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Refugee Narratives after the Arab Spring: Themes and Forms

سرديات اللجوء بعد ثورات الربيع العربي،الموضوعات والأشكال

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the term "refugee literature" critically by exploring the historical and epistemological contexts of its emergence. Additionally, it seeks to highlight a sample of refugee narratives that arose after the Arab Spring, written from both insider and outsider perspectives, to analyze their thematic and generic particularities while uncovering their shared issues.

Keywords: Refugee, literature, Arab Spring, journey, tragedy

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مقاربة مصطلح أدب اللجوء نقديًا، من خلال الإحاطة بسياقات ظهوره تاريخيًا ومعرفيًا، فضلاً عن تسليط الضوء على بعض سرديات اللجوء التي برزت عقب اندلاع ثورات الربيع العربي، المكتوبة من منظوري الأنا والآخر؛ للوقوف على خصوصيّاتها مضمونيًا وأجناسيًا والكشف عن قضاياها المشتركة.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: لاجئ، أدب، الربيع العربي، رحلة، مأساة.

1. Introduction

The discussion of refugee literature has intensified in recent years, coinciding with the global increase in asylum-seeking due to expanding armed conflicts. The southern Mediterranean region has been particularly affected by political crises that evolved into civil wars and armed revolutions, transforming cities into ruins and forcing populations to flee across land and sea in search of safe havens. The Arab Spring revolutions and armed conflicts in the African Sahel significantly contributed to the influx of refugees from Arab and African countries, many risking perilous sea crossings to reach Europe.

The term "refugee literature" shares the ambiguity of related concepts such as prison literature, travel literature, exile literature, and migration literature. This ambiguity stems from prefixing "literature" to the central theme—in this case, the asylum experience that extends across history and cultures, taking multiple manifestations. In this article, I employ the term "refugee narrative" to designate the documentation of experiences lived or closely witnessed by the writing subject within the specific historical context following the Arab Spring revolutions.

2. The Concept of Asylum: Historical and Semantic Evolution

2.1 Sacred Origins and Semantic Transformation

The term "asylum" occupies an intermediate position between exile and migration. It appears simultaneously as a coercive act, resorted to under duress after exhausting all possibilities of remaining in the homeland, and as a voluntary act driven by the human impulse to seek alternative spaces guaranteeing protection and improved living conditions.

In Western thought, the act of asylum (*l'asile*) was originally associated with sacred places representing safe havens for those seeking protection from imminent danger (Pestre 2019, 49). The act of protection constituted the primary function of these spaces, which derived their specificity from their sacred dimension, elevating them above worldly conditions. This semantic dimension appears across different religions; in the Arab-Islamic context, the similar term *al-ijāra* (protection) appears in verse 6 of Surat At-Tawbah: "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know."

During the eighteenth century, the term underwent significant semantic transformation. It lost its reference to sacred places, becoming limited to secular spaces with humanitarian dimensions. This shift reflected Western civilization's changing relationship with religious institutions. The term was emptied of its original meaning (protection from danger) and came to refer to places designated for the disabled, elderly, and believers—typically charitable institutions providing protection and security for vulnerable groups.

Subsequently, the term was employed to denote closed spaces for isolating the excluded, such as the insane (*l'asile de fous*), which from 1938 became *l'hôpital psychiatrique* (Pestre 2019, 50). According to Michel Foucault's analysis, this represented a form of surveillance and punishment adopted by modern Western

societies to exclude the different and control their fate. The term thus acquired a new meaning contrary to the original: isolation, exile, and removal, resulting from the sanctification of reason and rejection of everything inconsistent with it.

In modern times, the term's meaning has been associated with places promising security for vulnerable groups, though meanings of confinement and restrictions have replaced comfort and peace, as evidenced in camp situations. Additionally, this "promise" remains conditional upon the authority granting asylum rights rather than being absolute. The term's semantic trajectory concludes where it began: reference to a transcendent space opening onto the sacred and eternal rest—the cemetery, representing for many the final refuge (Pestre 2019, 46).

3. The Legal Status of the Refugee: From Historical Context to Contemporary Framework

3.1 Etymology and Legal Definition

The word "refugee" (*réfugié*) derives from the Latin *refugium*, indicating the act of cutting off and fleeing (*retrancher et fuir*), and the verb *refugere*, meaning to retreat while fleeing (*reculer en fuyant*) (Pestre 2019, 47). This etymology suggests that refugees lose connection to their original place, becoming suspended in a state of waiting while searching for alternative refuge providing protection and security.

Unlike exile, migration, and alienation, asylum assumes a special character due to its connection with legal status in modern societies. Edward Said identifies fundamental differences between these terms: "Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word 'refugee' has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas 'exile' carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons" (Said 2007, 126).

3.2 International Legal Framework

The legal conception of refugees emerged following World War I, when Nansen Certificates were granted to displaced Greeks, particularly Jews among them, as victims of Nazi persecution (Pestre 2019, 57). The refugee status acquired global dimensions after the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1951, responding to increasing numbers fleeing persecution during World War II. This necessitated the Geneva Convention of April 22, 1954, stipulating protection and assistance for refugees and asylum seekers.

Despite global recognition of refugee issues as humanitarian concerns, ground-level practices remain subject to tensions imposed by countries' internal policies, future stakes, and ideological positions toward asylum seekers, including racial and religious biases.

4. Refugee Literature: Terminological Debates and Analytical Framework

4.1 Conceptual Ambiguities

The term "refugee literature" is characterized by ambiguity resulting from adding "literature" to the central theme of asylum experience. This raises questions about authorial identity (must refugee literature be written by refugees?), the relationship between documentation and fiction, and appropriate artistic forms. Some scholars recognize this literature's existence, linking it to contemporary contexts with specific characteristics, while others question the legitimacy of the term itself.

This study adheres to "refugee narrative" as designating documentation of experiences lived by the writing subject or closely witnessed within the specific historical context following Arab Spring revolutions. The literary quality of these texts and their artistic forms merit separate examination. To achieve this analysis, I have selected four corpora published after the Arab Spring revolutions, presenting different perspectives on asylum experiences through Arab and Western perspectives.

4.2 Primary Corpus: "There May Be No One Left" by Haitham Hussein

Published in 2018 by Mamdouh Adwan Publishing House, this text is classified by its Syrian-Kurdish author as novelistic biography, reflecting the interweaving of documentary and fictional narrative. However, it incorporates multiple narrative forms including dialogues, philosophical reflections, essays, and testimonies. Through this hybrid composition, the writer documents his asylum journey to Britain via various stations (Egypt, Turkey) after conditions in post-2011 Syria compelled him to seek refuge for himself and his family.

The subtitle—"Agatha Christie, Come and I'll Tell You How I Live"—evokes the English novelist's 1930s diaries, *Come, Tell Me How You Live*, written during her stay in Amuda (the writer's hometown) with her husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan. This positions the text within the context of writing back and deconstructing stereotypes about East and West, as well as refugee images and surrounding perceptions, through strategies of role and position exchange.

The central title evokes Christie's famous detective story *And Then There Were None*, adding the particle "may" to suggest doubt and possibility, referencing crimes against refugees and alerting to dangers threatening them, extracting the narrative from fictional to real contexts.

4.3 Primary Corpus: "Salt Songs" by Al-Arabi Ramdani

This text, published by Al-Mutawassit Publications in 2019, falls within travel literature as a hybrid genre intersecting with autobiography. It documents an illegal or irregular journey undertaken by the writer himself after deciding to leave Algeria without intention of return, due to suffocating economic and political conditions producing despair. The subtitle "A Harrag's Biography" uses indefiniteness to refer to the unknown or absent, as survival sometimes requires separation from the self that becomes other.

This manifests in refugees wearing masks of false identities to deceive receiving countries' authorities to obtain asylum rights. The text evokes hybrid writing traditions opening onto marginal and silenced worlds, raising identity questions not for specification but as a temporary shared state lacking recognized social features. It refers to marginalized entities stripped of humanity and reduced to the common title *al-harrag* (the burner)—referring to burning identity documents during irregular asylum journeys to Europe.

Despite the narrative's tragic dimension, the writer frames it with aesthetic horizons through the title "songs," referring to poetry as creative humanity's language, soothing existing pains and heralding possible hopes. This manifests through the epigraph from Syrian poet Nouri al-Jarrah's poem "A Boat to Lesbos": "Die in metaphor, and do not die in reality."

4.4 Primary Corpus: "Fleeing from Death: Syrians and the Road to Europe" by Wolfgang Bauer

The Arabic translation was published by Al-Arabi Publishing and Distribution House in 2016, while the German original appeared in 2014. Unlike previous models, this presents living testimony about asylum experiences through Western eyes. It documents an adventure undertaken by a German journalist and Czech photographer who disguised themselves as Caucasian English teachers to participate in an asylum journey by Syrian refugees crossing from Egypt to Europe after conditions worsened following political and economic crises.

Through narrating events and tracking journey paths from Egypt and Turkey, the narrator reveals dark worlds of smuggling networks and human trafficking gangs exploiting human tragedies for profit, depicting inhumane practices refugees typically

face in detention centers after discovery by coast guards and failed escape attempts, contrasting with treatment of European foreigners.

Despite reality's bleakness and multiple exiles, renewed attempts remain refugees' only solution, as they no longer possess anything else to lose after losing their homeland. The author seeks to clarify asylum's reality and convey it to European recipients as an experience lived closely and known intimately, demonstrating European Union policies' failure to limit illegal immigration and eliminate smugglers on Mediterranean shores, launching humanitarian distress calls to save refugees from wars and human traffickers.

4.5 Primary Corpus: "Tears of Salt: A Doctor's Story" by Pietro Bartolo and Lidia Tilotta

The original Italian version was published in 2016, while the Arabic translation appeared in 2020 from Takween Publications. Unlike previous models, this text presents dual biography alternating between autobiography—recalling scattered life stations as a doctor who grew up on harsh Lampedusa Island and achieved his simple family's goal of completing education and becoming a doctor—and biographical narratives of refugees he encountered on the island through his work.

As a doctor responsible for autopsying corpses and conducting medical examinations for arriving refugees, he maintained daily contact with their tragedies. Autobiographical narration typically appears as entry points for evoking biographical narratives open to hopes and sorrows transcending cultures, as refugees' origins are multiple and references diverse.

The title adopts similar strategy, evoking childhood memories describing his father's face upon returning from Mediterranean fishing trips, when salt water traces left tear-like marks on his face. This later assumes condensed meaning referring to refugee tragedies arriving via death boats, which the Mediterranean undertakes to deliver to the other shore in both real and symbolic dimensions (Europe or the grave).

4.6 Typological Analysis

These corpora documenting asylum experiences following Arab Spring revolutions divide into two types. The first type, recorded by refugees themselves in hybrid artistic forms mixing documentation and fiction, appears as autobiographies or novelistic biographies questioning identity. As Al-Taritar notes: "The question of the self in autobiography always remains the axis and foundational focus from which the act of identity narrative emerges, and around this central focus narrative threads take shape and organize to push forward the birth of the story answering this problematic, troubling question" (Al-Taritar 2021, 207).

These narratives fall within travel literature due to travel narrative's presence as central structure, such as "Salt Songs" by Al-Arabi Ramdani and "There May Be No One Left" by Haitham Hussein. The second type, documented by foreigners in direct contact with this humanitarian ordeal (doctors, journalists, human rights activists), appears as testimonies, diaries, and biographies, such as "Fleeing from Death" by Wolfgang Bauer and "Tears of Salt" by Pietro Bartolo.

While the first corpus type aims to immortalize these human experiences and resist erasure and reification policies typically reducing refugees to anonymous corpse images or mute numbers crowding media occasionally—while concerned countries' policies deliberately ignore them—the second type aims to provide living testimonies revealing the tragedy's magnitude under which huge refugee numbers groan after wars and borders stripped them of human identity. This represents efforts to appeal to truth and convey this issue's echo to humanitarian affairs stakeholders—human rights organizations and media outlets capable of influencing global public opinion to direct it and pressure decision-making centers toward urgent policies and measures stopping the death flood sweeping lives on Mediterranean shores.

Despite artistic form variations and objective multiplicity, themes remain common features among them, summarized as follows.

5. Thematic Analysis

5.1 The Dialectic of Fleeing from Hell and Searching for Lost Paradise

Despair has driven many Third World people to view their homelands as earthly hell due to transformation into war and conflict theaters or corruption spread long preventing dignified life conditions. Facing this deprivation and overwhelming danger and futility feelings, hope drove them to weave mental perceptions evoking imagined images of Europe as ideal alternatives allowing newcomers to embrace absolute happiness dreams.

These appear in previous corpora as objective correlatives of promised or lost paradise or eternal abode for which life is worthwhile reaching. However, imagined images' aesthetics obscure from some minds the possibility of falling into intermediate positions between what they considered hell and imagined paradise, pushing them to reformulate perceptions inversely.

This intermediate position is nothing but borders shifted from dividing lines to centers and sometimes isolation or sorting zones lacking minimum human conditions, perpetuating permanent waiting states, making them symbolic embodiments of earthly nihilistic purgatory negating identity and citizenship values. As Bauman notes: "On the way to the camps, people are stripped of every unique element of their identities except one: the 'illegal' refugee who has no function, no place, and no state. Inside the

camp walls, refugees become a compressed anonymous mass, having been deprived of the basic social advantages from which identities are derived, and of the usual fabric from which identities are woven. Once one becomes a 'refugee,' this means losing the means on which social existence is based, meaning losing people and meaningful things, such as land, home, village, parents, possessions, jobs, and other landmarks" (Bauman 2017, 61).

Homeland rupture states and original identity feature stripping exacerbate loss feelings refugees experience in unknown bosoms and horizon absence. Imposed borders—whether through detention center isolation or imprisonment—keep them in anticipation and apprehension states losing psychological balance and increasing fragility.

Stephen Smith compares African youth's relationship with their continent to Peter Pan's relationship with Neverland in English writer James Matthew Barrie's story—that magical land turning into real nightmares given multiple dangers surrounding heroes (pirates, crocodiles, Native Americans) and inevitable death befalling every child upon reaching adulthood. Peter appears exceptional: a child with no memories, past, or future because he refuses to mature, living eternal present. The same applies to African youth; their dark present due to wars, conflicts, and change-open horizon absence drives them to adopt departure options overcoming inevitable fate dilemmas (Smith 2019, 164-165).

Al-Arabi Ramdani evokes this meaning in his text's opening. Under the title "Failed to Sleep," he indicates journey motives, revealing perceptions about his Algerian homeland: "When the time came, I decided to leave the 'homeland,' or in other words, to flee from it, from a homeland of falsehood, deception, and disappointment. The decision was not arbitrary. Nor was it hasty or sudden, but came as a result of many accumulations, loss in futility and emptiness and waiting for nothing. Legalized unemployment, reinforced by rampant corruption, and the absence of the slightest features of a decent life—this is how homelands appear in the eyes of their children who meet them with indifference, merely 'dark graves'" (Ramdani 2019, 11).

Through this image, the character condenses homeland rupture choices and disapproving stances toward its reality, given its nihilistic dimension depriving it of essential meanings and loading it with opposite meanings with which any life emergence possibilities are incompatible. Departure acts appeared as liberation from fear manifestations, which is "an adventure for liberation from submission, an adventure in the field of recovering free existence, and therefore the adventure takes forms of challenge, revolution, and violence tainted with intense hatred toward all who caused fear and submission" (Barqawi 2014, 315).

Despite journey fluctuations and horrors and outcomes ending in European arrival failures, this bleak homeland image remains present in character consciousness, to the

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extent of describing return states as withering, reviving grave symbolism in which no self-life exists: "The tree of my dreams withered, but it did not dry up; the scent of Samos keeps it alive" (Ramdani 2019, 331).

In contrast, depicting European space features evokes fictional fantasies reflecting obsession states and desires to embrace its expanses, including adding soft feminine dimensions in describing Greek island Samos features, starting with titles under which this passage falls, "The Virgin's Gate," and reaching employed lexicons (Samos scent): "After freeing myself from the document that binds me to the homeland, I took a deep breath and contemplated the island's surface. I imagined 'Samos' as a soft Hellenic blonde lying on her right side, preparing to sleep, and we climb her and walk on the geography of her body until we reach the color of her shining eyes" (Ramdani 2019, 94).

While homelands refer to pale pasts, chains, death, and nothingness, Europe refers to bright futures, beauty, pleasure, and life. We also sense through descriptions the representation of virility and masculinity values unconsciously evoking sexual fantasy legacies in depicting Europe by Arab writers. The phrase "Virgin's Gate" is a cultural phrase revealing preconception natures about East-West relationships, with all their historical burdens full of military confrontation records between both sides (conquests or invasion and colonization).

In contrast, Haitham Hussein presents different homeland visions and deeper analyses of his perceptions about asylum issues and their various psychological dimensions, explained by his novelistic and academic backgrounds as someone from teaching professions. About homeland relationships, he says: "In exile, this question insists upon us; the question of homeland, the belonging we seek, the security we dream of. In our flight from the homeland, we may find it. Exile shows us belonging in the lens of self and other; distance becomes a way to approach and identify more. The homeland may sometimes become a veil... exile may become a mirror and a way to the homeland [...] Longing for the homeland is our key phrase—we refugees. Talk of the missing spirit that was spread in us while we were in our homes is the subject of our analysis and longing. Every sentence ends with sighs and regrets. Every definition attempt falls for lack of transcendence. We were losing belonging to a usurped homeland, we began to miss ourselves and empowered by the foggy coming" (Hussein 2018).

Unlike previous passages, longing, nostalgia, and alienation feelings appear in past-present comparisons, with references to Kurdish situation specificities in their pre-asylum homeland. Despite lacking citizenship rights equally with remaining Syrian people components, this did not drive writers to disbelieve in homeland belonging and sever spiritual connections to it, but rather gave his vision something of balance manifested through memory presence and future openness with all its possibilities.

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5.2 Bare Life and Consecrating the State of Exception

French researcher Elise Pestre bases her analysis of refugee situations in contemporary Western societies on Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's writings, specifically his book "State of Exception: Homo Sacer," formulating refugee conceptions as dark figures (*figure obscure*) embodied in persons who can be killed without any rituals or legal consequences requiring punishment or accountability exposure (Pestre 2019, 71).

Despite international agreements requiring refugee rights protection, Western countries today pursue repressive policies with military dimensions tightening nooses on refugee waves flowing across borders, violating all humanitarian norms as well as legal legislation and international covenants, under security interest protection covers sometimes and economic and social interest covers other times. Politicians such as American President Trump often describe huge refugee numbers flowing into the United States across Mexican borders as invasions, as if implicitly legitimizing security confrontation policies against them, gradually increasing in intensity "from refusal at entry to expulsion, we move to exclusion, then to extermination not as a declared political goal but organized indirectly through shifting responsibilities and refusing international commitments (including maritime law), and most importantly dismantling rescue efforts carried out by humanitarian associations" (Balibar 2019).

Space natures designated for receiving or sheltering refugees contribute to consecrating exception states and exacerbating alienation feelings. This manifests starting from designations: Are they "refugee camps? Transit camps? Migrant camps? And waiting areas for people in anticipation states? And transit zones? And detention centers? And emergency residence places? And jungles? Complex and heterogeneous natural areas, undoubtedly. But we must summarize all this in one word, the only one describing the reality of what occurs there: camps of strangers [...] the only appropriate name for these facilities and for the type of prison geography they draw" (Mbembe 2021, 105).

Separation functions they undertake require preventing fusion in local societies, given heterogeneity or difference, and fears related to these strangers' backgrounds and what they might constitute as future threats to demographic fabric unity of those countries, unless subjected to sorting and filtering protocols similar to passage rites. This makes their natures and roles summarized as "places of exile, and exclusion apparatuses for persons considered as intruders, without authorization, and therefore without rights, and according to what they considered, without dignity. And by fleeing from worlds and uninhabited places due to double ferocity, external and internal, they entered places they cannot enter, without invitation from them, and without being desirable. Therefore, their assembly and exclusion cannot be the final goal of their rescue. And if we also want to throw them into camps—to make them subjects potentially deportable, repressible and even possibly destructible" (Mbembe 2021, 106).

Or perhaps recycling them, given that they are worthless from the beginning, as utilitarian visions appear in selection processes, whether through accepting the most competent among them or distributing them in abandoned places to form "ghettos" separated from local populations by invisible borders preventing their integration in the near term, to avoid attacks resulting from refugee hatred feeling intensifications in light of far-right parties reaching decision-making centers.

Among texts addressing describing refugee situations in temporary or permanent residence centers are "There May Be No One Left" by Haitham Hussein, "Fleeing from Death" by Wolfgang Bauer, and "Salt Songs" by Al-Arabi Ramdani, while the text "Tears of Salt" was limited to depicting refugee suffering at sea before reaching camps. Haitham Hussein likened temporary camp environments to prisons in terms of surrounding environments and prevalent treatment natures, as large hotels opposite English Wakefield prison were chosen to shelter refugees. About this choice, he questions: "Was the camp a threshold to disappointment and a passage to asylum prison and alienation cell?" Wolfgang Bauer likens neighborhoods designated for refugees in Sweden to ghettos, while Al-Arabi Ramdani makes Samos camp an earthly hell.

5.3 Soul Afflictions Versus Body Afflictions

Asylum journeys remain fraught with dangers and horrors, starting from departure decision-making moments, as refugees become easy prey for psychological fears and countless external threat sources, from smugglers to coast guards, from human trafficking gangs to seas whose sides cannot be trusted even if showing otherwise.

Refugee narratives abound with evoking tragic aspects of these life experiences involving suicidal adventure senses in many cases, given their lack of objective factors ensuring adventurer safety and journey aim achievements. This makes them laboratories for revealing dark sides of human nature, through highlighting humiliation and reification policies to which refugees are exposed by various parties, and may also illuminate some exceptional human positions that time rarely bestows, whether in hardship or prosperity, including rescue and relief efforts made by volunteers who kept noble human essences alive within them.

Tragedies presented in the text "Tears of Salt" by Italian doctor Pietro Bartolo are numerous and varied in sources, as they were presented as living testimonies presented by owners (women and men, Arabs and Africans) to text owners (Italian doctors) in disclosure moments required by medical examinations, searching for crisis solutions or lightening tattooed memory burdens.

Among women's tragedies, narrators recount "Sarah" stories, Nigerian refugees who tried to end lives during asylum journeys repeatedly, only to later reveal that reasons were desires to abort fetuses as results of being raped by five human beasts (Bartolo

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and Tilotta 2020, 27). In contrast, twenty-six-year-old Nigerian young man stories were complete human tragedy models in psychological and physical dimensions, leaving owners as wreckage in human forms (Bartolo and Tilotta 2020, 34).

The text "Fleeing from Death" by German journalist Wolfgang Bauer addresses another tragedy dimension, its protagonists being smuggling gangs managing asylum trips from Egypt across the Mediterranean with unparalleled opportunism and fraud, revealing corruption extent seeping into security apparatus joints, making them overlook these crimes in exchange for sharing spoils reaped by these people.

Smuggler meanness may reach bargaining over refugee lives merely to obtain additional money, making journey paths like passage routes through hell labyrinths; each labyrinth they cross reveals uglier faces of moral decline these souls reached, such as breaking promises, transforming passage routes to other destinations to load additional refugee numbers, or these people may be forced to move from good ships to dilapidated boats under drowning threats, which may expose their lives to destruction at sea.

An example of this is what appeared in the conclusion the writer concluded tracking refugee fates he documented journeys: "Mid-September last year witnessed the death of 'Mohammed,' the older brother of 'Alaa' and 'Hassan,' in his attempt to follow them across the sea. The smugglers deliberately sank their ship after he—with other refugees—refused to move to a smaller boat. On board this ship were 500 people, including hundreds of children, with very few men. It was one of the biggest disasters witnessed by the Mediterranean in recent years [...] But no one seriously searched for them. They were not Western passengers on a 'Boeing' plane that sank in the Atlantic Ocean. They were refugees by illegal means, trying to break the laws" (Bauer 2016, 209).

Borders control defining relationship dimensions between refugees and receiving societies, making them—according to Achille Mbembe—"border bodies," referring to stripping them of human identities and any existential dimensions connecting them to places, considering this a stark manifestation of brutality as a component of authoritarian capitalism. In addition to clear reflections in economic fields, influences also appear clearly in anthropological contexts, through "dividing humanity into multiple parts of typically racial classes. And it concerned, on the one hand, distinguishing between individuals of affluent human beings and bankrupt persons. It also concerned, on the other hand, at the global level, the division between what Etienne Balibar called 'the mobile part of humanity' and 'wandering humanity'" (Mbembe 2021, 183).

That section that became a source of Western politicians' investment—despite its fragility—to perpetuate fear states of strange others as strategies for tightening freedoms and imposing intensive surveillance on human movement, sometimes with

security pretexts, and economic other times. Therefore, "migrants and refugees were not, as they are, subject to difference. Moreover, they do not have special names, nor individual faces, nor identity cards. They are nothing but corridors, a kind of mobile cabinets at the surface of multiple organs, empty forms, but threatening, we search in them for burying an era's imaginations terrified by itself and its own excesses" (Mbembe 2021, 103).

In efforts to revive cultural specificities, refugees try to redraw borders inside camps and caravans designated for sheltering them through distributing in homogeneous groups symbolically representing miniature copies of their previous societies.

Wandering associated with them also refers to meanings despised in contemporary culture, removing added value from objects based on pragmatic logic, making them surplus to requirements, according to sorting and isolation criteria established by borders, whether in their material or virtual dimensions; in order to exclude the undesirable, under various pretexts: security, economic, health, united by a thin thread which is fear of strangers.

As an example of health fears, Wolfgang Bauer in "Fleeing from Death" depicts refugee boat relief scenes by Italian navy: "Initially the Italians lowered women and children from the boat surface, then they lowered men on the second day. This rescue operation lasted a day and a night. European soldiers—who are rescuing people here—resembled astronauts to miserable refugees. Rescuers wore white nylon protective suits, placing masks on their mouths, and protective helmets on their heads, while most wore white gloves, all this indicated fear of possible transmission of certain disease infections from refugees to them" (Bauer 2016, 156-157).

Refugees today in Western societies are exposed to racist positions that found in far-right policies and savage capitalism what justifies them, as they are often viewed as stereotyped units, referring to need and lack of value and futility meanings. They are burdens additional to receiving societies, in addition to being sources of danger and threat, necessitating taking preventive and punitive preemptive measures to preserve security, even at human values expense, including criminalizing illegal immigration, depriving shelter, and making them exposed to material and symbolic humiliation and violence in detention centers.

In this regard, Zygmunt Bauman indicates that "refugees are the true embodiment of what we call 'human waste.' They have no useful function to perform in countries of arrival and temporary residence, and they have no intention or realistic possibility heralding their absorption and integration in the new social body" (Bauman 2017, 62).

Their fate remains torn and divided between distancing from mother homelands and removal from dream homelands (imagined). The refugee term in many Western circles has become akin to accusations making owners convicted before crimes are

proven, and apprehensive about them even if they themselves are afraid and terrified of their unknown fates. With every economic or security crisis explosion, they are the first toward whom suspicions turn, especially in light of media charging that created connections between terrorism suspicions and asylum phenomena, as refugees in their view and merely crossing into border areas became pluralized individually, not dealt with in isolation from stereotypical preconceptions.

Therefore, "the border body is, fundamentally, a race body, a racially subject class body to intensive accounting of a new type. At its core, outsourcing and globalization meet. And it fundamentally lacks, and is always on the verge of transitioning to the other side of the fence, a security membrane. A torn body, folded into several layers and bearing in its flesh the memory of splits and divisions of all kinds" (Mbembe 2021, 202).

About rejection feelings to which refugees become exposed in asylum countries, Haitham Hussein addresses Agatha Christie in his text "There May Be No One Left," questioning her about him, comparing between her situation during her stay in Syria in the 1930s and his stay today in Britain as a refugee. His choice of the address term instead of imagined dialogue comes to indicate position similarity and emotional closeness, as there is no disparity or superiority of one party at another's expense, but rather symmetry and parity through experiencing the same experience; but in different historical contexts.

He says: "Dear Agatha; did you feel any rejection feelings while you were wandering in my country there decades ago? Did you become rejected in your own eyes when you met people and translated their looks at you? Did you convert what you encountered of madness and oppression and loss into employed imagined crimes in your works you breathed with them about what might ignite hatred sparks toward others? Perhaps your temporary presence there was granting you protection against rejection because you owned the option to return to your country at any moment, and this is a luxury the refugee does not possess most of the time, as he is governed by living 'here' and dreaming 'there'" (Hussein 2018).

Questioning in another context about the purpose of demonizing refugee issues in Europe in an effort to read asylum phenomena in their totalities and connections with major countries' declared policies and their hidden management of wars and conflicts in the global arena: "Do refugees bear the crime of being refugees? Why are victims talked about and portrayed as if they are executioners of others and threatening their safety in their safe homelands? Were not these refugees themselves safe in their homelands and homes previously before dirty war hands and conflicts masked with different miserable masks played with their fates and pushed them to displacement and asylum to new distant places?" (Hussein 2018).

This type of proposition suggests the writer possesses critical analytical visions driving him to refuse adopting victim images and surrendering to tragic fates to which he found himself exposed; he does not suffice with narrating personal suffering, but rather adds cosmic dimensions to it and makes it a reflection subject, contemplating its apparent and hidden faces, actual and fabricated, and this leads him in many cases to transcending stereotypical refugee images as "victims" and presenting critical readings of their different behaviors and orientations, revealing some claim and mask falsehoods, and approach shortcomings adopted by some of them at the level of relationships among themselves on one hand, and their relationships with hosting countries on the other hand.

5.4 Writing as a Form of Resistance

The writing issue in this context raises some issues related to its motives and possibilities, as well as its forms, given the impossibility of stability ideas allowing deep mental contemplation of phenomena. Writing becomes in some cases the symbolic manifestation of alternative homelands or the only remaining refuge for writers to confide what cannot be declared, or outlets for reconstructing memory after reality prevented resuming natural life courses within homelands.

Previous texts were associated with travel and rupture contexts experienced by these texts' heroes, personally or through recalling their paths from others' perspectives, placing what has been termed collective constants under question and testing, starting with identity and belonging issues. This character perhaps seeped also into what their hands wrote of texts refusing generic purity and seeking hybridization mimicking their owners' fates.

As for writing aims, they are as multiple as contexts and subjective motives from which their owners issued. In the text "Salt Songs" by Al-Arabi Ramdani, we find that celebrating daily narration occupies the center, in an effort to strip identity of its false masks and establish personal identity as a choice, with no subordination to the group. If peoples try through narration to establish their identity that proves their existence and distinguishes them from others, Al-Arabi Ramdani in this text seeks through narration to bestow recognition on a marginal identity, still in a state of indefiniteness, to transfer it to definition/recognition at the recipient level first, and reaching official bodies later.

For Haitham Hussein in "There May Be No One Left," the purpose of writing appears to be contemplating issues surrounding the asylum world according to an analytical vision and critical reflection on its outcomes, starting from reconsidering the character's internal world first, then their external environment open to the similar and different. In a statement to Al Jazeera Net, the writer clarified that through this text he "tried to understand himself and his new environment and sought to deconstruct the

asylum ordeal he went through and is going through, as he found that writing helped him discover different aspects of reality" (Hamza 2019).

About the nature of the relationship between writing and ordeal in this context, we find that the act of writing is linked to the need for documentation and capturing details, a desire to seize the present moment before oblivion folds it, and the matter becomes more urgent the narrower the spaces of disclosure due to an existential predicament or historical accident threatening the self's existence by erasing its features.

The renewed vision horizon in this text also relates to the nature of the travel act, as it becomes a laboratory for examining previous references and perceptions, and establishing deeper and more objective visions about the self in its different interactions with the other. What is notable in this context is this text's uniqueness from other corpus texts in dedicating pages to contemplating the writing issue. Under the title "The Self in Its Ordeal and Its Love," the writer reflects on the writing choice for him, through expressing his principled position refusing to make it an arena for settling accounts with others, explaining the choice to resort to mixing between biography and novel considering what the latter allows in terms of possibilities, as a fictional space that transcends boundaries.

He then moves to posing a set of questions related to form and content such as: Is biography a constraint in some sense? Is there a common denominator between writing and nakedness? Is nakedness one of the writer's masks in the game of suggestion and composition? Before concluding that "nakedness and writing are a duality that ensures furnishing the art space with what keeps its embers burning and stimulating excavation and interpretation" (Hussein 2018).

Through the above, the multiple dimensions of the writer's images in his text are manifested, as the following appear: the refugee's image, the writer's image, the literary critic's image, the social critic's image, the thinker's image and others, which reflects the text's hybridity on one hand, and its owner's learned reference.

In contrast, we find that the text "Fleeing from Death" by Wolfgang Bauer aims primarily to document the daily suffering of Syrian refugees in word and image, as well as forming a clear conception of the special political context that framed this type of asylum, in order to put the Western recipient in the picture of what is actually happening, away from the reductive or erroneous image presented by some media about these people. Hearing is not like seeing, so the content is manifested in the form of living testimony sometimes, and travel literature other times, in addition to using journalistic writing methods.

In the same context, the text "Tears of Salt: A Doctor's Story" by Pietro Bartolo appears as a dual biography (autobiographical and biographical) falling within

humanitarian efforts to make the forgotten heard. It shares with the previous text that it was accomplished in partnership with media institutions (press and radio), so testimonies and narratives appear to narrate refugees' stories and document their ordeals.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined refugee narratives emerging after the Arab Spring, analyzing them from multiple perspectives—insider and outsider, Arabic and Western. Despite differences in form and perspective, these narratives share common themes: the dialectic of flight and search for safety, the dehumanization inherent in liminal spaces, the physical and psychological toll of displacement, and writing as resistance against erasure.

These texts reveal how refugees navigate between multiple forms of exile—geographical, existential, and cultural—while challenging dominant narratives that reduce them to statistics or threats. Through autobiography, testimony, and hybrid forms, they reclaim their humanity and assert their right to tell their own stories, making refugee literature an essential archive of contemporary human experience.

The analysis demonstrates that refugee narratives serve dual purposes: preserving individual and collective memory against systematic erasure, and challenging Western perceptions that dehumanize displaced persons. Whether written by refugees themselves or by witnesses to their ordeals, these texts constitute acts of resistance against policies and discourses that reduce human beings to bare life, stripped of rights and dignity.

Furthermore, the hybrid nature of these narratives—blending autobiography, travel writing, testimony, and fiction—reflects the liminal condition of asylum itself, existing between departure and arrival, between past and future, between self and other. This formal innovation parallels the content's exploration of identity fragmentation and reconstitution in contexts of displacement.

Ultimately, refugee narratives after the Arab Spring contribute to a growing body of literature that insists on the humanity, agency, and complex subjectivity of displaced persons, countering reductive media representations and political rhetoric. They remind us that behind every statistic stands a life story worthy of being told, heard, and preserved.

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