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VULNERABILITY AND RECOGNITION IN SYRIAN PRISON LITERATURE

Abstract
Connecting the stories of human rights violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime against the children of Darʿa in March 2011 to decades of writings about political detention in Syria, this article argues that particular works of Syrian prison literature (*adab al-sujūn*) articulate a poetics of recognition that both reaffirms and challenges the foundational dependency on political recognition in human rights theory. By focusing on narrative scenes of recognition and misrecognition, I contend that these texts, much like the stories of the children of Darʿa, depict different forms of acute human vulnerability. In doing so, they offer a mode of sentimental education that evokes readers' empathy and awareness of human suffering. Yet such texts also demonstrate, in allegorical form, how the foundational reliance on political recognition in human rights regimes can limit their efficacy.

Keywords: fiction/novels; human rights; literature; prisons; revolution

According to the majority of mainstream media accounts as well as widespread social media sources, the Syrian Revolution began with an incident involving a group of children in the city of Darʿa in March 2011. Although other protests against the Asad regime had occurred two months earlier, the uprising began when fifteen children and adolescents (ages ten to fifteen), inspired by protesters in Egypt and Tunisia, sprayed antigovernment graffiti on the walls of their Darʿa school.[1] Their simple act of rebellion elicited a swift and brutal response from the Syrian state. The children were arrested, tortured, and held incommunicado; at first, their fate was unknown, and despite consistent pleas to various authorities, their parents and family members were unable to obtain their immediate release. In this small city near the Jordanian–Syrian border, the children's detention and torture sparked a protest movement that soon spread to other urban centers in Syria. At the end of April 2011, once again in Darʿa, security forces arrested thirteen-year-old Hamza ʿAli al-Khatib who, with his father, was attending a demonstration against the government's siege of the city. A month later, his almost unrecognizable, disfigured, and lifeless body was returned to his family.

Although government authorities denied mistreating Hamza al-Khatib while he was detained, relatives maintain that he was mutilated and tortured to death while in custody.

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As proof, they released photos of his battered body that quickly circulated in social media outlets and were often juxtaposed with a recent school photo of the boy. The tragic story of Hamza al-Khatib and the widely disseminated images of him both before and after he was tortured provoked enormous outrage and gave further impetus to those opposing the Syrian regime. The children of Darʿa, and the stories and poems that spread on social media about their courage and sacrifices, became, as poet Faraj Bayraqdar reminds us, the "spark" that "lit" the Syrian Revolution.[2] The idea of adolescents or children being arrested, tortured, and arbitrarily executed could not be erased from the Syrian collective memory. As one blogger stated:

> Hamza, I don't know you. But I miss your bright smile. There are no words to be said. I can't escape the pictures that assail me. I see you as a child alone, at the height of terror, the apex of pain as you live the details of what they do to you, far from the warmth and security of family and humanity. The devil takes inspiration from such acts. The shame of all shames on whoever remains silent and allows all of this sick oppression to continue.[3]

The same narratives and images from Darʿa also ignited the recognition of a possible alternative future—a future in which children, arguably the most vulnerable of Syrian subjects, would be free from cruel and unusual punishment, and in which the economic, political, and social aspirations of ordinary Syrian citizens would finally be fulfilled.

The brutality of the state's crackdown in 2011 against first, children and later, adults in Darʿa was not unfamiliar to Syrians, particularly an earlier generation of political dissidents, or to readers of Syrian prison literature. The detention, torture, and, in some cases, savage murder of the children of Darʿa are echoed in and connected to numerous stories told in works of contemporary Syrian literature about political detention that have been published and circulated in the years prior to the uprising. This literature bears witness to the long history of the regime's use of torture and detention to suppress political dissent and to many of the state's human rights abuses, which have also been documented in numerous reports by human rights organizations over the past four decades.[4] Thus, the stories of the detention and torture of the children of Darʿa and the murder of Hamza al-Khatib as well as other children were, tragically, easily recognizable and resonated powerfully with the residents of Darʿa and Syrians across the country.

Prison literature (*adab al-sijn* or *adab al-sujūn*) has been a specifically named genre in the Syrian and Arabic literary fields since the 1970s.[5] It is defined in this article as any literary work produced in, about, or through the experience of political detention, ranging from fictional and nonfictional prose to poetry and drama.[6] Including testimonials such as those by the late journalist Ridaʾ al-Hadad, novels such as Hasiba ʿAbd al-Rahman's *The Cocoon* (al-Sharnaqa, 1999), and memoirs such as Hiba Dabbagh's *Just Five Minutes* (Khams Daqaʾiq wa-Hasb, 1995), Faraj Bayraqdar's *The Betrayals of Language and Silence* (Khiyanat al-Lugha wa-l-Samt, 2006), and Baraʾ al-Sarraj's *From Tadmor to Harvard* (Min Tadmur ila Harvard, 2011), works of prison literature depicting the experience of political dissidents opposing the authoritarian regime have proliferated in Syria since the 1990s. As noted by miriam cooke and others, the publication of Syrian prison literature has increased greatly since the transition of power from Hafiz to Bashar al-Asad in 2000. Since the start of the Syrian uprising, that increase has only accelerated.[7]

The literary-critical designation of the genre of prison literature as a group of texts portraying the experience of political prisoners who have been deprived of many of their basic rights, coincided with the establishment of the first, formal human rights association in Syria in 1976.[8] Yet, beyond reading such texts as witness literature portraying human rights abuses, scholars have not yet thoroughly explored the connections between Syrian and Arabic prison literature and human rights discourse.[9] While comparative literature specialists and others have been examining the inherent links between literature, narrative, and human rights for over two decades, few have focused on the ways that Arabic and Syrian prison literature can help us critically reexamine modern conceptions and theories of human rights.[10]

As a form of aesthetic or creative intervention against the human rights violations perpetrated by the Syrian state, prison literature is also part of the essential backstory of the Syrian Revolution. However, rather than consider how novels about political detention were part of the "political geography" that "anticipated" the uprising, this article investigates the links between literary representations of detainees and their families as deeply moving images of human psychological and physical vulnerability.[11] In most works of prison literature, these depictions of vulnerability, including those representing the effects of human rights violations on minors, evoke for readers the power of recognition, sentimentality, and empathy so prevalent in the stories of the children of Darʿa. Yet, these same representations also directly intersect with the more recent focus in critiques and retheorizations of human rights on the vulnerability of human beings as embodied agents. Bryan Turner, for example, has argued for a new, universal human rights regime based on the acknowledgement of our shared, human vulnerability to physical pain and, at least to some extent, psychological and spiritual anguish. He also delineates the existence of a global "community of sentiment" that identifies and responds to human suffering universally through a process of critical recognition.

Through examples of literary texts that especially highlight this intersection of human rights violations and the themes, tropes, and figures of vulnerability and sentimentality, including those by Ibrahim Samuʾil, Ghassan al-Jabaʿi, and Mustafa Khalifa, I argue that, like the stories of the children of Darʿa, works of prison literature produce and portray a poetics of recognition that in turn generates a form of empathy, or a type of "sentimental education," in readers.[12] This poetics of recognition echoes and imitates the foundational reliance on political recognition in inherently aspirational conceptions of human rights. Yet, as will be shown, works of prison literature also frequently emphasize the negative effects of misrecognition. In doing so, their poetics of recognition reveals in allegorical form why the foundational reliance on empathy and particular modes of political recognition in rights regimes continues to limit the efficacy of human rights.

VULNERABILITY, SENTIMENTALITY, AND THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Of the numerous authors of Syrian prison literature, short story writer Ibrahim Samuʾil is perhaps the most well known for capturing, in sentimental form, the psychological, rather than physical, suffering of not just political prisoners, but also their families. In "The Visit" (al-Ziyara), the first short story of Samuʾil's collection *The Stench of*

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the Heavy Step (Raʾihat al-Khatw al-Thaqil), the tropes of recognition and a detainee's vulnerability are deeply intertwined, even though the text avoids any direct depiction of physical violence, and it is the parent rather than a child who is imprisoned.[13] In the story, the protagonist, a prisoner named Saʿd, is waiting nervously for a visit from family members. As the narrative unfolds, the reader discovers, via the protagonist's interior monologue, that Saʿd's wife was pregnant when he was arrested, and this visit will be his first chance to meet their son, Khaldun.

Saʿd's nervous yet optimistic anticipation builds as he prepares to see his son. As he enters the visitation room, he sees Khaldun:

> I stepped toward the bars of the first door, and she came out of the room behind the second door, my wife, holding the hand of a small, enchanting child. His head was drowning in a red cap with a long brim, and his two white legs protruded out from short, white pants, banded with a belt with a small gun hanging down the side. He was stepping slightly away from his mother, surprised at the clamor of crowded voices being exchanged between the prisoners and their relatives, and he was casting about brief, confused glances, without focus.[14]

Despite his joy at seeing his son, Saʿd finds the meeting does not go as he anticipated. When he tries to offer a cookie as a bribe, Khaldun refuses to acknowledge him and retreats behind his mother, tugging at her dress. The mother attempts to get Khaldun to acknowledge his father, but he refuses. When she tells Khaldun that Saʿd is, in fact, his father and pleads with the boy to greet him, the boy refuses, saying, "I don't wanna, I don't wanna. I want someone else!"[15]

Abruptly, Saʿd's visting time ends, and his wife is prevented from giving him a message, the content of which is not articulated in the story. The poignancy of Saʿd's anticipation of seeing his son for the first time is disrupted by Khaldun's abrupt rejection of him. The boy's unwillingness to acknowledge and recognize his father precludes a kind of cohesive or idyllic narrative closure that might have been brought about by a successful meeting of father and son. In addition, the content of the message his wife was meant to give him is never revealed, and it is on this ambiguous point that the story ends. The fate of Saʿd, who has been deprived of both his freedom and typical social relations, and his family is left in question as he is forced to return to his cell.

Like many of Samuʾil's short stories, "The Visit" evokes a thematic triad of recognition, vulnerability, and sentimentality while simulataneously depicting characters suffering from and contending with the state's violations of their human rights and human diginity.[16] First, the motif of failed recognition defines the narrative turning point of the story. When Khaldun rejects Saʿd, both the protagonist's and the reader's expectations are instantaneously interrupted. Second, the understated but sentimental depiction of the emotional or psychological vulnerabilities of a prisoner and his family members evokes the reader's empathy for the characters and their fate. Finally, the representation of the experience of political detention through a very brief scene portraying a long-awaited family reunion indicates how the short story, as a momentary portrait, provides a contrast to other narrative genres (eye-witness or third-person narrated reports, testimonials, declarations, interviews, memoirs, journals) more traditionally deployed in the documentation of human rights abuses.[17]

Recognition is a fundamental element not only of Samuʾil's short stories, but of all fiction.[18] In classical poetics, specifically in the Aristotelian tradition, recognition

signifies an essential transformation in any dramatic narrative. Marking "a shift from ignorance to knowledge," recognition is the moment when "characters understand their predicament fully for the first time" and when "a sequence of unexplained and often implausible occurrences" becomes resolved.[19] Recognition can occur through the protagonist's discovery of a truth, often about his or her own identity or about the original source of a misunderstanding. While it can imply a "recovery of something once known," a *re-cognition*, it can also link a restoration of knowledge with a "disquieting sense" that what was meant to be hidden has now been revealed and that what was previously taken to be true is now demonstrably false.[20] When engaging with a text, the reader also participates in similar processes of recognition.

In parallel, recognition, in a variety of political senses, is an inherent and essential element of human rights in international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) mentions the term "recognition" no less than four times—and this does not include derivatives or synonyms of the term.[21] In theory, countries, including Syria, that are signatories to and have ratified the UDHR, have officially acknowledged that their citizens are subjects of an international human rights regime, including Article 5 (the ban against torture and/or cruel or unusual punishment) and Articles 6–14 (which include the right to a fair tribunal and presumption of innocence and freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention). However, official recognition does not necessarily translate into the observation and implementation of international human rights protections on the ground. In addition, in human rights discourse and in debates about what human rights can potentially mean and do, recognition is always promulgated as both a political imperative and a point of contention, particularly in confrontations between human rights activists and the state. Just who gets recognized as a *human* worthy of rights or how extensive the recognition of those rights can be is always subject to dispute. International human rights institutions have historically relied on the nation-state (the signatories to the UDHR and other conventions) to recognize the validity of human rights regimes. However, deeming the state as the purveyor and protector of rights is inherently problematic because the nation-state has always been and remains the greatest source of human rights violations.[22] The United States and Syria are but two examples of this paradox. Official state recognition of human rights does not guarantee their implementation or practice on the ground.

As mentioned briefly earlier, in line with recent attempts to rethink human rights theory and address the issue of universalism versus cultural relativism, Bryan Turner has linked the notion of recognition in the political and legal sense to the vulnerability of the human body to pain and suffering. For Turner, "vulnerability defines what it means to be human." Because all human beings "experience pain and humiliation," this vulnerability constitutes a "common ontological condition" upon which a universality of human rights can be based.[23] Thus, he proposes a new human rights regime based on a "critical recognition theory" in which "recognition of the Other entails recognizing our mutual vulnerability."[24] Turner is well aware, however, that recognition "cannot take place between groups that are wholly unequal in terms of power," and because of this, he acknowledges the limits of the potential efficacy of critical recognition theory in both the construction and protection of human rights.[25]

Writing in the context of fear, mourning, and US human rights violations that followed the 11 September 2001 attacks, Judith Butler has also traced the link between recognition,

vulnerability, and humanization. Like Turner, she has noted that it is always possible that a vulnerability will not be recognized or that it will be deemed "unrecognizable."[26] In addition, Butler points out that if vulnerability is a necessary "precondition for humanization," which is a process that differs through "variable norms of recognition," then the definition of vulnerability is always "dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to a human subject."[27] The fundamental dependency on normative structures of recognition demonstrates that the very acknowledgment of vulnerability is always precarious and subject to limitations and shifts.[28] Along with Turner, she points to the troubling dilemmas of a complete lack of recognition of human vulnerability. In their detention and torture of children, Syrian state security agents replicate this lack of recognition clearly and intentionally. A parallel absence appears in Samuʾil's short stories and other works of Syrian prison literature. This absence works to remind readers of the harmful and far-reaching effects of a lack of recognition on a detainee's human rights. When someone's suffering and vulnerability is unrecognizable or is unintentionally or deliberately misrecognized or ignored by the state, he or she slips out of the category of human. Therefore, the state can ignore that person's status as the subject of and in the discourse of human rights.

Regardless of generic contours, works of prison literature, Syrian or otherwise, produce a critical intersection of the poetics and politics of recognition. Samuʾil's seemingly simple story offers a reevaluation of what constitutes a recognizable vulnerability. In the case of "The Visit," the narrative does not depict the direr physical vulnerabilities that both Turner and Butler emphasize in their discussions—for example, that of the human body under torture—in order to raise the reader's empathy for the characters and awareness of human rights abuses perpetrated by the state. The story also does not detail the standard practice by Syrian state security authorities of indefinite detention and refusing to grant Syrian political prisoners their rights to visitation. Instead, briefly and with tragic humor, the story sketches the alienation of a son from his father—an alienation elaborated more fully in another story in the collection, discussed below.

In such narratives of the daily suffering of detainees and their families and the human rights violations they endure, recognition functions on several levels. On the narrative level, it is scripted as a trope and embedded within the content and structure of the narrative. Recognition, in this sense, emerges again and again as a fraught process through which Samuʾil's characters attempt to reformulate their identities, establish their connection to others, and articulate a sense of their own dignity, humanity, and vulnerability. But often this process of establishing the self as a dignified, but vulnerable subject is not fully realized, and the stories, both within their narratives and for the reader, produce an acute awareness of the dangers of failed recognition.[29] On the level of hermeneutics and readers' response, recognition is also presented as an encounter through which the audience is forced to acknowledge and interpret the various vulnerabilities, physical and psychological, of the characters. Just as human rights organizations must rely on the political recognition of the abuses they bring to light and elicit the empathy and/or capture the attention of their targeted audience, whether governments, nonstate organizations, or individual citizens, so too do works such as Samuʾil's depend on as well as transform the "horizons of expectations" of their readers.[30] With "The Visit," the reader is left to make inferences about the reason for Saʿd's imprisonment, and with the build-up of narrative anticipation, the audience *expects* a moving first encounter between father and

son. When the fulfillment of such a meeting is denied by Khaldun's blatant rejection of his father, we, as the story's audience, are forced to shift our levels of understanding in order to "bridge" the distance between the "alien horizon of the text" and our own interpretive horizon.[31] Like Saʿd, the reader struggles with recognizing the broader, social and psychological ramifications of the unexpected rejection of the father by the son. This process prompts readers to engage in an empathetic process that allows them to, as Lynn Hunt has noted, recognize themselves in the characters and "feel the same feelings that the characters are feeling."[32]

In "The Visit" and other stories, Samu'il suggests diverse and lamentable forms of alienation and vulnerability in the everyday experiences of political prisoners and their families. Reading such works of prison literature mimics a process of critical recognition similar to that proposed by both Turner and Butler. Readers engage in a "dialogicity of literary communication" that is based on an inherently political process of acknowledging forms of alienation and otherness.[33] In order for our literary understanding to be more extensively dialogical, we seek out and then "recognize" the unexpected that differs from our own conventional horizon of assumptions.

As our interpretive horizons are expanded or transformed by the text that we are reading, we come to recognize that human rights abuses can generate forms and subjects of vulnerability beyond those that are conventionally the concern of international human rights law. Through Khaldun's words, we are reminded that arbitrary political detention not only results in the physical suffering and emotional estrangement of the individual political prisoner, but also afflicts the family and society as a whole with an infinite number of trials and tribulations. It is through this interplay between vulnerability, recognition, and interpretation that we, as readers, enroll in a form of "sentimental education." We become familiar with the experiences of the political prisoners through the evocation of the sentimental that in turn generates empathy for their and their families' plights, much like the responses to the vulnerability of the children of Darʿa.

UNHUMAN VULNERABILITIES

Recognition, vulnerability, and the sentimental also coalesce in the short stories of Ghassan al-Jabaʿi. His *Banana Fingers* (Asabʿ al-Mawz), a collection of stories he wrote during his ten years in prison, offers a range of narratives that fluctuate between social realism and surrealistic allegory, a narrative mode that clearly "says one thing and means another."[34] This vacillation from one stylistic mode to another within the same narrative space creates the sense that some of the stories remain unfinished. For Shawqi Baghdadi, who wrote the introduction to the collection, the stories' lack of unified style is indicative of a kind of existential angst that permeates the writer's work and that is produced by writing in the environment of prison.[35]

In the title story of the collection, "Banana Fingers," al-Jabaʿi, like Ibrahim Samu'il, tells a tale of alienation between parent and child due to political detention. The story begins with Ziyad, a prisoner, carefully saving some bananas he receives from a fellow detainee who, in turn, received the fruit as a gift from visiting relatives. Ziyad tells his comrades that he is saving them for his son, who should be visiting him shortly with Ziyad's wife. Finally, the day of the planned visit arrives, but the joyous anticipation of the encounter dissipates when they do not show up. After several days pass, the

bananas turn black. Devastated, Ziyad sinks into a depression that is depicted in the text by a momentary departure from the linear progression of the narrative. He imagines a series of scenarios where something horrible has happened to his wife and son. Later, he emerges from his grief-stricken stupor and relates to his comrade Muhammad the story behind his desire to give his son the bananas.

Ziyad begins this story by describing a scene at a school. A teacher asks the students to close their eyes and wish for something and claims that whatever they wish for will be granted. A boy, whose "father is a detainee," wishes for bananas rather than for his father's release from prison. In the end, the whole story of saving the bananas is revealed to be a figment of Ziyad's imagination. The vacillation between reality and delusion in the story makes it unclear if his son was ever actually going to visit him. He has been imprisoned for so long that he can no longer discern the difference between reality and his mental flights of fancy. In the text, Muhammad voices the truth that the bananas never existed at all. The narrative intervention of his revelation causes the reading audience to both recognize and witness Ziyad's acute emotional and psychological vulnerability; it is clear that Ziyad has become delusional. As a political detainee, he is unable to provide for his family, including fulfilling his son's wish for a piece of fruit, and thus has no way of "ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity," as Article 23 of the UDHR holds. The recognition of Ziyad's suffering caused by his and his family's loss of dignity and his isolation and alienation from his son evokes in the reader a form of sentimentality that cultivates empathy for the plight of the characters.

The failure of recognition due to a prisoner's inability to distinguish between reality and illusion, itself an effect of detainment, is also presented in al-Jabaʿi's story "The Ghoul and the Zaghlul" (al-Ghul wa-l-Zaghlul). This story, along with "The Memoirs of a Barrel" (Mudhakkirat Barmil) marks a shift to a more blatantly surreal and, at times, almost naively allegorical style of representation. In a disjointed narrative, a narrator who appears to be descending into madness attempts to recount his relationship with a dependent, child-like "ghoul" imprisoned with him. Unlike his fellow inmates, who, at first, do not appear to see or recognize the creature's presence, he befriends the ghoul. It is unclear at the beginning of the story if the ghoul is actually a fellow prisoner who has been disfigured by torture or is merely a phantom of the narrator's imagination, but later in the story the narrator notes that the other prisoners do not believe the ghoul to be real.

In oblique language, the narrator describes the effects of detention, not on himself as a human being, but on the ghoul as a mysterious animal-monster-unhuman figure whose existence in reality appears to be the subject of debate by the community of prisoners in the story. Who or what the ghoul was and is remains ambiguous, especially at the beginning of the story. The reader could view the ghoul figure as a human detainee, a mirror-like figure of the narrator, or a mere delusion. The ghoul's origins and status remain ambiguous even when, later on, the narrator's fellow prisoners mock him for believing that the ghoul exists. Leaving the question of the ghoul's human origin and humanity open to interpretation, al-Jabaʿi offers a portrait of the political prisoner reduced to the status of the unhuman. His allegorical narrative not only "disrupts or undermines meaning," and "serves as a way to describe the indescribable, or the monstrous," but in the context of political detention and the ongoing violations of the human rights of political prisoners, even the mythical monster figure, the ghoul, is diminished and

destroyed.[36] Alluding to the brutality of both the security agents and his fellow detainees, the narrator notes how the ghoul had once been a "giant" but was now a "shameful size" after "they squeezed him."[37] Through this brief reference to the torture of detainees, the narrative reminds the reader that political imprisonment and torture are an attempt by the state to render human beings as unhuman, as creatures whose rights and vulnerabilities remain unrecognized. Here, along with the ghoul, the narrator is reduced to a life that the state considers "unreal," a life that the regime can more easily target with violence and human rights violations that will never be acknowledged, by the state or by fellow citizens, much like some of the narrator's comrades refuse to acknowledge the ghoul's presence or its potential humanity.[38]

When the narrator and the ghoul claim that they are taking care of a *zaghlūl*, or baby pigeon, the *zaghlūl* becomes the focus of their relationship. The narrator refuses to recognize that the *zaghlūl* is actually a bar of soap, as his fellow prisoners keep telling him. He asks:

> Is it reasonable that they are all wrong, and the ghoul and I are right? They are a group of reasonable men . . . men who are clever, educated, with experience . . . have they never seen a *zaghlūl* in their lives? Haven't they longed to see it after all of these years? Or does prison change concepts and reason . . . I might be wrong . . . I . . . am definitely wrong, maybe it was a piece of soap, but . . . but they . . . It's a *zaghlūl* . . . by god, a real *zaghlūl* . . . I heard its voice with my ear, and I saw his eye with my eye . . . have *zaghlūl*s changed to that degree . . . I haven't seen or heard its voice for years.[39]

Remaining adamant that both the ghoul and *zaghlūl* exist, the narrator notes that the other inmates, seemingly out of exasperation with his behavior, expel him from the communal prison cell. Although he is initially happy with his exile, this feeling fades when two tragedies occur. The narrator reports that the ghoul accidentally kills the *zaghlūl*. Then, as the story concludes on the next day, he relates his discovery that the ghoul, at age fifty, is dead, presumably having committed suicide, another allusion to the fact that the ghoul was, despite the disbelief of some of the other prisoners, human afterall.

In "The Ghoul and the Zaghlul," al-Jabaʿi offers one portrait of a narrator-detainee who has lost his mental faculties and another of an ambiguously portrayed figure, a ghoul. The ghoul could be interpreted as the imagined creation of the detainee who has descended into madness, but it could also be seen as a prisoner who becomes reduced to the status of a debilitated creature, an unhuman yet child-like figure that highlights the Syrian state's stark dehumanization of political detainees. The narrator is depicted as living in a world of delusions and so appears to be uable to acknowledge the "truths" that other prisoners recognize and allude to in the story—that the ghoul is not a ghoul at all, and that the *zaghlūl* is not a baby pigeon/pet but a bar of soap. At the same time, the portrayal of the narrator and the ghoul serves to remind the audience that the harsh realities of political imprisonment render detainees as sub- or nonhuman. Al-Jabaʿi's tale makes recognizable the fact that the brutality of detention degrades and effaces a detainee's sense of self, the sense of one's own humanness, and one's sense of reality. The lack of recognition of the ghoul as human that plays out in the story can be linked to the problem of who is recognized as having human rights. The detained "ghoul" is deemed to be unhuman, and therefore no recognition or restoration of his rights exists; the ghoul takes his own life, and the narrator, though explicitly human, continues to languish in

prison, having been relegated to the status of one whose rights remain unrecognized, just like the ghoul.

Al-Jabaʿi's story reflects the tradition and prevalence of the mode of allegory in the work of other prolific Syrian writers, such as short story writer Zakariya Tamir and playwright Saʿd Allah Wannus. In works such as Tamir's *Tigers on the Tenth Day* (al-Numur fi al-Yawm al-ʿAshir, 1978) and Wannus's *The King is the King* (al-Malik Huwwa al-Malik, 1977), the writers use animal or abstract historical figures to provide a coded critque of the regime and its forms of political oppression. This allegorized critique in the work of all three writers is coupled with irony as "a discursive strategy operating at the level of language and form" and deploying a "critical edge," in Linda Hutcheon's terms.[40] Al-Jabaʿi's emphasis on ironic, allegorical narrative to depict the experience of political imprisonment is most fully realized in "Memoirs of a Barrel," a story narrated from the point of view of a barrel that was being used for smuggling weapons and that gets "detained" with a group of militant political dissidents. In this case, the narrator is neither human nor animal nor monster, but an inanimate, dependent object that takes on the dehumanized status of a political detainee. Yet the question of whether the barrel is actually a human being is always at the surface of the story. Hinting that it might have been human at one point, the barrel describes a security services report detailing his arrest and interrogation with another man. With ellipses ("three dots") serving as an indication of self-censorship or silencing, the narrator remarks: "I was a human being, and then I transformed into a barrel, and then 'three dots' . . . Pardon me, I was not a human being exactly and I didn't change into a real barrel."[41] While describing the arrest, the barrel questions how it is that he became a political detainee and how, again ironically, because of that status, he has become humanized by being imprisoned.

After recollecting his fellow inmates' initial suspicions about his political affiliations, he remarks: "My story is supposed to end because a barrel doesn't talk . . . or understand, nor can he hold a pen and write 'three dots,' but what happened to me after that . . . and, then who says that I am the one speaking and writing?"[42] Although a barrel should not be able to speak, and the ellipses in his speech indicate a form of self-censorship, he attempts to tell his story rather than be completely silenced. As he does so, he reveals his absolute physical vulnerability while in detention. At first, he is left outside of a communal cell and is occasionally kicked around by the guards—a passive object that suffers from physical abuse by those around him, abuse which clearly alludes to forms of torture that detainees endure.

Eventually, the barrel transforms into a small bucket due to a lack of water. As a bucket, he describes being used for various tasks, such as carrying water and washing, and being turned upside down to serve as a step stool. He endures all of these humiliations with patience until the inmates place him in the bathroom and use him either as a water bucket or as a toilet, a point in the story of extreme degradation. Finally, one day, a prisoner stands on him in order to reach something and the barrel-bucket's side cracks. He realizes he has suffered a "lethal blow to the stomach."[43] A guard, seeing the bucket is cracked, puts him in the trash. A prisoner retrieves him from the trash and then cuts him into pieces. In the end, the barrel-bucket is used for firewood, effectively turned to ashes and dust—a devastating reminder that "human rights abuses disconnect and destroy the conditions that make embodiment, enselfment, and emplacement possible."[44]

In "The Ghoul and the Zaghlul" and "Memoirs of a Barrel," al-Jabaʿi asserts nonhuman figures in order to provoke the reader's recognition of the inhumanity of rights violations, including torture, indefinite detention, and deprivation of due process that occur through the state's use of political detention. The ironic emphasis on nonhuman or unhuman figures works to highlight the humanity and physical and psychological vulnerability of political prisoners.[45] In narrative form, both the ghoul and the barrel are allegorical reminders that those who are rendered unhuman by the process of detention are deprived of their basic human rights, including the right promulgated in Article 5 of the UDHR to not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. And this deprivation can have lethal results. In presenting the political prisoner as ghoul and barrel, the writer reinforces the notion that despite the Syrian state's disregard of the rights of political prisoners, the detainee still counts as "a life that qualifies for recognition," and thus a life that should be mourned if it is lost.[46]

THE PERILS OF MISRECOGNITION

In addition to the depiction of unhuman, sometimes child-like figures, several works of Syrian prison literature present stories of mistaken arrest—when citizens, including children, are detained due to mistaken identity or for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Misrecognized as political opponents of the regime by security agents, they suffer the same carceral consequences and endure the same human rights violations as dissidents. In a short story by ʿAbd al-Salam al-ʿUjayli entitled "Rocky and His Mother" (Raki wa-Ummuhu), a young boy is detained along with his father because three political fugitives use their home as a hideout.[47] Security authorities fail to recognize that Rocky, a young child, and his father have never participated in any oppositional political activity. Yet the father is forcibly disappeared; Rocky never sees him again, and he, himself, is imprisoned without trial for most of his adolescence and early adulthood. When he is finally released, he acknowledges ironically that, having forgotten his real mother and unable to remember anything about his father except for his moustache, the Syrian state is his one connection to the outside world and has thus become "his mother." But before he is completely free, he must fulfill his duty to "his mother," the state, as a Syrian citizen. Just prior to leaving prison, he is conscripted and forced to serve in the armed forces by the same state that violated his right, as held by Articles 9 and 11 of the UDHR, to be presumed innocent and to not be subjected to arbitrary detention.

In al-ʿUjayli's story, the vulnerable child protagonist is unjustly imprisoned for fifteen years—a clear violation of his rights—and then is made to suffer even more by being forced to serve the very state that detained him. While he is a conscript, Rocky narrates his life story to Ahmad, a server in the café where he sleeps during his holidays from military service because he has nowhere else to go. Ahmad does not fully believe or comprehend Rocky's story, which concludes with the protagonist laughing and then crying at the absurdity of his own situation. The reader is left with the same disquieting impression as Ahmad; the arbitrariness of Rocky's oppression and the absurd origins of his suffering grow out of the misrecognition that caused his and his father's detention in the first place. At the same time, the poignancy of Rocky's tragic tale evokes empathy from both Ahmad and the story's readers. The protagnist's vulnerability highlights the

precariousness and failure of political institutions, whether those of the Syrian state or those of the international human rights regime intended to protect the individual child and young adult.[48]

The plot of Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell* (al-Qawqʿa) similarly begins with a case of mistaken identity.[49] The narrator of the novel, Musa, is a recent graduate of a Paris film school and is returning home to Damascus. After arriving at the airport, Musa is arrested by military security agents and taken for interrogation. The agents believe he is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and he endures extensive torture while they try to extract a confession of affiliation from him. He attempts to inform his torturers that he is from a Christian family and an atheist, but to no avail. Without a trial, he is sent to the infamous "desert prison," a common moniker in Syrian literature for Tadmur Military Prison.

Musa survives in the desert prison for twelve years despite being shunned and persecuted by his cellmates for his atheism. Aware that he is in constant danger from the prison guards and the religious extremists in his communal cell, he isolates himself and withdraws into his own psychological shell. Yet even in isolation, Musa becomes a keen observer of the quotidian horrors of Tadmur. In one of the novel's most heartbreaking scenes, a father and his three sons who have been imprisoned are sentenced to execution by a military court. But before the execution is carried out, a member of the court announces that only three out of the four of the imprisoned members of the family will be put to death. He orders the father to select one member of the family who will be spared. Faced with this impossible and agonizing decision, the father finally declares that the youngest son, Asʿad, should live.

Yet, when the day of execution comes, the officer declares that Asʿad will be executed along with his brothers, and the father will be spared instead. When the list of names of those to be executed is called out, the father realizes that the choice he was given was nothing but a sadistic joke intended as the cruelest form of psychological torture. All three sons are brutally executed while the father is left alive, stricken with indescribable grief. The other prisoners as well as the reader of the novel are left in shock, having failed to recognize just how cruel and arbitrary the system of punishment is. The prisoners organize a funeral prayer even as prayers are forbidden. The narrative depicts the detainees' recognition of the fact that even in a place where torture, degradation, and death are daily occurrences that are well documented by human rights organizations, the execution of the three sons is especially monstrous and inhuman.[50] The simple act of prayer becomes a form of resistance and a way for the prisoners to reassert their dignity and humanity. In this scene, the reader can easily recognize and sense the acute psychological and physical suffering of the entire family and of the other prisoners who stand as witnesses.

In addition to harrowing scenes like the above in which parents and children realize that they will not be able to spare each other from the horrors of an oppressive political system, in works of Syrian prison literature, and as seen in the story "The Visit," a frequently reiterated theme is the failure of recognition between blood relatives after long periods of political detention.[51] The failure of a child to recognize his/her father due to political detention and its devastating personal and political effects is revisited in a particularly poignant story, "The Man Who Is No Longer a Father" (al-Rajul Alladhi Lam Yaʿud Aban), in Samu'il's collection *The Stench of the Heavy Step*. The first-person

narrator presents a direct address to the reader as he tells the tragic-comedic story of a former fellow inmate. At the very opening of the story, he asks:

> Has it ever happened that you discovered that you were no longer a father to your son? Before you rush to answer, I would like to make clear that by "discovered" I don't mean what happens in Egyptian films when the hero calls out to his young son while on his deathbed . . . No, I don't mean that of course. Rather, I mean has it ever happened to you what happened to Nadhir Rahim al-ʿUmar who discovered that he was no longer—after he had been—a father to his son?[52]

The narrator brings the reader into the story by addressing him/her as if in a casual discussion. This conversational address strengthens the notion of the everydayness, of the "realness" of this narrative. Samu'il frames the story to come as, at least in part, a consciously polyphonic narrative—one in which a simple anecdote reveals through multiple voices and registers the tragic, psychological, and emotional effects of political detention and the various vulnerabilities of both the political detainee and his/her family.[53]

The narrator not only stresses the notion that Nadhir was a "father to his son in the past," but he also makes metafictional references. In this case, it is the story itself that is being written and recorded from a variety of viewpoints in order to provide greater validation of its reality:

> I say "after he had been" because he really was a father to his son Khalid, and Khalid was Nadhir's son and his name—up until the writing of this story—is still recorded in the family register in this way "Khalid bin Nadhir Rahim al-ʿUmar." And Maryam Rahim al-ʿUmar—the daughter of Nadhir's uncle before marriage—she is the wife of Khalid. She didn't marry anyone else before him and he didn't marry anyone but her . . . this is testified to by the family register whose pages specifically for wives are void of the name of any other woman except Maryam.[54]

In this circuitous way, the narrator presents the fact that Khalid is Nadhir's son and that Maryam is his wife and the mother of Khalid in order to establish clearly their genealogical relationship to one another. There is a high level of irony in the statement that the son–father relationship has been duly and dutifully recorded given what is about to unfold. The narrator also scripts the story as one of common occurrence, indicating that the tragic case of Nadhir and his son is not an isolated or exceptional phenomenon for political prisoners, held incommunidcado and deprived of their rights to visitation.

The notions of hiding, revelation, and recognition will remain in play throughout the story. As the narrator says to his audience, "I won't hide from you that this discovery wouldn't have caused a problem in Nadhir's life if it had remained in its reasonable boundaries . . . except that it surpassed them greatly."[55] The narrator thus describes the central problem between father and son as being due to a "failure" of recognition; after years of imprisonment, Nadhir is unable to convince Khalid that he is, in fact, the child's father. Following the path of the narrator's circuitous reflections, the story is constructed via the normal digressions of daily conversation, rendering the effects of political detention an everyday or commonplace occurence. Though the narrator deems Maryam, the wife, as the "cause" of the problem between father and son, the reader easily senses that in the larger picture, it is the Asad regime's environment of political repression and human rights violations that are to blame.

Eventually, the source of the problem between father and son is revealed. When Nadhir went into hiding as a political fugitive, he was forced to disguise himself with a beard, a hat, and dark glasses. When he was arrested, Maryam, who was pregnant with Khalid at the time, had only this single picture of a disguised Nadhir to show to her son after he was born. Effectively, according to the narrator, that picture of Nadhir in disguise becomes the focus of affection and attention for Maryam and later for Khalid. Maryam, "in all the years of her husband's detention," shared Nadhir's picture "in all things big and small" in Khalid's life.[56] The picture came to replace an absent Nadhir in his wife's and son's eyes. She would hold the picture nearby as she nursed Khalid, distract him with the picture if he cried, and use it to teach him to say "Baba" before "Mama." At Khalid's first birthday party,

> The picture was no less present than her and Nadhir's friends; rather, the picture even participated in eating the sweets as well . . . In this way, Khalid was growing up and the picture grew with him . . . He would say goodbye from the window before he went to nursery school, and he would greet him in the afternoon with toys and sweets. He would sit at the table with them in front of the food and sleep between them at night on the bed.[57]

Thus, due to Nadhir's prolonged absence from the household, Khalid grew up with the idea that the man in the picture was his father; the picture, itself, as a material object, served as a substitute for his father.

According to the narrator, the picture would cause a form of indefinite and life-long detention for Nadhir; in essence, even after he gains his freedom from the physical walls of prison, he will continue to be deprived of his dignity. The narrator details his friend's release by weaving the newly freed detainee's voice into the narrative:

> Nadhir embraced Maryam and cried, and she embraced him for a long time and cried. "But," said Nadhir despairingly, "when I turned to Khalid and hugged him to my chest, I felt a rock between him and me. I felt his frightened surprise at my hugging his mother maybe or at her crying maybe or at something else I still don't know . . . but I felt like I was pulling a coil to my chest.[58]

Ironically, this reunion between father and son, which should be filled with joy, is shaded with discomfort and rejection. The protagonist discovers that his son neither recognizes nor feels affection for him. All of Nadhir's efforts to get his son to recognize him are "of no use."[59] At the story's conclusion, the narrator reveals to the reader that he does not know what happened to the family, but he heard from a friend that the schism between parent and child was never resolved. Khalid, to this day, has continued to ignore Nadhir and act as if the picture was his father.

"The Man Who Is No Longer a Father" plays on the notion of anecdotal, comedic, and tragic storytelling as a kind of witnessing. Attesting to the emotional rupture between parents and children caused by the mechanisms of the Syrian state's political oppression, detention of dissidents, and human rights violations, the story represents the all too common event of famial alienation. In this case, not only has Nadhir been forced to endure arbitrary detention, but he has also been subjected to interference in his familial relationships, relationships which are officially recognized and protected under Article 12 of the UDHR. Though emotional states are not explicitly described in the narrative, the major characters are presented as in pain and suffering from "a loss of dignity" and "a loss of comfort."[60]

At the core of the story lies Nadhir's picture—a portrait of him in disguise. The picture, though "real" in and of itself, becomes a masked trace of a detained man. Maryam attempts to alleviate Nadhir's absence though a distorted image of him. Both Nadhir and his wife are forced by political circumstances to dissimulate, and such dissimulation warps normal, familial relationships. The significance of Nadhir's photographic image is that it exists as a real, manipulatable object and as a source of distortion; at the very least, Khalid can believe he has a father even while his actual father is imprisoned and absent. However, in the end, the picture of Nadhir becomes more "real" to the son than the actual father, and he no longer has significance.

The text makes the reader aware that while he is imprisoned, Nadhir's family must make due with his photograph, which is presented as a simulacrum, in the sense of being a "semblance" that "calls into question the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented."[61] Rather than his emotional loss or pain, Nadhir's frustration is briefly depicted as he recounts how he attempted to make his son acknowledge him. Both Nadhir and his wife have already reached a point of recognition in the story where they "understand their predicament fully" even if their versions of what happened differ.[62] But as a representative of the generation to come, Khalid, at the conclusion of the story, remains in a state of denial.

The denial of the father, the older generation, that is key to the plotline, unfolds as a recognition of the ways in which both the political prisoner and his/her family are acutely vulnerable. The reader comes to realize the painful lesson that Nadhir, having endured a series of human rights violations at the hands of the Syrian state, has been deprived of fatherhood. Similarly, Khalid remains a captive of a psychological or emotional form of detention. He has been deprived of the right to recognition as well as the right to forget. He has no memory of his real father and lives with the delusion that a photo is more real than its subject. Despite Maryam's attempts to help heal the relationship between father and son, Nadhir never fully gains his liberty nor is he able to develop a fully integrated relationship with Khalid.

CONCLUSION

Like the works of Ghassan al-Jabaʿi, ʿAbd al-Salam al-ʿUjayli, and Mustafa Khalifa, Ibrahim Samuʾil's story "The Man Who Is No Longer a Father" provides a form of sentimental education for its readers by evoking the image of the physical, emotional, and psychological vulnerability of political prisoners and their loved ones. Samuʾil's story presents the detrimental consequences of the failure of recognition between family members that is caused by prolonged absence due to political detention. This same failure in the private sphere of the family can be read as an allegory of the dilemma, if not danger, of relying on the recognition of human rights by both the state, whether Syria or others, and the modern international human rights regime. Just as the son fails to recognize the father, so too can the state, which "holds a monopoly over legalized violence," fail to recognize, and in turn, actively violate, the human rights of its citizens. In the same vein, the institutions of international human rights law can fail to recognize human rights violations in particular times and places and to hold accountable those individuals, groups, or states which are responsible for such abuses.[63] The recognition of human vulnerability that occurs when the narrator of al-Jabaʿi's story acknowledges

and befriends the real or imaginary ghoul, much like the recognition of human rights abuses by the United Nations and its requisite institutions, does not actually end the narrator's or other detainees' suffering. Sometimes, as such stories indicate, recognition fails, or when it does occur it is simply not enough.

As the narrator notes at the conclusion of "The Man Who Is No Longer a Father": "After three years passed, the prison released him *but the picture continued to detain him.*"[64] The fate of Nadhir and his family—much like the fate of many Syrian political detainees, the fate of many of the forcibly disappeared in Darʿa and elsewhere in Syria, the fate of the Syrian revolution, the fate of Syrian refugees, and the fate of Syria itself—remains uncertain. The government's arrest, torture, and killing of children and adult protestors in Darʿa and elsewhere in Syria in March and April 2011 resulted in widespread and newfound recognition both locally and internationally of the human rights abuses of the Syrian regime, and that recognition led to direct political action by Syrian citizens—demonstrators, including some of the parents, relatives, and neighbors of the children who were initially arrested, peacefully protesting and calling for the end to political oppression and the recognition of their human and civil rights, including the right to dignity. Much like the stories of the children of Darʿa, the sentimental poetics at play in the works of prison literature discussed in this article evoke both the vulernability of political prisoners and the necessity and perils of recognizing such vulnerabilities. Yet, more than five years after the start of the uprising, the international human rights regime, based as it is on a foundational reliance on the tenuous and fraught politics of recognition and the nation-state, has still offered no plausible solution to the greatest human rights and humanitarian catastrophe of our time. The question must continue to be asked: what new forms of recognition can we create to end the human rights abuses and human suffering and vulnerability caused by the current war in Syria?

NOTES

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[1]For a journalist's description of the events in Darʿa in March 2011, including the detention of the children, see, for example, Ghassan Saʿud, "Darʿa Madinat al-Ashbah: Rihla fi Thawra Lam Tulid Baʿd," *al-Akhbar*, 25 March 2011, accessed 30 April 2016, http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/7549/. See also Paul Gabriel Hilu Pinto, "Syria," in *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*, ed. Paul Amar and Vijay Prashad (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), Kindle edition. For details on the protests leading up to the same events in Darʿa, see Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), Kindle edition.

[2]Faraj Bayraqdar, "Awal Thawra fi al-Tarikh Yaqdahu Shararatiha al-Atfal," *al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin*, 10 June 2011, accessed 30 April 2016, http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=262727. For examples of poems dedicated to Hamza al-Khatib, see selections on the website of the Rabitat Kuttab al-Thawra al-Suriyya, accessed 30 April 2016, http://syrianrevolutionwriters.blogspot.com/2012/05/blog-post_7359.html/; and YouTube videos such as "Qasidat Hamza al-Khatib," 2 June 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Grq1rIGw3Y/. Multiple testimonials about and from the children of Darʿa can also be viewed on YouTube. See, for example: "Ahad al-Atfal Alladhina Katabu Awla Shiʿarat al-Hurriyya ʿala Jidran al-Madrasa fi Darʿa," 18 March 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlN2mAXHLYM/, and

"15 Tilmidh Sabab Indilaʿ al-Thawra al-Suriyya Haqiqa La Tusdiq," 30 January 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STikjAh0XXs.

[3]All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Mudawwana Muwatina Suriyya, 29 May 2011, accessed 30 April 2016, https://syrians4change.wordpress.com/2011/05/29/حتى-السوري-النظام-عذبه-طفل-الخطيب-حمزة/.

[4]Local and international human rights organizations have published dozens of special reports on the Syrian state's systematic human rights abuses and violations under the rule of Hafiz al-Asad (1970–2000) and Bashar al-Asad (2000–present). See, for example, Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991); Human Rights Watch, "A Wasted Decade: Human Rights in Syria during Bashar al-Asad's First Ten Years in Power," 2010, accessed 30 April 2016, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0710webwcover.pdf; and Amnesty International, "Annual Report: Syria," 2011, accessed 30 April 2016, http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/annual-report-syria-2011. For a special report on the detention and torture of school children after the beginning of the uprising, see Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Stop Torture of Children," 3 February 2012, accessed 30 April 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/03/syria-stop-torture-children.

[5]Though literary works addressing the experience of detention were published prior to the 1970s, the earliest work of criticism on a genre identified as "prison literature" (*adab al-sijn*) that I have read or seen referenced is an article by Syrian writer and critic Nabil Sulayman. Nabil Sulayman, "Nahw Adab al-Sijn," *al-Mawqif al-Adabi* 1/2 (1973): 137–41.

[6]The definition of prison literature used for the purposes of this article is deliberately inclusive and necessarily contingent given the debates about the parameters of the genre and authors' discussions and views on whether their own works are part of it. See, for example, the author's introduction to Yassin al-Hajj Salih, *Bi-l-Khalas Ya Shabab: Sittin ʿAman fi al-Sujun al-Suriyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2012).

[7]miriam cooke, "The Cell Story: Syrian Prison Stories after Hafiz Asad," *Middle East Critique* 20 (2011): 169–87, accessed 29 August 2015, doi: 10.1080/19436149. See also cooke's examination of prison literature, including the work of Ghassan al-Jabaʿi and Ibrahim Samu'il, in miriam cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), Kindle edition.

[8]Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked: The Supression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 9. A Committee for Human Rights was established by members of the Syrian Bar Association after two lawyers, Tariq Haydari and ʿAdil Kayali, were killed in detention.

[9]See Samar Ruhi al-Faysal, *al-Sijn al-Siyasi fi al-Riwaya al-ʿArabiyya* (Tripoli: Jarrous Press, 1994; and Nazih Abu Nidal, *Adab al-Sujun* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1981).

[10]See Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (Hanover, Pa.: Wesleyan University Press, 1992); Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004); Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); and Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore, eds., *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[11]Rita Sakr, *"Anticipating" the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary Literatures and Political Geographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Kindle edition.

[12]It should be noted that a number of other texts of Syrian prison literature could have been incorporated into the analysis forwarded in this article but were not due to space limitations. Additionally, in using the term "sentimental education" to indicate the generation of recognition and empathy through the reading of prison literature, I am drawing on Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*; and Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007). Slaughter has rightly problematized the need for "sentimental education" to implement human rights regimes, particularly as formulated by Richard Rorty. He highlights that the "sentimental model of reading has a tendency to become a patronizing humanitarianism that is enabled by and subsists on socioeconomic and political disparities." Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.,* 325; see also 324–28. For more critiques of Rorty's contradictory positions on human rights and sentimentality, see Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Bruce Robbins, "Sad Stories in the International Public Sphere: Richard Rorty on Culture and Human Rights," *Public Culture* 9 (1997): 209–32.

[13]Ibrahim Samu'il, *Ra'ihat al-Khatw al-Thaqil* (Damascus: Dar al-Jundi, 1990), 34.

[14]Ibid., 17.

[15]Ibid., 18.

[16]Margaret Cohen, "Sentimental Communities," in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 108. In this article, I follow Cohen's definition of sentimentality as the "narrative situation" portraying "a spectacle of suffering that solicits the spectator's sympathy."

[17]Although it cannot be addressed in detail in the scope of this article, it should be noted that until the mid-2000s, the most common forms of Syrian prison literature were first, memoirs, and second, short stories, which is an indication of the prevalence and continuing popularity of short fiction in Arabic literature more generally. In my forthcoming book manuscript, I draw on Julio Cortazar's analysis of the short story as a photograph to consider Samu'il's and other authors' short stories as forms of "prison portraiture" and "humanizing snapshots." These short narratives depict the experience of detention in discreet and selective moments and thus differ, especially in the representation of temporality, from memoirs, novels, and the reports of human rights organizations.

[18]Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

[19]Ibid., 2.

[20]Ibid., 2, 33.

[21]As Joseph Slaughter has noted, in drafting the UDHR's preamble, the UN "deduces the need for a speech act of recognition that identifies human rights as inherent and inalienable, and it declares *this* declaration to be *that* speech act of common recognition and understanding." Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 64. Emphasis in the original.

[22]In her critique of human rights, Hannah Arendt observes that despite the "best intentions" of international human rights declarations, a "sphere that is above the nation does not exist." Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1976), 298, Kindle edition. Therefore, the implementation and enforcement of international human rights law becomes problematic, if not impossible, in the face of the self-interests of sovereign nation-states. For additional discussion of the nation-state as both principle violator and essential protector of human rights, see Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 34–37.

[23]Bryan S. Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights* (State College, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), Kindle edition.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 43.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Likewise, in describing the ways in which an "ethics of recognition" functions in human rights discourse, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith observe: "Whether or not storytelling in the field of human rights results in the extension of human justice, dignity, and freedom depends on the willingness of those addressed to hear the stories and take responsibility for the recognition of others and their claims. In the transits of multi-vectored space there are many flows, but also many detours, undercurrents, dams and blockages." Schaffer and Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives,* 5.

[29]As Barbara Harlow has noted, "recognition scenes" in prison writings usually counter any form of narrative or ideological restoration or closure. Harlow, *Barred*, 72–73.

[30]Hans Robert Jauss, "The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding," in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7–28.

[31]Ibid., 7.

[32]Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 61.

[33]Ibid., 9.

[34]Ghassan al-Jabaʿi, *Asabʿ al-Mawz* (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1994); Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), 2. Fletcher also notes that literary analysis of allegory must always be aware of the "political overtones" rooted in the Greek understanding of the term because "censorship may produce devious ways of speaking," a point that is highly relevant to interpreting texts about political detention, such as al-Jabaʿi's short stories and other works of Syrian prison literature. Fletcher also considers irony as a form of "condensed allegory." Fletcher, *Allegory*, 230.

[35]Shawqi Baghdadi, introduction to *Asabʿ al-Mawz,* by al-Jabaʿi, 13.

[36]Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 92.

[37]Al-Jabaʿi, *Asabʿ al-Mawz*, 59.

[38]Butler, *Precarious Life,* 33.

[39]Al-Jabaʿi, *Asabʿ al-Mawz*, 77. Ellipses in the original.

[40]Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 2005), Kindle edition, 4, 10.

[41]Al-Jabaʿi, *Asabʿ al-Mawz*, 115. Quotation marks and ellipses in the original.

[42]Ibid., 123. Quotation marks and ellipses in the original.

[43]Ibid., 128.

[44]Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights*.

[45]As Hutcheon notes, irony is "an interpretative and intentional move" in that the reader as interpreter must make or infer "meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and unsaid." The presence of irony in the narrative thus adds to the forms of recognition a reader undergoes. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 11.

[46]Butler, *Precarious Life*, 34.

[47]ʿAbd al-Salam al-ʿUjayli, *Majhula ʿala al-Tariq* (London: Riyad al-Rayyis, 1997).

[48]Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights*.

[49]Mustafa Khalifa, *al-Qawqʿa* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 2008).

[50]See, for example, Amnesty International, "Torture, Death, and Dehumanization in Tadmor Military Prison," 18 September 2001, accessed 30 April 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE24/014/2001/en/.

[51]See, for example, Faraj Bayraqdar's *Khiyanat al-Lugha wa-l-Samt* (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 2006); and Malik Daghastani's novel *Duwar al-Hurriyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Balad, 2002).

[52]Samu'il, *Ra'ihat al-Khatw al-Thaqil*, 34.

[53]Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dotoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 6.

[54]Samu'il, *Ra'ihat al-Khatw al-Thaqil*, 34.

[55]Ibid., 34–35.

[56]Ibid., 37.

[57]Ibid., 37–38.

[58]Ibid., 38–39.

[59]Ibid., 39.

[60]Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights*.

[61]Michael Camille, "Simulacrum," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Kindle edition, 35.

[62]Cave, *Recognitions*, 1.

[63]Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights*.

[64]Samu'il, *Ra'ihat al-Khatw al-Thaqil*, 38.