and *Le Sadique* were all published, they also show what could be written about (sexually violated) bodies between 1970 and 2008 in Tunisia as well as in France.

The present chapter also discussed gender in Tunisia. This was timely, since it has repercussions for all of the chapters in this study. Introduced from a historical perspective, the development of gender discourse on the content level of the novels, intertextually as well as through the narrative perspective, was explored. The novels and the wide timeframe of their publications allowed for changes in social expectations regarding gender roles to be addressed. However, the traditional idea of the passive, restrained, honorable woman was shown to be present in all three novels, even if only as a foil against which to pit the spea-

king female body. Mūna and Warda overcome the traditional ideal to some extent, yet their physical violations remain veiled and in keeping with the expectations of honor. In terms of masculinity, the novels illustrated a change, specifically between *Le Sadique* and *al-Ightiṣāb*; while the former portrayed the violent male as desirable (see Leila's longing for Hichem/Zoubir), in the latter, Warda clearly distances herself from the idea of the assertive male when she leaves al-ʿĀtī after her rape.

Finally, an initial reply might be given to the second part's central question that concerns how the novels themselves discuss the writing of bodies and which meanings they attribute to them. Bodies show writing as a site of criticism. They have an oscillating presence in that they introduce plural truths and omit details.

Gender was discussed, but the topic itself has not yet been questioned or brought to oscillate. The novels showed two genders that are strictly divided. The next chapter will challenge this by exploring the representation of the gender binary throughout Tunisian literature.

4 Further Search for the Problematic: Reading 'Unlivable' Bodies

4.1 The Difficulty of Reading Bodies

Characters comment on the bodies of other characters all of the time, just like people comment on other people in everyday life. Is the other handsome, pretty, tall, small, able-bodied, or disabled? What are the body's features? Is the body male or female? All of these descriptions reflect a character's reading of another character that ends up in terms of a categorization. In fiction, these descriptions shape how readers imagine the character concerned, but what if a character cannot be categorized easily?

After the previous chapter explored the writing of abject bodies, in this chapter the focus is on how bodies are being read as problematic within literary works. This is meant both in a metaphorical and in a literal sense of reading understood as the perception, interpretation, or grasping of bodies, as well as the actual reading of their written representations. Addressing how bodies are shown to be read continues the discussion of the self-reflection of the novels and in the writing of bodies. Furthermore, it allows us to address and to critique the role of the author. Once again, problematic bodies occupy center stage. This is based on the conviction that problematic bodies are particularly insightful, a view that the previous chapter has already put forth. The analysis will proceed and show the texts' awareness of the problematic nature of writing dissent at the time of the novels' production.

One example of a reading that does not always lend itself to an easy categorization is the question of whether a body is male or female. The chapter discusses how the novels depict gender as being read and the irritation it causes when this reading becomes problematic. Susan Stryker, co-editor of *The Transgender Studies Reader*, explains that: "bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the flesh into a useful artefact". She refers to gendering as "the initial step in this transformation" (Stryker 2006[1994]: 253). This means that bodies are difficult to understand without a gender. Gender forms an important category in Tunisian society according to which individuals are organized.[1] The previous chapters indicated this in their allusions to gender-specific expectations. The analysis of gender phenomena is pertinent at this point of our study, particularly in terms of the belief in gender binarism. Novels were chosen for analysis that challenge this binarism and allude to transgender themes, as well as discuss them directly. The novels explore how male and female identification is not a necessary consequence of male and female genitalia and, thereby, position themselves as opposed to the general expectations of binary gender.

The two novels analyzed present different transgender themes. Alia Mabrouk's science-fiction novel *Hurlement* (1992, 'Screaming') concerns a woman whose brain, and therefore consciousness, have been transplanted into the body of a brain-dead man. The narrative follows her struggle to adapt to the new body. Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna* (1999;

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1   This is not meant to suggest that Tunisia is in any way exceptional in its conceptualization of gender as binary or different from its North African neighbors, France, or Germany in terms of the mainstream understanding of gender.

'Ṭurshqāna') tells the story of a transgender individual, Ṭurshqāna,[2] (actually Murād al-Shawāshī) who dreams of receiving genital reassignment treatment, against the wishes of other family members. According to its author, *Ṭurshqāna* was almost completely ignored upon publication in Tunisian literary journals and newspaper sections. However, in academic circles, both overseas and domestically, it was discussed, especially due to its controversial subject matter.[3] It was recommended as a key text for this study's purposes many times. While *Hurlement* did not receive the same amount of critical attention, it does form a suitable foil to read *Ṭurshqāna* against and to set out this chapter's theoretical angle.

A word of caution might be uttered here. By analyzing a science-fictional brain-transplantation patient and a transgender woman together, an undesired effect would be to cause us to question the authenticity of transgender individuals' experiences and to place them in the realm of the fantastic. While the novels raise different issues, and employ distinct narrative modes, their pairing allows us to highlight the issues at stake in this chapter and to explore bodies and their reading.

Problematic bodies were previously described as those that provoke disgust, shame, and anger or even irritation. The problematic explored here is not found in the materiality of bodies. Rather, it lies in the individuals' relation to their bodies and their reading by others, in the bodies' influence on identity and the relationship between mind and body. Irritation occurs for the individual concerned when internal and external readings fail to fit together, and when the conflict cannot be resolved. When the characters see themselves through others' eyes, they recognize and misrecognize themselves at the same time. This creates an inescapable position and, eventually, they give up. Others are irritated when they fail to read the discrepant gender identity of the person concerned and they oscillate between interest or attraction and the inability to understand. The bodies are shown to be unreadable by others, as well as by the self. They become 'unlivable', which is a term that Judith Butler suggests, and which will be introduced below (see *Section 4.3*).

The temporal proximity of the novels' publications suggests a shared historical background that performs a move back in time from the previous chapter's *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* and *al-Ightiṣāb*. Both of this chapter's novels were published in the 1990s (one at the beginning, one at the end) and they are the first attempt to bridge the gap between the three novels analyzed in the previous chapter.

The 1990s – as noted previously in the *Introduction* – are commonly perceived as 'a-political' within the MENA region; however, this does not reflect what actually took place during the decade at closer inspection. Zeina Halabi describes how the political had to be

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2   The meaning of the word is addressed in Samia Kassab-Charfi's interview with Messaouda Boubakr "Tout est féminin qui finit bien" as an expression in Tunisian dialect referring to the "*khantha-dhkar* qui renvoie à un homme du point de vue du sexe et à une femme du point de vue de comportement" (2015: 14), that is an individual who is biologically a man, but who behaves like a woman. Reference to transgender phenomena in the novel occurs via the nickname and the protagonist's behavior alone and the term transgender is not mentioned, neither in Arabic nor in any other language.

3   Several early reviews and articles will be referenced that discuss the novel throughout the course of this chapter. Lubnā al-Jadīdī wrote her dissertation about the novel under the title "al-Huwiyya al-jinsiyya fī-l-riwāyat Ṭurshqāna li-l-kātiba Masʿūda Bū Bakr" ('Sexual Identity in the novel *Ṭurshqāna* by the author Messaouda Boubakr'), Université de Tunis, L'École Normale Supérieure, 2013/2014. Unfortunately, I was not able to acquire a copy of this source.

rethought in her study *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual. Prophecy, Exile and the Nation* (2017). Consequently, one notes the presence of the political in new forms of articulation (compare: Halabi 2017). In the 1990s, Tunisia was dominated by the authoritarian rule of Ben Ali and *Ṭurshqāna*, in particular, reflects the severe suppression that Tunisia experienced. It was difficult to voice and write dissent, and so narratives instead moved into the realm of the private and personal, under the political constraints of the time. The result was an 'intimate' dissent that was political nonetheless and which forms a paradigm for Tunisian fiction in the 1990s.

Christopher Alexander describes in his *Tunisia. Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb* (2010) that under President Ben Ali, all of the political debate that existed in the 1970s and early 1980s was curbed from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. When viewed from the outside, the government used a rhetoric that seemed democratic (borrowed from the opposition), while every criticism against both president and ruling party was fought from the inside. Tunisians experienced a decline in freedoms of expression as well as a rise in the internal security apparatus that was employed to intimidate possible opposition (compare Alexander 2010: 3, 64). The measures taken to indirectly censor publications have already been outlined in the *Introduction*. Alexander offers the concepts of stability and reform, in addition to the aforementioned authoritarianism, to describe the Tunisia of the 1990s. All three functioned to reinforce one another, in that measures of reform were introduced from above to maintain a strong and stable rule. When the regime introduced the reforms, it could control both their scope and effect (compare Alexander 2010: 5). Alexander concludes that while most people resented Ben Ali's rule, its authoritarianism, and the widespread corruption, there was no opposition party capable of changing the situation and many Tunisians were therefore disenchanted with politics (compare 2010: 67).

In this context, it is specifically relevant to scrutinize the cultural production for the absence or presence of political references and for instances of dissent. Generally, different kinds of dissent and subversion can be unearthed in the problematic bodies presented in the two novels examined in this chapter, which is precisely what was meant by the term 'intimate' dissent.

4.2　　*Hurlement*. Towards the Conceptual Background of this Chapter

Alia Mabrouk's[4] novel *Hurlement* ('Screaming', 1992) starts with a perspectival twist that is characteristic of the narrative that follows. A female voice[5] exclaims: 'I live! The accident! So I live! […] I cannot move! […] I hear a voice… Ah! A nurse… […] But what does she tell me?... To wake up! But I am awake, I just need to open my eyes' (*Hurlement* 1).[6] Following this, an external perspective is given: 'In a resuscitation room, a male patient lies on a bed after surgery, his head is pierced with a series of needles that are connected to a device that is placed to his right, a whisper escapes his lips and he begins to stir' (*Hurle-*

4　　Mabrouk is also the author of *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* which was discussed in *Part I*.

5　　That the voice is female is expressed, for example, in the construction "je suis réveillée" in the section quoted.

6　　Original quote: "Je vis! L'accident! Je vis donc!.. Je n'arrive pas à bouger! […] J'entends une voix…. Ah! Une infirmière… […] Mais que me dit-elle?.... De me réveiller! Mais je suis réveillée, il faut juste que j'ouvre les yeux".

ment 2).[7] The female narrative voice of the first quote hears the nurse's effort to wake a male patient up and eventually realizes that it is herself who is being addressed: ''Sir!' Oh, she is addressing a man, not me, I can sleep [...] 'Sir, excuse me, Sir!' She touches me, I can feel her bending over. It is me to whom she speaks! But I am not a man' (*Hurlement* 3).[8]

The novel follows the quoted voice, which belongs to a female consciousness or rather to a brain. The brain was removed from its, originally female, body and has been transplanted into a male body.[9] The surgeon responsible performed the innovative experiment of a brain transplantation in order to further medical progress. However, he did not ask for the consent of the woman whose brain he extracted after a fatal car accident. This reflects patriarchal structures of domination.

The narrative covers the convalescence. The female consciousness's task is to develop a new sense of bodily being-in-the-world by establishing an identification with the foreign body. However, the consciousness is unable to develop this sense of coherent embodiment and both brain and body eventually die. During this process, from waking up in the body of a man to dying for a second time, several events occur that speak to the debates in which this chapter is interested.

The quoted scene suggests a mix of internal and external perspectives that contain a reading of the patient's outward physical appearance, on the one hand and a belief in the continuity of one's gender identity, based on bodily materiality, on the other. Identity here refers to the vision one has of oneself in relation to gender norms. The mix of perspectives finds its most immediate expression in the divergence of genders in language. The narrative perspectives give the patient two genders; one based on the internal conviction of the female brain, and one that results from the treatment by the hospital staff on the basis of what they see. Accordingly, the female consciousness is never called by her previous name, while the male body (and as a result the patient) is referred to by the medical staff as 'Joseph' throughout. It shows how identity is shaped by the social environment and its perception.

The name Joseph can suggest, metaphorically speaking, a wounded or incapacitated masculinity. The biblical Joseph did not father the son he raised. In the Qur'anic tradition, Joseph is connected to the prophet Yūsuf, son of Yaʿqūb, whose story is one of family ties and jealousy, courage, and beauty. Prophet Yūsuf is shown in a positive light since he is perceived to be favored by God, an aspect that is reflected in the medical authority's suggestion that the female consciousness has been blessed with a new life.

The narrative produces a mix of gender associations. In a later scene, the female consciousness dreams of dancing through a park full of flowers in a salmon-colored skirt that reveals her slender legs – narrated in an effectful way by the omniscient narrator employing

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7   Original quote: "Dans une chambre de réanimation, un opéré est étendu sur un lit, sa tête est comme transpercée d'une série d'aiguilles reliées à un appareil, placé sur son côté droit; un murmure s'échappe de ses lèvres et il commence à bouger". The gender of the patient is clearly marked in the term "un opéré".

8   Original quote: "'Monsieur!' Ah! Elle s'adresse à un homme, pas à moi, je peux dormir [...] 'Monsieur, Monsieur!' Elle me touche, je la sens qui se penche. C'est à moi qu'elle s'adresse! Mais je ne suis pas un homme".

9   This can be read as an ironic twist on the more stereotypical staging of the Arab woman as the body of the nation; here the woman is the brain.

the masculine pronoun, so that it is 'he' who sways in the park, "il évolue gaiement" (*Hurlement* 18). Diverging personal pronouns form a thread through the narrative and allow the novel to be read as a commentary on the production of gender and sex in the social context. One example of this production is the act of announcing a new-born as a boy or a girl. The announcement in itself makes the child a male or a female individual. However, as Todd Reeser argues in his *Masculinities in Theory*, both gender and sex are created continuously in every linguistic address or description "when we talk about maleness, when we say 'man' or even 'he'" (Reeser 2010: 77[10]).

The struggle with the specifically male or female address that *Hurlement* contains is characteristic of phenomena and narratives that subvert and challenge gender binaries. Michel Foucault edited the memoirs of a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, *Herculine Barbin* (1978; English transl. 1980). In his introduction, Foucault highlights the use of pronouns in Barbin's autobiographical narrative, whose gender was officially changed by a judge against their wishes. Foucault highlights how linguistic, "medical and juridical" conventions ironically contradicted the actual situation (1980: xiv).

In the previous chapter, bodies were presented as problematic on two planes; namely, when they troubled the character on the narrative's content level or when they irritated the writer/reader who was producing/consuming the narrative respectively. *Hurlement*'s description of the awakening patient crosses these levels. The reading of the patient's body is problematic within the narrative and concerns both the protagonist and the other characters who interpret it. In addition, the readership is confused. The interpretation of the character's gender here illustrates what the 'reading of bodies' means metaphorically.

In *Hurlement*, the characters have rigid convictions of what it means to be a man or a woman. A man has a male body, and a woman has a female body; a man should be referred to as "Monsieur" ('Sir'), while a woman should not. The female consciousness emphasizes this by questioning the male address (*Hurlement* 10). The characters are aware of gender norms as is shown in other aspects, such as the clothes worn. The female consciousness is horrified by the Bordeaux-colored pajamas with yellow stripes that her body is clad in, suggesting that she would not wear such a thing as a woman (*Hurlement* 86). She dreams about skirts, as noted previously (*Hurlement* 18). The motif of clothes gains nightmarish potentials in another dream. The dream describes how a woman attends a party and wears a dress when, suddenly, the dress turns into trousers and her features change and she is horrified (compare *Hurlement* 69). In these scenes, which suggest or play with the expectation of gender-conforming behavior, the novel reflects values that are present in Tunisian society, as the previous chapter established. However, there are no references to Tunisia in the novel, given that the action takes place in Paris.[11]

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10 Reeser draws on Butler's *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, in this quote, specifically: 1–5; 27–31.

11 The absence of references to Tunisia might be caused by the social position of its author whose husband was one of the most important bankers in Tunisia at the time, the brother of a businessman with close ties to both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. This suggests that any kind of political position-taking must have been impossible for the author. Abir Kréfa quotes Mabrouk's commentary on her husband's family's reaction about her decision to write: 'Well, my husband's family has cringed and highlighted that it is their name, [my decision to write] it was not very well received in the beginning' (Original quote: "Donc, la famille de mon mari a grincé des dents, en disant 'attention, c'est notre nom', donc, ça n'a pas été bien accueilli au départ", quoted in Kréfa 2011: 121).

The scene with the awakening patient establishes two perspectives, those of the female consciousness and of the medical staff. The first sees herself as a woman, the second sees the patient as a man. As a result, the patient oscillates between a male and a female body, which repeats similar oscillatory movements of previous chapters. The patient oscillates between different bodies since personal pronouns and gendered addresses in language refer to the presence of a sexed body. The patient challenges the rigid categories for masculine and feminine the novel otherwise assumes. This questions what it means to be an individual, how identity is produced and which role the body and the mind play in identity production. The novel's conceptualization of both identity and embodiment stages the opposition of mind and body that has been alluded to throughout the previous chapters.

Since both brain and consciousness are transplanted in the novel, the rationalizing instance of the male body is lost, and the female brain does the rationalizing. From the female perspective, the male body becomes an empty shell, a prosthesis, and a prison in which her consciousness is locked (compare *Hurlement* 54). The transplanted organ has the ability to remember its previous body and life (a fact that the female consciousness dearly regrets, *Hurlement* 46). This shows that, from the novel's perspective, the individual sense of self is not tied to the entire body, but rather to the brain. The brain is presented as the seat of the person.

The female consciousness understands that the body she inhabits is no longer the one she knew through a lack of recognition. This process establishes a distance between consciousness and body. The consciousness initially becomes aware of the discrepancy, as she discovers that the hands that move following her mental demand to scratch an itch are not her own, a scene that is again narrated from two perspectives:

> Joseph feels a point that itches him […], he lifts his arm, and his hand moves through his field of vision… Tense for some time, it is suddenly seized by convulsive tremble. The other hand joins it and together in front of his first bewildered and then panicked gaze they join and separate strictly following *her* orders. An icy emptiness invades *her* senses. Whose hands are these?... They are not mine… I do not know them… Why can I make them move! (*Hurlement* 11)[12]

The discovery continues gradually. Next, the female consciousness realizes that her chest is flat and that her breasts are absent (*Hurlement* 12). She panics when she grasps what she had initially perceived as a mistake on the part of her interlocutor. Her brain is indeed in the body of another human being and the medical staff confirm this. Her body has to be fixed to the hospital bed to prevent her from pulling out her tubes in desperation upon hearing this. The protest is narrated from the outside in its entirety, ending in the observation that 'Joseph could no longer move, his gasping intensified into a constant background noise and

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12 Original quote: "Joseph sent un point qui le gratte […], il lève son bras et sa main passe dans son champ de vision… Un temps crispée, celle-ci est soudainement prise d'un tremblement convulsive. L'autre main la rejoint et ensemble devant son regard ahuri puis affolé, elles se joignent et se séparent obéissant strictement à des ordres venant de *lui-même*. Un vide glacial envahit *ses* sens. A qui sont ces mains?... Ce ne sont pas les miennes… Je ne les connais pas… Comment puis-je les faire bouger?" (Emphasis is mine. In the French original, "lui-même" and "ses" could mean both him and his or her and hers. In the quote, however, the perspective changes from the outside to the inside, to the seat of the female consciousness; therefore the pronouns need to switch to the female as well, hence my translation).

his head roles slowly from right to left in refusal' (*Hurlement* 16).[13] His refusal is so complete in the scene that the narrative perspective of the female consciousness is absent. The rejection, however, continues and forms the basis of the disconnect between the female consciousness and the body. In contrast to the external narrator, she does not address the body by the name of its previous 'owner' and treats it as a thing, an object. The following sentence describes their relationship and confirms the novel's understanding of the seat of identity. The consciousness states: 'I know who I am, and I will remain that way. I reject this body that took the place of my own… I cannot destroy it because with this I would also destroy myself… But, it disgusts me… I do not even want to touch it so as not to feel the impact of its skin in my head' (*Hurlement* 32–33).[14] This is clearly a scene of attraction and aversion, of caring for the inner-felt self and refusing its new outer expression.

The female consciousness attempts to ignore the male body, especially the penis. However, through her efforts to avoid it, the penis achieves particular presence in the narrative. This can be explained with Drew Leder's description of the heightened presence of the problematic, an effect that Leder terms "*dys-appearance*" (1990: 84, see also the previous chapter). The penis represents the maleness of the body in *Hurlement*. Through the female consciousness's fear of its bodily processes, and her attempts to ignore them, the penis dysappears. It oscillates between presence and absence that actually work to highlight its existence:

> He is thirsty!! He will dehydrate! Never mind, the less he drinks, the less he will have to urinate! I just really cannot get used to it and every time when I can feel that this soft flesh is rising up, I panic… I well tried to think of something else, but regardless it is now also a part of me, I feel it as if it were my very own body… What will happen to me when on top of that I experience another excitement! Sexual excitement!! What will I do?... Will his penis rise when the sight of a man makes me react?... Will the feminine desire in my mind translate itself into male? (*Hurlement* 62)[15]

Part of what frightens the female consciousness in this scene is what others might think of an erection and whether there might be any homosexual interpretations or influences. She fears that the penis might be able to change her desire to a 'male' desire, to being excited by women. In this, the female consciousness worries that she might no longer be heterosexual because her sex is no longer congruent with the gender identity that she assumes. She suggests that her desire might be determined by her body alone. These concerns prove the previous certainty of knowing who she is ("je sais qui je suis et je le resterai") wrong and highlight a disruption in her sense of identity. This shows, in turn, the influence the novel

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13 Original quote: "Joseph n'a plus aucune possibilité de mouvement, son râle s'intensifie en un bruit de fond et sa tête roule lentement de droite à gauche en signe de refus."

14 Original quote: "je sais qui je suis et je le resterai. Ce corps qui a pris la place du mien, je le rejette… Je ne peux le détruire car je me détruirai également… Mais il me révulse… Je ne veux même pas le toucher pour ne pas sentir dans ma tête l'impact de sa peau".

15 Original quote: "Il a soif!!! Il va se déshydrater! Tant pis, moins il boit, moins il aura envie d'uriner! Je n'arrive pas à m'y faire et chaque fois, je panique quand je sens cette chair molle se dresser… J'ai beau essayer de penser à autre chose, elle fait quand même partie de moi maintenant; je la ressens comme étant mon propre corps… Que m'arrivera-t-il si en plus j'éprouvais une autre excitation! Une excitation sexuelle!! Que ferais-je?... Si la vue d'un homme me fait réagir, son sexe se dressera-t-il?... Mon désir cérébral féminin se traduira-t-il au masculin?"

attributes to the body in identity formation. While the body does not directly influence the consciousness, apart from the sensory information the brain receives from it, the consciousness experiences the importance of the body in social exchanges from the very first moment she woke up in a male body.

That the body is actually "fundamental in the development of our identity", is shown by studies of organ transplantation patients that describe how the surgeries can disturb the patient's sense of self (Sanner 2005: 10, similar to Shildrick et al. 2009: 35). Patients can certainly struggle to make a part of another person's body their own. They experience changes to their bodies as influences on their selves (Shildrick et al. 2009: 37; 35–36) and are particularly worried about receiving organs from people of the opposite gender (Sanner 2005: 10). Transplantation is interesting due to the historical context of the novel's production that paralleled the first organ transplantations conducted in Tunisia. This produced a heightened public awareness about the topic. Transplantation was propagated as an advancement and as a national concern in 1990s Tunisia (compare El Matri/Ben Abdallah 2015: 33–34). It has to be seen, like other propagated technological progress, as a means to distract common people from actual political hardships.

The gender divergence between mind and body is a key topic in *Hurlement*. Jay Prosser calls it "the logic of transsexuality" in *Second Skins. The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998: 43) which is why the novel can be read as a metaphorical enactment of transgender perspectives set in a science-fiction context. The novel offers the background against which the second novel of this chapter can be read.

The issue that occupies the center of the gender divergence between body and mind is one of embodiment. Embodiment, as the bodily being-in-the-world, is formed by both mind and body according to Csordas (see *Introduction*). One scene that helps to grasp *Hurlement* is presented by Hans Moravec and discussed at the beginning of N. Kathrine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Hayles describes that Moravec in his *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988):

> [i]nvents a fantasy scenario in which a robot surgeon purees the human brain in a kind of cranial liposuction, reading the information in each molecular layer as it is stripped away and transferring the information into a computer. At the end of the operation, the cranial cavity is empty, and the patient, now inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, wakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before. (Hayles 1999: 1)

Hayles writes that Moravec "proposed that human identity is essentially an informational pattern rather than an embodied enaction" (xi–xii). For Hayles, this is a "nightmare", and she wonders how the author could believe that it was possible to separate mind from body "unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment" (1999: 1). In downplaying the importance of embodiment, Moravec's example and Hayles' critique raise awareness about what is at stake in *Hurlement* and in its understanding of mind and body. Hayles strongly disagrees with Moravec's downloaded consciousness arguing that "[e]mbodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it" (1999: xiv). For Hayles, embodiment does not function in the sense of the body as a "support system for the mind" (1999: 288), but rather as an interlacing of mind and body that constitutes the human potential, which is in agreement with Csordas' understanding.

Hayles' criticism would apply to *Hurlement* as well; however, the novel shows how mind and body are not entirely separable, even though a brain can be transplanted in its

fictional reality. Mind and body are connected and the unconscious is shown to help the body circumvent the conscious mind:

> I feel his heart pounding in his chest, I feel him faltering, I feel him panicking… He moves his hand towards the bell and rings it!… Who ordered him, who?... My logical self who fights for survival and who considers my anguish and my revolts to be like other futile sensations! (*Hurlement* 27–28)[16]

The scene shows that the novel thinks about embodiment more in the way Hayles does than Moravec does. Embodiment is shaped through both body and mind and the two are closely connected. This aspect is pushed further, in that *Hurlement* lets body and consciousness die after a certain period in which they were unable to achieve a coherent embodiment together.

The gradual realization that the body to which the consciousness awakes is not her previous body has been described above. The lack of coherence between mind and body ultimately manifests itself when, after much anxiety, the female consciousness decides to look in the mirror through the eyes of her new body. She is curious at first, but then the experience provokes abjection, not plainly through the body's maleness or difference, but because the consciousness recognizes her self in an unfamiliar face. This means that she recognizes and fails to recognize herself at the same time. She oscillates between these poles and is caught in a situation for which there are no categories:

> Joseph opens his eyes and discovers himself in the mirror that is in front of him… […] Joseph makes sure that it is really him there in this mirror. He opens his mouth, touches his nose, his hand rises towards his scar, then falls abruptly on his mouth. Suddenly, he lets out with one big sob, all the air in his lungs. (*Hurlement* 88)[17]

'The mirror drops. Cold sweat runs down the forehead. It was me there in the mirror, it was me' (*Hurlement* 96)[18], continues the female consciousness after the first half of the experience was narrated by the external narrator. The foreign body is problematic, and it can be assumed that a different female body would also be shocking. It is the problematic of recognizing and failing to recognize the self in the unfamiliar face that upsets the female consciousness. This is heightened by the gender difference between mind and body. Such a difference would require the assignment of two parallel genders or the decision to identify with one that might not align with the physical appearance. That one can only be one or the other, and not both, is part of the concept of gender: Female necessarily means 'not male' and vice versa. The two are pitted against each other as opposites and they strengthen each other conceptually. The conviction that one can only belong to one gender is derived from heterosexuality and is propagated as 'normal' or 'natural'. Only if this conviction was upset, it could allow individuals to be both male and female (compare Prosser 1998: 31). It is

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16 Original quote: "je sens son cœur battre la chamade dans sa poitrine, je le sens s'essouffler, je le sens qui panique… Il tend la main vers la sonnette et tire! … Qui lui a commandé, qui?... Mon moi logique qui se bat pour la survie et qui considère mes angoisses ou mes révoltes comme autant de futiles sensations!"

17 Original quote: "Joseph ouvre ses yeux et se découvre dans le miroir lui faisant face… […] Joseph vérifie si c'est vraiment lui, là dans ce miroir. Il ouvre sa bouche, touche son nez, sa main se lève vers la cicatrice puis retombe brusquement sur sa bouche et d'un seul coup, il éjecte en un sanglot, l'air de ses poumons."

18 Original quote: "Le miroir tombe. Un sueur froide perle sur la front. C'était moi, là dans le miroir, c'était moi."

the impossibility to be both male and female that makes the recognition of the female consciousness so traumatizing.

Having a single gender is a norm at the basis of what it means to be human, according to Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004: 57–58). A voluntary or an involuntary break of this norm causes "desubjugation", which means that the person "emerges at the limits of intelligibility, offering a perspective on the variable ways in which norms circumscribe the human" (Butler 2004: 74). One case that Butler refers to in the chapter "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality"[19] shows some similarities to the scene in *Hurlement*. Decisions about gender affiliation are being made for an infant, Brenda. As a teenager, Brenda decides she belongs to the opposite gender and receives sex reassignment surgery. The case, however, does not have a happy ending. Butler asks if, when Brenda's looks into the mirror, something remains "between the norms, is she not at that moment in question as a human, is she not the specter of the freak against which and through which the norm installs itself?" (2004: 69). Butler suggests here that norms, such as gender, are being established by what they exclude. Thereby, the gender binary (male and female) depends upon the exclusion of further genders and of positions in-between. What is excluded is constructed as impossible, unintelligible, and thereby 'unlivable' (see *Section 4.3* for further elaborations of Butler's understanding of 'livability').

The female consciousness expresses a sense of this. Her despair is based on the discrepancy between the male body and the female mind that she cannot overcome. She realizes the impossibility of her position in the mirror scene, precisely since she understands that she will always remain two, never to be a coherent one again. She says to the surgeon that nothing fits together while she refers to herself as female, only to have others address her in the masculine (compare *Hurlement* 49). This highlights that the problematic also lies in her inability to achieve a unanimous and fitting reading of her body through others. The consequence in *Hurlement* is death, which occurs right after the mirror scene when the female consciousness was refused a sleeping pill that she wanted to forget her reality. The dying body is narrated from the outside: 'Sudden jolts contract Joseph's body, his limbs stiffen, his eyes roll back, a rattle comes out of his mouth'.[20] Meanwhile, the doctors attempt to keep the body alive. It is the nurse, Pierre, who acknowledges the female consciousness and her struggles: 'Pierre takes Joseph's hand and kisses it full of respect for her who is in this badly sticked-together skull and has survived only such a short time by herself' (*Hurlement* 97–98).[21] In referring to both Joseph and 'her'/"elle", Pierre highlights the unsuitability of categories to describe the situation.

A final aspect that needs to be addressed regarding the novel is its science-fictional mode. The novel depicts a futuristic medical procedure that, according to the current state of research, is both morally irresponsible and medically impossible. Its outcomes (e.g., the transfer of consciousness and memories) cannot be predicted. Organ transplantation is a

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19 Before "Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality" was published in *Undoing Gender*, it appeared in 2001 in a slightly different version, but under the same title in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7 (4): 189–211.

20 Original quote: "De brusques soubresauts contractent le corps de Joseph, ses membres se raidissent, ses yeux se révulsent, un râle sort de sa buche."

21 Original quote: "Pierre saisit la main de Joseph et la baise plein de respect pour elle qui dans ce crane encore mal recollé a survécu si peu de temps à elle-même."

central trope in science-fiction literature in which it is often portrayed as a dangerous future scenario. This is precisely what *Hurlement* does by showing medical authorities with questionable ethics who work without the patient's consent. The play with sex and gender roles has been a common theme in science-fiction literature written by women since the 1980s (compare Donawerth 1997: 18, see particularly the section "The Female Man: Transvestites and Androgynes").

In *Hurlement*, the science-fictional mode highlights the fictionality of being a female consciousness within a male body. In so doing, it is in danger of disregarding the possibility of the actual transgender experience that the second novel contains, and which is analyzed below. The science-fictional mode can also be employed to consider and to critique scientific development in relation to ethical considerations. It can comment on the perception of the individual, the self, and a body at the mercy of society and authoritarian institutions, such as the medical establishment (compare Chozinski 2016: 58). This is the interpretation suggested by *Hurlement*. It does not intend to show the transgender experience as science-fiction, but instead discusses the intrusion of male authorities upon an individual's identity and embodiment. The transplantation casts doubt upon the value of a progress that is progress for its own sake, not for the benefit of those concerned. This harks back to Bourguiba's speech, quoted above, about progress and society and which effects need to be prevented (compare *Chapter 3*).

Disregarding the author's private entanglements with the ruling elite of Tunisia (see footnote 11 above), in *Hurlement*'s depiction of progress and the abuse of the individual at the hands of male dominated authorities there lies a critique of contemporary practices. A similar refusal of authorities is expressed in Mabrouk's decision to publish at all and to even address issues of sex and gender. This was suggested in Kréfa's article, quoted above, about the repressions that female writers face from their immediate private environments when they address the body or sexuality. The central character holds a notion of dissent within herself and oscillates between diverging identities, always experiencing an inability to fulfill expectations. This topic will be further explored in the second novel analyzed by this chapter.

4.3   Approaching Gender and Transgender. 'Livability' and 'Unlivability'

The purpose of this section is to address and clarify the concepts that have been drawn from the analysis of *Hurlement*, such as gender and transgender, 'livability' and 'unlivabilty'. Judith Butler mentions '(un)livability' in her works *Gender Trouble* (2006[1990]), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and in *Undoing Gender* (2004).[22] The 'unlivable' is "a life for which no categories of recognition exist" (2004: 8). It is a life that exceeds the norms of embodied living, of that which is considered 'normal' for men and women (compare 2004: 206). These norms, Butler argues, are "not only a means of social control but a form of dehumanizing violence." Everyone who does not follow the norm is excluded from the "parameters of personhood" and becomes "the other against which the human is made" (2004: 56, 217–218). Only by conforming to the norms, can a human be understood as a human.

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22   Butler also discusses 'livability' in her *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004); however, she does not do so with respect to gender, which is why it has not been included here.

The requirement to be one discrete gender in order to be understood as human has already been discussed (see e.g., Butler 2006[1990]: xxv, 40, 190). The failure to fit into a definite category was fatal in *Hurlement*. The patient was not read in a way that reflected the consciousness's sense of self. The hospital staff made no effort to accommodate the consciousness's existence and instead insisted on the male address. As a consequence, the gender identities of mind and body could not be reconciled. The mirror scene showed that the female consciousness realized her own 'unlivability'. This led to a crisis that meant that the brain transplantation failed.

While the 'livable' is based on norms, the 'unlivable' is constructed as a lack of categories to rationalize the existence in question. With regards to gender, these norms are "ideal dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity" (Butler 2006[1990]: xxiv–xxv). The norms are larger than individual preferences and are formed by society collectively. Butler's work exposes the violence that the norms do to individuals through their exclusion. Butler demands recognition and legitimacy for bodies and individuals who are excluded and are not regarded as 'intelligible' (compare Butler 2004: 52, 2 as well as 2006[1990]: xxiv–xxv), for individuals who cannot not be read easily, who do not fulfil the norms or fit the categories.

For Butler, the 'unlivable' describes her understanding of the abject, a topic which connects this chapter to the previous one, in addition to the oscillatory move that was discussed previously. Butler writes:

> The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (Butler 1993: 3)

The abject is no longer tied to a female or even to a maternal body; Butler critically reads Kristeva's understanding of abjection in her *Gender Trouble* (compare 2006[1990]: xxxiii, 109, 117–118).[23] Imogen Tyler's criticism of Kristeva's focus on maternity was already mentioned in *Chapter 3*. Tyler argues for "a more thoroughly social and political account of abjection" (Tyler 2009: 77). This is what is attempted in this chapter; however, Butler's concept of the 'unlivable' is preferred to avoid confusion.

The abject in Butler's sense is conceived of as keeping gender norms in place through sanctions and taboos (compare Butler 1988: 520). It contributes to the construction of norms as real or true, thereby distracting us from the "performative practices" through which gender is actually produced (Butler 2004: 212). These are repeated, regulated practices that "congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (2006[1990]: 45). The repetitive aspect leads to the internalization and thereby "naturalization" of those practices as gender.[24] Both produce gender norms in their extension. The "appearance of substance" for Butler "is precisely that, a constructed identity". It is a collection of attributes that act individually and not as the expression of one bigger underlying identity (2006[1990]: 191–192). The idea of a fixed identity becomes yet another normative ideal.

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23 Further details regarding Butler's and Kristeva's different understandings of abjection can be found in Reineke, Martha J. 1997. *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence*.

24 Some transgender individuals disagree with the performative origin of gender, see below.

Identity, according to Butler, needs to be thought of as constantly in the making, not as pre-existing (compare Butler 1988: 519). In contrast to this, *Hurlement* presents identity as fixed and based on the categories of sex and gender that are thought as equally stable in the novel. This stability or continuity is precisely what – since it is disrupted – caused the patient's crisis.

Transgender phenomena have a specific potentiality in thinking gender and identity, as Butler describes:

> They make us not only question what is real, and what 'must' be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted. These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone. (Butler 2004: 29)

This interpretation, which sees the body as a process of becoming, notes its ability to change and highlights it as never being definite, a notion that was already been touched upon in *Part I* of this study. The body can challenge norms that concern it through its ability to change. Transgender phenomena, accordingly, highlight the arbitrariness of norms, especially gender norms that determine certain existences as 'unlivable' or unintelligible. Although the arbitrariness of gender norms was noted in *Hurlement*, in the existence of an outwardly male looking character who insists on being a woman internally, this awareness does not mean that the norms and their power can be escaped. Whether Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna* (1999) suggests a reworking of gender norms, or instead participates in their reproduction, will be further addressed in the following sections.

A central aspect in transgender phenomena is the questioning of the congruence of sex and gender, a logic *Hurlement* imitated by presenting a female consciousness in a male body. Petra L. Doan considers the belief in the congruence to be the general opinion in the Middle East, "where the two [*i.e., sex and gender; C.P.*] have been synonymous". For Doan, transgender phenomena can, therefore, undermine "the patriarchal system of power" that is widespread in the region (see "Disrupting Gender Normativity in the Middle East", 2010: 146). This was addressed previously through the above reading of *Hurlement* and will be furthered in the analysis of *Ṭurshqāna*.

What must not be forgotten, apart from the theoretical concerns, is that the strong belief in the congruence of sex and gender and in the specific content of gender norms is precisely why being transgender in the region cannot merely be read as a metaphor in literary works. The danger that transgender identities contain for the person concerned must always be thought alongside any metaphorical readings.[25]

The entanglement of language with issues of gender has been noted above, in the analysis of *Hurlement*. As Don Kulick highlights in his "Transgender and Language. A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for the Future", how language shapes gender instead of just reflecting it. He suggests an analysis of language and of its functioning to gain insights

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25 Amnesty International's report *Assaulted and Accused* confirms, with reference to police arrests, that effeminate men and transgender women were most often targeted and arrested without evidence "under laws that criminalize indecency and acts deemed to be offensive to public morals" (2015: 36, 37).

into transgenderism (compare Kulick 1999: 616). Atiqa Hachimi argues a similar point. She highlights how gender construction varies from culture to culture, which is why the specific society also has to be taken into account in order to gain greater understanding (compare her "Shifting Sands. Language and Gender in Moroccan Arabic").

The language situation in Tunisia is multilingual. However, the different varieties of Arabic, as well as French (i.e., the main languages in Tunisia), can be said to strongly resemble one another in their "constituting and indexing gender" (Kulick 1999: 614). Individuals are characterized as male or female through pronouns, fitted verbs, etc. With them, language shapes and supports differentiated concepts for men and women. These reflect the view that gender is binary, unchanging, and an observable substance (compare Talbot 2010[1998]: 6). The doctor and nurses accordingly index the patient in *Hurlement* as male (by using the name "Joseph", as well as "Monsieur", "il", etc.) to address or refer to a patient with a male body. The question of the right pronoun is discussed in the novel itself by the female consciousness's refusal to accept the male address.

Neither French nor Arabic are gender-neutral languages. In *Language and Gender* (2010[1998]), Mary Talbot describes that the sex differentiation increases from English, where only the third person singular is gendered, via French to Arabic. Clark et al. call this phenomenon 'gender loading' in their study, entitled "Gender Perception in Arabic and English". Hebrew "in which all nouns and their modifiers are overtly marked for gender, represents maximum gender loading" (Clark et al. 1981: 159). It is a Semitic language, like Arabic, which has to be considered as very similar with respect to gender.

Language mirrors the general problematic that transgender phenomena contain. They disrupt what is perceived to be a natural consequence, namely that (gendered) language in the form of address can be effortlessly attributed to (gendered) individuals based on the conviction that these individuals can be easily categorized and, therefore, controlled. However, transgender phenomena show that this consequentialness is constructed. Language participates in the construction of gender by producing the world it claims to simply describe.

Writing is not only marked by gender norms on a grammatical level; the very practice of writing can be perceived as gendered, since it is considered an activity of the mind. Butler highlights that "cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism". The distinction also implies a hierarchy of the genders (2006[1990]: 17).[26] In *Hurlement*, this association of mind with masculinity and body with femininity is turned around by focusing on the female consciousness in the male body, as was noted.

Reading is staged as a central mechanism from the very beginning of *Hurlement* in that Joseph's body and the female consciousness compete for the patient's gender reading. Meanwhile, writing is not commented upon and the narrative shows no awareness of its own textuality. In contrast to this, *Ṭurshqāna* addresses the transgender potential of writing,

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26 This stereotype of the connection between femininity and the less-valued bodily matter is not limited to Western thinkers, due to the joined historical development of philosophy. Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sīna and Ibn Rushd relied on Aristotle, whose work also influenced European thought in part via the Islamic transmission. Referring to the male and female contributions to conception, Ibn Sina restated that: "Aristotle's belief in the superiority of male seed and that, in particular, it contributed to the soul", while "the seed of women is fit to be matter" (Ahmed, Leila. "Arab Culture and Writing Women's Bodies", 2000: 59).

which is why the novel will be introduced through its discussion of writing in the following section.

4.4   Writing and Transgender. A Debate taken from *Ṭurshqāna*

Susan Stryker comments that "[t]ransgender phenomena […] point the way to a different understanding of how bodies mean, how representation works, and what counts as legitimate knowledge" (2006: 9). The quote alludes to the entanglement of (gender) identity with the body. The view that bodies are meaningful or intelligible by being distinctly gendered has been discussed previously. According to the quote, transgender phenomena draw attention to the power structures in this notion. They achieve a critique by being problematic and in defiance of easy categorization or reading and highlight the boundaries of what counts as legitimate knowledge. Transgender phenomena, by not conforming to established categories, show accepted meaning, representation, and knowledge as the results of the processes that make them legitimate. Transgender phenomena form a point of critique of the status quo that was already alluded to in the previous sections, especially in the discussion of transgender and language. In the following, the presence of transgender phenomena in, and influence on, writing shall be discussed in an effort to further address the self-awareness of Tunisian literary texts to themselves. Their critique of writing through transgender themes is explored exemplarily in Messaouda Boubakr's novel *Ṭurshqāna* (2006[1999]).[27]

The novel focuses on Ṭurshqāna (Murād),[28] a pre-operative transgender woman who indirectly compares transgender experience and fiction writing in a conversation with her friend and relative Nūra. For Ṭurshqāna, writing allows 'a slipping into the skin' of another gender ("taqammuṣu iḥābi rajulin", *Ṭurshqāna* 63).[29] This is precisely how she imagines sex reassignment: the shedding of one's previous 'shell' or the changing of one's 'skin' ("qishra", 36; "jild" 102). She asks Nūra, who is an author, whether writing male characters comes easily to her and whether this suggests a desire to be a man herself, thereby suggesting writing's transgender potential. Nūra denies having ever wanted to be a man and does not address the question's transgender undercurrent. Instead, she replies that her male characters have to remain an approximation, a 'partial trial' ("muḥāwala nisbiyya"). She turns the conversation into a debate about writing in a more general sense. The goal of writing in Nūra's view is one of mimesis, the reflection of text-external reality. No reference is made

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27 It is interesting to note that, in contrast to other novels by Boubakr, *Ṭurshqāna* did not receive the same official acclaim and prizes, see appendix of the 2006 edition of *Ṭurshqāna*. Boubakr comments that *Ṭurshqāna* was ignored by many critics upon its initial release in her interview with Samia Kasseb-Charfi (2015: 16).

28 I decided to use 'Ṭurshqāna' instead of 'Murād', although the novel gives no preference. 'Murād' is the character's birth name and 'Ṭurshqāna' is a mocking nickname the character acquires. The family uses 'Murād' and masculine pronouns only. However, the character states in a letter that she has accepted the nickname 'Ṭurshqāna' (*Ṭurshqāna* 35). Another strategy could be to use both names, as in 'Murād/Ṭurshqāna' as Samia Kassab-Charfi does in the aforementioned interview (2015: 15). Since it would slow the reading flow of this study, however, I will not pursue this option. Reference to the character is made with feminine personal pronouns in order to be true to her insistence on being a woman. This follows the English usage of calling a transgender person who was born male and feels like a woman, a transgender woman, or a transgender female. It also corresponds to the word "Ṭurshqāna", which is grammatically feminine.

29 The word „rajulin" (of a man; i.e. slipping into the skin of a man) is added, because Ṭurshqāna speaks about Nūra's perspective.

to the productive function of literature in so far as it opens new perspectives and insights. Writing characters of the opposite gender, she argues, is therefore problematic. Male writers stay on the 'threshold of her [*woman's; C.P.*] secrets, outside the doors of the soul' and can, thereby, merely offer a subjective interpretation or reading (*Ṭurshqāna* 64).[30] The difference between male and female authors appears in Nūra's description as the lived bodily experience (i.e., their embodiment) of being women and men. The respective other gender has no access to these experiences. The men that Nūra writes 'as a woman', she suggests, bear traces of her feminine perspective and are not written 'as authentic men'. This suggests the body of the author as problematically implicated in the produced text and reflects an obsession with sex and gender. The latter, gender, was described above as a major organizing principle in Tunisian society. The central characters from the present chapter's novels speak from androgynous positions. They move between the poles of male and female; their bodies are male while their minds consider themselves female. In this manner, they subvert the division of genders. The chosen protagonists could be read as a solution to the assumed problematic influence of the author's body in the narratives.

Nūra's statement furthermore suggests that while there are similarities between writing a gender that is not the same as one identifies with and between feeling to belong to another gender altogether, authenticity cannot be realized in cross-gender writing. This and the above shows that Nūra thinks that one possesses greater legitimacy in writing characters who belong to the same gender as oneself. She remains within a binary gender system of male or female authors and, accordingly, male, or female characters. She does not comment on the writing of transgender characters, even though she is in the process of writing a novel that features a transsexual woman, a narrative that forms a novel-within-the-novel.[31] Writing transgender characters herself should show her that male and female as categories are not exhaustive, but rather simplify gender pluralism through norms, taboos, and language, as has been suggested. It should present all fictional writing as having, at best, an approximate aspect that is accompanied by literature's otherwise productive function, a function that participates in the production of that which it represents.

It is easy to make out the search for a specific male or female literature in the discussion between Nūra and Ṭurshqāna.[32] Commonly, with regards to the Middle East and North Africa, female narratives in specific are found in traditional storytelling and oral culture, narratives that are told in family contexts or in all-women spaces, such as the public bath. These essentially are places that are enclosed. Monia Hejaiej argues in her seminal study *Behind Closed Doors. Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis* that in societies with "clear distinctions between the men's and women's worlds […] women generate their own aesthet-

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30 Original quote:

"لكنه ظلّ على عتبة أسرارها وخارج بوابة الرّوح."

31 The perspective of an author who writes about a transgender woman reflects Messaouda Boubakr's own perspective. She explained to me in a personal conversation on 22 October 2014 that the novel was inspired by a transsexual woman from her neighborhood; she expresses the same in the aforementioned interview with Samia Kasseb-Charfi (2015: 14–15).

32 The considerations of gender and writing in *Ṭurshqāna* are part of a larger concern for authorship and gender differences or writing as women in 20th century feminist criticism that produced diverse perspectives and interpretations (for an overview, see Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, edited by Elizabeth Abel, 1982, as well as other contributions to the same volume).

ics, artistic performances, privately enacted" (1996: 4); put otherwise, they produce their own uniquely female discourse. Ṭurshqāna presents a wide range of female characters and their various perspectives on life as women in Tunisia, thereby replacing the idea of a uniform Tunisian woman. The result is a collection of female voices that are presented through different literary techniques that highlight intimacy (e.g., by confronting the general Modern Standard Arabic with the Tunisian dialect of the grandmother or by including letters written between women). Female oral storytelling is traditionally perceived to give women the means of self-expression (compare Hejaiej 1996: 3). However, Hejaiej's assumption is criticized by female authors, especially when the figure of Shahrazade is drawn upon to argue for the freeing effects of storytelling. We have examined, in *Chapter 2,* how Fawzia Zouari is critical of the fictional storyteller. Shahrazade is not seen as either proactive or emancipated, but instead as a typical woman who let a man force her to narrate.[33] Messaouda Boubakr's interpretation of female literature is presented through an array of female characters throughout the novel, including Ṭurshqāna.

Behind the discussion between Nūra and Ṭurshqāna is a legitimacy discourse about literature and writing, a discussion of who is writing whom. The narration of transgender phenomena offers insights into this. Stryker's quote, provided above, suggests that transgender phenomena complicate representation. This is not only apparent in the dialogue between Ṭurshqāna and Nūra, in which the writing of transgender characters and its legitimacy is ignored, but also when Ṭurshqāna accidentally finds Nūra's draft for a transgender novel. Ṭurshqāna avidly reads it and with this, the reading of the problematic body becomes an actual reading. This reading remains to be about recognition: Ṭurshqāna considers the draft not as a fictional transgender experience, but as a prognosis of her future postoperative life. She sees herself in Nūra's representation failing to be a 'real' woman. Despite her initial attraction to the text, she does not like what she reads and despairs. A literary representation decides the 'livability' of her life. She does not question whether this draft or any literary work represents legitimate knowledge. Literature is attributed with a mimetic function in the exchange between Ṭurshqāna and Nūra, as well as in Ṭurshqāna's negative reaction after reading the draft. One can, however, detect a warning not to read works of literature as direct sociological or anthropological sources, given that they at best form 'attempts' or 'trials' at mirroring. The decoupling of literary production and social reality is precisely what allows literature to go beyond this social reality to produce new situations and values. Yet, Nūra does not seem to be interested in this. In the scene described above, the novel-within-the-novel neither presents new possibilities for its transgender character, nor, by extension, for its reader Ṭurshqāna. Instead, it shows her situation as 'unlivable' and makes her fail.

The situation suggests the impact of literature and writing. Ṭurshqāna disappears and Nūra stops writing fiction because she feels responsible (*Ṭurshqāna* 151). In this way, writing participates in the production of the problematic body and its implications. Ṭurshqāna reads her fictional representation, recognizes herself in this representation and has to acknowledge that – in Nūra's draft – her struggles continue. The protagonist of the novel-

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33 Leila Ahmed tries to soften the criticism and states regarding the stories from *The Arabian Nights* that it is "at least conceivable that in their telling and retelling they came to voice female-created as well as male-created fictions and fantasies" (2000: 54).

within-the-novel continues to be ambiguously gendered and wrestles with her identity, despite having completed the sex reassignment surgery that Ṭurshqāna still dreams of. Ṭurshqāna's reaction is not to distance herself from the representation and to find, as Stryker suggested "a different understanding of how bodies mean" (2006: 9). Instead, she despairs because she feels that her dream of ever becoming a woman is doomed to fail.

Overall, the novel moves between a confirmation of the body that cannot be grasped through binary gender categories, which produces and continues its 'unlivability', and the critique of that situation. It shows how representation participates in the production of that which it only seems to mirror. There is no way out for either the protagonist of the novel-within-the-novel or for Ṭurshqāna because it portrays the struggles of transgender characters as unsolvable (in the novel-within-the-novel).

The same is true regarding the role of the author. The actual author participates in the production of this role through the introduction of a fictional author and by problematizing this role. Writing is portrayed as fictionalization, that is the act of turning experiences into literature. Yet, *Ṭurshqāna* shows that a writer always brings a certain positionality to the writing in the sense of the writer's embodiment, a mental and physical presence and experience of the world. As a consequence, writing is always a subjective occupation and is never transparent. This subjectivity resorts to beliefs and convictions, such as the gender norms that the previous section has outlined. Due to the author's position of power, these convictions find their way into the literary work and pretend to be legitimate knowledge. Accordingly, Nūra represents a post-operative transgender woman as an unauthentic woman in the novel-within-the-novel.

The transgender experience is an entry point into a critical exploration of writing from the perspective of *Ṭurshqāna.* The novel was simultaneously introduced through both its discussion of writing and the transgender body. The following section approaches the novel's reading of non-normative bodies in order to further address its oscillation between its own production of the problematic bodies and the critique of the exclusionary aspects of the gender binary that produces problematic bodies.

4.5   Reading Bodies in *Ṭurshqāna*. Writing Subversion and Dissent?

Judith Butler frames the "moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman" as a moment in which "one cannot with surety read the body that one sees" (2006[1990]: xxiv). This reiterates the importance of reading and its entanglement with gender ascription that was highlighted in *Hurlement*. This section analyzes how *Ṭurshqāna* as a novel is essentially about bodies being read in this metaphorical sense, specifically read as gendered, and about the consequences that happen when this reading fails.

Reading is central in the novel. This is apparent in its organization between two scenes in which Ṭurshqāna's body is being interpreted by others at the beginning and end of the narrative. It is also present in the very literal reading of the novel-within-the-novel that forms a crucial turning point in the framing narrative. In all three cases, the novel questions how bodies are viewed, how the (gender) normative is read within, and into them. My analysis is structured according to the two scenes in which Ṭurshqāna's body is read metaphorically. The literal reading of the novel-within-the-novel will be referenced throughout. The novel's subversive potential is discussed in order to assess its possible critical impetus regarding the situation of sexual minorities in Tunisia and in the sense of a broader political dissent. The latter continues the exploration of how in writing bodies, dissent is constructed in the novels of the second part of this study. The hypothesis for *Ṭurshqāna* is that dissent

has moved to an intimate, if not individual, level. It forms a confrontation not only in the private realm, but also within the self between mind and body, as was noted for *Hurlement* (further elaborated in *Section 4.6*). This has to be seen as a direct reflection of the context of the novel's production in the 1990s when open critique of the general situation, and of the plight of minorities, was suppressed.

According to Butler, trans or drag narratives cannot immediately be expected to be subversive. Instead, she explains that: "[s]ometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact" (2006[1990]: xiv).[34] The novel's subversive potential is explored with regards to the topic of oscillation between a critique of the problematic status of gender ambiguous bodies and the reproduction of its 'unlivability'.

Ṭurshqāna opens on a lively wedding party, but one guest, al-Ḥājja Qamr, is depressed and regrets having brought 'him' with her (*Ṭurshqāna* 8). The focus jumps to "al-qāma al-unthawiyya" ('the feminine figure') who occupies the center of the celebration. The figure's elegant clothes, jewelry, and make-up are described in detail. While the figure moves in the traditional circular dance, it is stated that its 'excited body began to weave its secrets, to produce its language, to free its hidden expression' (*Ṭurshqāna* 9).[35] The description of the alluring dancer is interrupted with traces of doubt, the omniscient narrator makes references to a hidden truth about the dancer's body. Under the robe, no bulging of buttocks is apparent (ibid.); the dancer's facial features are unrecognizable in the shadows of deceptive lights. The breast size does not quite match the slender figure, narrow hips, and shoulders of the dancer (ibid.). However, as the narrator ascertains, none of these details could attract attention away from the dancer's symmetric movements, coalescing in 'the hysteria of the dance' ("histīriyyā al-raqṣ", *Ṭurshqāna* 10). This suggests that the novel does not conceive of embodiment as an unchanging material body in social space, but as a body that creates and recreates itself through its behavior. This is an important insight regarding the novel's transgender thematic. The dance scene is reminiscent of Butler's conceptualization of gender constitution through the repetition of "identificatory and performative practices" (2004: 212). In describing the dancing body as producing its own language, it can mean something without having to resort to actual language. This not only suggests the metaphorical aspect of reading, but calls to mind Csordas' conceptualization of embodiment as distinct from, yet nevertheless in dialogue with, textuality (*Introduction*).

A conversation between two other guests at the wedding only exacerbates the narrator's doubts. One man asks another when referring to the dancer: 'Who is this [*woman; C.P.*]? His neighbor smiles and whispers: Better ask who *he* is'.[36] The conversation illustrates the initial attempt to read normativity into a body. The figure *has* to be a woman, given their

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34   Some feminist writers – especially in the 1970s – believed that transgender phenomena are a male infiltration of the cause of women and understood transsexuality as a reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes and a danger to feminism. Examples include Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-male* (1979). However, this perspective is transphobic.

35   Original quote:
"راح الجسد المستتار يحيك أسراره، يصنع لغته، يحرّر تعابيره الدفينة".

36   The question "من تكون هذه؟" (*Ṭurshqāna* 10) means literally 'Who is that?', employing the verb in the third person singular feminine and the matching demonstrative pronoun for third person singular feminine. This suggests: 'Who is that female?' The construction is an example of gender-loading in Arabic.

dress and behavior. Another function of gender norms' pressure to conform that is present in this exchange is the reflex to ignore incongruences, so that the norm is not upset. However, the second man steps in as an authority and immediately corrects the assumption that the dancer is a woman. He polices the boundaries of gender and prevents a male body from being gendered female. The problematic nature of the described behavior for a man is noted with reference to violent repercussions that might follow together with a plea that they shall not (compare *Ṭurshqāna* 10).

For the reader, the combination of the narrator's reference to discrepancies in the dancer's body and the readings of the two onlookers, ultimately creates an ambiguous body. The imagined body that, despite its inconsistencies, was thought of as not only feminine but female initially, is turned into a male body through the conversation between the onlookers. Two chapters later, the narrative confirms that the dancer is al-Ḥājja Qamr's grandson Murād who is called Ṭurshqāna by the quarter's children for his feminine dress and demeanor. For al-Ḥājja Qamr, this self-presentation is part of a curse that has been on the family for several generations, ever since the grandfather discovered a Phoenician treasure (see below for further details).

In the scene at the wedding, Ṭurshqāna realizes a goal that she never attains again in the novel: she passes as a woman. Similar acts of gender presentation intended to produce a female association are repeated via clothes, the design of Ṭurshqāna's immediate environment, and the specifics of her work as a painter all throughout the rest of the novel. However, they remain in a transitory stage; she is never again read as a woman.

In the wedding scene, dance is given specific importance in its ability to transform, something which is further elaborated in a conversation between Ṭurshqāna and her cousin Karīm (*Ṭurshqāna* 80–81). Ṭurshqāna states that she dances against death:

> I dance in order to trample over the snakes of worry that live in this head. I imagine that my crazy cells are spread on the floor like odious worms and that I trample on them. […] I want to be a normal person with unambiguous characteristics who loves like everyone else. Dance allows me to forget that I am not like this, because when I dance this body unveils everything that is otherwise unheard… (*Ṭurshqāna* 80)[37]

In the quote, the speaking 'I' is differentiated from its body, the 'crazy cells', alluding to a separation of mind and body. This is reminiscent of the lack of coherence between the female consciousness and the male body in *Hurlement*. The similarity is even more apparent in another instance in which Ṭurshqāna expresses her belief that she has a female brain that is surrounded by male cells (compare *Ṭurshqāna* 86). A dissolution of her male body is alluded to in the cells that are spread out on the floor in the dancing scene. This signifies a refusal of her physical body and a preference for her mind, understood to be female.[38]

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37 Original quote:

"أرقص كي أدوس على أفاعي القلق التي تسكن قحف هذا الرأس... تصوّرت خلاياي المجنونة منتشرة أمامي كديدان كريهة و أنا أدوس عليها [...] أريد أن أكون إنسانا عاديّا واضح المعالم يحبّ ككلّ الناس...الرقص ينسيني أنّني لست كذلك فحين أرقص يبوح هذا الجسد بكلّ الخطابات التي تصمّون عنها الأسماع..."

38 Ṭurshqāna's negative feelings towards her body follow the frequently used concept that transsexuals are 'trapped within the wrong body'. The assumption behind this concept is a stereotype that is questioned within queer culture. What is emphasized is the necessary possibility to be neither considered male nor female and, therefore, not as someone in need of any 'correctional' surgery (compare Judith Butler 2004: 65; Sally Hines

Through this preference, the novel suggests that identity is seen in the thinking consciousness and not as an interplay of mind and body. The role given to the body in this effort must be addressed.

Ṭurshqāna attempts to ignore her male body. She aspires to have a female body that she attempts to create both through her actions (such as dressing and dancing like a woman) and by striving for surgery. She expresses her wish for sex reassignment surgery in four languages, in Tunisian dialect, French, English, and Italian and exclaims "'nhib nwallī mrā' 'je veux devenir femme' 'I want to be woman' 'vorrei essere donna'"[39] (*Ṭurshqāna* 13). In Arabic and French,[40] she makes a specific reference to the act of 'becoming' ('nwallī', 'devenir'); in so doing, she highlights that she does not think she is a woman, but rather a female consciousness in a male body despite her self-description. This suggests that the body is not entirely ignored in the shaping of her identity. After all, this is what hinders her to consider herself a woman. The exclamations are intimately related to her personal sense of identity and highlight a dissonance (or dissent) that she feels at the heart of her identity. Through them, she confirms the idea of male and female as binary genders that go back to male and female sexual organs. Susan Stryker's perspective, as expressed in the statement that "[a] woman, performatively speaking, is one who says she is – and who does what woman means" (2006: 10), does not suffice here. In her desire to become a woman, Ṭurshqāna does not critique binary genders. Instead, she suggests that there is no non-specific or non-binary existence for her. Her present ambiguity is 'unlivable' for her in that it is unintelligible to others. By alluding to 'becoming', the processual character of a transformation is suggested, one that goes from her 'unlivable' state to another that is more 'livable' and intelligible.

While it was suggested above that Ṭurshqāna does not derive her sense of self from her body, this is not entirely true. First of all, her male body is constantly present in the narrative. It is present in its need to be changed to conform with her sense of self. Secondly, it offers her the 'canvas' to create a female appearance with clothes, make-up, and props, just as the wedding scene showed. Her 'performed' body is, however, questioned throughout the novel in her readings of herself and of other characters who suggest that it is not real. Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender as performative has been criticized with reference to transgender realities since it seems to delegitimize an individual's desire to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Susan Stryker alleviates the criticism somewhat by contextualizing it. She paraphrases the performative conception of gender as disconnected from the body:

"Introduction" to *Transgender Identities*, 2–3; and Sara Davidmann's contribution "Beyond Borders. Lived Experiences of Atypically Gendered Transsexual People" to the same volume, 186–203.

39 These four sentences are printed in Latin script, except for the first which is in Tunisian dialect. They stand out even more from the rest of the text by being placed between quotation marks and in bold print under the number of the chapter. No other chapter has headlines. It is not commented upon why Ṭurshqāna uses four languages to express her wishes and there is no indication that she speaks English, for example. Throughout the chapter that follows her exclamation, Ṭurshqāna demands money from her inheritance because she wants to undergo surgery abroad. She intends to leave masculinity to the other sons of al-Shawāshī, to strip this attribute from her (compare *Ṭurshqāna* 15).

40 These are the primary languages of the author and are, therefore, the most significant.

> To say that gender is a performative act is to say that it does not need a material referent to be meaningful, is directed at others in an attempt to communicate, is not subject to falsification or verification, and is accomplished by 'doing' something rather than 'being' something. (Stryker 2006: 10)

Jay Prosser critiques in *Second Skins* that the body is absent in Butler's conceptualization (compare 1998: 32).[41] If the body vanishes as a consequence, transgender identity is wrongly placed in the mind while the specific embodiment of transgender in all its varieties (the refusal to have surgery as well as the desire and execution of surgery) is ignored or even policed according to stereotypical ideas of gender and transgender orientation (compare Davidman 2010: 188, 200).

While Ṭurshqāna might wish for her body to vanish, it is central in the sense of Drew Leder's above mentioned "dys-appearance". From this perspective, the problematic body seizes attention "as the very *absence* of a desired or ordinary state" (1990: 84, 4). It us allows us to read Ṭurshqāna's relation to her body without letting it disappear. This reading acknowledges her attempts to ignore her body to solve the dissonance that she feels and that for her can only be overcome with a female body.

Susan Stryker detects "abrupt, often jarring transitions between genders" in the lived realities of transgender individuals (2006[1994]: 245). The novel constructs a similarly abrupt confrontation by juxtaposing pre- and post-operative transgender individuals. It becomes apparent only towards the end of the narrative that the post-operative transgender woman is a fictional figure created by Nūra for her latest draft and that this is not in fact a projection of Ṭurshqāna's future. One can argue that writing forms the transition here. It is what turns Ṭurshqāna into the protagonist of Nūra's draft, Nadā. For Ṭurshqāna and Nūra, Nadā's post-surgical body exists only in language; that is, it belongs to a realm removed from reality and might, therefore, be called 'unreal' from their perspectives. For the reader, both Nadā's and Ṭurshqāna's bodies exist in language and they share the same plane. As literary characters, both bodies have a materiality that oscillates, that is present and absent at the same time. Their bodies also oscillate in terms of their gender ascriptions. They are not definitively male or female because both Nadā and Ṭurshqāna are uncertain about their gender identities. The oscillation occurs due to the heightened interest in their non-normative bodies and the parenthetical difficulty to read them. This difficulty to read them means that they are present and absent at the same time.

The narrative suggests a transition from Ṭurshqāna to Nadā. According to Prosser, narrative is oftentimes used to rationalize "jarring transitions". Prosser notes that for the transgender individuals, "[n]arrative is not only the bridge to embodiment but a way of making sense of transition, the link between locations: the transition itself" (1998: 9). Narrative, it is suggested, helps them to perceive of themselves as coherent individuals and to overcome internal dissonances. The situation illustrates Csordas' conception of the dialectic between embodiment and textuality. It is not textuality, but narrative that is meant to engage with mind and body to bring forth a coherent embodiment.

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41 Generally, see chapter 1 of *Second Skins* with the tite "Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex". Butler addresses this critique in *Undoing Gender* and affirms that gender production cannot be dissociated from "material life" (2004: 212), i.e., from the body.

In *Ṭurshqāna*, transformation is replaced by narrative and more precisely by the novel-within-the-novel. Ṭurshqāna reads herself in Nūra's representation, but does not find coherence in it. She both recognizes and fails to recognize her aspirations for the future in Nadā and feels that her dreams were pre-empted:

> Why, oh Nūra? Is that how you are picturing my future? I am not Nadā… I won't be like her, incapable to love or to adapt… […] What kind of hostility is this? Was it necessary that your pen unearthed my calamities this time? Was it a necessity for you to poke it, like a knife in the depth of my wound? Why did you destroy the invisibility of my days with your nosiness? If you had shot me, that would have been more merciful... […] Cursed be these pages of yours that tried to get ahead of my dream… (*Ṭurshqāna* 148–149)[42]

The violence of representation becomes apparent in Ṭurshqāna's specific choice of words to express her anger; she considers the draft an act of 'hostility', compares the encroachment to a knife in a wound (i.e., physical pain, an existing injury that is made worse), and would even prefer physically injury ('shot') rather than this invasion.

The misrecognition that is expressed is similar to *Hurlement*'s mirror scene; Ṭurshqāna is alienated by the simultaneous recognition and misrecognition of her 'mirror image' in the novel-within-the-novel. Nadā's persistent doubt in her passing as feminine is especially problematic for Ṭurshqāna, since it suggests that the struggle with one's (gender) identity, body, and with gender norms more generally persist, even after surgery.[43]

Nūra's draft moves Ṭurshqāna to question her 'livability'. Meanwhile, the effect on readers of the novel is different. The mirroring that the novel-within-the-novel effects facilitates the ability to view Ṭurshqāna as a woman. Both narrative strands are interwoven with one another and this means that Nadā's scenes as a postoperative transgender woman leave an impression on the sections that focus on Ṭurshqāna and vice versa. However, they also leave the impression that Nadā did not achieve everything that Ṭurshqāna aspires to through their surgery.

After reading the draft, Ṭurshqāna disappears and the narrative ends in three pieces of news, only one of which is said to be true ("thalāthat akhbār… wa-l-ḥaqīqa wāḥida"; *Ṭurshqāna* 152). In the first, an exhausted looking person is seen with a bundle of papers who wants to return his grandfather's Phoenician tomb, possibly as a redemption for the curse. In news item two, fishermen find a body with unrecognizable features close to Tunis. It is said that during the autopsy it was impossible to determine the dead person's sex, a first in human history. News item three notes that Shaykh al-Fīlālī was seen in Marrakesh in the company of a youth with a shaved beard (ibid.).[44]

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42 Original quote:

"لماذا يا نورة؟... أتخطّطين لمستقبلي... أنا لست ندى... ولن أكون ندى في مثل عجزها عن الحبّ والتأقلم... [...] أيّ عدوان هذا... أكان لا بدّ أن ينبش قلمك في دائرتي هذه المرّة؟ أكان لزاما عليك أن تغرزيه كنصل في عمق الجرح؟ لماذا تجتاحين بفضولك غيب أيّامي؟ لو أطلقت عليّ الرصاص لكان أرحم... [...] تبّا لصحائفك هذه تستبق حلمي..."

43 The surgery is not directly mentioned in the novel-within-the-novel; however, it is said that Nadā has become a woman in the meantime (*Ṭurshqāna* 148).

44 In Ṭarshūna's review "Ightiyāl al-ḥulm fī riwāyat 'Ṭurshqāna'" ('The murder of the dream in the novel 'Ṭurshqāna'') this is perceived as a series of events that are not contradictory, but are integrative and are left to the reader to order (compare: 1999: 113). The view is not shared by the present analysis since it contradicts the narrative's suggestion that only one account is true.

All three news items contain an aspect of a strange departedness. The individuals are outside of Tunis (the novel's primary setting), they are exhausted, dead, carry items that could connect them to the narrative (e.g., a bundle of papers that alludes to Nūra's draft) or are in the company of a religious figure. All three show that Ṭurshqāna's struggle for sex change led to failure and confusion. While the novel does not tell readers which of these accounts is true, the second seems most relevant for this chapter's concerns because it addresses body, sex, and gender. In the scene, the body is described as unreadable, that is as 'unlivable'. Judith Butler writes that not only gender, but also sex:

> is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way to distinguish between what is "materially" true, and what is "culturally" true about a sexed body. (Butler 2004: 87)

If gender identity is understood as "what I am and how I am recognised" (Connolly 2002[1991]: 64), then the dead body in the second piece of news has neither sex nor gender. It has to be expected that cultural influences converge in the investigation of the dead body and in the autopsy material. The struggle for bodily autonomy, the freedom to live out one's inner gender identity, and life with an ambiguous gender fails in the Tunisian society that the novel narrates. However, contrary to the expectations that exposure and medical scrutiny provoke, by declaring that no judgment can be made about the gender of the dead, the novel restores some privacy to the discovered body that could be Ṭurshqāna's. This is further emphasized by the two other accounts that suggest that no general truth claim can be made regarding her whereabouts after her disappearance.

As was established in the analysis of *Ṭurshqāna* thus far, the narrative is framed by scenes in which the reading of problematic bodies is attempted. In both scenes, bodies are shown to cause irritation. In the former, it is the irritation of the onlookers; in the latter, it is the irritation of the reader that is provoked by the parallel accounts and their contents. The irritation brought about in the act of reading non-normative bodies suggests a subversive potential of the overall narrative. This potential will be explored in the remainder of the present section by scrutinizing the context in which Ṭurshqāna al-Shawāshī is being read.

The setting of *Ṭurshqāna* is dominated by the al-Shawāshī family who constitute Ṭurshqāna's primary readers and who function as a stand-in for the rest of Tunisian society. The family is traditional and authoritarian; many of its members still share a house and the younger family members have only recently begun to move out to live as nuclear families. Family members appear in exchanges with Ṭurshqāna throughout the novel, yet the most apparent reading of her occurs during a family assembly. In the assembly, it is decided whether Ṭurshqāna will be granted financial support to pay for sex reassignment surgery. The meeting is headed by the elder generation, al-Ḥājja Qamr and her two sons as well as by an imam and a qadi from the neighborhood (*Ṭurshqāna* 98–99). Asking for an authority's financial support clearly inhibits an otherwise emancipatory process for Ṭurshqāna. It allows authoritarian and paternalistic structures to give their opinions. There is a resemblance with procedures that transgender individuals have to undergo in Europe or the United States to receive insurance coverage for genital reassignment or to be eligible for surgery at all. The assembly's setup allows us to read Ṭurshqāna's situation as that of a powerless individual in front of a larger authority. By claiming a female identity, Ṭurshqāna dissents with a private authority, that of the family.

The family refuses to refer to Ṭurshqāna using anything but male grammatical constructions and calls her Murād since it is the name her father chose. A change in the name is

specifically problematic, since Ṭurshqāna's father was killed abroad and she is his only offspring. Ṭurshqāna cannot be a woman, according to the al-Shawāshīs, because of the importance of masculinity in keeping up patrilineal continuity.

The al-Shawāshīs' family history is referenced throughout the novel in relation to national history. The concrete cross-references suggest that the novel addresses Tunisian sociopolitical reality at a deep level. One example is the accumulation and loss of wealth. The family's wealth began with the discovery of the Phoenician treasure, followed by a period of affluence that was only stifled when losses were incurred due to land reforms and dispossession in the post-independence era.[45] The family is nostalgic for more affluent days, which gives them a notion of conservatism.

The novel's generally positive view of tradition and history is contrasted with al-Ḥājja Qamr's notion of the 'Phoenician curse' that was allegedly brought upon the male family members by the discovered treasure. Ṭurshqāna, she assumes, is the curse's latest victim. This ostracizes Ṭurshqāna for not conforming. History and tradition have haunting aspects according to the curse. Times past are thought to have a negative influence on events in the present. This dark notion of tradition is not developed within the novel. It can, however, offer a critique of the al-Shawāshī family's position regarding Ṭurshqāna's dream of reassignment surgery. It points out the negative repercussions of the very traditions that the family wants to protect. The family refuses to support Ṭurshqāna. They do not accept her choice to live life outside of frames that are purported as normal, necessary, and natural, such as marriage and starting a family. They even tell her that she would receive the money were she asking for it for a different cause, such as a wedding. Interestingly, however, it is not the family's refusal to help her financially that leads to Ṭurshqāna's despair, but it is the literary representation of her future according to Nūra's draft. This suggests that the family's decision does not influence her perception of herself or leads her to question her 'livability'. There is no moment of a parallel recognition and misrecognition in the family's decision. Rather, the decision contains the confrontation of two perspectives that have nothing in common. After an immediate reaction of anger and sadness, the family's opinion is not accepted by Ṭurshqāna as meaningful in the long run.

In the novel, Ṭurshqāna is generally shown opposite accepted normalcy. However, as was indicated above, she does not challenge gender binary, but instead aspires to fit normative notions of woman. She also is not shown as being part of a community of transgender individuals. This reflects the situation in Tunisia, where the first collective LGBTI activism only occurred in the early 2000s, some time after the novel's publication. Officially registered organizations were only possible after 2011, and descriptions of LGBTI activism in Tunisia are rare even after that time.[46] To this day, same-sex sexual activities are criminalized and activism is a dangerous affair, according to Amnesty International's aforementioned report *Assaulted and Accused* (2015: 34). Much less of a transgender community

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45 This is alluded to in chapter 17, when it is mentioned that al-Ḥājja Qamr hid her jewelry from the collective and organized a lawsuit against the dispossession of land (*Ṭurshqāna* 84–88). A discussion of the cooperativization of land in Tunisia can be found in White, Gregory. 2001. *A Comparative Political Economy of Tunisia and Morocco. On the Outside of Europe Looking In*, especially: 89–91.

46 Articles offer some insight into this, including two that were published on the website of *Heinrich Böll Stiftung – The Green Political Foundation*: Sana Sbouai "Tunisia: Fighting in broad daylight", 18.06.2015; and Haïfa Mzalouat's "LGBT rights in Tunisia: The fight will be televised", 17.06.2016.

could be expected when the novel's narrative takes place in the 1970s and 1980s (ʿAzzūna 2000: 26).

Tunis is a capital city, yet it is not comparable to other metropoles in which Western models of homosexual identity are followed that shape a global queer community. In close-knit neighborhoods where families live together or in direct proximity of each other, especially in the old town where the al-Shawāshī's family home is, a typical anonymous city life is not possible. In this context, Ṭurshqāna's transgender behavior does not and cannot participate in a global queer community, but forms a local expression of her estrangement with being born a man. Instead of finding herself within an activist context, Ṭurshqāna is shown by herself and expresses that all she 'wants is to be a normal person […] like every body' (*Ṭurshqāna* 80).[47] This brings back to mind Judith Butler's cautionary remark that not all narratives of gender ambiguity are subversive. However, when the novel is read on a metaphorical level, as a tale about the state of the country and its people, instances of subversion and dissent appear in the private realm.

The novel makes ambiguous references that can be read both as expressions of nostalgia for Bourguiba during Ben Ali's reign and as a critique of Bourguiba and his measures. The two levels belong together as can be seen in the subplot of Ṭurshqāna's absent father. It is the story of a father who leaves his child (or country) behind, a father who can be both missed and criticized for leaving. This interpretation is particularly supported by Jalūl ʿAzzūna's review of the novel who confirms: 'We are all Ṭurshqāna in this time of wickedness that we are living' (2000: 133).[48]

Ṭurshqāna's father was entangled in political intrigues. Bourguiba's competitor for the presidency, Ṣāliḥ Ben Yūsuf, is mentioned to whose supporters the father belonged. The latter was killed in a politically motivated assassination one morning when he left his apartment in Paris in 1959. It is suggested that his murder was part of systematic assassinations in the opposition's rows. If this were the case, then the people responsible for killing him belonged to Bourguiba's side (*Ṭurshqāna* 91–92), a subtle criticism of the state's founder.

The absent father might, therefore, allude to former President Bourguiba in a different fashion, especially since he used to present himself as the father of the Tunisians, but could no longer take care of his 'children'. Bourguiba was still alive and lived solitary old age beyond the gaze of the public after Ben Ali's take over.

Lamia Benyoussef offers further analysis of missing fathers. She paraphrases an argument by Tunisian psychologist Fethi Benslama from his *La Psychanalyse à l'épreuve de l'Islam* (2002; English transl. *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam,* 2009). She writes that according to Benslama rather than the father-son conflict in Lacan and Freud, the "father's abandonment (of his wives or children)" forms the "primary trauma in the Muslim psyche, from the story of Abraham's abandonment of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, to Muhammad's status as an orphan and his symbolic abandonment (through death) by his biological and adoptive fathers" (Benyoussef 2015: 117). Abdelkébir Khatibi observes that

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47 Original quote:

"أريد أن أكون إنسانا عاديا [...] ككل النّاس..."

48 Original quote:

"إننا كلّنا طرشقانة في زمن الرداءة هذا الذي نعيشه".

Prophet Muhammad is not cast as the father of the believers in Islam, although his wives are seen as their symbolic mothers. Khatibi concludes that "les musulmans sont orphelins de Père symbolique" ('Muslims are orphans of a symbolic father'; see his "La Sexualité selon le Coran", 1983: 171).

Similarly, Tunisia as a country is deserted without its father figure and unsheltered against the challenges of life, which is an indirect criticism of Ben Ali's regime. The novel hides the critique in the private realm and the political commentary appears only on a meta-phorical level. This is typical for the context of the novel's production in the 1990s, a decade that has already been discussed as a period in which open criticism was almost impossible.

Ṭurshqāna breaks with social expectations and gender roles as an expression of her dissonant bodily being-in-the-world or embodiment. Yet, the actual subversiveness of her position is ambiguous. The novel shows the violence that gender norms do to her, which can be read as subversive criticism. It also portrays transgender identity as a problematic that faces its own 'unlivability' and ultimately has to fail, however. On the one hand, Ṭurshqāna is presented in an empathetic way (e.g., by showing her pain and the abuse she receives as well as the hurt she feels through teasing and mocking); on the other hand, though, the surgery that she dreams of is not only relegated to fiction, it is also described as not solving a transgender individual's identity struggles. Exclusion and self-consciousness remain. In this, the novel reproduces what makes Ṭurshqāna's situation 'unlivable' in the first place.

However, the novel's construction and its content have subversive potential. The novel tries to create an inside perspective on transgender reality. It does something that had not been done before in Arabic or Tunisian literature in its choice to include a transsexual protagonist (compare Ṭarshūna 1999: 111, Fontaine 2000: 73, Head 2016: 812). It occurs at a specific time in-line with more global developments. Judith Halberstam observes in *In a Queer Time and Place. Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* that the transgender body gained a sudden attention in the US American cultural production (in art and films specifically) at the end of the 20th century (2005: 15–16). A similar trend can be highlighted in the field of Arabic literature. Although *Ṭurshqāna* is described as the first Arabic novel with a transgender protagonist, its publication was surrounded by other texts that presented queer characters.[49] This shows that transgender and queer characters expressed something about this period of time in the region, a notion that will be further explored in the following section.

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49 As Fontaine notes, *Ṭurshqāna* appeared after several other Tunisian novels touched on homosexuality, mentioning Muḥammad Hīzī's *Dhākirat al-milḥ* (1996), Hātim al-Najāti's *Ḥikāyāt al-mawta* (1997) and al-Bashīr Ibn Slāma's *al-Nasir* (1998); as well as centrally ʿUmar Ibn Sālim's *Ṣaḥrī baḥrī* (1996) (compare Fontaine 2000: 73). *Ṭurshqāna*, however, differs from what was written previously. Gretchen Head comments that its protagonist "bears little resemblance to standard Arabic literary representations of alternative sexualities", in which "the pathologised figure of the *mukhannath*, or effeminate man" was shown as failing to "inhabit the acceptable masculinist episteme" (2016: 814). Barbara Winckler similarly describes that works of modern Arabic literature until recently presented homosexuality in a negative light and are only recently becoming more empathetic in her *Grenzgänge* (Winckler 2014: 129–130). With regards to transgender characters, *Ṭurshqāna* was followed by the Lebanese author Ḥanān al-Shaykh's *Innahā Lundun yā ʿazīzī* (2001; English transl. *Only in London*, 2001); as an example of transgender phenomena more broadly, Algerian Nina Boura-oui's *Garçon manqué* (2000; English transl.: *Tomboy*, 2007) should be mentioned.

4.6 Reading Dissent within the Private

In what follows, it is explored further what transgender and queer characters express about the time of the novels' publication, the 1990s. As was outlined above, in the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, all political debate that had existed throughout previous decades were contained under President Ben Ali, in order to stabilize his rule (compare Alexander 2010: 3). This political situation is emphasized in Gretchen Head's discussion of *Ṭurshqāna* in "Transgender Subjects, Fairytales, and Red Light Districts" (2016) as the novel's immediate context. Head highlights the strict control that publishing was under, meaning that "[d]irect criticism of the regime was difficult, if not impossible" (2016: 815).

While *Hurlement* leaves out any reference to Tunisia and the author's connections to the previous regime, which has been noted; both novels focus on the individual instead of political commentary. Although this trend was specifically highlighted regarding *Ṭurshqāna* so far, it is equally true for *Hurlement* where an individual, is faced with overpowering authorities. The individual's personal opinions are not considered legitimate knowledge, since they do not conform with mainstream ideas. They are ignored, even in intimate contexts such as gender identity. The individual dissents with official opinions on the inside. Dissent itself was moved to the private realm.

Generally speaking, transgender positions form a counter thesis against dogmatic stability – against the very stability that suppressive governmental politics attempt to create. They upset norms that are believed to be definite, such as the gender binary, and thereby challenge norms more generally. Transgender positions also highlight the violence norms commit, offering a leverage point for a larger critique of dogmatic opinions. Jay Prosser expresses this in his description of transphobia, not so much as a "fear of the same or the other but fear of bodily crossing, of the movement in between sameness and difference" (1998: 47). That which oscillates between sameness and difference cannot be contained as easily as either one of the two. Yet, as was highlighted above, this does not mean that transgender phenomena are per se subversive or are placed within literature to these ends.

Reviews written at the time of *Ṭurshqāna*'s publication reflect the same political strain that Head highlighted as the background of its publication. The reviews ignore possible political meanings in their respective description of the novel's central issue (i.e., of what the novel is essentially about). The state of the individual and individual freedoms,[50] the struggle between men and women,[51] and the concealment and unveiling of non-normative sexuality in a society of taboos are all mentioned as possible readings of dissent.[52] All of these interpretations noticeably emphasize the private realm. The consecutive step, which the previous section attempted regarding *Ṭurshqāna*, is not taken and so there is no retreat from the private realm to the public and political. None of the reviews can be described as containing an explicitly political interpretation; however, both the first and the last reflect

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[50] ʿAzzūna, Jalūl. 2000. "Riwāyat Ṭurshqāna li-Masʿūda Bū Bakr: ṭarāfa wa-jurʾa" ('The novel Ṭurshqāna by Messaouda Boubakr: peculiarity and courage'). *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyyah* 120: 132–136.

[51] ʿUbayd, Sūf. 1999. "Ṭurshqāna." *al-Mulḥaq al-thaqāfī*. 18.11.1999 546: 11; see also: ʿAzzūna, who states that highlighting the struggle between men and women forms only a superficial interpretation of the novel, but not its key issue, 2000: 132.

[52] Ṭarshūna's review "Ightiyāl al-ḥulm fī riwāyat 'Ṭurshqāna'" was mentioned previously.

authoritarianism by addressing the absent freedom to choose and the confinement that society can instill (compare ʿAzzūna 2000: 132; Ṭarshūna 1999: 111).

In his review of Boubakr's novel, the critic and novelist Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna describes aspects of concealment and exposure in the phenomenon of transgender positions in Tunisia. Rather than being non-existent in the region, he writes that transgender behaviors are mainly hidden (1999: 111). This means that their open discussion in literary works happens at the boundaries of both the private and public realms. It actually brings the boundaries into oscillation and they become softened. Their different demands for normative behavior are challenged and this influences both the private and the political status quo.

Ṭarshūna's concern for the dialectic between concealment and exposure touches on the border between private and public realms. In the private realm, a political meaning can be concealed. Jarrod Hayes explores how this functions and he argues in his *Queer Nations. Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* that: "the personal (and therefore the sexual) is indeed political; the very technique of using the private to allegorize the public bridges this split and deconstructs the binaries" (2000: 263). It is the issue of privacy that literature can resort to in times of political authoritarianism and state control. In Head's reading of *Ṭurshqāna*, this is represented in the following way: "while the novel's starting point is a concern for inequalities grounded in questions of gender, it, in fact, works to reveal the restrictive limits placed on everyone within the failed post-independence context of Ben 'Ali's government" (2016: 812). She strengthens this claim by pointing out further political references contained within the novel. For example, *Ṭurshqāna* mentions the year 1864 as part of the al-Shawāshī family history, which might connect Ṭurshqāna's forefather with a rebellion in the Tunisian countryside that: "was a response to a regime whose abusive economic policies had made the lives of the general population impossible" (Head 2016: 815). Not only can the reference be applied to the political situation during Ben Ali's reign, but it also shows the entanglement of private and national history. This is another indication of how the personal can acquire a political meaning.

The political is also present in *Ṭurshqāna* at a more basic level. The novel portrays how its protagonist struggles against different authorities to reach coherence. Ṭurshqāna ultimately fails to realize her inner-felt gender identity. In Ṭarshūna's reading, *Ṭurshqāna* offers no permanent relief for the non-normative. His review highlights the novel's focus on transformation: "The narrative moves […] The present is changed into a future, masculinity into femininity, the dream into the realization of the dream […] and finally, the narrow social reality is changed into the vastness of fictional reality" (Ṭarshūna 1999: 111).[53] The revelation of the transformations' fictionality, he argues, occurs to the reader through Ṭurshqāna's discovery of Nūra's draft (the novel-within-the-novel). *Ṭurshqāna*'s narrative in Ṭarshūna's reading does not mark a permanent opening up, but rather a cyclical movement. Possibilities are indicated, but remain unrealized. Wilson Checko Jacob writes about the Middle East, that: "the queer subject is always partial, only a potentiality, an opening onto other worlds yet to come" (2013: 347), which is certainly true for Ṭurshqāna.

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53   Original quote:
"يتحول السرد من الجنوب إلى الشمال أي من المدينة العتيقة في تونس إلى مدينة لوهافر بجهة النورمندي بفرنسا، فيتحول الحاضر إلى مستقبل، الذكورة إلى أنوثة والحلم إلى تحقيق الحلم [...] وأخيرا يتحول ضيق الواقع الاجتماعي إلى رحابة الواقع الروائي."

The problems that she has to face are shown to not only come from the outside, from social pressure; instead, both *Ṭurshqāna*'s and *Hurlement*'s protagonists fall victim to an internal dissonance which eventually seals their fates. It is a view of the self that reads their problematic embodiments, it is a perspective that simultaneously recognizes and does not recognize at the same time. It only sees 'unlivability' and loses hope for the future. On a social plane, this indicates how the individual has internalized the expectations of conformism as they are fostered, such as by families or other authorities for example. On a political plane – and the reference here is to *Ṭurshqāna* rather than to *Hurlement* – the internal disagreement alludes to the absence of a workable opposition that could challenge Ben Ali's regime. This forms a point in which Tunisia resembles other Arab countries in the 1990s, such as Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria which faced similar authoritarianism in their governing elites. It also suggests what transgender and queer characters expressed with their presence in literature at the time. As was discussed in the *Introduction*, the 1990s were a decade of people's disenchantment with political participation, with their respective state's role as leader towards progress.

4.7   Discussing the Writing of 'Unlivable' Bodies

The preceding chapter analyzed another type of problematic bodies. It continued the discussion of the writing of bodies within Tunisian novels and explored which meanings are attributed to these bodies. A dissenting presence was confirmed in the discussion of the two novels of this chapter, Alia Mabrouk's *Hurlement* and Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna*, and of their 'problematic' bodies. Subversion and dissent were found in the private realm, in bodies, and this turn to the private was linked to the realities of (public and political) life in Tunisia in the 1990s, as well as to the authors' personal backgrounds. Both novels show an awareness of the difficulty of addressing the political and they solve it by focusing on the individual, by presenting an 'intimate' dissent. Both novels express how the effects of political oppression appear as an absence of the autonomy of the physical body.

The focus of the analysis was on the act of 'reading' bodies. This 'reading' was understood to mean both the interpreting or grasping of bodies metaphorically (e.g., regarding their gender) and the literal act of making sense of words. Accordingly, 'problematic' bodies appeared as those that cannot be 'read' easily and which cause irritation. Gender norms were presented as an organizing principle in Tunisian society, one that reflects the strict expectations for gender-conforming behavior among men and women. When bodies overstepped gender norms, they were shown to cause irritation and this is why the phenomenon of transgenderism was established as particularly insightful. The potential of transgender phenomena is that they question the congruence of sex and gender that lies at the base of gender norms, thereby revealing the constructedness of the norms.

Both of the novels analyzed contain a transgender thematic. The protagonists struggle with their respective bodies, which do not conform with their inner sense of gender identity. They attempt to ignore them and this gives the bodies an oscillating presence (a "dysappearance" in Leder's words) and even more attention. The narratives, however, do not undo the binary conceptualization of gender as male or female but they do draw attention to the injustice that norms do to the multiplicity of individual identities and to the pressure to comply under which individuals are put.

The focus on bodies that are problematic in being read allowed for the discussion of writing, as it appears within the novels, to continue. A critique of representation was determined in *Ṭurshqāna*, following the observation that if the reading is difficult or impossible, then representation cannot be transparent or innocent.

The specific concept that was used to describe bodies that cannot be read easily in the chapter was Judith Butler's notion of the 'unlivable', in which the aspect of reading is central. For Butler, the 'unlivable' describes the abject, the human body that cannot be read due to the absence of suitable categories. Categories make it intelligible and, therefore, confirm its humanness. 'Unlivability' was employed in the chapter to describe society's difficulties in reading the protagonists' bodies and to explain the failure of both protagonists to build a life outside of established norms.

The writing of bodies itself was addressed, particularly through the novel-within-the-novel included in *Ṭurshqāna*. The novel-within-the-novel offers the protagonist a 'reading' of her body (in the literal sense of the word) that has severe repercussions. On the one hand, the narrative realizes Ṭurshqāna's dream and examines her transition, while it also destroys it on the other.

Writing generally participates in the production of the problematic body, as both novels show. In each case, it lets the protagonist fail and this suggests a certain ambiguousness. The novels do not show an unclouded support for non-normative individuals. Neither novel takes a clear stance when read as a statement about possible dissent and subversion contained in the narratives. The actual authors are implicated in this ambiguousness through the act of writing.

Language plays a role in the writing of bodies and it was shown to participate in the production of the problematic. The medium of language increases the potential for misunderstandings, especially in the context of gender, as exemplified in the novels examined. Most languages produce gender through forms of address and the grammatical gender – Arabic and French particularly are not transparent tools with regards to gender. As a consequence, languages also partake in the violence that gender norms impose. Language is the means by which gender and identity are simultaneously constructed and expressed, as well as distinguished from what is other (compare Sadiqi 2003: 277). Language is subject to its own rules (e.g., grammar) that do not necessarily fit the realities of problematic bodies. Transgender phenomena, for example, bring out the difficulties in conversational language (both in Arabic and French) by not lending themselves easily to the necessity of using gender-specific personal pronouns.

In the context of identity formation, the roles played by mind and body were discussed in this chapter. Although both protagonists aspired to leave their bodies behind or to change them, it was shown that the respective body not only plays a central role in both characters' belief in its wrongness, but also in their (gender) identities. This illustrated Csordas' conceptualization of embodiment. The novels suggest that an individual has to develop a coherence of some sort between mind and body to realize a 'livable' existence and successful embodiment – disregarding social pressures and opinions. The novels were described in order to witness their protagonists' struggle against different authorities, to reach coherence, and to see them fail after a crisis caused by simultaneous recognition and non-recognition. The oscillation between recognition and non-recognition translates to an awareness of 'unlivability'. The individual finds itself and does not find itself in this person who does not and will never fit into society's categories. Being difficult to read attributes them with a dissenting presence, an identity conflict and an internal dissent is at the heart of their failure.

The meanings that are attributed to the problematic bodies show them as opposed to different authorities. These authorities appear in a negative light, given that they cause problems for the individual with whom the sympathies of the narrative oftentimes rest. The problematic bodies are, therefore, cast as spaces of resistance. Subversion and dissent, as I

have argued in this chapter, have graduated to the private realm. This indicates the authors' awareness of the difficulties involved in writing dissent. Writing was, however, also shown to be entangled with the (re)production of the problematic, to oscillate between a critique of exclusion and its confirmation. As a consequence, the narratives could not definitively be considered to be subversive. In the following chapter, writing and the role of the author will appear to be even more entangled with the bodies narrated, a notion that was first suggested in *Ṭurshqāna.*

5 A Last Search for the Problematic. Sexuality, Protest, and Representation

5.1   Provocative Bodies and a Literary Scandal

In 1975, the editors of the Tunisian magazine *Dialogue pour le progrès* proclaimed a literary scandal in their anonymously authored article "'Cendre à l'aube' de Jélila Hafsia: Un Plagiat Manifeste…" ('Cendre à l'aube' by Jélila Hafsia: Blatant plagiarism'). The article initially feigns that the similarities between Jelila Hafsia's work published in 1975 and *Journal d'une Bourgeoise* by Geneviève Gennari from 1959 as well as *Elles*, which is the 1956 French translation of Alba de Céspedes' *Dalla parte di lei* from 1949 could be coincidental. Then, however, Hafsia is blamed for threatening the country's honor by plagiarizing the earlier works and for implicating the quality of Tunisian literature (compare N.N. *Dialogue* 1975: 74). While the pages that contain plagiarisms are listed with their respective originals, no effort has been made to analyze which sections were copied and why. The number of copied pages is also not put into any kind of relation with the amount of material that was genuinely written by the author.[1] It is not the interest of this chapter to discount the accusations made against Hafsia or to further analyze what was copied and why. The journalistic article is tendentious, which is addressed in another article "Point d'Orgue… Par qui le Scandale arrive!" ('Climax… by which the scandal arrives!'), signed with the name Ajeb from July 14, 1975. It indirectly refers to the first article and criticizes its main reproach against Hafsia, namely that she ridicules the country's honor ("bafouer l'honneur de notre pays", Ajeb 1975: 2[2]). Ajeb's text warns not to take the issue quite so seriously, especially since *Cendre à l'aube* (its title translates to 'Ash at dawn') was not the first work that copied others without acknowledgment, but instead followed the example of similar cases.

What the two articles certainly confirm is that something provocative permeates the novel and it can be found in the novel's content. The novel portrays a female body that gains independence, addresses marital relations, and sexuality and was written by a female author. Abir Kréfa explores the writing about sexuality and its repercussions for female writers in her aforementioned article "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes". She suggests that woman authors still face social control and censorship that limits their dealings with intimate themes in the new millennium (2011: 109). That Hafsia has resisted such control must have influenced the novel's perception.

Cendre à l'aube presents the making of an independent woman, a realization of self-sufficiency that is told via the body. Nabila's marriages and divorces are narrated, which connotes a development from passivity to activity that simultaneously transgresses and critiques social expectations. The narrative is influenced by the author's personal experiences and follows her need to free herself through writing (suggested by Hafsia herself; the autobiographical elements are also noted in Fontaine 2009: 145). About her first divorce,

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1   The article claims that over 45 pages of *Cendre à l'aube* were taken from *Elles* (the chart counts 59 individual pages) and a dozen from *Journal d'une bourgeoise*; it offers quotes for six of these. *Cendre à l'aube* has 269 pages, which means that slightly over one quarter of the novel is concerned.

2   This is presented as a quote but, in fact, it is a paraphrase; the *Dialogue* article says: "Se taire et prendre le risque que tous les tunisiens soient ridiculisés […] que l'honneur de notre pays soit bafoué" (N.N. *Dialogue* 1975: 74).

which became effective before Tunisian independence, the author states that "à l'époque c'était une performance" (N.N. *Ferida* 1975: 15), thereby highlighting the implicit provocativeness of the event by alluding to the attention it received. Related to the autobiographical elements is another issue that makes the novel provocative; individuals from Hafsia's personal environment saw themselves reflected in the narrative and were taken aback.[3]

Two scenes are pertinent in order to highlight the development that Nabila undergoes throughout the narrative and to tie it back to the role played by the body. The first finds Nabila, aged sixteen, on her wedding night. The narrative voice explains that even though she knew that spouses share the same bed, she had never given much thought to it. She is prepared for the wedding: 'She is being undressed, her make-up is removed, she is dressed in her bridal nightgown […] In total, everything was being prepared for her: the husband, the marriage, the furniture, the lingerie, in short, all the elements of happiness' (*Cendre* 67–68)[4]. When her newly-wed husband Youssef tries to approach her, she does not want to allow it:

> He read in her eyes such an aversion that he recoiled. With cold hands and a heavy heart, she felt that her breath was escaping her. Something really strange happened. She tried to struggle against it. But nothing helped. The operation took place. A terrible nervous breakdown followed. She cried, she hurt Youssef, she would have liked to see him dead… (*Cendre* 68–69)[5]

Both with words and in the preparations made for her, passivity is suggested to the bride as the best way to spend her wedding night, to endure what happens. However, as the scene shows, Nabila lacks both an emotional readiness and a personal interest in marriage. Nabila's body is present to feel fear (alluded to in the cold hands and heavy heart), but her first sexual experience disappears into the observation that the 'operation took place'. Sexuality happens to her, but Nabila is not part of this experience except through her resistance.

In the second scene, at the end of the novel, Nabila finds herself free of all ties and on her own in a café close to the Zaytūna mosque in Tunis drinking mint tea after three unsuccessful marriages. She is the only woman around and sits with her legs outstretched ("jambes allongées", *Cendre* 265). She contemplates her life and realizes that in this moment the young woman she once was is now gone: 'Relieved from the past, mistress of the future, with perfect knowledge of herself, Nabila feels free' (*Cendre* 268).[6] In this scene, Nabila's body is present and it strives to take more room than it usually does by stretching out. The character's outlook, as well as the narrative, is towards the future, towards what is to come for the protagonist and for women in Tunisia in general. Suitably, the novel – before discussions about its authenticity started – was published on the occasion of the United Nations' year of the woman 1975 (compare *Dialogue* 1975: 74). It was published at a time

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3   The author alluded to this in a personal interview on 3 October 2015.

4   Original quote: "On la déshabille, on la démaquille, on lui met la chemise de nuit nuptiale. […] En somme, on avait tout préparé pour elle: le mari, le mariage, le mobilier, la lingerie, bref les instruments du bonheur".

5   Original quote: "Il lisait dans ses yeux une telle aversion qu'il recula. Les mains froides et le cœur serré, elle sentait que la respiration la fuyait. Il passe quelque chose de bizarre. Elle essaye de se débattre. Mais rien n'y fit. L'opération eut lieu… Une crise de nerfs terrible la suivit. Elle pleurait, elle injuriait Youssef, elle aurait voulu le voir mort…".

6   Original quote: "Délivrée du passé, maîtresse de l'avenir, ayant la parfait connaissaince d'elle-même, Nabila se sent libre".

when female participation among those parts of the population that are either employed or seek employment made a significant jump (from 6.8 per cent to 18.7 per cent between 1966 and 1975[7]). Nevertheless, a free-spirited woman must have seemed provocative to large sections of Tunisian society at the time.

As a continuation of the previous two chapters, provocative bodies are discussed as a final kind of problematic bodies. In this chapter provocation is understood as having an emotional effect on another person or institution. Problematic bodies are shown in this chapter as provocative in two respects: they are both sexually and politically active bodies and through this evoke fear or anger in different authorities. The two respects of sexually and politically active bodies continue from where the previous chapter left off, in terms of the dissent found within the private, individual realm. We will proceed from here. While the realm of the sexual might be understood as the most private realm, it is questioned and explored for its potential to defy authorities and contains political connotations. This follows an observation that Nouri Gana makes regarding Tunisian film and suggests a close connection between sexual references and political meanings. The connection, as will be shown, is equally valid for the Tunisian novels analyzed. In films, Gana reads an "obsession with sex and the female body" as an allegory for the "body politic". Through the obsession, he continues to write: "[b]reaking sociocultural taboos has become a style of political expression and subversion […] once you practice it somewhere, chances are you will be able to practice it elsewhere, even in the forbidden realm of grand politics" (see Gana's contribution to his edited volume *The Making of the Tunisian Revolution*, 2013: 185–186). This is another reason to explore the novels' interest in sex and the female body.

Fear and anger are the final negative affective responses that problematic bodies produce, as was outlined in *Chapter 3*. They are the typical reactions that are shown when one is confronted with the threat of losing control. Sexuality and politics are key discourses in which the Tunisian authorities attempt to control the individual. This means that the authorities are also in danger of losing control when the individual disregards limits or rules imposed on them. The connection between the two respects of provocative bodies is discussed with reference to their structural similarities, particularly the communicatory function of bodies. A note of caution, however, has to be added regarding the subject of sexuality and its place in Tunisian literature. According to Abir Kréfa's aforementioned article "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes", literary works are required to narrate sexuality and sexual transgression to be considered modern works of acclaim. For female writers, external constraints (such as a concern for one's personal reputation or that of one's family) cause anxiety about the description of these subjects or result in self-censorship (2011: 109, 114). This suggests that the subjects remain problematic. This is why this chapter was introduced with reference to Jalila Hafsia's novel and the discussions it provoked. On the one hand, the subject of sexuality is attractive, draws attention, and is deemed a necessity of modern fiction; however, on the other hand, it is perceived as dangerous and alluring in a negative sense. The structure should be familiar by now, given that it involves another oscillatory movement. The subject is not only difficult for female authors, as a male

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7   In the decade that followed, the percentage grew more slowly and rose to 21.3 per cent until 1984; for all percentages, compare Chater's "Les mutations de la condition de la femme tunisienne (1956–1994)", 1994: 52.

author discussed in this chapter shows. The author even addresses the difficulty of writing about sex within his novel. This further confirms the subject's problematic nature, even for male writers. The narration of problematic bodies noticeably challenges authors.

The structure of the chapter is bipartite and follows a discussion of the key concept that the analysis is built upon. In the two sections of the first part, sexuality is connected with the defiance of inhibitions and is discussed as a tool to express individual liberation in literature. Its writing is explored in addition to other issues of representation. In these sections, a return is made to Aroussia Nalouti's *Tammās* (1995; 'Mutually touching'), while Fredj Lahouar's *al-Jasad walīma* (1999; 'The body is a feast') is introduced to the analysis for the first time.

The second part consists of a single section and focuses on Kamel Riahi's *al-Ghurillā* (2011; 'The Gorilla'). Politically active bodies are analyzed in their literary rendition. Dissent in this novel is no longer hidden or indirect but open, which calls for a specific discussion of the writing of opposition and the question of literary engagement. More than a decade separates the novels of the first part of the chapter and *al-Ghurillā*. Tunisian society had changed by the time the latter was published. The changes that occurred are explored through the potential of bodies to function as communicative media, especially in protest.

The struggle over representation is another element that connects the two parts of the present chapter and, therefore, sexually and politically active bodies. It stems from the awareness of the problematic nature of writing dissent, which was ascertained in the previous chapter, to an entirely different view of representation in its literary and political sense. On the content level, *al-Ghurillā* allows for a description of how dissent in the private turns into an agency to influence masses. Theoretically, *al-Ghurillā* points toward a general problematic of writing: the truth value of realist depiction. This questions literature's capability to mirror text-external reality and suggests the productive function of literature. In so doing, it furthers the understanding of writing itself and of the self-awareness of Tunisian novels to themselves. This examination will allow us to conclude this analysis of how writing is problematized via the narration of problematic bodies.

5.2   In-between Sexuality and Sedition. *Fitna* as a Concept

Classical Arabic thought has a concept that comes very close to the oscillatory movement of abjection. The Arabic term *fitna* translates to temptation, charmingness, fascination, infatuation, but also riot or chaos. Traditionally, it describes both seductiveness and seditiousness. Stefania Pandolfo writes in her *Impasse of the Angels. Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (1997) that:

> in the Qur'an *al-fitnah* is the excess, the testing and ordeal that is both transgression and the foundation of God's law. In its colloquial use, it evokes the other states of madness and love, the cutting force of discord, violence, and war, and speaks of a straying off familiar paths. (1997: 5)

Fatima Mernissi describes the "fear of *fitna*" as a "fear of female self-determination" in her *Beyond the Veil. Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (2003[1975]: 53).[8] This "fear of female self-determination" is precisely the provocative potential that was shown in *Cendre à l'aube*.

In a sexual sense, *fitna* has come to express the perception of women more generally as possible seductresses who corrupt men, as Rachid Boutayeb notes in his reading of the widely cited *La Sexualité en Islam*[9] by Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (1975). For Bouhdiba, men traditionally have power and primacy over women in Islam: "Woman is chronologically secondary. She finds her finality in man. She is made for his pleasure, his repose, his fulfilment. [...] Married life, then, is hierarchized" (1985: 11). Bouhdiba continues that: "one would seek in vain for the slightest trace of misogyny in the whole of the Quran" (ibid.). Boutayeb rightly criticizes these sections as inconsistent,[10] arguing that misogyny is founded precisely in the hierarchy to which Bouhdiba refers. The seeming acceptance of the hierarchy is based on the strict control of the female, who is the source of all anarchy in the traditional conception; in short, women are the source of fitna (compare Boutayeb 2013: 158).

In Islamic history, *fitna* is associated with Hussayn's rebellion against the Ummayad caliphate. It ended in the battle of Karbala in the 7th century AD (i.e., the 1st century of Islam) in which Hussayn was killed. The result was the division into Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims known as "the great *fitna*" or schism. *Fitna* and the "morally justified" *thawra* ('revolution') are mirror images of one another. In the political context, *fitna* is translated as "chaos/mayhem/sedition" (Mallat 2015: 73–75).

To summarize, the word *fitna* is connected to the riotous or rebellious as well as to seductiveness and attraction. It applies to both contexts under examination in this chapter: the sexual and the political body. It contains both attraction and fear, especially the fear of losing control over norms and rules, the fear that an established peace will be upset. *Fitna* expresses oscillation and continues the previous chapters' theoretical development.

In employing the Arabic word *fitna* conceptually, this study follows others; one example is Stefania Pandolfo's aforementioned study that describes *fitna*'s plural meanings as "ambivalent and paradoxical". Pandolfo notes the oscillatory potential of *fitna* as a concept to explore: "between languages and cultures, between genders and categorizations" (1997: 5). *Fitna* clearly allows us to read cultural production through a local, instead of another imposed Western perspective, thereby supplementing the previous two approaches that focused on abjection and 'unlivability'.

Fitna contains a communicatory function in the realm of sexuality and seduction as well as in politics and protest. Both seduction as well as sedition imply a sender and a receiver of information. The following sections will explore what role bodies play in this communication. This offers a different perspective on Csordas' conceptualization of embodiment as

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8 Mernissi's book was published for the first time in the year that both Bouhdiba's *La Sexualité en Islam* as well as Hafsia's novel came out, showing that they all belong to the same temporal context.

9 Alan Sheridan's English translation *Sexuality in Islam*, published in 1985, is quoted here.

10 Compare Boutayeb, Rashid. 2013. "La violence du texte fondateur: Abdelkébir Khatibi et la question du corps en Islam." In *Scènes des genres au Maghreb*, edited by Claudia Gronemann and Wilfried Pasquier. 151–161; especially: 158.

separate to, yet in discursive engagement with, textuality to which this study has referred to time and again. It continues the previous chapter's concern with 'reading' bodies.

When read through *fitna*, the sexual bodies that this chapter addresses gain a political momentum. According to Pandolfo and Vigo's reading of her, *fitna* attributed to an individual, suggests a transgression of norms and turns the individual into a "figure of alterity" (1997: 5). This figure has the potential to be dangerous, at least for authorities keen on preserving their status quo (compare Vigo 2010: 163). It communicates dissent. The dissenting body puts into question who can represent it. The novels debate how the body should be written and what effects this writing might have, how sexuality or protesting bodies could be written in the context of taboos.

To close the section, the use of a term such as *fitna* is reflected upon with specific regard for the influence meta-language (i.e., concepts and keywords) has on the narrative of this study. The terms and theories employed for the analysis of the novels are powerful not only in the present chapter, but also regarding the previous chapters. They are capable of distorting the bodies and this text, even more so when they have a religious background. Language, although fluid and changeable, is always bound by expectations. In this chapter, using a term such as *fitna* is charged with tradition and its use can be perceived to be equally provocative, even derogatory. However, as Chibli Mallat argues, *fitna* lost its repressive meaning during the uprisings of 2010/2011.[11] The body and its functions gained freedom in social life. However, talking about *fitna* in its polysemy also highlights that there are traces of meaning that can neither be grasped nor taken back. *Fitna* can be an analytical tool that suggests the body's provocative aspect and highlights its empowerment on the one hand, while it also alludes to its investment with traditions and values on the other.

5.3   The Sexually Active Body. Potential, Provocation, and a Problem to Write

In the 1990s, the freedom of expression was not what it used to be in Tunisia, as was outlined in previous chapters. Alexander's *Tunisia. Stability and Reform* (2010) offers an explanation as to why society did not show greater unrest in the decade: "Tunisia's stability rested on two shaky foundations […]: fear of an Islamist takeover and conjunctural economic prosperity." Alexander rightly predicts, as the events of 2010/2011 showed, that: "[o]nce the conjuncture shifted, the economy would decline and people would become less willing to tolerate Ben Ali's authoritarianism and more willing to support opposition movements" (2010: 122). As per Gana's allusion which sees instances of subversion and protest in the breaking of social taboos, quoted above, traces of protest could be detectable in literary works that focus on the description of sexuality. This was especially true if they were published in the 1990s, when direct criticism was difficult. The 1990s and the first decade after the millennium, furthermore, must be understood as the underbelly of the events of 2010/2011. The centrality of sexuality needs to be further explored in order to get at the traces of protest. This is attempted in the following sections that analyze two novels, *Tammās* and *al-Jasad walīma,* which were published in the middle and at the end of the 1990s, a decade, this chapter aims to further understand, especially the state of political representation.

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11   What the present study does not intend by employing the term *fitna*, is to express a negative judgment against an individual or a behavior.

In the first section, which focuses on *Tammās*, *fitna* is developed following Pandolfo and Vigo; it is shown as a potential to distance oneself from social expectations and thereby challenge authorities. *Fitna* clearly gains a positive meaning in this. It allows the protagonist to struggle for the power to represent herself through the novel-within-the-novel. Her writing is based in *fitna* as the origin of dissent. In writing this novel, the protagonist shows that she can give new, individual meaning to her body and to her actions. She refuses to be constructed according to the likes of the authorities.

In the second section, which introduces and analyzes *al-Jasad walīma*, the central theme is an obsession with the writing of sex (compare Gana's quote). The struggle over representation is the struggle for the perfect representation and involves the need to find a suitable language to render sexuality in the protagonist's writing of his novel-within-the-novel. *Fitna* becomes apparent in *al-Jasad walīma* as a term that can be attributed to women for their positive seductiveness, but also for their cunning. From the male perspective, *fitna* keeps its ambivalent meaning and has implications on sexuality and married life. The female body has a problematic presence. However, a woman is shown to push back, especially concerning the representation of her body.

5.3.1   The Meaning of Sexuality in Tammās. Fitna as Potential

Aroussia Nalouti's *Tammās* ('Mutually touching', 1995) was discussed in *Chapter 1* with reference to the daughter's representation of her mother's health problems. In this section, the focus will be on how *Tammās* establishes the provocative sexual body and how dissent originates in the individual position. The writing of sexuality and the divergent self defies social expectations, and yet it is cast in a positive light. Therefore, the narrative perspective that creates this effect is central in this analysis.

Set during the Gulf War of 1990/1991, both thirty-year-old Zaynab's as well as her mother's experiences with their sexual bodies are narrated. The novel covers three decades, starting with Zaynab's alleged year of birth, centering around the year 1975, both the UN's year of the woman and the year that Bouhdiba published *La Sexualité en Islam*.

The novel highlights generational differences between Zaynab and her mother, specifically with respect to sexuality. The contrast between their experiences is striking; while the latter was neither able to take control of her body, to express it genuinely nor to feel pleasure (see *Chapter 1*), the daughter experiences sexuality actively and writes about it. This juxtaposition mirrors the beginning and the end of the protagonist's emancipation in Jelila Hafsia's *Cendre à l'aube*. Hafsia's novel forms the missing link that bridges the gap between mother and daughter in *Tammās*. The mother's behavior reflects conservative standpoints, whereas the daughter defies them. It is in the meeting of these extremes that the mother's situation seems particularly restricted and the daughter's position particularly free. As part of this freedom, Zaynab writes the novel-within-the-novel. She creates a protagonist who shares her first name and who has an affair with a married man, something that reflects her own relationship with the poet Maḥmūd Sulaymān. Both the writer Zaynab and the fictional Zaynab are unmarried and do not want to marry. Their fathers were abusive towards their mothers. Although the different parts of the narrative are separated from each other by chapter headlines, the similarity of the storylines causes disorientation, a purposeful doubling of identities that is already alluded upon in the novel's title, rendered here as 'Mutually touching', to signify the mutually touching narratives as well as the characters in the loving embrace that the narratives focus on. The narratives that touch, and yet are separate from, each other contains an oscillatory movement that gives protagonist Zaynab a distinct presence. It allows Zaynab to write herself and to represent the provocation

that her libertine sexual behavior contains in a positive light. Another function is high-lighted by Abir Kréfa. She writes that the inclusion of the framing device by author Nalouti is meant to clarify that what is being narrated is not autobiographical. Otherwise, this is a common accusation that immediately occurs around the works of female authors and can have negative repercussions for them (2011: 123).

The provocation in Zaynab's affair with a married man becomes apparent when *Tammās* is read in parallel with Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam*. According to Bouhdiba, marriage is a religious institution and forms the only framework in Islam that permits sexu-al relations between a couple. Society and existence are essentially based on the duality of the couple (compare 1985: 7, 14–15). Marriage consolidates the union of the *zawj* (pair, couple; and also: spouse), which contains a notion of both "the parity and the opposition of the sexes" (1985: 7). It is a duty: "for the man to assume his masculinity and for a woman to assume her full femininity" (1985: 30). This insists on heteronormativity (compare 1985: 11, 114), not just for marital relations, but for society in general. The hierarchical relation-ship between men and women in marriage that Bouhdiba posits was quoted previously.

Fatima Mernissi was referred to above with respect to her reading of the 'fear of fitna' as a fear of independent women. Behind this is a fear of women's sexuality and their seduc-tiveness. According to Mernissi, female sexuality is understood as following two parallel theories in Arab-Muslim society. In keeping with the first prevailing theory, men are active and aggressive while women are inactive and submissive. The second: "implicit theory, driven far further into the Muslim unconscious, […] sees civilization as struggling to con-tain women's destructive, all-absorbing power. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties" (2003[1975]: 32). The contra-diction between the perspectives is apparent and yet both influence the concept of *fitna*. As a result, it promotes passivity and submission among women and cautions men against female seduction.

For Bouhdiba's context of the mid-1970s, he detects that sexuality has meanwhile lost its regulatory instances. Sex is increasingly decoupled from marriage, and an alienation between religion and sexuality has occurred. Sexuality is no longer understood as a means of religious transcendence, as "a prayer" (1985: 248). This leads Bouhdiba to assess that its point of reference is lost and that its meaning is empty. Instead, sexuality "takes the form of a protest against the system of traditional values regarded as archaic" (1985: 243), a mean-ing that Bouhdiba does not perceive as relevant. It functions as a refuge, a flight from the world and the self (compare 1985: 245, 247). There is some truth to his assumption that sexuality functions as a stand-in to critique "traditional values", as will become clearer below. However, Bouhdiba's conclusion that behind the protest is a flight from the world cannot be true if concrete, social issues are critiqued via sexuality. Rather, an engagement with the world takes place through the body and sexuality. The body is suggested as a site of dissent. This is further explored with reference to *Tammās*.

Tammās juxtaposes the sexual experiences of mother and daughter, as was highlighted previously. The mother's experiences show that Bouhdiba's ideas about marriage are idea-listic and unreachable. Zaynab's mother was married off from the playground, a prepubes-cent girl unprepared for married life,[12] so much so that her first pregnancy and birth sur-

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12 In this she resembles the protagonist of *Cendre à l'aube*.

prise her (compare *Tammās* 56). Until the end of her life, she is revolted by sexuality. She feels disgust ("qaraf") for her husband's sagging flesh, his round belly, the scrawny legs, and his sweaty body odor (*Tammās* 57). She never experiences pleasure and only ever has an awareness of her body when it is in pain or physically over-worked (compare *Tammās* 61).

Her daughter Zaynab's situation is set out against this unfortunate background, which could not be more different only one generation later. Through higher education and work, Zaynab is not only economically independent from a male provider, but she is also his peer which allows for a completely different interaction. She has a sexual relationship, the beginning and end of which she herself determines. This love story is considered with hindsight since Zaynab and the married poet Maḥmūd are no longer together. A reflexive perspective is present in the novel's language as Jean Fontaine analyzes in his "'Arûsiyya Al-Nâlûtî: écrivaine tunisienne" (1997) in which he detects a strong presence of the semantic field of memory and remembrance. He counts 54 occurrences in which the self is debated such as 'asking oneself' (saʾala nafsahu) (compare 1997: 67–68), highlighting that events are told with hindsight and through the characters' reflections. The novel accordingly begins with Maḥmūd's memory of his past lover, Zaynab, who left him when she did not need him anymore (compare *Tammās* 21). His memory of her is sensual and includes her smell, the search for visual traces of her presence in a long-deserted summer house, and the desire to hear a specific kind of bird song. This search for traces left behind is an allusion to classic Arabic poetry's *aṭlāl* motif, according to which the nomad poet is standing over the ruins left behind in the desert after his beloved's tribe's departure and longingly reminisces in rhymes. The motif forms an archetype that has migrated into prose in modern Arabic literature (compare Kilpatrick 2000: 29–30). The reflexivity of the language not only points towards the past, but it also points towards the self, as Fontaine was quoted above. This is contrary to Bouhdiba's assumption of the flight into sexuality as a turning away from self and world.

The sex scenes in the framing narrative, as well as in the novel-within-the-novel, highlight an aspect which, according to Bouhdiba, was intended in classical ideas on sexuality: the total union with the sexual partner. Traditionally, he writes, "sexual pleasure" was meant to "bring us close to God", with whom a union was aspired (1985: 91, 18), brought to an extreme in Sufi practices (compare Mojaddedi's entry "Annihilation and abiding in God" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*). The first intimate scene in *Tammās* is part of the novel-within-the-novel and expresses a longing for the dissolution of the self, the crossing of the body's natural boundaries towards total bodily (and not primarily mental or emotional) unity:

> He pulled her towards him. […] The heaviness of skin and their very materialities kept them apart, they did not allow dissolution and substitution. Suffering moans escaped them and tears were shed to lament the realization of the impossible dream and all that they definitively and unreconcilably missed. However, the volcano of the body had broken out. Really, this is the other truth of the clay which does not know what to do to cross the limits that were given to human creatures… (*Tammās* 41)[13]

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13 Original quote:

Another scene between the writer Zaynab and Maḥmūd mentions her desire to incorporate herself into her lover's body and to 'sit on the darkest ground of his existence' (*Tammās* 84).[14] It alludes to her sadness when they reach sexual climax caused by the momentary unity that is lost directly afterwards (ibid.). In these two scenes, the wish for unity is certainly not a union with God.

What is particularly interesting for the present study is the role bodies and their materiality play in the descriptions. The physical materiality of the lovers' bodies is addressed both as the medium for the pleasure that they experience (in the skin that is heavy, the moaning and the tears that come from somewhere) and as a hindrance, a 'materiality that keeps apart' and prevents the lovers from becoming one entirely. However, the actual physical materiality of two bodies having sex is absent, apart from the initial movement between them: 'He pulled her towards him'. The rest of the encounter is narrated in metaphors, the allusions to 'dissolution' and the erupting volcano. In the absence of physical details, the narrative comes close to the desire to overcome the body, however, it also takes aspects of the scene with it into oblivion. Despite the focus on sexuality, the materiality of the body oscillates again, it is absent and present at the same time.

That the materiality of the body oscillates and is only alluded to suggests an anxiety about explicit detail and a decision to self-censor. This reflects the constraints that Kréfa discusses in "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes", especially with regards to female writers (compare 2011: 119). However, leaving out physical detail might also be part of the author's creative vision, it is impossible to say. In the near absence of the material body, the scenes contain the very spirituality and transcendence that, as Bouhdiba suggested, belong to the past. Maḥmūd exemplarily describes Zaynab's touch in the following way: 'When she moved her fingertips over his skin, inside him stars fell, his flesh and his bones took flight and he became light from the heaviness to turn into a strange feast of brightness and colour that she created' (*Tammās* 20).[15] This description again mentions the heaviness of the body which had been referred to as the 'clay' in the previous scene. This brings back to mind the Islamic version of the creation of the first human that was discussed in the *Introduction*. Despite the references, both official religion and Sufi tendencies of dissolution are absent from the scene in *Tammās*. Instead, new values take religion's place, such as the desire to realize the self in the other through passion.

The end of Zaynab and Maḥmūd's relationship contradicts the desire for dissolution in the other and reclaims the self. Zaynab wanted Maḥmūd for herself and was jealous of his daughter, since she could not understand their intimacy. So, eventually, she decides to end the relationship, to return to her true self (compare *Tammās* 86). Not only is it her decision to have a sexual relationship, but the decision to end this relationship is also hers. The first

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"يضغطها إليه [...] فتمنعهما كثافة الإهاب وأبعاد المادة التي لا تقبل مشاريع التحلل والحلول فيندّ عنهما أنين الشكوى وينهمر الدمع ينعى عجز الرغبة عن التحقق وعن احتواء ما يفرّ منها فرارا محتوما لا برء منه رغم استعار براكين الجسد... إنها حقيقة الطين الأخرى. التي لا تعرف كيف تجامل لتتجاوز الحد المرسوم للمخلوق البشري..."

14 Original quote:

"لتقرفص في سويداء كيانه..."

15 Original quote:

"كانت عندما تتمشى بأطراف ألأنامل على مساحة جلده، تتهاوى فيه الكواكيب والمجرّات ويهجره لحمه وعظمه ويتخفّف من ثقله لغُدُو مهرجانا غريبا من الضوء والألوان تتوالد من بعضها البعض في..."

allows her to feel and experience her own body to an extent that her mother never was able to, the latter is a sign of self-determination and differentiation from the other. The separation inspired her to process and communicate her experiences in writing and to give them her own meaning.

Zaynab clearly holds a position of power in the narrative. However, this position depends – at least partially – on the power that writing the novel-within-the-novel entails. Both the framing narrative and the novel-within-the-novel inform each other. Zaynab comments and reflects back on her storyline. She creates herself through her writing. However, responsibility for the act of writing is kept at a distance. Zaynab's hand is writing separately from her own will, she states (*Tammās* 64). In this, Zaynab's body produces language while this language creates a(nother) body that is her mirror image. In shaping her own image, Zaynab is the master of the reactions of fear and anger that her body (or rather her protagonist-mirror image) provokes. This explains the absence of critique in the novel – all possible irritation is replaced by the juxtaposition of mother and daughter and the discrepancies that this highlights. The absence of criticism for her non-normative behavior confirms Zaynab's relative power.

In the novel-within-the-novel Zaynab wonders:

> Was it not the word that created us and retrieved us from the slumber in the dreaming clay? Who created the word? .... Was it not speaking that called us here and realized itself through us? Were we not the literary embodiment of what wanted to be, one day when the world was quiet and in search for a form that realized itself within it. (*Tammās* 39)[16]

This is reminiscent of Surat Yāsīn 36:82[17] "when he wills something to be, His way is to say 'Be' – and it is". In both cases, living existence is created through language. Yet, in *Tammās* the speaking position does not refer to God; instead, this position is left blank. The act of speaking itself is highlighted, suggesting a decrease in the immediate importance of God in Zaynab's perspective.

The quote not only refers to the religious context, but also shows an awareness of literature to its own literariness. It is Zaynab, the protagonist of the novel-within-the-novel, who wonders whether it was 'the word that created' her, this word belongs to the author Zaynab. Stefania Pandolfo links the creative impetus of words and her concept of *fitna* by quoting her Moroccan interlocutor Ḥadda[18]: "History is born of words, marriage is born of words, selling, and buying originate in words, everything comes from words. The origin of fitna, the history of fitna is WORDS!" (1997: 90). In this, language appears as the basis of institutions like marriage and trade or discourses such as history. *Fitna* itself is shown as a discourse that originates in language. *Fitna* is a communicative situation. In the novel, how-

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16 Original quote:

"ألا تكون الكلمة في آخر الأمر هي التي صنعتنا وبعثتنا من سبات طينة هشة، كانت تحلم نفسها؟ مَن خلق الكلمة؟ [...] أفلا يكون الكلام هو الذي يقولنا فعلاً فيحقق ذاته عبرنا...فلا نعدو أن نكون حينئذ سوى تجسيد حرفي لما أراد أن يكونه في يوم من الأيام عندما كان العالم صامتا يبحث عن شكل يتحقق فيه."

The account of creation in the Old Testament is very similar: *Genesis* equally shows creation through speech, compare Gen. 1,1–31. Sexuality and creation are linked as the sex scene quoted above has shown.

17 The sura says in Arabic: إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئاً أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

The English translation is quoted from Abdel Haleem's *The Qur'an. A new Translation*, 2005[2004].

18 Pandolfo refers to him as the "protagonist of part 2" of her study, "an intellectual, a thinker" (1997: 7).

ever, writing is shown to be born from *fitna* and not vice versa. It is the sexual experience that inspired writing.

Both the sexual relationship and writing are portrayed as struggles for power. The love affairs contain a fear of the other. This is not so much a fear of feminine sexuality per se, but rather an anxiety caused by a loss of control; the other cannot be entirely controlled. In the novel-within-the-novel, Zaynab describes her protagonist as her lover's 'paradise and his hell, his dream and his nightmare' (*Tammās* 38).[19] She casts herself in this role. This is confirmed by Maḥmūd who is shown to fear for himself in light of Zaynab's ability to seduce him, which is apparent in the final scene. He receives a copy of Zaynab's novel and feels that she possesses seductive powers over him: 'The shiny wrapping was removed from the book that was still covered with both of his hands. The title already jumped at him, it danced in front of him in broken letters that imitated a clumsy childlike handwriting' (*Tammās* 119).[20] He

> gazed at her image on the back-cover. It quarrelled with him with its ironic, wicked expression; it hid – like he knew it to always do – under two dense brows.

> It attracted him once more… He drew the book towards him a second time. The same reckless curly hair of beloved perfection, he knew its feeling, the softness of its curves, the waves of its colours and the smell of its seasons and festivities. He traced her face with his fingers and stopped at her neck and began to whisper as if to continue a poem from his unfinished pieces:

> For the beloved hand, her memory!

> For the nose

> For the eye

> and for the heart above all, a howl

> that God has never heard

> and that…

> The coldness of certainty. (*Tammās* 121)[21]

Maḥmūd reacts physically to the book and suggests an interaction between himself and its materiality – the cover with its title that 'jumped at him'. Via her image, Zaynab communicates with him. The image invokes sensory memories and nostalgia for the lost lover's

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19 Original quote:
"كانت جنته وجحيمه، حلمه وكابوسه".

20 Original quote:
"انحسرت اللفافة الصقيلة عن الكتاب الذي ما زال يطبق عليه بكلتي يديه فنطّ العنوان صارخا، يتراقص أمامه بحروف متكسّرة تحاكي التعثر الطفلي في تشكيل الحرف".

21 Original quote:
"فانشدّ بصره إلى صورتها على قفا الغلاف تشاكسه بنظرتها الساخرة، المتخابئة تتخفّى ـ كما عرفها دوما ـ تحت ظلال الحاجبين الكثيفين. جذبته مرة أخرى... فاقترب ليقرّب الكتاب إليه ثانية، نفس الشَّعر الأهوج المجعّد في إتقان حبيب، يعرف ملمسه ونعومة تعرّجاته وتماوج ألوانه ورائحة فصوله ومهرجاناته. مرَر بأصابعه على وجهها وتوقّف عند العنق ثم أخذ يهمس وكأنّه يواصل نصًا من نصوصه المفتوحة: لليد العاشقة ذاكرتها! / للأنف / للعين / وللقلب فوق الكلّ عواء / لا يعرف الله. / ولا...... / بُرد اليقين."

body. He alludes to a struggle for power in his reading of Zeynab's expression, its irony, and the ability to draw him in. This is furthered in the title of Zaynab's novel ("Sirād li-fulūl al-dhākira"; 'An Account of the Debris of Memory'), which is based on Maḥmūd's poetry collection entitled "Fulūl al-dhākira" ('The Debris of Memory'). This is not only part of Maḥmūd's irritation, but suggests Zaynab's protest against the patriarchal discourse of writing. Zaynab is capable of shaping the memories of the relationship and of claiming the right to represent herself according to her own liking. This is reflected in an inner monologue given by Maḥmūd, another instance that shows writing's awareness of its own production:

> He knew that writing followed a different logic. It allowed it to borrow a face from here, an appearance from there and a story that was concocted from a number of imaginations and dreams […] in an order that suggests that it actually happened in this form and not in another. He also knew that behind a text there could be another text that accompanies the first and that can only be read from the perspective of their creator. (*Tammās* 122)[22]

The content's referentiality and reliability is unsettled in the above quote. In addition, *Tammās* shows that the right to represent oneself is not attained without struggles. Zaynab questions her entitlement to write a love story during the war (the Gulf War of 1990–1991). She responds that she writes for writing's sake, for the amusement it affords (compare *Tammās* 63). Writing becomes a flight from a turbulent world, that is reminiscent of Bouhdiba's warning against a sexuality without values, especially since Zaynab withdraws into the fiction of a former, intimate relationship. However, the narrative also contains a rebellion against the authorities of the world represented in her father. In the novel-within-the-novel, she challenges her father for abusing her mother. In a confrontational scene, she pulls at his *jallābiyya* (a long shirt-like garment), rips it from him revealing another layer underneath, then another and another. She equally pulls at his face and removes it. But behind it new faces appear until the father is merely a naked slender body with shaking knees. His friends close in around him and he disappears from Zaynab's view (compare *Tammās* 108–109). Author Zaynab comments on this scene in the novel-in-the-novel; her writing had gotten out of hand, although she did not want to let her father disappear before she settled her score with him. This suggests that the self in writing can be overcome by the body and by emotions. This is an assertion of the embodied self.

With the novel-within-the-novel's dedication to her father, author Zaynab suggests a rapprochement after losing him (compare *Tammās* 121). Yet, the details of such a rapprochement are not part of *Tammās*, leaving the only allusion in the dedication. A parallel is drawn between her father and Maḥmūd, her former lover. Upon reading the dedication, Maḥmūd feels personally addressed. The narrative, thereby, suggests that the reader considers the extent to which they are accomplices. Both of them certainly belong to the patriarchal authorities from which Zaynab emancipates herself.

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22   Original quote:
"كان يعرف أنّ الكتابة منطقا آخر، يُجوّز لها أن تستلف وجها منْ هذا وسحنة من ذلك وحكاية تختلق من مجموع أوهام وأحلام واستيهامات تتقاطع مع نُتَفٍ من حكايات الناس مع الناس وحكاياتَ الكُتَّاب معها، في نسق قد يوهم بأنَّها قد حدثت فعلا بذلك الشكل دون غيره. ولكنّه يدري أيضا أنَّ خلف النصّ يمكن نصّ آخر، يساوق الأوّل ولا يُقرأ إلا من طرف صاحبه".

Zaynab writes herself as a "figure of alterity", to use Pandolfo's description of *fitna*. She is positioned outside of traditional expectations for women (that dictate virginal marriage and sexual abstinence outside of marriage, for example). In directing her representation, she can steer the meaning of her body and its actions. Sexual activity is established as a positive realization of the self in its confrontation with her mother's miserable position. What could be negatively described as *fitna*, for breaking societal rules, actually attains a positive connotation and it becomes a potential. It highlights the oscillation that is contained in *fitna* in so far as *fitna* can be both controlling and liberating. That it is the latter in this chapter depends on Zaynab's power to represent herself. The writing of a divergent self against the self-doubt that the act of writing entails and against the authorities that wish to dictate a different representation communicates dissent.

A focus on sexuality, consequently, does not mean a flight from the world. However, in its portrayal, bodies were merely alluded to and were almost totally absent physically. This shows an unease with the materiality of the body in the writing of sex scenes. The following section focuses on the problematic of narrating the physical body in sexual situations, its communicatory and provocative value. *Fitna* will once more play a central role.

5.3.2   The Writing of Sexuality in *al-Jasad walīma*. A Problem of Language

Fredj Lahouar's *al-Jasad walīma* ('The body is a feast', 1999) addresses the difficulty of describing sexuality in literature, particularly with physical details.[23] In contrast to *Tammās*, where the body was shown to be hidden in metaphors during sex scenes, *al-Jasad walīma* faces the question directly. How can one address sexuality without 'immature allusions' or 'obscene repetition' is a central concern for narrator Muḥammad (*Jasad* 29).[24] Muḥammad is a teacher who wants to write 'a novel in which I describe the riddle of men and women like nobody before me and without falling into the pitfalls of tradition' (*Jasad* 29).[25]

The question of how to write sexuality brings Nouri Gana's observation back to mind, that connected the focus on sex and the female body with the body politic. In this, sexuality functions as a substitution. It is used as a realm in which dissent can be voiced when this is impossible in the political context, due to state repression. The question, therefore, also needs to concern how to write political opposition. The previous section's analysis, where intimacy was a site of female resistance, is extended here. The issue of writing is also further debated. *Al-Jasad walīma* no longer questions whether the writer should write sexuality, but rather how. In discussing this, *al-Jasad walīma* already writes about sexuality and it does so with an ambivalence that reflects the political situation.

Muḥammad states that he is 'armed with poetry' (*Jasad* 29)[26] when he writes about sexuality. He refers to classical erotological texts throughout the narrative, such as al-

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23 From its creation, the novel was perceived as provocative in its Tunisian context. Jean Fontaine remarks in his *Le roman tunisien a 100 ans* that it took more than three years before censorship let the book pass into publication in 1999 (compare Fontaine 2009: 182). In 2014, it was impossible for me to buy the book in a bookshop, and I eventually received a copy from the author.

24 Original quote:

"بالإشارات الفجّة والإحالات البذيئة".

25 Original quote:

"كتابة رواية أفصح فيها عن أسرار النساء والرجال بطريقة لم يسبقني أليها أحد، ودون الوقوع في المطبّات التقليدية".

26 Original quote:

Nafzāwī's *al-Rawḍ al-ʿaṭir fī nuzhat al-khāṭir* (in English known under the title *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights*) and *The Arabian Nights*.[27] These taught him about sexuality and offer inspiration for the description of sex. *The Perfumed Garden* is specifically interesting. The book is a manual to sexual pleasure, most likely from the 15th century and written for the chief minister to the Sultan of Tunis, and covers sexual techniques, available vocabulary for sexual organs, and treatments for an array of complications and ailments. When *The Perfumed Garden* was discovered by 19th century orientalists, it was misread as a "reasonably precise, accurate, and systematized knowledge of Mohammedan sexual life and thought"[28] as Jim Colville, translator of the 1999 English translation critiques (1999: vii). The present chapter does not wish to generalize the individual sexual fantasies that the novels contain.

Already al-Nafzāwī has dealt with the question of how to write sexuality. This is palpable in his introduction in which he recounts his commissioner's encouragement telling him that "only an idiot or half-educated fool would laugh at this or shut his eyes to it" (1999: 4). It is further present in the array of word lists offered for the sexual organs of men, women, and animals. Bouhdiba's *Sexuality in Islam* discusses *The Perfumed Garden* at length and addresses written obscenities and word lists in classical erotological texts specifically. In addition to seeing them as offering alternative expressions to facilitate speaking and writing about sex, he attributes them with the creation of an arousing effect:

> When we look at the content of Arab eroticism more closely, we cannot fail to be struck by the role invariably played by language [...]. It is as if the verbal evocation of sexual acts, gestures and organs were itself erotic. There is an erotology simply at the level of naming. The accumulation of words creates a veritable verbal hallucination. (Bouhdiba 1985: 146)

> In pronouncing obscene words, one provokes, catalyses, drains the libidinous. One expresses it, tames it, diffuses it. One also provokes others; with it one creates a veritable relationship or complicity; by conjuring up obscene situations, one frees oneself and frees it. (1985: 206)

Here, Bouhdiba explicitly highlights the provocation to be found in erotic terminology that comes into play when narrating sexual activities. Individual words, Bouhdiba writes, are

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"لأنني سأتسلّح بالشعر".

27 These are not the only intertextual references in *al-Jasad walīma*: medieval writer al-Jāhidh is referenced in the motto (*Jasad* 11); book two begins with a quote from George Bataille's *Ma Mère* (*Jasad* 85), a work that is infamous for its transgressive depiction of maternity and incest; book three begins with two verses attributed to the poet Abū Nuwās (*Jasad* 167) and all three parts ('books') invoke the Bible in their titles: "Sifr al-takwīn" (*Book of Genesis*, Arabic title for the first book of the Old Testament); "Sifr al-ghiwāyat" ('Book of Temptation'), and "Sifr al-amthāl (*Proverbs*, also part of the Old Testament) (compare Fontaine 2009: 183–184). In his discussion of the novel, Aḥmad al-Samāwī notes that there is not actually a separate chapter called 'temptation' in the Bible, compare his "al-Jasad walīma unshūda li-l-jasad" ('al-Jasad walīma a hymn for the body'), 2007: 39. By being singled out here, the importance of temptation – one of the meanings of *fitna* – is emphasized. Further Islamic references are scattered throughout the novel, starting with the names of the characters, Muḥammad and his wife ʿĀʾisha which mimics the prophet and his favorite wife, as well as Firdaws, see footnote 30 below.

28 This is a quote from A.H. Walton's introduction (1963) to Richard Burton's translation of *The Perfumed Garden* and reflects a certain misunderstanding in reading the manual. The opinion expressed is countered by contemporary Arab commentators who, according to Colville, complain about the "choice of a book of this kind to represent Arabo-Muslim culture" (1999: ix).

already placeholders for actions; he highlights the physical aspects of words when they are pronounced and the pleasure they actually produce (compare 1985: 206). As an example, some of the names for penis suggested by al-Nafzāwī in Colville's translation include: "stud, […] jingle bells, stroker, shifty, poker, basher, knocker, thirst-quencher" (1999: 39).

It can be assumed that al-Nafzāwī's word lists have not only been an inspiration for the narrator in *al-Jasad walīma* but also for the actual author Fredj Lahouar, given the overall variety of the novel's vocabulary shows. Fredj Lahouar's publishing activities also show an interest in classical Arabic erotological works.[29]

The stories in *The Perfumed Garden* highlight the importance of sexual satisfaction in marriage to keep wives from being unfaithful (compare Colville 1999: x). Disregarding this assumption's misogynist bias, which suggests that sexual gratification is all that binds a wife to her husband and that solely blames women for failed marriages; sexual neglect forms a key theme in *al-Jasad walīma*. The novel describes the affair between the narrator, Muḥammad, and his colleague Firdaws.[30] Both are married to other partners and are unfulfilled. The narrative is intertwined with sections of the novel Muḥammad writes in which the protagonist is also having an affair with a woman called Firdaws. This complicates the narrative; what is fiction and what reality on the level of the narrative is uncertain. Jean Fontaine describes this effect most suitably and states that: 'in Muḥammad's hands, Firdaws becomes a book' (2009: 183).[31] The narrative is primarily written from a male perspective, interspersed with female commentary. In these, Firdaws comments on the words and descriptions that have been employed, but it is not certain whether this is Firdaws the character of the novel-within-the-novel or Firdaws the colleague. The figure of Firdaws oscillates and, therefore, the differentiation between fiction and reality in the novel does as well. The reader cannot easily make out what is supposed to be real and what is literature on the content level of *al-Jasad walīma*.

Muḥammad has four children with one on the way. He justifies his affair by arguing that it enables him to write (compare *Jasad* 82). Firdaws offers him inspiration through her body, leaving: 'traces that allowed me [*him; C.P.*] to fill some stubborn pages that lay dormant on my [*his; C.P.*] desk for more than four years' (*Jasad* 73).[32] He claims to need a juxtaposition of passion to the daily life with his wife in which there is neither room to talk and enjoy sexuality, nor for his literary endeavors, showing again the connection between sexual, personal, and literary expression.

All of the characters in *al-Jasad walīma* have complicated relationships with sexuality. Fascination and aversion are simultaneous, which is reminiscent of the meaning of *fitna* and of oscillatory movement in general. Firdaws is deprived of intimacy by her husband. He has

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29 He published annotated editions of several Arabic manuscripts. To mention just one example, he edited and commented upon Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's work on overweight women in 2003 *Kitāb al-yawāqīt al-thamīna fī ṣifāt al-samīna* ('The book of gemstones of the plump kind'), Hammam Sousse: Dār al-mīzān li-l-nashr.

30 The name Firdaws is a reference to Islamic imaginations of paradise (mentioned in this respect in the Qurʾān in Surat al-kahf 18:107 and Surat al-muʾminūn 23:11). Firdaws is one of the names for paradise in addition to, for example, 'al-janna'. Leah Kinberg's entry "Paradise" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan* mentions that in different Qurʾanic commentaries Firdaws is considered to refer to the highest level of paradise.

31 Original quote: "Entre les mains de Mohamed, Firdaws devient un livre".

32 Original quote:

"تُسعفني بما أمْلأ به بعض الصفحات العنيدة التي تنام على مكتبي منذ أكثر من أربع سنوات."

a mental illness and is afraid of her body and its 'eternal dirtiness' as well as of the 'animalism' it might awaken within him. Firdaws herself states that she does not experience pleasure a while into her relationship with Muḥammad. This assertion is not entirely reliable, since it is presented through Muḥammad's mediation who had previously portrayed Firdaws as being in search of pleasure. His representation is contradictory. The narrator himself describes sexuality as abominable ("baghīḍ"). He explains his perspective through his aversion against disorder ("fawḍā") and the belief that sex causes disorder (compare *Jasad* 52). Set against these complicated backgrounds is the narration of the budding affair between Muḥammad and Firdaws that at least excites them enough to betray their respective partners.

Muḥammad's ambivalence regarding sexuality is reflected in the juxtaposition of wife and lover, family life and individual expression. The juxtaposition alludes to the stereotypical incompatibility of motherhood and sexual attraction. Marriage and family life are described as the end of love while bodily liquids gain importance: milk, pus, and the children's pee (compare *Jasad* 31). The description of abjection as the leaking (female) body (compare *Section 3.3* above) comes back to mind and here its maternal aspects in particular are highlighted.[33] Physical descriptions of his wife ʿĀʾisha are actually absent from the narrative. Muḥammad thinks that she does not value her body and blames her for not registering his lack of attention for her (*Jasad* 27). In Muḥammad's representation, she is not at ease with sexual topics or words: 'she drowned in laughter when I used obscene words in front of her […]. From time to time she wanted that I refreshen her memory regarding some of them or regarding their details that she did not quite remember' (*Jasad* 27).[34]

In contrast to ʿĀʾisha, Firdaws is described sensually. Her face is an expression of happiness that floods through the dark brown color of her skin. When she sits and speaks, she presses her breasts against the table (compare *Jasad* 54). These descriptions, the glowing and the pressing, suggest a propulsion from the inside to the outside, towards the narrator. The attraction he feels for Firdaws is present in the description of her body and this appears to be what causes it.

Muṣṭafā al-Kīlānī writes that the two women constitute two different sides of femininity that are encountered by a male who is haunted by tradition and liberation (compare 2007: 26). In another review, Aḥmad al-Samāwī notes that Muḥammad does not entirely refuse ʿĀʾisha; instead, she stays on his mind at all times. The novel itself, he argues, defends the institution of marriage as a cover for otherwise illegitimate acts (2007: 40) and thereby stands between tradition and modernity.[35] The wife is stuck in an abject environment. Fatima Mernissi writes about the idea that sexuality is polluting and claims that it is what pre-

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33 Although Firdaws's husband's aversions for her go a lot further than Muḥammad's alienation from his wife as a mother, he shares the disgust for 'secretion and rotten blood' ("الرشح والدماء اللآسنة", *Jasad* 108), which suggests a general fear of the female body's natural functions.

34 Original quote:

"تغرق في الضحك إذا نطقتُ أمامها ببعض الكلمات النابية [...] وكانت تطلبُ مني من حين لآخر أن أذكِّرها ببعضها أو بجزئيات فيها لم تعها تماما."

35 In his review Aḥmad al-Samāwī highlights a difference between the two women already in their names, ʿĀʾisha meaning 'the living' and alluding to life, while Firdaws is a reference to the hereafter (compare 2007: 39).

vents true intimacy between husband and wife and introduces God's presence and social control (compare 2003[1975]: 113).

The problematic to narrate the body that is sexually active becomes apparent in the sex scenes between Firdaws and Muḥammad. The narrator Muḥammad cannot free himself from inhibitions when he narrates them. Their first intercourse is not described at all and is instead replaced by a section on Muḥammad's efforts to open the door to his friend's flat where the rendezvous is meant to take place. This is a reference to defloration and sex, an interpretation the narrative suggests itself by describing the opening of the door as a 'defloration of the threshold' ("iftiḍāḍi l-ʿataba", *Jasad* 80). The actual intimacy disappears into a cryptic sentence: 'Then there was what was and what I do not remember anymore, it was considered good, so do not ask about the rest' (*Jasad* 84).[36] Yet, the narrative continues to address the gap that the missing sex scene leaves. If someone were to ask him about why the scene is omitted, Muḥammad asks:

> [h]ow were I to reply to such an impertinence? How would I quiet down such shameless desire? The best is probably, Firdaws, if I left it upon you to reply to this nonsense, or would it not? Since there is no narrator better than Firdaws, whose tongue had been sharpened by sin. (*Jasad* 84)[37]

The refusal to narrate cannot be taken entirely seriously, when only four pages later he describes another scene in greater detail. Firdaws: 'removed my hand from her most sacred and bit me again so that I lifted my hand from her behind or another shame of the *fitna* that lay in front of my eyes. […] My hand took the chance to be completely dedicated, took off cheekily, undisturbed by anything, and plunged into the thicket' (*Jasad* 88).[38] While this scene does not contain an anxiety to address intimacy, it is still metaphorical.

In the scene, Firdaws either is or possesses *fitna*. The expression, as well as other derivatives of the same root f-t-n, are present in more instances in the novel. When Muḥammad considers talking to Firdaws for the first time she is already "al-fātina" (a fascinating, charming, seductive girl; compare *al-Jasad* 58). Later, right before she approaches him: 'Firdaws was on that day a burning *fitna*' (*Jasad* 63),[39] which should be read as 'temptation' and suggests the pains it takes him to restrain himself. Firdaws is constructed as a temptress, as the factor that leads Muḥammad astray, away from his wife. A communicatory impulse has been attributed to her body that is read as alluring, although it might not be interested in tempting anyone.

The concept of *fitna* speaks to the novel's Tunisian readership on different levels (sexual, religious, political) as was outlined in *Section 5.2* and it conveys affects such as arousal,

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36 Original quote:

"ثم كان ما كان ممّا لست أذكُره، فظُنَّ خيرا ولا تسأل عن البقِيَّة."

37 Original quote:

"بماذا أردُّ على هذا الطاول؟ بماذا أفحم هذا النهم الوقح؟ الأفضل فردوس أن أفوّض لك أمر على هذا الثرثار وأمثاله، أليس كذلك؟ فليس كفردوس خطيبا إذا شحذ الغيُّ لسانه."

38 Original quote:

"تطوح بيدي خارج حرمها، وتقرصني ثانية حتى أفك قبضتي عن ردفها أو شيئا آخر في الفتنة التي تستلقي أمام عيني [...] فتقتنم يدي فرصة الانهماك وتنطلق لا يردُّها شيء، تتجاسر وتخوض في الأدغال."

39 Original quote:

"كانت فردوس يومها فتنة متأجّجة."

fascination, fear, and abjection. By referring to Firdaws as *fitna*, she is equated with her body as it is seen from the outside. When viewed positively, her attractiveness is confirmed. Yet, she is also not more than this. Her entire relationship with Muḥammad is a result of her perception as *fitna*. It reinforces her own aversion for her embodiment, something that was suggested above as her inability to feel pleasure. It is extended in a longing for death that is revealed over the course of the narrative. She wishes to escape being married to a husband who is disgusted by her body, a relationship in which she is again equated with her body.

Literary critiques emphasize the role of the body in *al-Jasad walīma*. Referring to a statement by one of Muḥammad's friends that: 'the body is the religion of the century, even if the haters hate it' (*Jasad* 37),[40] Muṣṭafā al-Kīlānī comments that the body is everything in the novel: 'as soon as the body realizes this, it frees itself from its inherited heaviness by following the lightness that is the basis of all being and existence' (al-Kīlānī 2007: 27)[41]. In contrast to *Tammās*, where the heaviness was found in the physical materiality of bodies, it is seen here in the institutions that regulate the bodies' actions. The body, for example, transcends marriage and yet it does not entirely overcome tradition and its confrontation with modernity.

'The body' that appears at the center of the novel, as well as in the reviews, seems to be a neutral, ungendered body. That a neutral body is an unrealized ideal was discussed in *Chapter 1* and this is confirmed upon closer scrutiny of *al-Jasad walīma*. The novel does not feature a generic body after all. Instead, it opens up a difference between male and female bodies by suggesting that female bodies have the potential to disgust. Both Muḥammad and Firdaws's husband are appalled by the naturally bleeding and lactating female body and exclude it from the liberating experience of sexuality. Both breast milk and menstrual blood highlight the abjection that is connected to the maternal (see *Chapters 3* and *4* above).[42] However, maternity has different meanings for the two men concerned in *al-Jasad walīma*. Firdaws's husband finds childlike consolation in her breasts. Muḥammad, in a contradictory move, distances himself from his wife's maternity and cherishes Firdaws for its absence. While it is the novel's alleged goal to describe light and darkness surrounding the body (compare *Jasad* 13), female bodies are partially silenced by marginalizing aspects that are perceived to be abject. This is reflected in Firdaws's longing to escape her body, while insisting on the importance of her physical needs. *Fitna* contains the oscillation between fascination and abjection.

The title of the novel contains this ambivalence. Particularly the word "walīma", 'feast' or 'banquet', is read by the characters differently and causes conflict. Firdaws is said to have coined it for her intimate meetings with Muḥammad (compare *Jasad* 90). At another instance, she critiques Muḥammad for using it to refer to her (body). Firdaws ends the af-

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40 Original quote:

"الجسد [...] ديانة هذا العصر، ولو كره الكرهون."

41 Original quote:
"واللحظة تأكّد هذا المعنى بدأ الجسد يتحرّر من "ثقله" الموروث بانتهاج سبيل "الخفّة" التي هي أساس الكائن والكيان."

42 Malek Chebel in *Le corps dans la tradition au Maghreb* addresses the taboo of menstrual blood with which contact has to be avoided. At the same time, he mentions its healing powers (1984: 97–98). Aversion against menstrual blood or breastmilk is not specific to Tunisia or the Arabo-Islamic world as ongoing debates about breastfeeding in public show, as well as artworks created with menstrual blood.

fair by telling him that 'no matter how much prestige I win in your opinion, I will always stay the whore, or the 'walīma' as you like to say' (*Jasad* 185).[43] This shows the difficulty of representation right down to the specific choice of words that are said or written and heard or read from different perspectives. It is a topic that the novel addresses in several instances. For example, the narrator questions the audacity of his own writing and in this addresses the reader:

> She let her hand wander to a certain place of me. Some of you will certainly presume that I mean my private parts ("'awratī"). I prefer to leave a gap in place of this stupid expression. The question that is necessary in this case is: Why do I have an aversion against an expression like this? Do you [*readers*; C.P.] know why? (*Jasad* 99)[44]

Instead of the readership responding to the question, Firdaws replies by commenting on the novel-within-the-novel with what can be read as a critique of *al-Jasad walīma* as a whole with regards to its writing of sexuality:

> 'I advise you to rip up all those pages', Firdaws told me briefly as she returned the manuscript of my novel *Firdaws* [...]. 'For love and for sex there are laws and rites, not in what the past centuries have written, but in our pulse today, in the recklessness of our tongues, the defiance of our phantasies and in our courage that is carved from flesh – from its hills and hollows – for which the soul pines away passionately.' (*Jasad* 99)[45]

Here several issues become apparent. Firdaws is the first reader of the novel and is a place-holder for actual readers, offering an example of how one might react to what has been written. However, it is not clear whether Firdaws' manuscript is the same as the narrative that actual readers of the novel can access. She does not refer to a specific scene or quote. Her commentary to write from today's perspective, instead of the traditional perspective, continues the discussion about how sexuality should be written. For her, the writing of sexuality should begin in a courage that is based in the body, a writing from the body. Firdaws gives a second reply further below commenting on the word "'awra": 'oh, how superficial is the word. And superficial is what it contains, in that it expresses the monstrosity that it tries to hide from' (*Jasad* 131).[46] Here, she suggests that describing the pudendum through a word whose lexical meaning contains shamefulness (as is the case with *'awra*) does not succeed in covering up its perceived 'monstrosity'. She asks Muḥammad to speak

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43 Original quote:

"مهما حزتُ عندك من مكانة، فسأظل دائما المومس، أو الوليمة كما يحلو لك أن تقول".

44 Original quote:

"وهي تجيل يدها في مكان ما مني. سيتوهم بعضكم أنني أقصد عورتي طبعا. أنا أفضل أن أترك بياضا مكان هذه اللفظة السخيفة في هذا المقام بالذات. والسؤال الذي لا بد منه في هذه الحالة هو: لماذا أستنكف من كلمة كهذه؟ ـ هل تدرون لماذا؟"

The 'you' of my translation refers to the second person plural, as the Arabic original shows, and it implicates the readers.

45 Original quote:

"أنصحك بتمزيق كل هذه الأوراق. قالت لي فردوس باقتضاب وهي تعيد لي مخطوط كتابي رواية فردوس لأن [...] للحب والجنس نواميس وطقوس، ليست في ما خطته القرون الماضية، بل هي في نبضنا اليوم، وفي نزق ألسنتنا وفي جموح خيالنا و في جرأتنا تنحت من اللحم ـ من نتوئه ومغايضه ـ ما تذوب له الروح وجدا."

46 Original quote:

"العورة! ما أسخف هذه الكلمة! وأسخف ما فيها أنها تفصح عن الفحش الذي تُحاول أن تتستَّر عليه".

about the body with more clarity, employing words that man and woman might in fact say to each other in private, instead of seeking refuge in poetic expressions and artificial metaphors. Muḥammad should: 'call the things by their names' (*Jasad* 126).[47] The 'forbidden' ("al-harām"), according to her, cannot be tamed in kitsch ("bahraj"). She alludes to something that cannot be represented which suggests the futility of the endeavor of perfect representation that Muḥammad aspires to. While Firdaws' presentation as an appreciated reader and critic allows a second voice to appear within the narrative, the power to represent remains with the narrator. Although Firdaws narrates her own experiences in sections, these are mediated by Muḥammad. She may write notes into her diary in private; Muḥammad as the man, however, writes a novel and directs the narrative. The inclusion of Firdaws's stories, and Muḥammad's expressed doubt in them, further strengthen Muḥammad's position as opposed to Firdaws's.

By arguing that the language is not ordinary enough, Firdaws draws attention to the vocabulary employed in *al-Jasad walīma*. The vocabulary is more varied, and of a higher literariness than what was employed in many of the other works examined in this study, especially when bodies, emotions, or sexuality are explained. The following scenes display embellishments where simpler word choices were refuted for precision and poetic sound. Muḥammad describes a prostitute's body: 'it was still wrapping me, connecting in the hiding place of affliction, her tender hand was on my back and a smile – oh how moist its flourishing! – quivered on two dry, firm lips of pallid colour' (*Jasad* 47).[48] Another example is an early meeting between Muḥammad and Firdaws in which the development of mutual feelings leads to sexual attraction:

> The morning was at its peak. An all-engulfing sun with contagious vigour spread heat in the entire being. The soul clamoured in delighted viciousness and the hand longed for the hand that lay close to the breast. […] I talked and Firdaws talked a lot and the conversation seemed palatable, serene, smooth. In its course, wishes and desires were exchanged. And passions, too. […] The flesh moaned in complaint […] and Firdaws kindled the fire as she flashed smiles and laughter. What she said turned in her throat like a slow song before it struck me as flood and folly. (*Jasad* 71–72)[49]

Even in translation, the exceptional vocabulary and poetic imagery is apparent. The novel deliberately draws inspiration from classical works to describe the modern-day affair between Firdaws and Muḥammad. In so doing, it claims a language that is closely invested with literary as well as religious tradition and uses it to refer to the characters' sexual exploits. The divide between modernity and tradition is challenged through language. Abir

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47 Original quote:

"تُسمِّي الأشياء بأسمائها".

48 Original quote:

"الجسد وهو لا يزال يلتحفني ملتئما على مكْمن البلوى، ويده رفيقة على ظهري، وابتسامةٌ ـ كم كانت نضرة ندِيًّا! ـ ترتجفُ فوق شفتين جافتين يابستين حائلتي اللون".

49 Original quote:

"كان الصباح في ذروته. شمس غامرة تشيع في الكون حرارة في عُنفُوان العدوى، فتضجُّ الروح سرور شرسا، وتتوق اليد إلى اليد ربضت قريبا من النهد. [...] وكنت تحدثتُ وتحدثتْ فِردوس كثيرا، وبدا الحديث سائغا رائقا سلسا ومن خلاله تهادت الأماني والرغبات. والشهوات أيضا. [...] جأر اللحم بالشكوى [...] وفردوس تُؤَجِّج النار وهي تتألَّق ابتساما وضحكا، ويتأَوَّد الكلام في حلقها كالنشيد المتمهِّل قبل أن يُبادر إليَّ طوفانا وهوسا."

Kréfa describes this as an endogenizing of what is understood as modernity (i.e., its localization through what is inherited) (2011: 111). The use of *fitna* as a category in this chapter reflects this, since it is also a traditional term that has been recontextualized here to describe modern Tunisian novels.

By arguing that Muḥammad portrays the couple with dialogues that are not life-like, Firdaws furthermore addresses his use of high-level language (*fuṣḥā*), instead of the Tunisian dialect that would actually be spoken between couples in private. The novel pre-empts this by stating in the foreword, in defense of its vocabulary, that language has to be used to exist and to persevere (compare *Jasad* 11). That this is mentioned suggests a certain insecurity around language registers and language choice that is the result of Tunisia's multilingualism, where the choice of one language over the other is always political. The core text comments upon the discrepancy between life and literature and that there are things that cannot be said in literature, although they are said in life (compare *Jasad* 58). The opposite is also true. Literature forms a specific realm in which unusual expressions can be employed and in which 'problematic' issues can be addressed. This is precisely what forms literature's potential for dissent.

The last remark returns the section to Gana's observation regarding the obsession with narrating sex as a placeholder for a discussion of the body politic. In the novel, the search for the perfect representation of sexuality is highlighted. It occurs at a time at which the body politic could not be openly addressed. This could also allude to the author's search for a workable representation of the political.

In the search for an ideal representation of sexuality, different opinions were taken by Firdaws and Muḥammad. A pluralism of opinions exists in the novel and this is also a key element of dissent. There is only one scene in which actual political dissent is being alluded to. Firdaws is violently questioned and sexually abused by officials. They force her to sit on a bottle because she is suspected of being linked to an oppositional demonstration and possesses a problematic book (*Jasad* 149–152). The political critique in the scene is marginalized while the sexual violence that occurs is highlighted. The sexual stands in for the political. What the sexual elements show here is that society under authoritarian regimes is unfree and victimized with perverse methods.

5.4   The Politically Active Body. Protest and its Narration in *al-Ghurillā*

The novel in focus in the present section is the only work in the textural corpus that was published after the Tunisian uprising of winter 2010/2011. *Al-Ghurillā* by Kamel Riahi (2011, 'The Gorilla') presents a body that is problematic or provocative in the second sense that this chapter addresses; namely, it involves a protesting body. How this body develops its protesting presence, how it communicates despite being silent, and how it spreads dissent are all topics that are explored. The discourse of political engagement in literature is further addressed and a return to the uprising is also made.

Politics, similar to sexuality, is a discourse in which authorities attempt to control individuals against their own wishes of self-expression. The similarity between breaking social norms regarding accepted sexuality and stating one's criticism in protest, however, lies not only in the act of defiance, but in the centrality of bodies with which this defiance is acted

out. In both cases, bodies form communicative mediums.[50] They instill fear in authorities, a fear of losing control, which the authorities then attempt to regulate through the very bodily practices of individuals (e.g., by prohibiting participation in demonstrations). The proximity of sexual attraction and the instigation of upheavals was already contained within the different meanings of *fitna*.

Al-Ghurillā suggests that it was mainly written before and during the uprising of 2010/2011. However, hindsight has to be assumed, at least for the final draft. The yardstick here shall not be to prove that a work of cultural production was able to announce the uprising – aspects of dissent were shown to exist since the 1980s, as the previous chapters have shown – rather the retrospective perspective should be taken for what it is worth. *Al-Ghurillā* comments directly upon text-external events to which the novel makes the connection via its afterword. It no longer reflects the same oppressive background in which sociopolitical criticism was nearly impossible and was, therefore, moved to other thematic contexts such as sexuality and the female body. The novel offers a valid end for this study: It shows how dissent is no longer about the individual, but about how the masses relate to an embodied individual and are motivated to act. It forms the last piece of an embodied understanding of the country that offers a relevant background against which to read events such as the uprising of 2010/11.

Kamel Riahi's novel *al-Ghurillā* witnesses a Black Tunisian[51] climbing the clock tower in central Tunis and refusing to come down. Crowds of onlookers gather while he, who carries the nickname al-Ghurillā (the Gorilla),[52] is on the tower. Among them are people whose path in life he has crossed. Together, they narrate his story that is dominated by racial discrimination and social marginalization. His occupation of the tower is physical; it is the intrusive presence in a space to which access is regulated by state authorities. Although al-Ghurillā does not state any specific demands, this presence is understood as protest immediately with the authorities trying to remove him. The Gorilla's body is problematic in different ways. Firstly, it has entered into an otherwise policed space. Secondly, it belongs to a marginalized community in Tunisia that thereby gains visibility. Thirdly, the authorities do not succeed in ending the disruption that the occupation entails, which implicates their power. Eventually, they electrocute and shoot him to regain control over their space. Al-Ghurillā falls from the tower like 'a glowing piece of amber' ("jamratan"). The

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50 The body as a medium in the uprisings of 2010/2011 and their aftermaths is discussed by Marwan M. Kraidy in his articles "The Revolutionary Body Politic: Preliminary Thoughts on a Neglected Medium in the Arab Uprisings" (2012), "The Body As Medium in the Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities" (2013) as well as in his monograph *The Naked Blogger of Cairo. Creative Insurgency in the Arab World* (2016).

51 This term is taken from the novel as well as from different publications that address the social situation of Tunisians with sub-Saharan heritage. It should not remain unquestioned, especially due to the intangibility of the concept of race (see below). Critics such as Stéphanie Pouessel doubt its validity; compare her "Les Tunisiens noirs. Entre stéréotypes, racisme et histoire: regards sur l'actualisation d'une identité 'marginalement intégrée'" (2012).

52 The nickname was given to him during his childhood, due to his dark skin and long 'ape-like' arms. The character's real name is Ṣāliḥ which, however, is rarely mentioned in the novel. To follow the novel's mores and avoid confusion, the protagonist is also referred to as the Gorilla or al-Ghurillā, here. With this, no racist judgment is intended.

onlookers are moved to rise up, chant, and blame the authorities for committing murder (*Ghurillā* 178–179).[53] Dissent is out in the open.

The concept of *fitna* can describe the protagonist's outsider position as well as explain the seductive effect that his climbing of the tower has on passers-by. The communicative impetus contained in the concept is further highlighted in the course of this section. It not only implicates the seductress, but also the seduced (i.e., the onlookers and the authorities in addition to the Gorilla). Something that is also relevant in this analysis are the notions of protest and performativity, especially as they are expressed and linked to visibility in Judith Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015).

Before protest in the novel can be discussed, it needs to be highlighted that the Gorilla's occupation of the tower is not definitively determined as such in the novel: His intentions and driving forces are not clarified, therefore it is possible that he did not climb the tower in an initial act of protest. Can and should the protagonist's behavior, therefore, be read as protest? Instead of offering an ultimate reply, in what follows I argue that the climbing of the tower forms a protest in so far as a communicative social event is produced between the Gorilla and the onlookers. The onlookers read the climbing as protest, and it is them who actually unquestionably protest at the end of the novel.[54]

The structure of the communicative event that protest contains is not unlike a seduction. Through a protest, one party is looking to be convinced by another party to perceive of an idea in a certain way (as wrong, unsupportable, or in other cases as necessary, preferable, etc.). Harry Pross highlights the double address that protest necessarily targets, concerning the establishment against which the protest is directed and those who are supposed to be won over. This draws attention to the role played by the authorities in producing protest in the novel. All three sides are connected in Pross's model by the idea or action that provokes the protest, a specific content against or in favor of which the protest has demands (compare Pross' *Protestgesellschaft. Von der Wirksamkeit des Widerspruchs*, 1992: 18–19). The Gorilla does not state any demands that he has. According to the above description, his presence on the tower does not form a protest. Some even state that a goal or demand is required to mobilize others to protest (see, e.g., Virgl 2011: 45, 75).

Judith Butler questions the necessity of definite demands to turn assemblies into protests in her *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*[55] (2015, compare e.g., 18) and instead highlights:

> [I]t matters that bodies assemble, and that the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse, whether written or vocalized. Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor predis-

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53 The chants are the very same ones that were heard during the uprising in Tunisia which suggests an a posteriori perspective.

54 See my previous discussion of the novel and the notions of protest it contains in Pardey, Charlotte. 2015. "A Body of Dissenting Images. Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's Novel *Al-Ghurillā* Read as an Example of Engaged Literature from Tunisia." In *Commitment and Beyond*, edited by Friederike Pannewick and Georges Khalil. 273–284. This present chapter will go into further detail regarding the narration of protest and its connection to visuality.

55 In this work, Butler refers to the uprisings that took place in the Arab world from Winter 2010/2011 onwards and the assemblies that occurred as part of them, which makes the work particularly suitable for the present analysis.

cursive. In other words, forms of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make. (Butler 2015: 7–8)

Her thesis is that: "acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political" (Butler 2015: 9). Assembling is "already an expressive action", by highlighting the existence of oppositional groups or individuals. The embodied action to which Butler refers – embodied is to be read here as 'via the body' – forms a central concern for the present analysis. In the novel, it is unclear whether or not the Gorilla's physical presence on and the people's physical presence below the clock tower is connected by a common goal or demand. The Gorilla's silence, however, emphasizes the impact that his body and its behavior have. As the onlookers' reaction shows, outspoken demands are not necessary for his occupation of the tower to provoke an assembly of people. At the end of the novel, when the onlookers protest against the mistreatment of the Gorilla, they clearly share a common complaint.

Intended protest or not, the Gorilla's climbing of the tower is an 'expressive action', and it has performativity without employing verbal language. Butler calls similar acts the positing of the "'right' to appear" (Butler 2015: 50–51). The Gorilla's refusal to be invisible constitutes an attack against the control that the authorities seek to keep up. He gains access to an even greater visibility by catching the attention of the media. News of the clock tower's occupation travels to television broadcasts[56] which increases the space in which the Gorilla is visible. The television broadcast frames the Gorilla as a protester, especially since the commentator wonders what his demands might be.[57]

The Gorilla's occupation of the clock tower is not intended to show how a person willingly ignites protest. Rather, the novel portrays how an individual act gets out of hand. It becomes a protest in the interpretation of others for the people below the tower, for the authorities, and for the media. The perceived protest, however, facilitates another protest, that of the people who watch the authorities become violent in their treatment of the Gorilla. The Gorilla's otherwise private pain of exclusion becomes visible as physical pain caused by the violence of the authorities. The onlookers take the Gorilla's side. They defend the integrity and inviolability of the human body against the state oppression that the authorities disregard.

In the previous two novels, the protagonists and narrators were shown to struggle for their own representation. In contrast to this, the Gorilla does not try to represent himself in words at all, and instead is reflected in the absence of demands or explanations for his actions. The Gorilla is his embodiment, an "existential immediacy", that is at odds with any "objectified abstraction" (Csordas 1994: 10). He gives up his representation and the meaning of what is happening is something that is left up to the onlookers to decide, which is reflected in the structure of the novel itself, it is the onlookers who tell his story after all. This suggests a change in the role and self-perception of the individual between the 1990s and 2010s that needs to be further explored. To begin with, it can be determined that the

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56 Mobile phone technology is present in the novel in text and voice, but not as a means to film and upload material to the internet. There is no reference to social media.

57 The reference to the role played by the media in the production and propagation of public political expression and protest alludes to the function the media had in uprisings in the Arab world in 2010/2011. More details about the Tunisian case can be found in Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle's aforementioned chapter (2013).

focus is no longer on the individual, but on the masses. Butler's discussion of the assembly highlights the plural presence, yet she also notes the specific locale's influence in facilitating agency (compare 2015: 72).[58]

The specific space of the novel – an actual clock tower in the center of Tunis[59] – is exceptional. Not a place to idle, it is in the middle of a busy roundabout that is inevitably passed by many people. It is a place of movement, where one can wait for transportation, an area in which one cannot be stationary. Therefore, even by staying there – on the tower as well as directly underneath – subversion is produced. Climbing the tower is performative since it is dangerous, places the self at a center (of the roundabout) and above traffic and people, thereby suggesting an elevated speaking position. However, as Butler highlights, space not only supports the action, but it is also what is being fought over (compare 2015: 71). In the novel it is presented as a mirror of political authority, explained in a short historical overview inserted into the novel as the chapter "Kalām fī al-bināʾ" ('Conversation about the building', *Ghurillā* 97–100). The section describes how a statue of president Bourguiba, which used to be at the center of the roundabout, was secretly replaced with a clock, something intent on symbolizing Ben Ali's presidency. In the remainder of the novel, the clock tower becomes the place of the authorities' delegitimization through its occupation by the Gorilla.[60]

Another element that facilitates the public uproar at the end of the novel is the Gorilla's marginalized position in Tunisian society more generally, something that also contributes to making his body problematic. As a Black Tunisian, the Gorilla is very visible as an outsider. However, Black Tunisians are absent in society, especially in structures of power and influence. Performative action for Butler depends "on institutional structures and broader social worlds" to facilitate it (2015: 64–65). Visibility can be understood as one of those structures. By climbing the tower and refusing to dismount, the Gorilla draws attention to the lack of visibility of Black Tunisians in society. Consequently, the absence of facilitating structures can also motivate performative action to make claims about what is missing (compare Butler 2015: 65). The Gorilla refuses to be represented by the state by claiming visibility in opposition to the authorities. His provocative body is placed against the body politic and is personified in the authorities.

Stefania Pandolfo, as was noted above, explains *fitna* as a "figure of alterity" (1997: 5). This closely describes the Gorilla throughout his life. He is left behind at the children's home unadopted, due to his skin color. The first thing that his eventual adoptive mother says about him is "waṣīf" ('slave', compare *Ghurillā* 39). This derogatory term is used to

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58 See my previous discussion of space in the novel: Pardey, Charlotte. 2014. "Space and Experience for the Racially Marked Body: Kamal al-Riahi's Novel *al-Ghurillā*." In *Experiencing Space – Spacing Experience*, edited by Nora Berning et al. 169–182. Certain spaces furthermore have great importance in other uprisings and movements (e.g., Taḥrīr Square for the Egyptian uprising, Taksim Gezi Park for protests in Turkey, and – further back in time – the Bastille for the French Revolution).

59 The clock tower is found at one end of Avenue Habib-Bourguiba, a large boulevard that features the Ministry of the Interior (Wizārat al-dākhiliyya), the national theatre, the cathedral, the French embassy, important hotels, and top-notch shops.

60 Post-revolutionary Tunisia confirms the novel's observations regarding space as a mirror of political authority; the roundabout was renamed to commemorate the events of 2010/2011 and Bourguiba's statue was returned in the summer of 2016 and currently faces the clock tower.

describe Black Tunisians and refers to their arrival in Tunisia as part of the slave trade.[61] Through his skin color, he is visible and invisible at the same time, drawing attention while being ignored. This is the same oscillatory movement that the concept of *fitna* was shown to be about.

Tunisian writer and novelist Albert Memmi describes racism in (formerly) colonized societies in his work *Le Racisme* (1994; English transl. *Racism*, 2000). He argues that racism is present in these societies; however, this racism is not directed at Europeans, but at more vulnerable groups on which the (formerly) colonized can look down (compare 2000: 32). In Tunisia, one such group are Black Tunisians. They are discriminated against based on seemingly different skin colors, sometimes even on the basis of religion. However, all nuances of skin color are present in Tunisia itself, in addition to the general arbitrariness of the suggestion of race based on complexion (compare Young 1993: xviii). Differences are emphasized to provide reasons to exclude and suppress groups. Behind this stands the fear of losing one's own privileges (Memmi 2000: 23). The Gorilla's refusal to be invisible constitutes an attack against the privileges of the authorities and against the control they seek to defend. His body on the clocktower is alluring and is *fitna* in its political sense since it attracts onlookers.

The Gorilla is constructed from the outside as seen by these onlookers. The reader barely knows anything for certain about him and sees even less through his eyes. Only a minority of the novel's chapters engages with his perspective. We, therefore, need to look at those present at the Gorilla's occupation and at the "interactions" between them and him to explore how the Gorilla is produced as a subject and protesting body. This analyzes how protest is produced in the novel on the one hand and how the novel itself is constructed on the other.

Firstly, the people who collect around the tower take on the role of the 'audience'. Their behavior changes over the course of the narrative; initially, they stand and watch, forming an assembly in Butler's sense. They interpret the Gorilla's occupation of the tower and look up at him, but they also see each other and talk. Their bodies are involved in the occupation. By being present, they challenge the authorities to consider them as eyewitnesses when discussing measures to remove the Gorilla (compare *Ghurillā* 75). The Gorilla is described watching the crowds from the tower: 'Below him is mankind like the fan community of a famous singer – Michael Jackson, maybe. They are standing there for a spectacle without sound' (*Ghurillā* 130).[62]

The onlookers, from their multiple perspectives, write the Gorilla in a communal narration. They produce multiple yet overlapping images of the Gorilla based on their individual perspectives, their positions under the clock tower, and their memories throughout different chapters that are told from various perspectives. The Gorilla is remembered as a Black orphan in the children's home, as a goalkeeper with long arms during a football match, as a lover who could not be married due to the absence of a proper family name, a troublemaker disguised as a radical Islamist, a person running amok, and a fugitive. Overall, the multi-

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61 As a further reading about the slave trade and its connection to Tunisia, see Rahal, Ahmed. 2000. *La communauté noire de Tunis. Thérapie initiatique et rite de possession*, especially 13–18.

62 Original quote:

"تحته الخلق مثل جمهور مغنّ شهير. مايكل جاكسون ربما. يقفون للفرجة دون صوت".

layered oscillating image of an anti-hero is created as a "figure of alterity". His image oscillates in the variety of the perspectives offered on him. While he does not utter demands, he is nevertheless read as protesting. This gives him a dissenting presence that oscillates as well; his protest is present and absent at the same time. The audience is enabled to their own protest based on the Gorilla's behavior.

The Gorilla is constructed not only through the memories of the onlookers, but also in allusions to prominent figures and images present in the collective memory of his expected readership, particularly in terms of religious and cinematic references. The religious references that the novel contains are threefold. Firstly, the Gorilla is compared to Bilāl the muezzin; according to *ḥadīth* literature, he was a Black slave of African heritage who became one of Prophet Muhammad's earliest followers and his first caller for prayer (ʿArafat 1960: 1215; Rahal 2000: 20). Through this comparison, the Gorilla is shown to be calling the people or in the words of an onlooker: 'This is the prayer call that shakes up the city. The Gorilla is a muezzin. [...] The Ethiopian Bilāl forever' (*Ghurillā* 156).[63] Secondly, the way the novel is narrated alludes to the Islamic tradition of reporting via *ḥadīth* literature. *Ḥadīth* literature initially contains oral reports about the life of the Prophet that have been passed down with their respective chains of transmitters. The reports' knowledge is created by and supported through a community. Similarly, what is known about the Gorilla is based in the community of onlookers. A last religious reference is made to Jesus with regards to the Gorilla's pose on the clock tower. His posture (his arms are raised and extended to the sides) and his gaze that is lifted to the sky or to God (compare *Ghurillā* 178) corresponds with Christian iconography. Another hint at this reference is the instance of self-sacrifice that Jesus embodies.[64]

The last reference in particular is more visual than literal and it resides in the picture the novel conjures. In his short story collections, Kamel Riahi already used cinematic techniques that drew on visuality. This was analyzed by Nabīl Darghūth with regards to the use of perspective (the writer's pen is a camera), attention to detail and other, more technical considerations from film studies (different camera positions and shots, montage, etc.).[65]

Al-Ghurillā offers a cinematic experience in its overall visuality as well as in its fragmentary structure of multiple narrators, a technique reminiscent of the cuts that a film camera might produce. On the content level, there are direct references to the movie *King Kong* (compare *Ghurillā* 42) as well as indirect allusions through the ape figure and the violent death on a tall building. In the 1933 feature film by Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, a giant ape called King Kong is killed on top of the Empire State Building in New York by

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63　Original quote:

"ها هو الأذان يهز المدينة. الغوريلا مؤذن. [...] بلال حبشي دائما."

Bilāl is said to have been of Ethiopian descent (ʿArafat 1960: 1215).

64　For a more detailed description, see my aforementioned work "A Body of Dissenting Images", 2015: 277–278.

65　See his study *al-ʿAyn al-sārida. Nāfidha ʿala al-ʿālam al-qiṣṣaṣī li-Kamāl al-Riyāḥī* ('The piercing eye. A window onto the fictional world of Kamel Riahi'), 2008: 48, the fifth part of which was also published as the article "al-Lugha al-sīnimāʾiyya fī aqāṣīṣ Kamāl al-Riyāḥī" (2008, 'Cinematic language in the stories of Kamel Riahi').

white men intent on defending a white woman.[66] A more subtle cinematic reference links the novel with the 1996 film *Essaïda* (al-Sayyida; the name of a poor neighborhood of Tunis) by Tunisian director Muḥammad Zran. The film deals with destitution in a Tunisian suburb. It ends in a scene that is reminiscent of the Gorilla's death where the protagonist, a marginalized youth named Nidhal, dies after falling (or perhaps jumping, something that the viewer is left to wonder) from a metal construction. He had climbed it out of hopelessness threatening suicide. Nouri Gana considers the movie "prophetic in the wake of Mohammad Bouazizi's self-immolation" (2013: 192). Accordingly, Nidhal's death is mourned in a large funerary procession accompanied by ululations. The resemblance to a protest march is apparent.[67]

Al-Ghurillā contains an overall visuality that begins with the protagonist's nickname – the novel's title – and continues with other characters who have similarly suggestive names (e.g., ʿAlī al-Kilāb, Karṭūshā, and Ḥabība[68]). The visuality is part of Riahi's conception of writing. Riahi stated about his previous novel, *al-Mishraṭ* ('The scalpel', 2006), that he wanted to: 'paint Tunis […] on paper'. In his work, 'image and writing are twins', he proclaims, thereby highlighting the importance of visuality.[69] With regards to *al-Ghurillā*, images are conjured in a double sense. On the one hand, the Gorilla is constructed as a collage of images and allusions to famous figures present in the different accounts, whereas as a literary character his image is constructed in the mind's eye of the reader or listener on the other. W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* describes literature as a "visual art form" (1994: 96). It has an effect, he ascertains, that is: "no less real for being indirectly conveyed through language" (Mitchell 2002: 174). This is particularly true in the case of the novel which is aided by the aforementioned cinematic techniques. The Gorilla gains materiality in the sense in which materiality was outlined in *Part I* of this study, as a presence that is an absence at the same time, as an oscillation.

The novel comments on the writing of protest and literary engagement in general. The Gorilla led the onlookers to protest through his occupation of the clocktower. By becoming a victim of state violence, he produced an increased awareness of the regime's violence. The novel is political, but not in the typical sense of engaged literature. It was the resistance poet who spoke by himself in Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée*, which found entrance into Arabic literature via translation as *adab multazim* in the middle of the 20th century. That a host of narrators write the Gorilla together can here be interpreted as an alternative literary engagement, as I have argued previously. In this way, a communal nar-

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66 Compare Erb, Cynthia. 2009. *Tracking King Kong. A Hollywood Icon in World Culture*; especially: xvii, particularly her analysis of the narrative's racist undertones.

67 Butler, in her *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, also compares the visual similarity of demonstrations and funerary marches (2015: 197).

68 Ḥabība is the Gorilla's lover and a prostitute and 'ḥabība' means beloved or lover; ʿAlī al-Kilāb came to riches as a dog catcher, 'kilāb' means 'dogs'; Karṭūshā, is violent with sadistic inclinations, 'karṭūshā' is the Arabic transcription of the French word 'cartouche' for 'cartridge'. Both ʿAlī al-Kilāb and Karṭūshā have to be considered sobriquets. Giving names to individuals is common in the Arabic context.

69 Original quote:

"حاولت أن أرسم فيها تونس [...] ورسمتها على الورق"، "الصورة والكتابة عندي صنوان".

See the interview with the author in Darghūth 2008: 64–65. In the same interview Riahi expresses his affinity for images and photography (ibid.).

rative is produced.[70] This updates literary engagement to current times by highlighting networks over individuals. It is also better suited to the Tunisian literary scene and the status of writers therein. Writers struggle for attention, readers, and the opportunity to be translated; this is a situation that is very different from the centers of francophone and arabophone literary activity (France, as well as Egypt and Lebanon respectively) where authors are more respected. This results not only in a different conceptualization of the role of the author, but also influences the position that literary production takes up in relation to political events, as *al-Ghurillā* shows. One might wonder about the truth value of realist depiction. In the novel, literature appears less as a direct mirror of text-external reality, its productive function is highlighted to a greater degree instead. This becomes particularly apparent in the narration of protest and its development that was part of the analysis of *al-Ghurillā*.

The novel engages in the struggle over the interpretation of political events through its description of the development of protest. On the basis of fiction, it draws attention to the central questions of this struggle, such as what protest is and what it is not, who owns it and who started it. That the novel's author is invested in these issues becomes apparent in his attack against Tahar Ben Jelloun's work on the Tunisian uprising, specifically the latter's narrative *Par le Feu*. Riahi argues that it is a "scandal", a "crime", and "bad literature", alluding to mistakes in the Moroccan author's representation of Tunisia (see Riahi's article "Arab Spring novel: the necrophilia of Taher Ben Jelloun or The Martyr's meat eaters", n.d.[71]). Many of Riahi's points of criticism are based on a discrepancy between text-external Tunisia and the Tunisia that appears in Ben Jelloun's text. This raises the question how Riahi's own novel relates to the uprising of 2010/2011.

Al-Ghurillā does not merely allude to the uprising, but includes it in its afterword entitled "14 Jānfī 2011" ('14 January 2011', a reference to the day former president Ben ʿAlī fled Tunisia and the uprising was considered to be victorious). The novel suggests a reading of the actual political events, their development, and structure. This highlights the productive function of literature that does more than just mirror text-external events. The awareness of this furthers the understanding of writing and its role.

In the afterword the (fictionalized) author enters both the story and the streets of the Tunisian uprising. He describes from the first-person perspective that he was finishing his novel in the countryside and almost missed the uprising. He returns to Tunis after hearing about the upheavals, gets into a violent confrontation, and has to protect his apartment building from thieves. He is on the street when a big car approaches threateningly: 'Suddenly my body grows black fur. I feel larger, my body swells and becomes ginormous. I bang my chest with my fist'[72] (*Ghurilla* 190). This metamorphosis occurs in a moment of fear in which the author would have liked to write, to at least take some notes, already thinking about becoming a literary character himself. He fantasizes about this right before his body turns into an allusion to his own character. The fictionalized author clearly identi-

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70   See my aforementioned chapter "A Body of Dissenting Images", 2015: 281–282.

71   The undated article was published online on a platform called *The Arab Washingtonian*; the website is no longer accessible, but the link to Riahi's article (last access 10/01/2013) was:
     http://www.arabwashingtonian.org/english/printArticle.php?articleID=1488.

72   Original quote:

"يكسو جسدي فجأة وبر أسود. أشعر بأني أضخم وأن جسدي ينتفخ فجأة ويتعملق. أضرب بقبضتي على صدري".

fies with his protagonist. His body-turned-gorilla forms the link between the events in Tunisia and those of the novel, blurring the lines that separate reality from fiction. This is emphasized by a footnote in the afterword that refers to an eyewitness account Riahi, the actual author, wrote for the *New York Times* which was published in print on January 18, 2011.[73] A comparison with the afterword proves that large sections are identical. What is missing in the article, however, is the metamorphosis as well as the connection of the revolutionary events to the novel's immediate production.

The afterword suggests that the novel was written before the Tunisian uprising, since the author states that he was finishing his draft when the revolutionary events occurred. Yet, as was outlined above, the narrative reflects a perspective of hindsight in exploring the development of protest. It seems furthermore that some elements (the uncalled-for violent death, the responsibility of state authorities, popular unrest, and the very chants of the Tunisian uprising), reflect the demands of post-revolutionary publishing and reader expectations. They confirm the assumed retrospective perspective and are not in fact an anticipation of the events, as the publisher's marketing of the novel suggests. On the novel's back cover, as well as on the publisher's website, the work is described as: 'a novel that in scenic, nightmarish presentation conjures the truth that cleared the way for the 14 January revolution'.[74] This description alludes to a prophetic quality within the novel that is likely untrue.

After major political events, cultural production seems to be stuck between diverse demands of authentically realistic, yet artistically insightful depictions of the events. Above all, publishers' market-based requirements and the interests of academics exert influences on authors, especially after an event so overly present throughout the media as the uprisings of 2010/2011.[75] With regards to the novel, it seems that aspects of actual events are mirrored in the novel in a heightened way in order to maximize their distinctness. The suicide of Mohammad Bouazizi is turned into murder, for example, and the protests begin in Tunis and do not have to spread there from the periphery. The description of the novel through the publisher suggests that there was an interest in marketing the work as a narrative that heralded the uprising, rather than one that rationalizes the events. The novel, however, needs to be read as the author's suggestion of how the Tunisian uprising and protest in general can be written and how it can be understood in writing. The novel traces the production of protest from a provocative or problematic body, from an individual act of defiance to its culmination in a communal action that was again carried by bodies. Speaking was not necessary; instead, bodies were made to communicate similar to images and they were shown by the author to visualize social conditions of precarity, which made them threatening and fear-inducing, but also seductive promoters of the ideas and demands they seemed to embody. In this, they were *fitna*. These bodies contained dissent and confirmed that concern for *another* body can be the plane that motivates this dissent to become political.

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73 The link to the online version of this op-ed is as following:
    http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/19/opinion/19riahi.html.

74 Original quote:

"رواية ترصد في سرد مشهدي كابوسي الواقع الذي مهّد لثورة 14 يناير".

75 For these post-revolutionary influences and demands, see Pardey, Charlotte. 2021. "Processing the Revolution: Exploring the Ways Tunisian Novelists Reflect Political Upheavals." In *Re-Configurations*, edited by Rachid Ouaissa et al. 247–259.

5.5   Provocative Bodies and their Literary Consequences

Bodies receive the most attention – or are perceived as a presence at all – when they do not conform to expectations. This is a rough paraphrasing of Drew Leder's understanding of the absent-present body, his "dys-appearance" (Leder 1990: 85). To stretch the metaphor, the body politic could be expected to receive the most attention when it does not function the way that it should. However, in authoritarian regimes, it is not always possible to openly voice criticism regarding the way in which the state is being run, government measures are being implemented, or on how the individual is being treated. Nouri Gana, as has been quoted throughout the present chapter, suggests that the inability to address the malfunctioning body politic, at least in film, is solved by shifting to an engagement with the female body and with sexuality. In this context, social rules are challenged as a replacement for the political realm. For literature, the present chapter has assumed a similar substitution. To that end, it read works that focus on sexually active as well as politically active bodies together, thereby highlighting their similarities. This approach's aim was to explore bodies that are provocative, that produce anger and fear in the different authorities in Tunisia because they feel threatened with a loss of control when bodies defy the rules. This continues the analysis of 'problematic' bodies and their writing as part of the effort to further understand the reading and writing of bodies in Tunisian literature, a strategy that was already followed in the previous two chapters.

The two respects that were analyzed – sexually active bodies and protesting bodies – continued an engagement with dissent in literature that the previous chapter led to. Notions of dissent were perceivable in both novels (*Tammās* and *al-Jasad walīma*) that centered on sexuality and its writing. Both works were published at a time at which open political criticism was not possible. That dissent was moved to the intimate realm, confirming the assumption that Gana's observation holds true for literature. Dissent is clearly present in the third novel, *al-Ghurillā*, and it is no longer hidden or indirect. It is the only novel from the textual corpus that was published after the uprising of 2010/2011 and, therefore, it does no longer reflect the same context as either *Tammās* or *al-Jasad walīma*. This allowed for a writing of protest and opposition and its discussion in the present analysis.

The Arabic concept of *fitna* was employed to address both aspects of provocative bodies, sexual and political activity. In its traditional meaning, it already describes both riots and seduction, referring especially to the dangerous seductive powers of women. However, following authors such as Stefania Pandolfo and Julian Vigo, it was used to describe the communicative momentum that bodies share. These bodies are provocative and fear-inducing by transgressing rules through their sexual and political practice and by becoming 'figures of alterity'. Vigo describes *fitna* as a "cultural artefact" that "traverses and contradicts meaning – both the poetic and the real" and its different implications were alluded to. Its multiplicity, according to Vigo, allows us to "look to other cultures and other bodies in molding a language emancipated from the undertow of binaries" (2010: 191), which suggests the oscillatory presence and absence of both poles of these binaries. *Fitna* connects the theoretical terms of abjection and unlivability, concepts employed previously, to a local perspective. Its relation to abjection is obvious since it expresses an aversion against sexuality for its possibly polluting capacity, while it also highlights sexual attraction as seductive. The position of *fitna* can be productively claimed by individuals if the 'pollution' or crossing of cultural boundaries is accepted, as *Tammās* and *al-Jasad walīma* show. This constructs the respective bodies as sites of dissent. In *al-Ghurillā*, what motivates the acceptance of the *fitna* that rising together in protest entails for the onlookers is precisely unlivability, or rather the defense of livability; the onlookers defend the livability of the

Gorilla against the violence of the authorities. This reading of *fitna*, as a quality that can be taken upon the self willingly, removes the concept's negative and thereby controlling meaning by which religious authorities sought to control its subjects for centuries. Unregulated bodies worry authorities that are interested in perpetuating their control. Bodies, consequently, have a political potential in their ability to disregard set boundaries. This suggests why the authoritarian mechanisms of control failed to function in 2010/2011, when threatening categories such as *fitna* could not deter protests and the self-assertion of individuals disregarded personal costs.

The analysis of the novels' writing of provocative bodies showed the relevance of the narrative perspective (e.g., in changing values and expectations). This perspective allowed for a description of sexuality outside of the frame of marriage as liberating and to show *fitna* as a characteristic that can be chosen. The writing of provocative bodies also motivated an engagement with uncertainty in the narration, especially in *al-Jasad walīma* where it was reflected in the search for the perfect language to describe sexuality. The narrative uncertainty brought several opinions into conflict.

Novels can maintain different relationships with language and representation. Generally, one can detect a growing mistrust in representation and the representative function of literature from *Tammās*, via *al-Jasad walīma* to *al-Ghurillā*. In *al-Ghurillā*, the last in this sequence, the protagonist does not even attempt to influence his representation. In the Gorilla's communal narration, the novel offers an alternative to individual representation and this calls the validity of the latter into question.

Writing is interrogated in all three novels through characters who discuss the legitimacy of their own writing or the way in which they are writing. Each character voices anxiety about writing provocative bodies. This anxiety lies in the affective response that can be caused in the reader and the consequential responsibility of the literary work.[76] Regardless, the novels both display and produce certain perspectives. For example, sexual liberty and self-determinacy are portrayed positively while authorities are refuted. Tradition is wrested back from the hands of the conservatives to function as a repository. Classical poetry is resorted to in search of the right expressions for liberal practices. Protest appears to be ambivalent through the inclusion of multiple perspectives that avoid oversimplification.

Provocative bodies refuse to stick to expectations and rules, and notions of dissent are woven into their narration. This allowed us to continue to explore the dissent that was noted in the previous chapter further. Here, it was discussed both on the content level of the novels and via the struggle for representation. The chapter followed dissent as it moved from the intimate and hidden into the open. As Gana had assumed, dissent spread and *al-Ghurillā* explores this in how the masses are influenced to rise up by an individual's bodily

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76 Here a further exploration of the third notion of Khatibi's reading of the body in the Qur'an could continue, analyzing possible influences on implied or actual readers. It would, however, exceed the scope of this chapter. I followed a related path in my aforementioned article "Space and Experience for the Racially Marked Body", 2014, in which I analyzed the performativity of *al-Ghurillā* with reference to Erika Fischer-Lichte's ideas on performativity (e.g., Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* and 2012. *Performativität. Eine Einführung*). Helpful for further discussion of the affective responses, is Junge, Christian. 2015. "On Affect and Emotion as Dissent: The *Kifāya*-Rhetoric in Pre-Revolutionary Egyptian Literature." In *Commitment and Beyond*, edited by Friederike Pannewick and Georges Khalil. 253–272.

act and how protest is produced. The following *Conclusion* returns from the realm of fiction to the Tunisian uprising of 2010/2011 and this insight will be particularly relevant there.

The three novels, apart from all of their similarities in focusing on provocative bodies, display certain differences based on the context and perspectives they were written within. Most crucially, the roles of the individual vis à vis the masses differ. Both *Tammās* and *al-Jasad Walima* were narrated and centered on an individual boasting a specific bodily being-in-the-world that expressed itself provocatively. Meanwhile, *al-Ghurillā* showed that although the individual and its bodily practice might be at the center of attention, what is truly important is how the masses read, make sense of, and reproduce the provocation. In the post-2011 context, individual interpretations were similarly challenged and made room for communal opinions. What the analysis of the three novels also showed is how their backgrounds differ and how the taboo of political criticism weakened in the context of *al-Ghurillā*'s production.

The second part of this study explored how problematic bodies are described and how the writing of bodies is discussed in literary works. Writing reflects on itself by problematizing its implications and repercussions. Problematic bodies were chosen as the focus of the analysis because these bodies provoke an awareness and reflection precisely by causing difficulties in their writing, as well as on the content levels of the novels. Their writing challenges authors. Bodies have the potential to subvert tradition and oppression, and so does the writing of these bodies by extension, which brings diverging expectations into conflict in the text as well as in the author and society at large.

The writing of bodies allows writing to reflect on itself. The novels critique representation and highlight the view that writing does not offer ultimate truths. They offered a plurality of opinions instead to defy authoritarianism. These plural truths form a dissenting moment in the literary works. They emphasize that representation cannot be unequivocal or perfect, as is reflected in the hopeless search for the truest depiction of sexuality or the ultimate meaning of a dissenting body. Bodies in literature oscillate (problematic ones that both fascinate and horrify in specific) – which destabilizes the representational function of literature. Oscillation was a central notion; it was the element that connected the theoretical approaches of the second part's chapters: *abjection*, *unlivability*, and *fitna*. It characterized problematic bodies as such, as bodies that attract and repulse at the same time. However, its relevance is based on the chapters contained in the first part.

Literary works need to contain discordant voices, plural perspectives, and communal opinions in order to be meaningful for multi-faceted reality and to yield insights into Tunisian society. In their plurality, the novels allow us to glance at the internal workings of this society that oscillates between modern and traditional influences.

Conclusion: Oscillating Bodies in Tunisian Novels

1   A Return to the Beginning

This book began with the notion that bodies had an immediate importance in the Tunisian uprising of 2010/2011. The *Introduction* contended that society can be understood through the various bodies that form it. These bodies include those that are created by cultural production. Post-colonial Tunisian society was explored at the brink of the uprising of 2010/2011 through an analysis of bodies portrayed in novels written between Tunisian independence and 2011. The goal was to present the significant moment of the uprising as historically formed and to explore Tunisian society generally. This study aimed to generate particular insights that differ from the usual information about a country and its people. What was attempted was an embodied understanding of Tunisia and of its society's cultural knowledge. Such insights establish the background in front of which events like the uprising of 2010/11 and issues like illegal immigration and Islamic terrorism need to be understood.

Embodiment was proposed as a concept for the analysis, particularly in terms of Thomas J. Csordas' theorization. It allows us to regard bodies as a source of knowledge. Other theoretical aspects were added throughout the course of the study. Between these aspects, the idea of bodies in literature oscillates and thereby crystallizes. Oscillation forms a figure of thought that runs like a thread throughout the entire study and connects the different theoretical notions around both embodiment and the body. It also describes the study's relationship to primary (literary) sources and secondary (theoretical) works as a constant back-and-forth between the two.

Finally, oscillation describes the relationship between the textual reality in the novels and text-external reality; these are discourses that inform each other. Literature, as it was assumed from the beginning, is not a reliable mirror of society. Literary works are fragments that are both in dialogue with each other and with their historical context. They participate in shaping social reality while being influenced by it at the same time. The study focused on the productive and transformative potential of literature and its reflection within the analyzed literary works through the discussion of writing. Language and writing were, therefore, assumed as additional concerns since all of the bodies that were drawn upon for the analysis were essentially bodies written in language.

The results of the engagement with Tunisian society via its novels and the body therein will be summarized and further interpreted in this conclusion to offer a reading of its complexity, especially in the light of the revolutionary processes of 2010/2011.

2   Recapitulating the Core Chapters

Embodiment as inseparable from human existence was an insight that Messadi's *Mawlid al-nisyān* offered (compare *Introduction*). From this starting point, the first part of this study asked what embodiment means in the context of Tunisian novels after the country's independence in 1956. Particularly, it explored the body as a concept or ideal and examined the importance of materiality for literary bodies.

Chapter 1 questioned the existence of the body as a generic ideal in literary works and suggested that human bodies in novels are specific, historical, and determined by their cultural contexts. The chapter explored embodiment and the body through impaired, sick, or wounded characters as placeholders for all of the bodies found in literature. It did so

because the construction of all literary bodies is identical. Impairment and non-impairment fluidly blend into each other which makes the distinction arbitrary. The earliest work from the textual corpus selected was addressed in Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui's *al-Tūt al-murr* (1967) and it was read together with Alia Mabrouk's *Sombre histoire de cellules folles* (2001), interspersed with observations regarding Ridha Bourkhis' *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu* (1989) and Aroussia Nalouti's *Tammās* (1995). The chapter drew on the theoretical frame of disability studies, given that it already contains a critique of the idea of a generic body. The chapter suggested addressing 'bodies' in the plural, instead of 'the body' as a generic ideal. Bodies were shown to be essentially historic and culturally determined in the analysis. While bodies belong to individuals, they are also the products and producers of their society and thereby oscillate between these poles. Society was shown to shape what it means to be an individual and to have a body, what health entails as well as disease and disability, and how these expectations are expressed through language. The expectations appeared gendered and were tied to the bodies' efficiency (both financially and reproductively).

A change was noted in the understanding of embodiment proposed throughout the course of the chapter, given that it studied the novels chronologically. The emphasis in embodiment as being-in-the-world shifted. Initially, being-in-the-world focused on the community or the world. Over time, the viewing direction turned to the individual, to the being. This means that in the understanding that embodiment oscillates between society and the individual, the focal area of interest still moved away from society. Embodiment appeared to exist both prediscursively, via the material body, and as discursively produced through society. For Csordas, embodiment forms "the existential ground of culture". It is connected to a body that is both an actual thing and a concept (1994: 6). Embodiment, as it is produced between the individual and society, was analyzed in the first chapter.

Chapter 2 then took a closer look at the issue of materiality (the body as 'an actual thing') to better understand what bodies and embodiment mean in Tunisian literature. The central concern was to explore what happens to their materiality when bodies enter the realm of language and how this aspect is addressed in Tunisian novels. This was approached through the subject of death because death essentially concerns physical materiality. Fawzia Zouari's *Ce Pays dont je meurs* (2000[1999]) and Hassouna Mosbahi's *Ḥikāya tūnisiyya* (2007) were discussed, as well as Ridha Bourkhis' aforementioned *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*. The specifics of literary texts in general and the novels' bodies' existence in language motivated the choice to include Derrida's understanding of hauntology as the chapter's primary conceptual approach. It allowed us to address a presence that is simultaneously a no-presence, a presence that oscillates. This came to describe the specific embodiment of bodies in literature, how it is created and what role the narrative voice or language play. The chapter showed that embodiment is not necessarily tied to bodies whose materiality exists on the level of the narrative. Rather, embodiment remained significant after the death of the character or even narrator. Materiality can be produced by the narrative voice alone, by reminiscing about a past body for example. Embodiment is then perceivable and analyzable, even though there is no body apart from its reflection in language. This embodiment is based in the materiality that the narrative voice conveys. As a result, literary bodies have a simultaneous absence and presence, an oscillatory presence. Literary embodiment is based on this oscillation, as this chapter showed.

After these two foundational chapters, *Part II* of the study delved further into the writing of bodies and embodiment by asking how Tunisian novels discuss this issue of writing itself and which meanings they attribute to the bodies being described. The chapters of *Part*

II focused on 'problematic' bodies in the belief that the novels express most awareness about the writing of bodies when these bodies are difficult. 'Problematic' bodies were introduced as those that cause negative affective responses through a property of theirs and through their respective embodiment. These negative responses (such as disgust, shame, and anger or irritation) occur both on the content level of the narratives as well as outside of the text, in both the writer and reader. The focus was not on the negative affective responses themselves, but rather on the bodies that caused these affects. These bodies formed sites of otherness by being problematic.

Chapter 3 entered into the discussion of 'problematic' bodies in writing by focusing on bodies that are overly physical and that expose aspects that are meant to remain private, bodies whose boundaries have been crossed. These bodies were described as abject and they encourage a reaction that oscillates between attraction and disgust. This highlights that literary bodies are oscillatory. The chapter discussed the connection between the concept of abjection and the female as fundamentally abject in the eyes of society. It focused on the subjects of rape and sexual violence, given that they epitomize the transgression of bodily boundaries described above. The novels addressed were Koelman's *Le Sadique* (1970), Amel Mokhtar's *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* (2002), and Hédi Thabet's *al-Ightisāb* (2008) since they all shared occasions of sexual violence. Gender appeared as a central category in the novels. The chapter developed it as an instance that influences the perception of bodies as problematic.

The abject bodies that the chapter addressed exist in language and are represented. A concern that the chapter drew from the novels was the question of whether descriptions of violence repeat and/or prolong the violence. This concern was read as a reflection of the authors' awareness of the affective response that problematic bodies could cause that led to an anxiety that is perceivable in the narratives. The view that various techniques let the violated bodies appear and disappear in the novels was described and was interpreted as another oscillating move. Abject bodies, as a consequence, highlight the oscillatory presence of bodies in literature. This destabilizes the representational function of literature. Writing is pluralized through diverging perspectives and narrative layers, pointing to the existence of several opinions and, thereby, to a notion of dissent in an otherwise authoritarian context. Bodies defy simple categories and reflect Tunisian society with its in-betweens. They have a dissenting presence and show writing as a site of criticism. The possibilities of critical writing, however, were probed further in the two subsequent, final chapters.

Chapter 4 approached this dissenting presence by asking how bodies are being read as problematic within literary works; 'reading' was understood both metaphorically as in making sense of them and literally as actual acts of reading. The central example given was how the novels portrayed the reading of gender and the irritation that results when this reading failed. The division between male and female was perceived to be a key ordering principle in Tunisian society. Transgender phenomena subvert this principle and, accordingly, Alia Mabrouk's *Hurlement* (1992) and Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna* (1999) were analyzed which both contain transgender themes. By subverting the male-female binary, the individuals concerned appeared metaphorically unreadable or, in Butler's words, as 'unlivable'. The 'unlivable' describes a state for which no categories exist. The individual concerned cannot be grasped as human because the concept of human demands a clear ascription of gender. This individual as a consequence oscillates between recognition and misrecognition in the eyes of others, between their interest and attraction and their ability to understand. How closely the concepts of 'unlivability' and abjection resemble each other was highlighted. The 'unlivability' is even felt by the individual who finds itself and does

not find itself in this person who will not fit into society's categories. The result is the dissenting presence that the transgender characters were shown to bring to different levels of the narratives: They expressed it on a personal, internal level; they formed an 'other' to an authority and through both brought the dissenting presence to the narrative itself.

The chapter suggested that dissent had moved into the private realm, given that critical writing was hindered through different authorities at the time of the novels' publication. In the 1990s, it was difficult to voice dissent due to Ben Ali's authoritarian rule. Both novels show an awareness of the difficulty involved in addressing the political. The chapter explored how, in order to enable criticism, the authors moved to personal topics and presented what I call an 'intimate dissent'. In this private realm, references to the political were demonstrable in *Ṭurshqāna*. Although writing in the novel was shown to contain a critique of the authorities, the analysis determined that it also participates in the production of the bodies discussed as problematic and as 'unlivable'. Writing oscillates between a critique of exclusion and its confirmation. Through this, the role of the author was problematized, and it was concluded that dissent was not straightforward. However, the view that bodies bring a dissenting presence to the narratives was confirmed for both novels examined.

Chapter 5 explored the reading and writing of bodies further by approaching another type of problematic bodies, namely those that provoke fear and anger in different authorities by being sexually and politically active. In this provocation, the communicatory function of bodies was highlighted. Sexuality and politics were addressed as key discourses in which the authorities attempt to control the individual. They were, therefore, shown as areas in which these authorities lose control once the individual disregards the rules. The chapter continued from where *Chapter 4* had left off, the dissent in the private realm. The sexual might be considered the most private context and yet it was explored for its potential to contain oppositional views. From there, the chapter led to the Tunisian uprising of 2010/2011, which appeared at the end of the last novel analyzed here. It was explored how private dissent returned to the public sphere.

The chapter revisited Aroussia Nalouti's *Tammās* (1995) and further analyzed both Fredj Lahouar's *al-Jasad walīma* (1999) and Kamel Riahi's *al-Ghurillā* (2011). It inquired into how political critique is substituted with an engagement with the female body and sexuality, in the context of authoritarianism where a direct critique of the malfunctioning body politic is impossible. With this, social rules are challenged and cultural taboos are broken as a substitution for the political realm.

The classical Arabic term *fitna* is a concept that resembles the oscillation between attraction and repulsion that abjection describes. *Fitna* translates into temptation, charmingness, fascination, infatuation, but also into riot and chaos. It contains both attraction and fear, especially the fear of losing control over norms and rules, the fear that a status quo will be upset. In the chapter, the term was employed to continue the previous chapters' theoretical development. It allowed sexually and politically active bodies to be understood as both fear-instilling and seductive, and to describe the communicative momentum these bodies share. Both seduction as well as sedition imply a sender and a receiver of information. By reading the sexually active bodies through the concept of *fitna* their political positions were highlighted.

Sexuality was described as an attractive topic in literature. Not only can it be used as a tool to express individual liberation in a character, but it can also draw attention to the literary work and is considered to be a prerequisite of modern fiction. At the same time, it is not an easy topic and can result in backlash against the respective authors. It was shown as an ambivalent, if not oscillatory, topic that provoked discussions within the works. The

chapter explored how the novels debate the writing of sexually and politically active bodies in the context of taboos and how writing itself is problematized in the process. It set out from the awareness of the difficulties of writing problematic bodies and dissent, a topic that has been established in the previous chapter, and which then achieved a general complication of writing, a mistrust in unequivocal representation. All three novels contained plural voices that challenged the individual perspective and literature's ability to mirror text-external reality. What was emphasized instead was the productive function of literature. In *al-Ghurillā*, how the individual perspective was replaced by a collective representation was highlighted. This collective perspective, and the novel's overall analysis of the production of protest, was suggested as its reading of the uprising of 2010/2011.

3   Body and Language. Further Insights

Throughout this study, bodies have appeared as an ideal example of the problematic of representation. Bodies cannot be represented in the sense of a transparent representation that neither takes sides nor assumes a perspective (compare Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's observations in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", 1985). In literature, one does not find 'the body' as a general concept or idea, but instead only individual bodies. These bodies do not speak for themselves, but are always already represented, portrayed, and are shown from a certain perspective and in a particular light. There is no direct access to the body that is not mediated by a sense of consciousness.

This aspect was shown to emerge from the novels in their concern with the writing of bodies that appeared to never meet the aspired-for ideal. Particularly in the case of the three chapters of *Part II* in the writing of problematic bodies this became obvious. Many of the works contained metafictional elaborations and a general skepticism towards representation and singular opinions. A concern with literary representation is characteristic of the late colonial and post-colonial situation that both grapple with political representation, speaking for the self, speaking for others, and with identity. Both literary and political representation touch upon issues of the individual and the society, self and other, the (formerly) colonized and the (previous) colonizer, confrontations that appeared crucial in many of the texts analyzed (e.g., in *al-Tūt al-murr*, *Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, and *Ce Pays dont je meurs*). Consequently, a dissenting perspective was developed, particularly in relation to the novels examined in the second part.

Through an engagement with representation not only the novels' understanding of bodies and embodiment in writing could be discussed as a site and tool of dissent, it also brought insights regarding Tunisian society to the fore. In the analyses, bodies appeared to reflect different expectations, values, and opinions. To listen to these is to hear in soft tones what is happening under the surface of society. Bodies were shown to be carriers of issues that haunt society, like partially overcome systems of control such as patriarchy or restrictive gender roles. As carriers of these issues, bodies were discussed as being pulled in diverse directions (such as by the demands of tradition/modernity, honor/shame, and freedom/self-expression). Bodies that transgressed social expectations appeared unable to create permanent spaces for themselves in Tunisian society. This was an occasion to address the authors' and also the literary works' participation in the survival of these expectations, something which necessitated a discussion of literary representation.

Although the chapters did not present a chronological reading of the textual corpus, instead choosing to arrange the novels according to their thematic elements, a historically correct succession remains conceivable. Such a reading would describe a turn to the individual, a move from nationalist concerns of the early years of independent Tunisia to liber-

alist ones in more recent narratives, as well as an increasing engagement with the marginalized and the problematic. This reflects tendencies in Tunisian society to also gradually engage more critically with society itself and with the regime's status quos. A chronological reading of the novels analyzed would simultaneously move away from singular truths towards plural perspectives that present diverse images of the bodies depicted. The most recently written novel, *al-Ghurillā*, was a case in point and showed how the communal perspective of masses of people influenced the general perception of events and occurrences.

The simultaneous presence of different voices and opinions is reflected in the overall importance of the figure of thought of oscillation that appeared time and again throughout the preceding chapters, both on the levels of theory and of content. Oscillation connected the chapters' theoretical approaches while it also described Tunisian society as such. Tunisian society was explored as one that oscillates between different influences (Eastern, Western, and more, see following section).

Different voices within language, or rather the traces of different languages, are reminiscent of Khatibi's *bi-langue*, a viewpoint that this study understood to be connected to oscillation. The *bi-langue* was discussed previously as an oscillation of several languages within one language, the multilingual presence that determines Tunisian literary production. It was described as part of the process of decolonization and the revaluation of local ideas and concepts. The existence of other languages behind what is written in both French and Arabic texts was noted in the analyses (e.g., in *Ce Pays dont je meurs* and *al-Ghurillā*). It forms another remnant of Tunisia's previous colonial position that still haunts the country.

In the preceding study, multilingualism was reflected in the choice to address Tunisian novels written both in Arabic and in French. They were put in dialogue without particularly searching for differences between the languages themselves. The presence of francophone and arabophone texts in the corpus was not intended to explore whether one language excels in daringness, bluntness, or criticism in describing the body, or whether the specific arrival or departure of the French influence changed concepts of the body;[1] the material does not justify such observations. This is confirmed by Abir Kréfa who describes that Arabic authors reinforced the number of transgressions in their works in order to escape the criticism that Arabic is unfit as a literary language. She argues that their writing has the same to offer as their French colleagues: "leur production n'a aujourd'hui […] plus rien à envier à celle de leurs pairs francophone" (2011: 112). Skipping a specific comparison of the languages agrees with Lamia Benyoussef's discussion of the assumption that African diaspora writers address sexuality more explicitly than their peers in their original home countries. This, Benyoussef argues, is: "a patronizing Eurocentric construct that infantilizes African writers […], as if 'creativity' or 'morality' could crop up only on 'Western' soil" (2015: 110) or in Western languages. Instead, Karima Laachir's suggestion to 'read together' works written in Arabic and French has been followed to the letter. This reading toge-

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1   Susanne Kaiser remarks, regarding her exemplary authors Djebar and Ben Jelloun, that French as a new language in the Maghreb allowed new concepts to be developed and that (e.g., in discussing issues related to shame which, as a central idea in Islam, is closely connected to Arabic) French might be a more permeable and accommodating language of expression (2015: 126, 135). I cannot make a similar observation for the Tunisian context and the works that I studied.

ther showed that language – without differentiation between Arabic or French – is the object of anxiety within the texts. It is implicated in the production of the bodies analyzed and their embodiment and is especially controversial regarding 'problematic' bodies. Language anxiety is also reflected within the novels, it results in questions about if and how to write. However, what is never addressed as a problem or as a fortunate possibility is Tunisia's multilingual situation, despite the occasional animosity between authors who insist on the superiority of their respective language. The multilingual situation is Tunisian literature's state of being. It exists between several languages; one might even say that it oscillates between them.

4   Oscillation in Tunisian Literature and Society

The second part of this study suggests that dissent gradually grew as social expectations were increasingly defied. This is an effect of the novels' thematic arrangement. The impression gets blurred when they are read strictly chronologically, and a parallelism of different stages appears. The parallelism shall be highlighted here, in order to describe the complexity of Tunisian society as it is reflected in the narratives that have been presented.

First of all, many novels contained the parallel existence of generations with entirely different values. This was the case, for example, in Amel Mokhtar's *al-Kursī al-hazzāz* and in Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna*. These novels illustrate how several timelines exist in parallel in text-external society. Further parallelisms can be found in the themes of the books, in their causes, so to speak. It was noted in *Chapter 3* that a need to narrate or to open up can be accompanied by the urge to remain quiet – particularly concerning aspects of the body and sexuality. A similar ambiguity was discussed in *Chapter 4* where life outside of binary genders was carefully portrayed and social expectations were challenged, while the status quo of gender binarism was also policed.

The figure of oscillation is the shape that this parallelism took, and it involved a constant movement between opposite poles. It was the element that connected the theoretical approaches taken in the second part's chapters, *abjection*, *unlivability*, and *fitna*. Oscillation turned out to be of the utmost relevance when describing Tunisian literary production, the presence of bodies in it, and the issues that are expressed through these bodies.

The relation between Tunisia and its literary production can be grasped as an oscillation. Literary discourse was understood to be separate from Tunisian society, but it was no less informed by and informing text-external society too. This was assumed and then confirmed through the analysis of bodies as oscillating presences in literary works that are in exchange both with discourses and the bodies outside of the text.

Throughout this study I have argued that Tunisian society itself oscillates. It is complicated and contains different voices and perspectives. It moves between different trends and influences (the religious impetus, the politically steered effort to modernize and emancipate, efforts to promote sexual liberation and remnants of patriarchal perspectives, colonial pressures as well as nationalist influences, Arabization, and an individual's choice to cherish francophone culture, etc.). This is not meant to express a search for identity or a lack of some kind, but rather serves as a description of its unique character. This unique character is, in part, the result of Tunisia's geographical position between Europe, Africa, and the Middle East that led various civilizations and powers to leave their cultural imprint through conquest, colonialism or merely proximity all throughout history. Tunisia's oscillatory character is reflected in its literary production whose state of being was said to oscillate in the previous section.

Tunisian society's oscillatory character indicates why the country functioned as a role model in the recent political developments throughout the MENA region. It connects to its North African and Middle Eastern peers as well as to its neighbors throughout the Mediterranean. In fact, it should be further regarded as an important political partner for the EU in North Africa and deserves greater interest in all areas of its society, and most certainly in its cultural sector.

5   Prospects for Further Research

The impression should not arise that research ends with the final pages of this study, which is why possibilities for additional investigations are suggested in this penultimate section.

Tunisian literature generally offers ample ground for further research. One obvious avenue to pursue would involve an analysis of Tunisian literary production after 2011 with regards to the body. It could discuss in how far the political changes are accompanied by an adapted embodiment presented in literature and whether bodies are employed to address new and different concerns than before. The need for an exploration such as this has been suggested, for example, by Xavier Luffin's book *Printemps arabe et littérature. De la réalité à la fiction, de la fiction à la réalité* (2013). Luffin attempts to give an overview of the uprisings and of how they are reflected in literary productions; however, he does this without discussing a single work from Tunisia, even though he references the country's political role throughout. The literary processing of the Tunisian uprising over the years is another possible avenue for further research and I have made a start in this respect in an article entitled "Processing the Revolution: Exploring the Ways Tunisian Novels Reflect Political Upheavals" (2021). The article specifically looked at the winners of the Tunisian literary prize Comar d'Or in the years after the uprising to not only reflect what is being written about the uprising, but also to examine which writing is awarded for how the uprising is being processed.

Any research about Tunisian literature after 2011 should certainly consider Shukri Mabkhout's (Shukrī al-Mabkhūt) debut novel *al-Ṭilyānī* (2014, 'The Italian'), which won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2015 and was its first Tunisian winner. In general, it should include relevant questions such as whether the political events, and the interest in Tunisia they brought with them, will have a lasting change on the position of Tunisian literature on the world stage.

One might also ask whether bodies that were absent from the novels analyzed previously (such as veiled female bodies, for example) reappeared in the novels published after 2011. It might be preferable in the post-2011 context to widen the scope to include genres other than the novel, since the socio-political upheavals caused a turn to popular and more immediate genres. This is alluded to in Ẓafar Nājī's article "Min thaqāfat al-dawla ilā thaqafat al-thawra" ('From the culture of the state to the culture of the revolution', 2011) that highlights the growing importance of new genres, such as graffiti and rap, as forms of revolutionary cultural production.[2] Film, performance, poetry, installations, or shorter texts

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2   Nājī's article is part of the Tunisian periodical *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya*'s 222nd issue from June 2011 with the overall topic *Thaqāfa mā baʿda al-thawra?* ('Culture after the revolution?') that alludes to the necessity of questioning established understandings of culture. The international research landscape, which explores cultural expressions in the Middle East and North Africa post-2011, reflects similar choices that broaden the scope,

such as short stories, blog entries and op-ed columns were resorted to by the local pro-ducers for immediate commentary and reflection as a result. This should be discussed in forthcoming academic research. In the aforementioned *Printemps arabe et littérature*, Luf-fin argues that the first authors who addressed the uprisings in their literary works were poets, the genre of poetry benefiting the easy circulation of their reflections. Novelists took longer to produce novels that discussed the events and, in the meantime, resorted to other genres according to Luffin (compare 2013: 59, 63–65). This confirms the need for future research to widen its generic scope.

Following the notion that novels themselves have physical aspects and form a material, the Tunisian book market, aspects of which were alluded to briefly throughout the study, equally merits further research, especially due to changes in state funding that has been awarded for cultural activities since 2011. One entry point might be a study of the book fairs that are organized in the major cities every year (e.g., Tunis and Sousse). These book fairs offer an overview of what is being published in Tunisia and in other participating countries. In the case of the Tunis book fair in 2016, as I witnessed, the fairs can create a forum in which the state of publishing was questioned by the publishers in a controversial manner. At the time it was highlighted that major stalls on the fair were run not by the pub-lishers, but by Tunisia's largest bookshops.[3] That the role of literature and publishing in society is being discussed in Tunisia is also apparent in the debate surrounding the presence of Tunisia as guest of honor at the *Salon du livre et de la presse Genève* 2016, in the context of which the major Tunisian publishers complained to the Minister of Culture in an open letter about the misrepresentation of Tunisia and Tunisian publishing by highlighting the country's touristic benefits, instead of offering publishing and literary production its due place.[4] In general, the connections between publishing and the Tunisian state, by way of the Ministry of Culture, would offer an entirely new approach to the country's literary production, thereby allowing issues of subject matters, (hidden) censorship, access, and availability to be addressed further.

The aspect of language could also be explored further in future studies. How does lan-guage influence research on the Tunisian book market, state subsidies for publishing, and external rewards such as prizes endowed by private companies? How do language politics influence what is being supported? What is their outcome for the Tunisian book market and its ability to export to other arabophone or francophone countries? Tunisian readers them-

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such as the project "In 2016: How it felt to live in the Arab World five years after the 'Arab Spring'" at the University of Oslo under the lead of Prof. Stephan Guth which analyzed social media activities, textual as well as non-textual expressions online and offline, as well as Prof. Friederike Pannewick's research project "Turning Points | Figures of Thought" (2012–2020, DFG, Leibniz-Prize) at Philipps-Universität Marburg that also included a wide spectrum of different forms of cultural expressions to gain insights into the region.

3   Here, I refer to the Tunisian editors' roundtable discussion of the state of publishing at the *Foire Internatio-nale du Livre de Tunis/Maʿraḍ Tūnis al-dawlī li-l-kitāb* introduced by Ghazi Mejbri and with the participation of the Union of Tunisian Publishers ('Ittihād al-nāshirīn al-tūnisiyīn') under its president Mohamed Salah Maalej from 30 March 2016. I witnessed the general discontent of the publishers with the conditions of publi-shing, financial support, the specific organization of the book fair, its expensiveness for the participating pub-lishers, and the general lack of interest in the country's cultural production.

4   Compare: "La Tunisie au Salon du Livre de Genève: Les éditeurs se disent marginalisés", 22/04/2016 via: http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/04/22/la-tunisie-au-salon-du-livre-de-geneve-les-editeurs-se-disent-marginalises/.

selves form a related research aspect that needs to be addressed. Who reads the Tunisian literary production and how are prospective readers constrained by issues of access, availability, and the prestige (or lack thereof) of Tunisian publications? Once again, the annual book fairs might be a good first port of call since they offer the single best opportunity to buy books in Tunisia and to restore the belief in the reading audience. In contrast to this, Ali Abassi expresses his disappointment in the near absence of reading habits among his compatriots in his *Littératures tunisiennes. Vers le renouvellement* (2006: 10–17). The disinterest in reading, as Abassi claims, could be examined further. All of these issues and research perspectives would allow us to extend the understanding, meaning, and cultural value of the texts analyzed in their workings within Tunisian society.

In order to broaden the scope, a different avenue for research might also be the comparative analysis of the literary production throughout the Maghreb, which tends to marginalize Tunisian production as was outlined in the *Introduction*. Here, the book markets in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco might be an interesting starting point to allow for a levelling of the Maghreb's different national literatures. The theme of the body could be widened further by reading comparatively across the Maghreb, thereby extending Susanne Kaiser's study to include Arabic texts from Morocco and Algeria, as well as the present discussion of the body in the post-colonial Tunisian novel. To better grasp the post-colonial situation itself, a comparative reading of French and Tunisian literary production could offer yet another possibility to expand upon the results of this study, in order to follow the aspect of cultural haunting through the colonial experience, as is exemplified for the French-Algerian past and literature by Fiona Barclay's study *Writing Postcolonial France. Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (2011).

Finally, the oscillatory movement that appeared throughout the study frequently in the analysis of Tunisian literature, and was used to describe Tunisian society, lends itself to wider exploration. I would like to suggest it as a relevant approach to other North African literatures and societies and encourage the extension of its application to post-colonial societies in other regions.

6   By Way of an Ending

Although this project's open-endedness was outlined in the previous section, in order to conclude this book, a return shall be made to its anecdotal starting point, to Bouazizi's self-immolation and to Ben Ali's arrival at his hospital bed, acknowledging a bandaged body. The image contained the embodiment of the marginalized and disenfranchised people of Tunisia at the end of 2010. It made their being-in-the-world visible and comprehensible for countless onlookers. *Chapter 5* returned to the uprising and the centrality of the body in it by discussing Kamel Riahi's novel *al-Ghurillā* and its portrayal of a protest's development. The novel was shown to point outwards from the fictional representation of Tunisia towards text-external reality in the afterword, thereby suggesting a connection between the events on the street, the novel's narrative, and the bodies of both the protagonist and the fictionalized author/narrator: The author was morphing into a gorilla after all, into the nickname of his protagonist. He was becoming a fictional hero and participated in the production of revolutionary myths; this indicated his awareness for their creation alongside the protest. Heroic ascriptions and hyperboles have not only influenced representation, but have also shaped how Tunisian reality was seen and thereafter became in the period of the uprisings and immediately following them. Marwan M. Kraidy's description of the uprising and the role of the human body therein illustrates this. Kraidy notes in *The Naked Blogger of Cairo* (2016) the centrality of the human body in the uprisings, in how the people stood up

for themselves and rallied for a dignified life, and in how they reclaimed: "popular sovereignty from the body of the tyrant" (2016: 223). Kraidy declares the existence of a "heroic body of the revolutionary self" that rose as part of the uprisings and which was heralded in 'creative insurgency', the umbrella term that the author develops to describe all kinds of cultural production in the context of the uprisings. Kraidy refers to this 'heroic body' as: "an extension of the people's bodies in the public sphere" (2016: 223). This means that the existence of people's bodies in the streets was primary to or temporally before the creative insurgency which in turn preceded the "heroic body of the revolutionary self" as a "new sense of self" (2016: 223, 20).

While this study agrees with the importance of bodies in the revolutionary context, it has also shown this importance not as a new development, but instead highlighted the continuous relevance of bodies since a time before the Tunisian struggle for independence. The fight against the French influence was already one about bodies that claimed their freedoms (compare the reading of Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui's *al-Tūt al-murr* in *Chapter 1*). Furthermore, as was noted in the *Introduction*, the colonial situation was also shaped by bodies and by their specifics; after all, physical differences were resorted to in order to justify dispossession and control.

The second part of this study suggested that forms of dissent in cultural production preceded the protests and also the bodies in the streets. Literary bodies, however, were carriers of critique in novels, specifically in the 1990s when open criticism was nearly impossible. An 'intimate dissent' was developed and expressed through bodies. This study, therefore, doubts the existence of "the heroic body of the revolutionary self" as Kraidy describes it. Kraidy suggests the existence of a generic body that is singled-out, but at the same time is unmarked. Such a body was refuted in the case of literature in *Part I*. Literature simply does not contain generic bodies. Riahi's novel highlighted the constructedness of the idea of a "heroic body of the revolutionary self" and its imaginariness. The Gorilla might be perceived of as such a heroic body; however, this perception can only take place when seen through the eyes of all onlookers at the same time. It could not be what enables the protest, as that is instead found in the individual perspectives. The onlookers are moved to protest while they witness the events individually. These center around not a generic body, but around the concrete body of an individual. *Part II* of this study highlighted instances of dissent in the problematic, marginalized bodies that only with hindsight – as in the case of Mohammad Bouazizi – might be re-constructed to fit the mold of Kraidy's "heroic body of the revolutionary self". They are, however, specific bodies, not one generic body.

Instead of detecting a generic, heroic body, the study has opted to focus on a more complicated multi-layered reading of bodies in literary works and what they tell us about Tunisian society. The bodies found in the analyzed texts appeared to oscillate between passivity and activity, marginalization and protest. By being in this oscillatory motion, they always already contained a potential for change that is contagious and fear-inducing. This can be specifically emphasized from a post-factum perspective, as Riahi's afterword has shown, but it is equally present in Messaouda Boubakr's *Ṭurshqāna* and in other narratives. The question of whether a new sense of self arose as part of the uprisings, which is what Kraidy is suggesting, seems to ignore tendencies that have been motioning in the direction of the uprising all along. This chimes with Gana's observation that Tunisian literature has long contained decolonial critique and, thereby, that it has had a "repository of critical dissent" to contribute to the revolutionary moment (compare Gana 2013: 16–17). A similar observation is made by Xavier Luffin in his *Printemps arabe et littérature* with regards to Arabic literature in general. Luffin highlights how literature from the MENA region stored the

memory of instances of public dissent for more than a century before they were reactivated through the actual uprising (2013: 27, 113). These observations highlight and confirm the relevance of literary works as sources for socio-political insights and they invite us to read more and to read more closely.

Appendix

Further Information about Novels and Authors

The following contains synopses of the novels analyzed in the preceding study as well as biographical information about their authors. Novels appear in the order in which they were discussed in the previous chapters and works that were addressed in more than one chapter are discussed in the section on the chapter in which they were first mentioned. The characters' names appear as they are written in the novels (or with regards to Arabic in transliteration). This means that in between the texts various spellings of the same name can occur. The biographical information that appears below the articles was provided by the authors, except where otherwise indicated, either in personal interviews or through their literary works in the form of back cover texts and writer's presentations.

Chapter 1

al-Tūt al-murr *(1967, 'The bitter mulberries') by Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui.*

The novel interlaces two narrative strands that are connected in the central figure, a young man called ʿAbdallāh. The first strand describes his encounter with ʿĀʾisha. ʿĀʾisha is the lame daughter of Shaykh Miftāḥ who had to leave his home in Libya and who recently arrived in the village with his two daughters. The second strand follows ʿAbdallāh and his friends. It describes ʿAbdallāh's increasing aversion to the consumption of hashish (*takrūrī*). Set in the context of a growing nationalist awareness, the ultimate destruction of the village's *takrūrī* production is cast as a protest against the French protectorate; this time, the protest was directed against *takrūrī*, but the next time, as the French are expected to think, it might revolve around another issue that is more important to them.

ʿĀʾisha is the younger daughter of two. Her disability started when she was a small girl and after lightning struck the ground right next to her. She was unconscious for a while and developed a fever afterwards. Her parents managed to keep her alive, but she was left with paralyzed legs after the fever subsided. Her sister, Mabrūka, and her father care for her since she cannot walk and instead can only crawl. Her mother passed away and the family worries about ʿĀʾisha's future. They assume that she will never marry or have children. ʿĀʾisha befriends the neighbor's daughter Fāṭima (ʿAbdallāh's younger sister). ʿAbdallāh hears about ʿĀʾisha for the first time through his sister. He is overcome with sympathy for her difficult fate. Even before meeting her for the first time, he dreams about a beautiful girl and assumes that this must be ʿĀʾisha. He seeks her out to see whether or not the girl in his dream was really ʿĀʾisha. After ʿAbdallāh meets ʿĀʾisha, and is impressed by the beauty of the moment he lays eyes on her, he cannot stop thinking about her face.

Instigated by his friends ʿAbdallāh tries *takrūrī* and makes negative experiences after the consumption. In his delusion he eats a slab of clay and raw meat. He also experiences frightening hallucinations. Through Fāṭima, ʿĀʾisha hears about his strange behavior when under the influence of the drug and realizes that it produces an escape from one's reality, something she wishes for dearly. When the opportunity arises for ʿĀʾisha and ʿAbdallāh to speak in private, she asks him despite her embarrassment to give her *takrūrī* because she too would like to escape her reality. ʿAbdallāh reacts with anger. He dislikes the idea of her using *takrūrī* and promises that he will save her from her reality, but not by way of a drug.

ʿAbdallāh and his friends unite in their fight against *takrūrī* because they see its consumption as a crime against their society; it is forbidden in France while it remains permit-

ted in Tunisia. This is interpreted by the friends as France's conscious effort to keep the Tunisians weak. They found a secret society, *The Society for the Rescue of the Youths* and plan to destroy the *takrūrī* plants that are grown in the village. For his friend Ibrāhīm in specific the stakes are high; his father owns the only store in the village that is allowed to sell *takrūrī* and the family depends on this business. The father is also a veteran who lost one of his legs in the first World War and received a medal from the French. The friends, however, including Ibrāhīm, go through with their plan one night. The next day, the villagers wonder who might have been behind the destruction. Ibrāhīm sees a car arriving in the village and two police officers enter his father's shop. Ibrāhīm follows them secretly. The police officers inquire whether there had been any news regarding the destruction of *takrūrī*. The father replies that this was the first time he ever failed to acquire the information they are looking for and promises to do his best, but they must keep their collaboration a secret.

After Ibrāhīm overhears the conversation, he is angry and disappointed in his father's betrayal. He decides that he needs to teach his father a lesson to remind him that he belongs to his nation and fatherland. He burns the father's stock of *takrūrī* and tells him what he thinks of his betrayal of the Tunisian cause. The success of the secret society's effort is that *takrūrī* and alcohol are no longer consumed in public.

Meanwhile ʿAbdallāh is pestered by his mother to find a wife. He declares that he wants to marry ʿĀʾisha since, unlike other girls in the village, she would otherwise struggle to find a husband. His decision does not please his parents. ʿAbdallāh goes on hunger strike to get what he wants. Eventually he marries ʿĀʾisha, but his mother refuses to live with them and moves out. ʿAbdallāh suffers. ʿĀʾisha becomes pregnant with their first child. After giving birth, she is miraculously cured from her condition and can walk again. ʿAbdallāh is delighted, but instead of greeting her and his newborn baby boy, he runs to tell his mother that ʿĀʾisha is no longer lame, and that his transgression by marrying her is solved. On the way, he has an accident and falls unconscious.

Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui (Muḥammad al-ʿArūsī al-Matawī) was born in 1920 in Métouia, the place after which he was named. He studied law at Zaytūna University. He then taught at Zaytūna before entering the diplomatic service after Tunisian independence. In 1964, he was elected to the National Assembly. He was the chief editor of the journal Qiṣṣaṣ *published by Nādī al-qiṣṣa (The Club of the Story) an organization at which he was president from 1964 until 1995. In addition to* al-Tūt al-murr*, he published the novel* Ḥalīma *('Ḥalīma', 1964) as well as poetry collections, children's books, and plays. Mohamed Laroussi El Metoui died in 2005.*

Un retour au pays du bon Dieu (1989, 'A return to God's country') by Ridha Bourkhis

The novel narrates Abdallah's return to his Tunisian village after twenty years of absence. The returnee is anxious because he fell out with his father when he left and refused to marry his cousin Zèynèb to whom he had been engaged since his childhood. The parents receive him back despite the disgrace that his departure had caused them.

Even before he is greeted by his parents, however, he encounters the ghost of his grandfather who died fifteen years previously. Throughout the novel, Abdallah receives visions and ghostly visits from his deceased cousin Zèynèb, his former lover Jamila who allegedly killed herself, and from his dead grandfather. In addition, he sees letters in his dreams and finds actual letters and notebooks. All of this leads him to solve the mystery surrounding Jamila's death and to find out what happened to Zèynèb.

While the family assumes that Abdallah will start to work on the family's fields, he feels estrangement. He thinks about his diploma, his French wife, and their children who will follow him to Tunisia a month later. The father is impressed that his son had earned a doctorate, making him the first doctor in the village. Abdallah is informed that a banquet will be held in his honor and that he will be expected to give a talk. Among those invited is Officer Muhammad Salah, Jamila's widower. During the talk, Abdallah becomes distracted by his presence and wonders whether his wife had told him about their relationship before she died. In his talk, Abdallah addresses the role of women in the West and notes that they are not murdered there. He looks at the officer and has the feeling that the entire audience shares a secret from which he himself is excluded. The officer seems embarrassed.

Abdallah describes his love affair with Jamila retroactively. It had started when he was 15 and she was 22. While he was initially asked to run errands for her, sexual encounters followed. Zèynèb knew about the affair and suggested that Abdallah should marry Jamila instead of her. She implored him to demand Jamila from her husband who was mistreating her and unable to satisfy her sexually due to an erectile dysfunction. She (Zèynèb) did not want to marry Abdallah herself, because she was in love with another man as Abdallah found out after his return.

During Abdallah's search for the truth, he encounters resistance until, finally, the owner of the coffee house tells him to speak to his uncle, Zèynèb's father, since he was the first to hear the gun shots involved in Jamila's alleged suicide.

In addition, Abdallah finds a notebook from his grandfather that suggested that Zèynèb did not die of leukemia, but instead that she committed suicide in order to pre-empt a scandal. With this, Abdallah confronts his uncle who starts to cry and gives him a booklet with Zèynèb's farewell letter that she wrote that says that she committed suicide because of a pregnancy that was conceived out of wedlock. When Abdallah speaks to the officer, he tells him that he saw Zèynèb in an intimate meeting with a man. At the time, the officer informed her father that he saw a burglar at his property. Her father, despite his doubts about the story, hired someone to watch the house at night and this prevented Zèynèb's lover from returning. She committed suicide because her lover did not come back according to the officer. The officer told his wife about the story, and she took Zèynèb's side; this made him realize that she also had a nightly visitor. The officer murdered her and made it look like a suicide. At the entrance of his house, he meets Zèynèb's father and tells him about the suicide story. Two weeks after Jamila's burial, Abdallah's sister Mèryèm disappears. After finding out all of this, Abdallah decides to burn the grandfather's cabin in the garden and receives a burn from the flames.

In Abdallah's mind, four people fought against the reign of patriarchy: Jamila, Zèynèb, Mèryèm, and him. His entire search for truth is described as his effort to end the destruction and violence that results from authoritarian and patriarchal structures. This story is told in first person perspective by Abdallah to a second narrator who appears in the epilogue. The second first person narrator is one of Abdallah's students who leaves for Paris the next day. He feels the resemblances between himself and Abdallah and hopes to also earn a doctorate in France and to return with a wife like Abdallah's.

Ridha Bourkhis was born in 1966 in Hammam Sousse and after the initial stages of his education in Tunisia went to Paris for his doctorate at Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris IV) which he completed with a thesis entitled "La langage de connotation: recherche théoretique et application à l'œuvre de Tahar Ben Jelloun" in 1990. He is a Professor of French at Sousse University. In addition to his novel Un retour au pays du bon Dieu*, he has*

published short stories, poetry, and criticism. He is also a regular contributor to the Tunisian newspaper La Presse.

Tammās (1995, *'Mutually touching'*) by Aroussia Nalouti

This novel has two layers, one follows the characters in 'real' life and the second contains a novel written by the protagonist which reflects and fictionalizes the first layer's events.

This first layer contains the story of Zaynab Ḥassan ʿAbd al-Jabbār, her previous lover Maḥmūd, and her parents. The story is told by different characters and from various perspectives (it uses first-person as well as third-person narrators). Zaynab is a journalist and Maḥmūd is a poet. He is married to another woman, but has had an on-again off-again affair with Zaynab. At the beginning of the narrative, they are separated. He thinks of Zaynab because the newspaper contains a headline that she (or a person with the same name, as he adds) has killed her father. Their previous affair was characterized by fulfilling physical encounters he never knew with his wife, who is described as a broken woman since her brother's death. Zaynab ended the relationship with Maḥmūd because she was jealous of his wife, his affectionate relationship with his daughter, and because she cannot have him to herself. However, both seem to suffer from the breakup. The Gulf War rages alongside the plot unfolds.

Zaynab's parents are Hajj Qāsim and Khadīja. Khadīja is ill. She was mistreated by her husband for a long time who was never tender with her. He was only close to his mother, whom Khadīja had to serve. When Khadīja was pregnant with her first child, she had no idea what was going on. She did not know the facts of life when she was married off. After her daughter was born, the mother-in-law forbids her son to see his child for a year. When her mother-in-law finally dies, Khadīja cannot feel sad about her death. Khadīja hopes that everything will improve, but her husband had already internalized his mother's ways. Khadīja withdraws from the relationship, is disgusted by him, and realizes that he cannot show affection. The couple lives like neighbors in one house. However, late in life Khadīja discovers the pleasure of going to the *hammām* and to experience her body unseen by male eyes. Her only concern in life is for her daughter's future.

The second layer is a novel-within-the-novel written by Zaynab under the title *An Account of the Debris of Memory*, which is a reference to Maḥmūd's poetry. The protagonist of this novel-within-the-novel is called Zaynab ʿAbd al-Jabbār. She has a lover by the name of Ṣalāḥ, who is married and has a daughter. He is an architect and a poet who published a poetry collection called *Debris of Memory*. Theirs is a story of lovers who cannot get away from each other. According to Ṣalāḥ, Zaynab came to him whenever she wanted and stirred his desire, only to quench it again with her disregard. He blames her for not knowing what she wants and for sabotaging his self-assurance. She initiated the revival of their relationship after reading his poetry. Although he no longer had sexual relations with his wife, Zaynab remained jealous of her and of his daughter, whose relationship to Ṣalāḥ is narrated with sexual undertones.

Zaynab's mother in the novel-within-the-novel is sick; she has just had an operation. The doctors tell Zaynab that they could not help her mother. Although they opened her abdomen and diagnosed a peritonitis, they could do nothing to reduce the overgrowth on her uterus that was caused by many self-administered pregnancy interruptions. The mother is dying and Zaynab and her sisters are present while her husband is not. The mother longs for his attention, nonetheless. She can let go of life and dies only when Zaynab tells her that the father had been by her bedside. When her father and his friends come to pick up the corpse to take it away for burial, Zaynab confronts him about the lack of attention he paid

to her mother and the abuse he committed. The father disowns Zaynab and throws her out of the house. She rips down his *jallābiyya* under which another one appears and another and another and another until he has lost his last *jallābiyya*. She does the same with his face. When she goes to grab him at last, his friends come between them and the father disappears.

The two layers of the narrative are connected by intermediary sections in which Zaynab comments on writing e.g. by discussing whether one can write a love story in times of war or how writing can be a play on names and epithets. She also discusses the disappearance of the father and argues that she did not want him to leave before they could settle accounts. She admits to herself that she only ever wanted to love him.

The novel ends with Zaynab sending a copy of her book *An Account of the Debris of Memory* to Maḥmūd. He immediately feels personally addressed, due to the title, which is a variation of one of his previous work's titles. The novel is dedicated to her father. Yet, Maḥmūd wonders which father she means (implying that he also sees himself as a father).

Aroussia Nalouti (ʿArūsiyya al-Nalūtī) was born in 1950 in Annaba (Algeria). Her father, a merchant, came from Djerba. She received primary and secondary education in Tunis and studied Arabic language and literature. She completed her Licence d'arabe at the Faculté des Lettres in Tunis and started teaching in Nabeul, and then in Tunis some time later. In 1994, she received the Certificat d'Aptitude à la Recherche for a study about the body in the contemporary Arabic novel. She worked for the Ministry of Culture. Apart from Tammās, *she also published the novel* Marātīj *('Locks', 1985) In addition to writing novels, she also writes screenplays, children's books, and criticism.[1]*

Sombre histoire des cellules folles *(2001, 'A dark story of crazy cells') by Alia Mabrouk*

The narrative follows protagonist Alia's experience with breast cancer, from the very first diagnosis through surgery and chemotherapy until the breast is reconstructed. The narrative gives an insight into the struggles that a cancer patient goes through in coming to terms with the illness. According to the author, her book was used in breast cancer awareness programs. It is built upon the author Alia Mabrouk's personal experiences with the disease. Yet, it cannot be understood as an exemplary account of an ordinary breast cancer patient in Tunisia, since the upper-class background of the patient is blatantly apparent from the fact that she receives treatment in France and frequently travels back and forth between Paris and Tunis without giving the expenses involved a second thought.

A central element of the narrative is the protagonist's effort to remain seemingly healthy in the midst of disease and treatment. She attempts to hide any signs of her condition and pretends, even to herself, that her cancer does not exist. Yet, it does exist and one of her breasts is surgically removed in order to prevent further spreading. The first-person narrator vividly narrates the bodily repercussions of her treatment, especially the gap that the amputated breast leaves behind and the discomfort the chemotherapy causes.

She loses her hair and covers her head with a wig. After the removal of her breast, she also wears a prosthesis made from silicon to fill the void. In her daily activities, which she

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1   Compare Fontaine, Jean. 1997. "ʿArûsiyya Al-Nâlûtî: écrivaine tunisienne." *Le Maghreb littéraire* 1 (1): 55–70.

keeps up at all times, she is very careful not to do anything that could let others know about the wig or about the prosthesis. She concludes that she is living for the benefit of others rather than for herself.

Meanwhile, all her energies are focused on having her breast rebuilt. She is horrified when doctors suggest that at her age the reconstruction might not be necessary (at the time of her diagnosis, she is 54 years old). Eventually, the breast is reconstructed, however, and Alia is immediately shocked by the results since the new breast is higher than the other, natural breast. The surgeon is convinced that it will drop lower as part of her recovery from the surgery. A week later, the breast is still too high and this time the doctor agrees that it needs to be fixed. Alia receives a new appointment two months later. She now has to hide the fact that one of her breasts is higher than the other. Eventually, the breast is operated on again, this time to her liking.

Motifs that are contained in the novel are death and funerals. Alia plans her own funeral at one point and decides that she wishes to be cremated. She speculates that this would have to be done in France since, to her knowledge, the procedure is impossible to attain in Tunisia as an Islamic country.

The notion of death and funerals is also present in a longer digression that describes her attendance at Bourguiba's funeral. She not only describes what happens, but also uses the funeral as a possibility to repeat what the founder of modern Tunisia had done for his country, especially in terms of opening education to everyone.

Death and funerals are also present in a chance meeting Alia and her sister have with a woman in a Parisian park after Alia's last check-up. The woman grieves for her deceased husband, an ornithologist who did research on migratory birds in Tunisia. She describes an experience she had when she scattered his ashes in the Tunisian desert. Two girls passed her and gave her flowers and a small doll which she saw as a token from her dead husband. Alia comments on the story, remarking how narratives are adapted to the hopes and requirements of their narrators, which causes one to wonder about how far her own narrative was adapted as well.

There are more references to Tunisia and to Tunisian history in the material that Alia reads or writes to keep herself occupied in hospital and during her chemotherapy (e.g., in her intention to write a novella about Louis IX in Carthage).

The narrative contains several instances that critique the medical realm. Cancer, for example, is discussed as a disease for which the treatment, especially in its early stages, appears far more invasive and painful than the disease. In Alia's case, as in many others, the cancerous growth is not felt through pain, but is instead diagnosed. Thereby, in the consciousness of the patient, the cancer is created through the diagnosis, although it certainly existed before. Alia's refusal to accept psychological support services is similar to this. Although she clearly suffers from the loss of her breast, she does not take the offer that a psychologist could talk to her and generally does not seem to approve of mental health support. Finally, medical professionals are overall presented in a negative light. One example includes Alia's exchanges with the doctor who oversaw the chemotherapy and who, in the end, thoughtlessly asserts that her operated breast is much prettier than it originally was. Alia has lost her sense of touch under the arm next to the operated breast which makes the doctor's statement sound even more ridiculous to her.

The narrative ends with Alia who has somewhat made peace with her prosthetic breast which she considers an accessory that makes her more beautiful.

In terms of its literary features, *Sombre histoire des cellules folles* is told in a chronological fashion without specific literary techniques or embellishments, an organization that reflects the genre of testimonials.

Alia Mabrouk was born in 1945 in El Kef as the daughter of a French mother and a father of Berber origins. She married into an extended family that became one of the most influential families in post-independence Tunisia with personal ties – via her husband's brother and his sons – to Bourguiba's family as well as, one generation later, to Ben Ali's circle. Her husband, Boubaker Mabrouk, was the general manager of Banque de Tunisie for several decades. Abir Kréfa quotes Mabrouk referring to the initial opposition that she received from her husband's family when she started writing and publishing at an age of over forty. Alia Mabrouk has since published science-fiction novels such as Hurlement *(summarized below) and historical novels such as* L'Émir et les croisés. Chronique d'Ifriqiya *('The emir and the crusaders. A chronical of Ifriqiya', 2003) which received the COMAR d'Or in the year of its publication.*[2]

Chapter 2

Un retour au pays du bon Dieu *by Ridha Bourkhis*
See Chapter 1.

Ce Pays dont je meurs *(2000, 'The country from which I die') by Fawzia Zouari*
The novel tells the story of an Algerian family of four and is narrated by the eldest daughter, Nacéra. Her account starts when police and an ambulance come to the flat that she shares with her younger sister, Amira. Aged 26 and 33 respectively, the sisters are starving; Amira because she has been suffering from anorexia for years and Nacéra because she fails to earn the money necessary to provide for herself and for her sister.

In an effort to pass the time while waiting for death, as Nacéra claims, she starts to tell her sister the story of their lives. Her account brings her closer and closer to the time of narration, yet it is also interlaced with various associative jumps in time.

Nacéra narrates how her parents met and were married, despite the mother being from a more respected family. Nacéra's father is said to have gone to France to work merely to impress his future in-laws. Her mother's longing to join her husband in France is described when, years after their marriage, she still has to stay behind in Algeria with their daughter Nacéra. Eventually, their father takes them to France with him. They arrive in a tiny and barely furnished apartment which does not please the mother. However, she accommodates herself and has a second daughter, Amira, to overcome her estrangement, according to Nacéra.

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2   Sources in addition to the personal interview with the author on 6 October 2015: Kréfa, Abir. 2011. "Corps et sexualité chez les romancières tunisiennes. Enjeux de reconnaissance, coûts, et effets de 'transgressions'." *Travail, Genre et Sociétés* 2: 105–128; Boumiza, Khaled (2006) "Groupe Mabrouk: Un groupe tourné vers l'extérieur", originally published in *African Manager*, published online on *Turess* [last access 30/7/2017]: http://www.turess.com/fr/africanmanagerfr/11942; N.N. (2014) "La tribu MABROUK: ce que peu de gens savent", *L'Expert* [last access 30/7/2017]: http://www.lexpertjournal.net/fr/1418/la-tribu-mabrouk-ce-que-peu-de-gens-savent/.

Despite the distance in age, Nacéra describes how the sisters grew up together, how they shared the role of the 'foreign sisters' at school. Amira is initially shown as strong-willed and eager to participate in the lessons. She struggles with her Algerian background, calls herself Marie, and claims to be of Italian descent. At the age of 12, she loses her appetite and her interest in education shortly after that. Nacéra describes how her sister withers away, how doctors are consulted, and that no treatment follows after she is eventually diagnosed with anorexia.

The parents' marriage is shown as positive and sensual. The father can be his own boss at home, even though has to follow orders and adapts to the French context at work. He enjoys regular sexual encounters with his wife and Nacéra notes that it is as if this was his way of taking back possession of a country that he never forgave himself for leaving. The mother, although ambivalent towards France and continuously withdrawn into the apartment's bathroom to take long baths, pretends to live a life of luxury when they return to Algeria every two years, carrying presents for the entire extended family.

Nacéra is too ashamed of herself to do well at school. She tries to minimize the attention that she draws, by being much older and taller than her French classmates, and accordingly fails to gain her baccalaureate. She starts as a trainee at a local grocer.

The family's actual tragedy begins when the father has an accident at work and becomes wheelchair-bound. He is out of work and only receives a small amount of compensation, since his employer claims the accident happened outside of working hours. Nacéra finds a job as a secretary and her first few salaries are used to pay for a lawyer in an effort to get the father's previous employer to pay more. The father dies two years after the accident and the family tries everything to arrange for his funeral in Algeria. After their return from Algeria, the mother decides that she has to earn money as well and begins to work as a house maid.

Nacéra and her mother still pretend to have a glorious life during their next visit to Algeria, despite their tragic reality in France. Nacéra claims to be an architect and that Amira is an industrious student. Amira no longer wants to lie.

Eventually, the mother has to stop working as a maid due to her health. Amira loses the job that she had only recently started. Nacéra falls in love with another Algerian, they date for a year which makes her happy for the first time in her life. Then her boyfriend suddenly disappears. As a result, Nacéra slacks off at work and makes mistakes until she is fired, despite having worked at the same firm for ten years. She finds other jobs, however, mostly short-term ones and does not make enough money to support her family. She receives a letter from her boyfriend explaining that he went back to Algeria, because although he loved France, the country did not love him back.

Several months later the mother dies after having spent her last days in silence. Nacéra does not find enough work, all of their savings have been used up, she even starts to sell what little she has in the apartment. Nacéra takes her sister to hospital where they are told that Amira has to stay to be treated. Nacéra refuses this, thinking that she cannot leave half of her own body behind. When a woman from the social services comes to their door, Amira gets angry and shouts that she does not want any charity. Nacéra feels that she would be betraying Amira if she asked for help. However, the woman arranges for their rent to be paid by the state.

Amira knows that she will die and asks her sister not to call an ambulance or to try and save her. The story ends where it started and the ambulance arrives. Someone takes Amira out of Nacéra's arms.

Fawzia Zouari was born in 1955 in El Kef. She holds a doctorate in French and compara-
tive literature from Paris-Sorbonne University. She has lived in Paris since 1979 and is
currently a journalist for Jeune Afrique. *She previously worked for the Institut du Monde*
Arabe. She publishes critical essays and articles, as well as novels. Her novel, Le corps de
ma mère *('The body of my mother', 2016), received the Prix des 5 Continents de la Fran-*
cophonie.[3]

Ḥikāya tūnisiyya (2007; English transl. A Tunisian Tale, 2011) by Hassouna Mosbahi

The novel tells the story of a murder alternately from the murderer's (i.e., the son's) and the
victim's (his mother's) point of view. The event of the murder is approached over the
course of a narrative that is dominated by retrospective accounts in which both mother and
son describe their lives. The end of the story is alluded to from the beginning: the mother is
burned to death by her son, Alaa al-Din, who ends up on death row waiting for his execu-
tion.

     The mother describes her childhood as having ended harshly when her body showed the
first signs of becoming a woman's body. She was no longer allowed to run around with the
boys. At the age of sixteen, she felt like a prisoner in her own home and under the close
scrutiny of the people in her village who monitor her behavior for any transgression. She is
the most beautiful girl there, but thinks that beauty is a danger. She fears being pushed into
a ravine at any moment. When a young man who had left to work in the capital returns to
the village and asks for her hand in marriage, she accepts to escape the control of her en-
vironment. She arrives in a neighborhood of Tunis that scares her, M Slum. She is happy
for the first time when she visits the city center with her husband and wishes to be there by
herself. She has nightmares in which the other inhabitants of M Slum burn her at the stake.

     Married life bores and disgusts her. She never wanted to be a mother. When she finds
out that she is pregnant, the news is a surprise. As soon as her son is born, she feels that he
does not like her. She starts to go to the city center regularly by herself and eventually
meets a woman from her village who helps her to find a job. Her husband only finds out
about the job a month later.

     The mother is aware that her neighbors gossip about her and question her morals, some-
thing she blames on her beauty. She claims that what is being said is not true and that while
trying to live life to the fullest she always avoided getting herself into trouble or doing
anything that might cause her pangs of conscience. She acknowledges only having had one
affair a year after her husband died. She fell in love with a seemingly wealthy stranger and
they met several times to have sex until he vanished, leaving her feeling old and undesired.

     The son's accounts are gloomy and hopeless. He imparts a sense of disappointment in
his affectionless childhood that was dominated by the feeling that his mother never loved
him because she always left him in the care of others. The grandmother is described as the
only motherly figure in his life who told him stories and fairy tales. His favorite tale (Alaa
al-Din in the Land of Terrors) is included in both parts of the narrative.

     Ever since the age of seventeen, he knew that his life would be dominated by consecu-
tive losses (his father, his grandmother). His father died after a fight with a man from the

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3   Compare: https://www.francophonie.org/Prix-5-continents-Francophonie-28807 [last access: 31/07/17].

neighborhood who had molested his mother. Alaa al-Din ultimately blames his mother for his death, which causes their relationship to deteriorate further.

For the people of M Slum Alaa al-Din harbors reservations because they talk badly about his mother. He realizes that many of the women in the neighborhood work as prostitutes. After his father's death, nobody is interested in Alaa al-Din's academic achievements anymore, his grades deteriorate, and he drops out of school. A chance encounter with a young man called Aziz presents Alaa al-Din with the opportunity to work in a café. He is happy until men from his quarter, who used to hassle his parents, start to frequent the place. In horror, Alaa al-Din drops a tray. He excuses himself from the café without explaining his reasons or struggles. He feels that nobody would be able to relate and assumes that he would be kicked out regardless. He finds a job in a different bar, but then the guys from the quarter appear until the very same men who caused his father's death order beer from him. The same night he decides to take action. He tricks his mother into thinking that they are attending a wedding in a village close to the ravine near the Arches of Zaghouan. They are walking through the heat when he knocks her out, gags and binds her, pours gasoline all over her body, and sets her on fire.

After the murder, the son goes home and finds money that had been hidden away. He decides to spend it and have some fun in the beach resorts. He buys new clothes and visits Sousse, Monastir, and Hammamet, where he seduces women, drinks, and parties until the police find and arrest him. He has no regrets.

Hassouna Mosbahi (Ḥassūna al-Muṣbāḥī) was born in 1950 in a village in the proximity of Kairouan. After his graduation from university, he worked as a French teacher before he was removed from his job for political reasons, according to his own account. He worked as an independent journalist for different Arabic newspapers and journals such as al-Sharq al-ʾawsaṭ *and* al-Waṭan al-ʿarabī. *After study stays in Paris, Madrid, and London, he eventually settled down in Munich, Germany, where he lived from 1985 to 2004 before returning to Tunisia. Several of his works have appeared in German translation such as* Rückkehr nach Tarschisch *('Return to Tarshish', 2000) and* Adieu Rosalie *(2004), as well as the short story collection* Der grüne Esel *('The green donkey', 2013). He won the COMAR d'Or in 2020 for his novel* Lā nasbaḥ fī l-nahr marratayn *('We do not swim in the same river twice', 2020).*

Chapter 3

Le Sadique *(1970, 'The sadist') by Koelman*

The novel's narrative structure is intricate and multi-layered. *Le Sadique* begins with the preface of a (fictional) editor, followed by an introduction written by a doctor who refers to the characters in the text as 'patients'. The actual novel begins afterwards. The corpse of a dead girl is found together with a message from her murderer who expresses his hatred for women. Similar letters pervade the narrative and are invested in the discourse about modernity in independent Tunisia. The role of women is a key element of the debates as the novel depicts them.

Leila writes a comment about the murder for a newspaper. This part of the novel consists of her diary. It describes her struggles to acquire the newest novel by Zoubir, an author with whom she is infatuated and who reminds her of a former lover, Hichem. When she has finally gotten a hold of the novel, called *Le Sadique*, a novel-within-the-novel begins as she starts reading. It is narrated by a first-person narrator called Hichem. He describes his relationship with a woman called Leila who was his secretary and then became his lover. Alt-

hough he never wanted a Tunisian wife, eventually they get engaged despite him not follo-
wing Tunisian traditions of a generous dowry. He informs his family and the father threa-
tens to disinherit him if he goes through with the wedding. Hichem is also afraid of his
bride's mother because friends have warned him that all Tunisian mothers were vampires
keen on monetizing their daughters' flesh. Leila is described as the 'ideal oriental girl'
whose temperament and character are reminiscent of Shahrazade. Hichem experiences his
first, violent intimate exchange with her.

Two months before the wedding, Hichem is outraged by Leila's mother who is making
material demands and wants a traditional Tunisian wedding for her daughter; Leila is under
her influence. Hichem insists on a modern wedding. A misunderstanding follows and he
leaves for a month-long stay in Bonn, Germany, without seeing her again beforehand. Upon
his return, he finds two letters. Leila tells him that she got engaged to another man. He
writes an angry reply about men and women and gender differences. The second letter is
from his sister Mn'ê. She informs him that their parents had banished her fiancé and indica-
tes that she is psychologically unstable.

Hichem spends the next two weeks in a haze, drugged with alcohol and in the company
of an imaginary twin sister of Leila's with whom he acts out all the outrageous things he
can think of to let her blood flow and his passions soar. He wants to take his revenge on all
women.

Eventually, he leaves to stay with his sister. Their bedridden mother dies during his vis-
it. The siblings develop a sexual desire for each other. An incestuous relationship starts at
his sister's initiative, inviting him to sleep with his hand between her breasts. Hichem de-
scribes that he is trying to fight the incestuous desire. However, he is overcome by it, some-
thing facilitated by alcohol. Desire is personified as a strong beast that possesses him. His
sister refuses his brutality, but not his sexual intentions. He hurts her with a razor blade.
After their first sexual encounter, Hichem states that both of them agreed to follow their
incestuous desires and to satisfy their pleasures together. His sister, however, grows hostile
towards him and loses weight over the following weeks, as he notes, which indicates that
his representation of the mutual consent between them might be biased.

During their lovemaking, their father suddenly stands in the doorway for a moment.
While the siblings are uncertain, whether they did indeed see their father, they plan to kill
him. The father is completely drunk. He calls them the devil's children. When he is asleep,
they strangle him. Afterwards, the sister refuses Hichem's sexual advances. He hits her
unconscious, so as to be able to satisfy himself with her body. He generally treats her with
increasing violence and is intoxicated by the idea of drinking her blood. He eventually kills
her with an axe, then sexually abuses her corpse for several days, exploring her primary and
secondary sexual characteristics. He lays her to rest in the family vault, only to recover the
dead body a while later. He is shocked by its grossness, having hoped to find her beautiful
and warm.

The novel-within-the-novel ends with an epilogue that refers to Doctor F who is said to
have succeeded in healing the patient. He took Hichem's confession, which is represented
as a therapeutical success, even though at the time Hichem had stated that he was uncertain
who killed his sister, the devil or himself. Two days after the confession, it is noted that
Hichem flew from the institution, which proves that Doctor F's success is an illusion.

Leila's account continues after she finishes reading the novel. She recognized herself as
the Leila from the narrative and the Hichem who is described as the Hichem of her past.
She longs for Hichem and is aroused by Zoubir's assertiveness. Leila reads newspaper
articles of women who had been brutally killed. Days later, she reads an article that states

that Zoubir and Hichem are in fact one person and that his novel, *Le Sadique*, is the story of his life.

Koelman is the penname of an author who also published under the name Loqman. It was impossible to find out more than the year of their birth (1938) as well as the information that the person behind the names is a novelist and a press correspondent. This information is given in Jean Déjeux's Dictionnaire des auteurs maghrébins de langue française (1984: 308) and the grammatical gender employed lets one assume that the writer behind Koelman is male.

al-Kursī al-hazzāz (2002, 'The rocking chair') by Amel Mokhtar

The novel tells the story of the relationship between a 39-year-old university employee called Mūna and her father who is bed ridden and of ill-health. The framing narrative is that of the father's disappointment after catching his daughter having sex with one of her students on the rocking chair at the family's house. He has refused any communication with her ever since the incident, even though they live together (Mūna's mother has died). Mūna expresses her regret for the lack of connection between them and which, for her, is not only tied to the incident on the rocking chair, but also to her development from a girl to a woman and the distance that her femininity brought between them.

Mūna wants to please her father to gain his forgiveness although many of her life choices seem to be in conflict with his understanding of proper female behavior. She has lovers, male friends, and is unmarried. The latter she decides to change over the course of the novel by giving in to a colleague's proposal of marriage. However, she is convinced that the institution of marriage is unnecessary. She believes that natural passion needs no contract. She sees her decision to marry as a form of self-punishment. Once married, she realizes her disgust for her husband Munjī whom she had always seen as her inferior. She separates from him on the day after the wedding to have an affair with his best friend.

The key theme of the novel is to be found within the narratives that all revolve around the loss of Mūna's virginity. These narratives are dispersed throughout the entire novel and are narrated by the first-person narrator Mūna to the different men in her life. Before offering her body to her husband, for the one and only one time, he is told that she was born without, or rather with, a flexible hymen that does not break during intercourse as she was notified by a doctor.

In another instance, seemingly before her plans to get married were established, she tells her lover Majdī that she was abused by an uncle when she was a child. This narrative is prompted by Majdī's surprise at finding her a virgin on the inside (i.e., mentally), as he says, although she is no longer like one physically. At her father's bedside she tells a different account of how she was sexually abused by the brother of her kindergarten teacher. The connection of abuse and education is specifically telling here, since Mūna knows that her father prides himself in giving her an education. She states that she never told her parents about what had happened to her, because they never asked.

When her friend Muḥammad later asks her what she had told her father, she gives another, different story. She tells him that she had recounted her seduction of a foreign student from Syria with whom she slept to find out whether she was still a virgin. The incommensurability of the accounts is addressed in the novel itself. Mūna expresses her doubts as to which account is accurate.

Mūna's friendships and experiences with Muḥammad and Majdī are narrated in greater detail than those with her (prospective) husband. While the poet Muḥammad is a friend, at

best a father figure for Mūna, he wants more than friendship. His desire for her is met by her laughter and ridicule, expressing her conviction that a platonic friendship between men and women is possible and can be more fulfilling and relevant than marriage. Such a friendship, however, is not trusted by Tunisian society as Mūna states. Mūna's relationship with Majdī is shown as an affair in which she is less forgiving and tolerant due to the passion that she invests in it. When Majdī introduces her to a new female acquaintance of his, Mūna is jealous, especially as he begins an intimate relationship with her. Both Mūna's friendship with Muḥammad and her affair with Majdī are presented as alternatives to the traditional legitimization of male-female encounters that can be found in marriage.

The theme of male-female relations is a repetition of the father-daughter relationship and all revolve around masculinity and femininity. On the morning after her bedside narration of the sexual abuse she allegedly experienced as a child, Mūna realizes that her father has died, which leaves her devastated and wondering whether he had actually heard her account. While Mūna knows that her father loved her, she is convinced that he hated her femininity. The novel ends with a dream in which she is reunited with her father. He approaches her in the form of a white horse. They go to sit by a table, which holds a heavy book, and he tells her that this will be their place, where they will meet every year from then on. She resolves that her father did not die and the pains of the wound of femininity inside her remain silent.

Amal Mokhtar (ʾĀmāl Mukhtār) was born in 1964 in El Kef. Since the middle of the 1980s, she has worked in the media sector, for radio, television as well as print media. She is chief editor of the newspaper al-Ṣiḥāfa. *She has published several novels, the first of which,* Nakhb al-ḥayāt *('The choice of life', 1993) was published by the prestigious publishing house Dār al-ādāb in Beirut with the support of Lebanese novelist Suhayl Idris. It received the Prize for Literary Creation awarded by the Tunisian Ministry of Culture in 1994. Her novel* Mayistrū *('Maestro', 2006) received the COMAR d'Or in the year it was published. She is also the author of collections of short stories.*

al-Ightiṣāb *(2008, 'The rape') by Hédi Thabet*

As the novel's title suggests, its narrative revolves around the issue of rape. However, it contains not one, but two scenes of rape. The narrative begins with the death of a young boy. Violent clashes between the police and the inhabitants of his quarter occur when the people march in the boy's funerary procession, a procession that was not authorized. Al-ʿĀtī, the protagonist of the novel, had anticipated the clashes and thought they might offer an opportunity for his oppositional organization to show the people its support. Other members were against this. During the clashes, youth throw stones at the police forces and al-ʿĀtī is imprisoned. He is questioned under torture about whether he was part of those who threw stones and bombs or if he knows their names. He is raped repeatedly by one of the prison's guards, but refuses to cooperate. After his release from prison, due to the foreign pressure against torture in Tunisian prisons, his elderly mother tells him that a girl had visited her and gave her money in his absence. The girl, Warda, comes back and reveals herself to be a member of his organization. She wants to find out more about the torture in prison to write a report. Al-ʿĀtī agrees to help her to get in touch with other former prisoners. Al-ʿĀtī and Warda fall in love. However, al-ʿĀtī feels that he cannot behave naturally with her before he has taken revenge for what happened to him in prison. He remembers details of his arrest that help him find the secret prison. He prepares his revenge and catches the warden outside of the prison. He blindfolds and fetters his victim and hangs him up on a

tree, upside down. Threatening him with a knife, al-ʿĀtī interrogates the warden to find out who was responsible for his torture. He receives the name and address of the warden's superior. However, instead of letting his victim escape, al-ʿĀtī leaves him hanging on the tree gagged, well aware that this might be the other's death sentence. He feels his manhood is re-established. His relationship with Warda can proceed.

However, there are new waves of arrests and al-ʿĀtī wants to commit suicide rather than being imprisoned again. He hides in a friend's flat. Warda is also in danger of being discovered as a member of the oppositional organization, since she spoke to the previous prisoners and wrote reports.

Al-ʿĀtī plans to kill the overseer who ordered the warden to rape him. Warda tells him that the time for revenge is over. They sleep with each other for the first time following Warda's initiative on the condition that al-ʿĀtī does not insist on killing the overseer. Warda leaves for Paris the next day. Al-ʿĀtī travels to France illegally his flight was organized in advance by Warda. In France, they are the guests of a leftist activist, but al-ʿĀtī is told to start a job in Clichy after several weeks (a job found for him by his host). Warda starts university and moves into a dormitory in Paris. The lovers grow apart and start to argue, specifically about gender roles. Warda reconnects with her cousin Ḥasīb of whom al-ʿĀtī immediately feels jealous. Warda welcomes Western ways, which irritates al-ʿĀtī. She also does not share al-ʿĀtī's aspirations for their future with him as the main provider. The two of them attend a political demonstration at which Warda's cousin is also present. Al-ʿĀtī loses them and cannot get hold of Warda for several days. He finds out later that she went with their previous host, Ḥasīb and others, to a farm where they amused themselves with food and wine.

Al-ʿĀtī makes the acquaintance of a Moroccan immigrant in Clichy. He is his only friend there. The Moroccan is a strict Muslim and although al-ʿĀtī is irritated at the beginning, he quickly admires the other and takes to reading the Qurʾān and texts by the Islamic conservative Sayyid Qutb.

On Warda's birthday, her cousin invites her out. She borrows a revealing dress and high heels. She realizes that her cousin is trying to get her drunk and thinks she is too clever for that to happen. After dinner, they go to a bar to dance. Warda drinks cognac and gets drunk quickly. Her cousin takes her to his flat. She is almost unconscious. He puts her on his bed, undresses, and rapes her. Warda returns to consciousness when he is entering her and tries to defend herself. Ḥasīb does not let go and Warda only grasps completely what happened when she wakes up the next morning. She feels disgusted, empties a bucket of water over her cousin's head, and runs away. She feels unable to see or talk to al-ʿĀtī. Instead, she decides to leave Paris and to stay with a friend in Lyon where she intends to continue her studies.

Al-ʿĀtī is at a loss as to what happened to her. He tries to find her but does not learn more than that she left her previous dormitory. Eventually, he grows closer to a group of Islamists with whom he made contact via his Moroccan friend. Al-ʿĀtī does not realize that he is getting entangled in a secret organization. He leaves for Pakistan for what he thinks is a holiday at the end of the novel.

Hédi Thabet (Al-Hādī Thābit) was born in 1942 in Tunis. He holds a Masters degree (Maitrise de recherche) in modern French from the University of Paris. He taught French in Tunis as well as in Baghdad. He writes science-fiction literature as well as realist fiction. One example of the latter is his novel al-Qaranful lā yaʿīsh fī al-ṣaḥrāʾ *('Carnations do not live in the desert', 2004), which received the COMAR d'OR in the year 2004, while an*

example of the former is his Ghār al-jinn *('The jinn's cave', 1999), which was awarded the Nihād Sharīf Prize for Science-Fiction in 2013. He also contributed to Tunisian radio by turning some of his works into serials programs, such as the novel* Law ʿāda Ḥanbaʿl *('If Hannibal returned', published as a novel in 2005).*

Chapter 4

Hurlement (1992, 'Screaming') by Alia Mabrouk

The entire plot of the novel happens in a hospital room in France and follows a patient who wakes up after a major surgery. The surgery is the crux of the story. A female brain has been transplanted into a brain-dead male body without the prior consent of the female patient who had gotten into a fatal accident that destroyed her body.

The novel is in part narrated from the perspective of the female brain or consciousness and in part by an omniscient narrator. Over time, the female consciousness realizes that she did not wake up in her own body, but in the body of a stranger and the reader accompanies her on this journey of discovery: from initial doubts as to the change in the sound of her voice, via her irritation at seeing different hands moving in front of her face, and to the inability to imagine her future in a male body.

Despite her efforts to ignore it, the male body becomes more and more present to the female brain throughout the novel since the medical personnel removes supportive equipment in an effort to allow the female consciousness to grow accustomed to her new body. For example, the catheter is removed so that she has to urinate by herself with the body's penis. The effect is, however, that she feels even more estranged, which is a central theme of the novel.

Her estrangement causes the consciousness to see herself and the male body as two separate entities. Although it seems as if she had been developing a certain acceptance of her situation (she had decided to help her body recover), an ultimate split occurs when she sees her male body's face towards the end of the novel. She recognizes and simultaneously fails to recognize herself in the mirror which causes a crisis and eventually her death.

The surgery itself is described as a prestige project, an experiment for the advancement of science that the operating surgeon wants to succeed dearly, without however considering the severe psychological repercussions it has for his patient. The efforts to help the patient are limited and only increase when the patient's distress becomes clear, after refusing to speak with anyone for several days, for example. Despite a few interactions with the hospital minister, there is hardly any relationship between the patient and the hospital staff; the only exception is a male nurse called Pierre who, however, also cannot console the female consciousness. Her complaints are ignored and she is not provided with tools or suggestions that might help her to recover from the shock of the surgery. Instead, the doctor argues that the differences between the sexes are not too remarkable and that what counts is life. The surgeon's ultimate goal is to defeat death. By exposing his perspective as unsuccessful, the novel suggests that the differences between the sexes are significant after all.

The age-old dream of overcoming death by some trick or procedure – here the brain transplant – is turned into a nightmarish science-fictional idea. The patient has no choice as her life and identity are taken from her. The decision was made by others, leaving her with the task of grappling with her identity so that she wonders which of the two (brain or body), might be her true identity from the time of the surgery. She is told that she should make whatever she feels is right from the 'material' that the body offers her. The female consciousness, however, is unable to find a compromise or coherence between her bodily and

mental identities. The influence of the body on identity and experience is highlighted (when seen through the eyes of others specifically, such as the hospital staff). The female consciousness's failure to see her brain and the male body as one, is due to the barriers that the consciousness sees existing in society against effeminate men (and by extension other gender non-conforming individuals). She feels that she is one of them, now. The consciousness's death is eventually caused by her inability to imagine a possible future for her female brain in a male body. Here, the novel hints at something that makes life livable, a working compromise between the understanding others have of ourselves and our own perspective.

For biographical details about Alia Mabrouk, see the note provided below her aforementioned novel Sombre Histoire des Cellules Folles *in the section on Chapter 1.*

Ṭurshqāna *(1999, 'Ṭurshqāna') by Messaouda Boubakr*

Ṭurshqāna is not only the title of this novel, but also the nickname its protagonist received from the children of the quarter in which she grew up. Properly called Murād, this protagonist dreams of becoming the woman she feels that she is on the inside. Without ever mentioning the term 'transsexual' or 'transgender' throughout the novel, the reader meets Ṭurshqāna dancing at a wedding, dressed in women's attire, expressing the wish to become a woman shortly thereafter. The ensuing narrative follows Ṭurshqāna and her attempt to receive her rightful share of her father's inheritance from her family, the al-Shawāshīs.

The narrative not only presents Ṭurshqāna, but also the rest of the family: the grandmother al-Ḥājja Qamr who takes up the position of a matriarch after her husband's death, her sons and Ṭurshqāna's uncles, their wives, and the cousins. In presenting this family, the author of the novel offers an array of different personalities that mirror Tunisian society; there is a cousin who is a philosophy professor and falters under the influence of his wife, a well-off young woman when they married who meanwhile turned into a serious businesswoman. Another cousin is convinced that in marrying Nūra, he married a writer rather than a wife. As for Ṭurshqāna, she is the son of Aḥmad al-Shawāshī and a French woman which set Ṭurshqāna apart from the very outset. Her father was assassinated in Paris for political reasons in clashes between Yusufists and Bourguibists, which al-Ḥājja Qamr interpreted as a manifestation of the Phoenician curse that had been on the family's men ever since they built their family fortune on the Phoenician treasure that an ancestor found. Ṭurshqāna's dream of becoming a woman is seen as another manifestation of the curse.

Ṭurshqāna believes that sex reassignment surgery will free her from the estrangement that she feels towards her body and solve the in-between stage that she is forced to occupy. The family comes together to decide what ought to be done about her appeal to receive her inheritance to pay for surgery. Although other family members ask for money and are given support, Ṭurshqāna's wish is refused. Instead, the family offers to finance an exhibition of her art (Ṭurshqāna is an artist).

Another story is woven into the novel that is parallel to this strand of the narrative, seemingly telling Ṭurshqāna's future as a post-operative transsexual called Nadā who lives in Le Havre as a sculptor and painter. Nadā stayed with her maternal grandfather, caring for him when he was sick and eventually inherited his house after he dies. She was able to have the surgery and is shown living in Normandy, sharing her house occasionally with Anūshka, an old friend of her mother's.

Anūshka is a point of contact between the strands of the narrative, since Ṭurshqāna is also described as being in contact with a musician called Anūshka. They exchange letters. Anūshka is willing to help Ṭurshqāna to organize her surgery in France.

Nadā is a successful artist who travels abroad to exhibit and sell her work. She is attractive and receives the attention of the men around her. However, she is unable to open up to her suitors and barely allows intimacy – mentally or physically. Her masculine build causes suspicion and deep within herself she seems to be uncertain about whether she is passing as a woman. The men around her, however, merely wonder whether she played a lot of sports at a younger age.

Both story lines are connected via Nūra, the author who is not only the wife of one of Ṭurshqāna's cousins, but also her friend and the only family member who shows support for her dream of becoming a woman. Nūra is writing a new novel and, unlike the previous times, does not share early drafts with Ṭurshqāna. Ṭurshqāna accidentally finds the folder with the draft and starts reading. It is Nadā's story, which means that the narrative strand forms a novel-within-the-novel. While Ṭurshqāna does not recognize herself in Nadā, she is aware that the narrative forms a prognosis of her own future. She feels as if her dream has been stolen from her. She disappears and takes the folder with her. The family is in deep distress after her disappearance. Nūra thinks that she has lost her talent to write. The novel presents three different endings and remarks that only one of them is true. In the first, a man is seen in a cave with a folder claiming that he is there to return the Phoenician tomb. In the second, a dead body is found in the sea South of Tunis. Its features are unrecognizable and even an autopsy cannot define the sex of the person. In the third ending, a young man with his beard shaven off was seen with a religious figure in Marrakech, alluding to a religious pilgrimage.

Messaouda Boubakr (Masʿūda Bū Bakr) was born in Sfax in 1954. She writes novels, short stories, children's stories, poetry, and journalistic articles. She presented the program "Majallāt ʿarabiyya" ('Arabic Journals') in Cultural Radio Tunisia and participated in other programs on National Radio. Many of her published novels received literary prizes; the novel Wadāʿan Hamūrābī *('Farewell Hammurabi', 2002) was awarded with the COMAR d'Or in 2003 while* Al-Alif wa-l-nūn *('Das Alif und das Nūn', 2009) received the Zoubaida B'chir Prize for Narration awarded by the Centre de Recherches, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme (Credif).*

Chapter 5

Cendre à l'aube *(1975, 'Ash at dawn') by Jelila Hafsia*

Cendre à l'aube tells of a woman's coming-of-age in Tunisia, starting with her childhood and ending in a scene in which the woman, now middle aged and twice divorced, sits in a coffeehouse by herself and feels free for the first time in her life.

The woman is Nabila, daughter of a well-off family that showers her with love and affection – a fact that she later regrets since she feels that life cannot keep up with the promise of such love experienced early on. She lives with her grandparents, receives school education and, in addition, the grandfather passes on his cultural knowledge by teaching her classical Arabic and music. He also encourages her to go to the theatre or cinema regularly.

At the age of fourteen and a half, Nabila is engaged to her mother's cousin who is fourteen years her senior. She thinks that he is beautiful, but they do not know each other at the time of their engagement. When Nabila is sixteen, they are married after a time during

which they saw each other every day to become acquainted. Nabila is certain that she does not love him. She is overwhelmed by the demands of married life for which she is unprepared. The wedding night ends in her nervous breakdown and, being with her in-laws, she misses her family and her home. She seeks refuge in music and literature. She does not want to be intimate with her husband and does not discover her body's potential for pleasure and intimacy. Her husband is frustrated with her. One night, he comes home drunk and hits her. He screams at her and she runs away. She gets a divorce and, as a result, loses most of her friends.

At age nineteen, Nabila meets a young man who had just returned from his studies in France. He proposes marriage. She is in love with him, despite his lower status as a teacher. Her mother thinks that they are not from the same background; however, Nabila insists. When they are engaged, he tries to get closer to her physically. She is horrified and remembers her first sexual encounter with her previous husband that she considers a traumatic experience. The day of the wedding arrives and although Nabila already thinks about annulling everything, they get married. The wedding night does not fulfill her dreams of a careful, loving union and neither does married life. Her husband tries to control her. Nabila gets pregnant, but he does not want her to keep the baby since in his opinion they were only setting out to build their life together and were not ready to have children. Nabila, however, wants to keep the baby. She goes to see an abortionist following nightmares of dead babies, but she remains pregnant. The baby is, however, stillborn and Nabila falls into a depression. Everyone around her tries to cheer her up, but she feels as if she were in a bubble, removed from everything. She seeks refuge in books and reads for days on end, something about which her husband despairs. After four years of marriage, she still feels that he is a stranger who does not understand her. Nabila is pregnant again and again, but can never bring a pregnancy to completion. Her husband still does not want to have children.

Tunisian independence happens and Nabila is simultaneously fascinated but also detached from the events. She thinks about getting a second divorce, but does not want to fail again. She wants to work although her husband is against it. He would prefer her to be the way she was when they first met. She searches for work regardless and learns typing. Her husband falls ill and she delays her plans to get a job. Again, she has depressive spells, but she then finds a job. Her relationship to her husband deteriorates further. Eventually they get divorced and she moves into her own apartment. She is incapable of spending her money responsibly and suffers from hunger at the end of the month because there is nothing left with which she could provide for herself.

She starts to attend philosophy lectures at the University of Tunis. There she meets a man, a professor of law, and they fall in love and she is happy. They get married although her family thinks it is too early. The problems begin after their first year together. He wants her to be more of a housewife while she wants to support him in his work, actively helping him. They talk about separation. She is working on a book which gives her great satisfaction, and he thinks he must leave her because he needs solitude to work; they eventually separate, even though they still love each other.

At the very end of the novel, in a coffeehouse in the old town of Tunis, Nabila reflects about her life and the independence that she has created for herself. She realizes that she is no longer the girl she once was. She feels free and as if she is finally starting to live.

Jelila Hafsia was born in Sousse in 1927 into a privileged family. She was a journalist and wrote for La Presse *from 1966 until the late 1990s. She directed several cultural spaces, such as the Club Culturel Taher Haddad, which she founded and whose president she re-*

mained for 30 years, as well as the Espace Sophonisbe. She currently publishes the person-al journals of her life in several volumes under the collective title Instants de vie. *The accu-sation of plagiarism regarding* Cendre à l'aube *is discussed above.*

al-Jasad walīma (1999, 'The body is a feast') by Fredj Lahouar

The novel tells the story of an affair between the teacher and writer Muḥammad and his colleague Firdaws. Both are unhappily married and look for satisfaction outside of mar-riage. Muḥammad is driven into the affair because he feels that the adventure might inspire his writing so that he can finally finish his novel. His novel reflects what happens between lovers since it also follows a couple called Muḥammad and Firdaws who have an extra-marital affair. It is its author Muḥammad's goal to write sexuality in a way that is neither stereotypical nor bashful language-wise. The discussion of writing continues throughout the entire narrative and the narrator considers the reader's interest and the consequences repre-senting a certain – mostly sexual – aspect or scene might have.

Both Muḥammad's and Firdaws's marriages are sexually deprived. For Muḥammad's wife, sex is an obligation that she seems to fulfill (she is pregnant with their fifth child), but does not enjoy. She feels her husband neglects the family and blames him for not being attentive enough (forgetting their children's birthdays, not expressing his love for her, not being ambitious at work to provide for his family in a sufficient way, etc.). He in turn feels that daily life as a family man kills romance by involving milk and soap and pee. He is drawn to Firdaws's body and the change the affair signifies. However, he does not intend to leave his wife ʿĀʾisha; on the contrary, keeping the affair secret is central. He tries not to anger ʿĀʾisha and attempts to stick to a tight schedule in order not to return home too late. This hastiness produces conflicts with Firdaws.

Sex forms an even bigger problem for Firdaws and her husband al-Ṭayyib. He is phobi-cally afraid of all kinds of dirt and considers bodies to be perpetually spoiled and spoiling. Firdaws has to constantly clean herself, yet al-Ṭayyib is still not content. He behaves more like a child with her than like a husband and the only part of her body that he shows an occasional interest in are her breasts. It is Firdaws who initiates intercourse, but not always successfully as the novel shows. While al-Ṭayyib assures her that he loves her and Firdaws loves him back, he cannot leave his fears behind and gets paranoid about Firdaws and everyone else. Since her husband refuses to get treatment, Firdaws goes to a psychiatrist hoping that she might be able to get help for him. The doctor suggests that she should have an affair and actually becomes her first lover himself. Firdaws begins the relationship with Muḥammad after this. At first, she seems to start the affairs to receive sexual gratification. Throughout the novel, however, she declares that she cannot actually feel pleasure unless she masturbates and looks at erotic images.[4]

Muḥammad and Firdaws not only exchange intimacy, but also deep intellectual conver-sations. These are mostly initiated by Firdaws so that it seems to Muḥammad as if she were speaking to herself. He does not quite believe everything she says, especially regarding her

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4   One exception is a scene in which Firdaws is interrogated by (police?) investigators regarding her knowledge of a political demonstration (about which she knows nothing). The investigators are violent and sexually abu-sive and force her to sit on a bottle neck naked. The scene, however, seems to cause Firdaws pleasure to a cer-tain extent.

husband's psychosis. Yet, he is frightened in part, when she suggests that al-Ṭayyib might kill them together, for example. Being killed would not necessarily trouble her, however, because she fantasizes about death to end her unfulfilling marriage and escape the impossibility of a divorce. Divorce is unattainable because her mother does not want her to seek it and suggests instead that she should seek pleasure wherever she finds it.

Apart from the meetings between Muḥammad and Firdaws (at first in a flat that belongs to a friend of Muḥammad's and then in a hotel), Firdaws also reads and comments on Muḥammad's manuscript. It is she who urges him to finish the novel while his wife thinks it is idle to write. Firdaws appears in the narrative as an active speaker herself, having dictated a short section to the narrator. In this section, she discusses the right of the body and its capriciousness oscillating between the desire of a thing it does not have and its loathing from the moment it has acquired it; this is the oscillation between the animal and the human in everyone.

Both Firdaws and Muḥammad think about separation. What Firdaws criticizes about their relationship is that it has become a duty, a regularity. She wishes Muḥammad would cancel meetings now and then. The novel alludes to the end of the relationship throughout. However, the narrative itself does not end in a breakup, but instead in a poetic sequence that is influenced by the television in front of which Firdaws sleeps/sits. It is not clear what is dream and what is reality. There are allusions to violence as well as sexuality, metaphors about water, swimming, trees, death, etc. The novel ends with Firdaws's questioning whether Muḥammad is listening to her and his confirmation that yes, he is, suggesting that the previous sequence might have been part of her narrative.

Fredj Lahouar (Faraj al-Ḥiwār) was born in Hammam Sousse in 1954. He holds a doctorate in French language and literature (Université Rennes 2) and is Professor of French at Sousse University. He both publishes in Arabic and in French and writes novels, short stories, and poetry, as well as criticism. In addition to his al-Jasad walīma*, for example* Ainsi parlait San-Antonia *('Thus spoke San-Antonio', 1998) which received the 2nd place in the COMAR d'Or competition in 1998 or* al-Muʾāmara *('The conspiracy', 1992) which received the Abou al-Kacem Chebbi Prize for the Novel in 1992. He is also involved in editing and publishing works of classical Arabic erotology. In 2018, Fredj Lahouar published* Il était une fois…: roman-dictionnaire encyclopédique raisonné de la révolution *('Once upon a time…: encyclopedic novel-dictionary brought about by the revolution).*

Tammās *by ʿArūsiyya al-Nalūtī*

See Chapter 1.

al-Ghurillā *(2011, 'The Gorilla') by Kamel Riahi*

Al-Ghurillā is a novel that is constructed from an array of individual narratives that are clustered around the central image of a black man who climbs the clock tower in central Tunis and refuses to come back down, despite the best efforts of various security personnel. The narratives are connected to the protagonist, Ṣāliḥ, who is nicknamed 'al-Ghurillā' or 'the Gorilla'. They explain his (possible) background or focus on the lives of the other individuals involved in the scene, such as commanders (ʿAlī al-Kilāb) and onlookers; these include, for example, the transvestite Shakīra, prostitute Ḥabība, and others. Among the onlookers are people who knew the Gorilla before he climbed the tower. Piece by piece, multiple images of the Gorilla and his occupation of the tower form. The plurality of the

different accounts, however, highlights that no one understands either the occupation or the Gorilla himself. The television coverage suggests, in one instance, that the Gorilla might intend to commit suicide while in another it expresses the media's ignorance concerning the demands that his occupation might be pushing for.

The setting of central Tunis and the construction of the narrative allow the author to highlight different aspects of present-day Tunisia; for example, the political entanglements of architecture are discussed in the novel's description of the history of the site on which the clock tower is situated. As a second architectural reference, allusions to Bourguiba's grave (a large mausoleum in Monastir that is reminiscent of a mosque) form a thread throughout the entire narrative and highlight the ubiquitous presence of the country's first president and the ideology of his statesmanship.

Another aspect alluded to in the chapters is the marginalization of minorities, especially racism against black Tunisians. This is present in the Gorilla's origin in a children's home where he was waiting to be adopted and almost got left behind. The lack of perspectives that the marginalized have is also reflected, such as Ḥabība's dream to become a news presenter that ends in her becoming a prostitute. Stories of rape and sexual abuse surround Ḥabība, but also the Gorilla's adoptive sister. Opportunism and corruption have a presence in the narratives, especially in ʿAlī al-Kilāb's chosen career. Despotism and state violence are reflected in the treatment that the Gorilla receives on the tower (the authorities try to electrocute him to bring him down). Islamism and terrorism are also present in the novel, yet it is not quite clear as what. On the one hand, an Islamist militia intends to cleanse the streets of people who are unworthy of life (the Gorilla and the transvestite Shakīra are abducted) yet, it is discovered that the Islamist garb is only a disguise used by a group that plans a coup d'état against the president. It is not clear whether this is real on the level of the novel's content, a dream sequence, or if it is the result of gossip and conspiracy theories which are other aspects the author highlights about Tunisia. It can be assumed however, that the author has created this plethora of obscure allusions to portray Tunisia as multifaceted.

Throughout all of the accounts, the Gorilla remains on the tower while the authorities attempt to remove him. At the end of the novel, while being shot at, the Gorilla tries to dismount by climbing on the fire-ladder that has been extended to him, but he falls. The onlookers react with rage and scream "Murder, murder!" The police attempt to hinder them with clubs and teargas. People die. The man who was responsible for the violence directed at the Gorilla (ʿAlī al-Kilāb) flees in a car. The burning Gorilla appears under the tower as a corpse. Some protesters carry him on their shoulders. A demonstration forms and people march toward the Interior Ministry. The people demand the end of the regime. Police forces shoot at the protesters. Ḥabība screams that they will not back down. The novel sole positive event is this revolt, which is where the novel ends. It illustrates an adage that the Gorilla utters; namely, that it is possible to win at life at the very last minute (compare *Ghurillā* 114).

An afterword follows on from this core narrative under the title "14 Jānfī 2011" ('14 January 2011'), in which the author describes the competion of *al-Ghurillā* in parallel with the Tunisian uprising. However, this afterword cannot solely be read as a meta-narrative since it connects the novel's production and the real-life uprising with the novel's protagonist and replaces the actual author with a fictionalized Kamel Riahi who, at the end of the afterword, turns into a gorilla himself.

Kamel Riahi (Kamāl al-Riyāḥī) was born in Tunisia in 1974. He worked for the Arab High-
er Institute for Translation in Algiers. Upon his return to Tunisia in 2010, he started work-
ing for the Ministry of Culture. He is currently writer in residence at Carleton University in
Ottawa Canada. He also works as a journalist. Regarding his literary proceeds, his first
novel, al-Mishraṭ *('The scalpel', 2006), which received the COMAR d'Or in the year 2007*
and already runs in its third edition, is currently being prepared to come out in an Italian
translation. His novel al-Ghurillā *('The Gorilla', 2011) is translated into English, yet needs*
a publisher. He was chosen among the 39 winners of the Beirut 39 competition organized
by Hay Festival and the journal BANIPAL *and published in translation in the resulting*
anthology that collected the 39 most promising writers under the age of 40; it was edited by
Samuel Shimon under the title Beirut 39. New Writing from the Arab World *(2012).*[5]

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5   Compare: https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/beirut39-9781408809631/ [last accessed: 28/10/2021].

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Acknowledgements

What characterizes Tunisian society? Which topics and conflicts are of concern to its members? *Oscillating Bodies* answers these questions by approaching Tunisian society through its novels that are written mainly in Arabic and French. With specific consideration for the depiction and use of the human body in selected novels, Tunisian society is described as one that oscillates between the poles of tradition and modernity as well as various cultural influences. This allows for insights that are more than numbers and statistics but instead contain socio-cultural knowledge.

Oscillating Bodies can also be read as an introduction to the genre of the novel in Tunisia. It makes selected works written in Arabic and French accessible to an anglophone audience for the first time by providing translations of key scenes as well as thorough synopses of the analyzed novels.

By offering insights in Tunisia's history from the country's independence in 1956 onwards, *Oscillating Bodies* provides the social context of the revolutionary upheavals of 2010/2011.

Finally, with the concept of *oscillation*, this study proposes a perspective to read the post-colonial situation, which makes it transferable to the study of other post-colonial societies and their literatures and a worthy read for scholars of diverse regions.