CHAPTER-3

A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE THEMES AND STYLES OF KHOURY'S NOVEL "YALO"

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3.1 A Brief story of the Novel *Yalo*

Yalo is an Arabic novel which is published in the year 2002. This novel is written by Elias Khoury, the most distinguished Lebanese novelist of modern Arabic literature. The novel is also being translated into various languages like English, French, and German etc. Edward Said remarked Khoury as a brilliant figure, an artist giving voice to rooted exiles and trapped refugees, to dissolving boundaries and changing identities.[151] He has written a dozen novels, half of them translated into English, while working as a critic and journalist in Beirut, where he has been editor-in-chief of the cultural supplement of An-Nahar daily newspaper since 1992. He became global distinguished professor at New York University, shuttling from Beirut each spring to teach Arabic and comparative literature.

A number of Khoury's novels begin with death: that of Umm Hassan in *Gate of the Sun*, of Khalil Ahmad Jaber in *White Masks*, or even that of Abd Al'Karim in *The Journey of Little Gandhi*. But *Yalo*, on the other hand, doesn't begin with a death; instead, its opening sentence is "Yalo didn't understand what was happening" sets the tone for the rest of the novel as Khoury unravels Yalo's story weaving together as it were and the shards of his recollections. This sort of writing is always tricky: there being the risk that the reader will guess at revelations before they come to pass. Despite this, Khoury keeps pace with his narrator notwithstanding

[151]Maya Jaggi, *A circle of madness,*The Guardian,Saturday 28th july 2007

the fact that Yalo has to reflect on his story a full seven times before anything approaching a complete portrait emerges.[152]

The story of the novel *Yalo* is set in post-civil war Lebanon. It is story of a young ex-militiaman named *Denial Jalou* who does not re-adjusting well to peacetime. He was working as an armed guard of a rich man's villa, he begins raping and robbing people who come for surreptitious sex to a nearby Lovers' Lane. The uneducated thug falls in love with one of the women he rapes, pursues her, trying futilely to win her heart, and though he is rejected in the end by the upper-class woman. He becomes less brutal and a potentially decent human being through his love for her, or so the author implies. In the end, Yalo is absolved of the more sinister conspiracies, but sentenced for his common crimes.

These bare bones of the story, however, don't convey its disorienting experimental texture. Indeed, one of the most striking qualities about this novel is the way the author subverts the linear nature of narration and turns it into something closer to random access. If you're looking for one coherent continuous story, you won't find it here. Rather you will find multiple versions of Yalo's life and crimes told and retold as he undergoes a set of gruesome tortures that not only damage his body but also fragment his mind. And since the novel is told from Yalo's point of view, the impressionistic vortex of his mind is our only source of information. The challenge is that this information is often expressed in non-literal language, so that at times we have to wade through prose saturated with Yalo's personal myths, images and symbols.

The first line of the novel 'Yalo': "Yalo did not understand what was happening."[153] As the book opens, the reason for Yalo's confusion is

[152] Andre Naffis-Sahely, *reflection on yalo*, February 1, 2011,p-1
[153] *Yalo*,2002,p-1

twofold: most immediately, he is being denounced by the woman he thought he loved while a police interrogator harangues him every step of the way. This scene of purely sensory confusion soon gives way to a much more profound kind: *Yalo* is an extremely troubled man, and these troubles exacerbated by the police interrogation make it difficult for him to understand what his life has amounted to and who exactly he is.[154]

Although *Yalo* is a book rife with torture and degradation, a book that asks us to bear witness to the real-life atrocities that are mirrored in its pages, there is nothing *Yalo* asks us to do more than understand its protagonist's coming-of-age, even as, in Elias Khoury's hands, Yalo's development as a man is subtly but markedly inflected by the political and the moral realities of Lebanon. Khoury, a former participant in the PLO and an outspoken critic of the government in his native Lebanon, here brings in many strands of his nation's past: the long civil war from 1975 to 1990, the sectarian strife that exacerbated it, the torture still used by Lebanese police. Yalo has both helped perpetrate these historical wrongs and been a victim of them, and his mixture of culpability and circumstance is mirrored by the morally ambiguous figure that he cuts. Few with any sense of civility would say Yalo's crimes merit torture and a stiff prison sentence, but most readers would also agree that he does deserve some form of punishment. To his credit, the Yalo that we discover in these pages would be among them.[155]

Yalo's fundamental confusion as to who he is and what he deserves makes for a highly digressive, spiraling narrative, one that continually totters askew and that constantly waves its unreliability in our faces. Part of the richness of Khoury's protagonist comes from the fact that he is

[154] Esposito, *Scott review on the book Yalo* by Elias Khoury.

[155] Esposito , Ibid,p2

given so many reasons to narrate his life unreliably. Rather than an unobservant dodderer, Yalo is very much an active, canny person. Though it's true that on occasion Khoury resorts to the staid device of making Yalo not comprehend something that is clear to the reader, much more often Yalo's unreliability springs from deeper wells: wish-fulfillment, the excision of childhood scars, the fragility of memory, and the general uncertainty that anyone would encounter when trying to put decades of cause and effect in order. In establishing such a broad base of reasons why we cannot trust Yalo's narration, Khoury humanizes him; Yalo becomes a character who struggles with the same problems any of us would have when trying to fashion our own life histories.[156]

As *Yalo* loosely circles around the life of its unreliable protagonist, some reasonably trustworthy details do emerge: Yalo was raised by his mother and her father, a harsh, fundamentalist preacher who threw Yalo's true father out of the house for obscure moralistic reasons. (In a subtle bit of writing, Yalo's continual vagueness over exactly why his father was made to leave implies the confusion that young Yalo must have felt as he tried to comprehend where his father went.) Khoury's protagonist left this broken home as a teen to fight in the Lebanese civil war; he eventually ended up in France penniless after being double-crossed by an army buddy and was delivered from Europe by a rich Lebanese who made him a personal bodyguard to his wife. Yalo takes advantage of this position to commit adultery with the wife and to rape women and rob their boyfriends when he finds them, in contravention of Lebanon's moral or legal codes, necking in the woods surrounding his employer's estate.[157]

[156] Esposito ,Ibid,p3
[157] Esposito,ibid,p4

Although the skeleton of his story is not terribly complex, Yalo is an extremely rich character, one worthy of the over three hundred pages dedicated almost solely to him. A Street tough who grows excessively attached to a woman who at best patronizes him, Yalo is by turns piteous, barbarous, compassionate, ambitious. He is typified by both a childlike love of whimsy and claustrophobia with the extremely brutal reality that he is forced to operate in. Through Yalo's mounting sense of paranoia, Khoury bridges together Yalo's penchant for whimsy and the brutality that often confronts him, in the process evolving a highly personal vernacular. What makes Yalo's personal language both powerful and affecting is that we watch how he creates it, and in watching Yalo develop the language he uses to understand his own life we become privileged to the intimate workings of his mind.[158]

Khoury narrates the story in an extremely close third-person. He uses repetitious, sometimes purposely descriptions of physical and mental cruelty, to eventually build a character history based on numerous semi-stable leitmotifs. Over the course of the novel these leitmotifs become a crucial part of Yalo's ability to comprehend his life; they are like mantras or mnemonics, little units of synecdoche Yalo can call upon as necessary to fill gaps in memory and logic. As Yalo's story and his consciousness develop through the story, the actual meanings of these leitmotifs shift and bend. Khoury's technique can be seen in this paragraph, wherein Yalo recalls how his authoritarian grandfather, referred to as the *cohno*, disciplined him as a child by battering him with questions designed to force a confession:[159]

[158] Esposito,ibid,p5
[159] Esposito,ibid,p6

Yalo did not know how to answer his *cohno* grandfather's questions, but he closed his eyes and confessed that he had lied or stolen an apple, or not studied, or anything that came into his head. When the *cohno* listened to his confessions, he was transformed from a *cohno* who heard the sacrament of confession into a grandfather, and instead of preaching to the lad who confessed before him with bowed head and closed eyes, he would beat him with a bamboo stick.

There is much going on in this short paragraph. Most fundamentally, Khoury blends the characters of Yalo's grandfather (the religious leader known as a *cohno*) and the police interrogator, both of whom harass him into false confessions and both of whom use the threat of torture to compel testimony. Moreover, because the *cohno* is a preacher who looks to religion to give his life meaning, in this paragraph the *cohno* mystifies the very prosaic idea of a son confessing to a parent with the Christian sacrament of confession (possibly even conflating it with the many Bible stories involving sons confessing to fathers). Lastly there is the bamboo stick the *cohno* uses to beat Yalo; late in the novel the police will use just such a stick as part of Yalo's torture.

With the method and density seen in just this one paragraph, Khoury builds and builds Yalo's identity with images and phrases of great symbolic weight. In this way Khoury is able to frankly discuss difficult subjects (among them war, rape, murder, torture, and possible adultery) without either turning his book into a freak show or trivializing the importance of what is under discussion. Although the effect of Yalo's repeated regressions and overlapping images can be overwhelming and some spillage is likely inevitable for any reading of *Yalo* this too seems to have been a purposeful stylistic choice.

What is perhaps most interesting about *Yalo* is that despite the title character's misdeeds, by the end of the novel he is a perfectly sympathetic character. This is partly due to Yalo's unreliability it's unclear precisely how many crimes he committed and the circumstances of them. This is also due to the slow-moving, accumulative nature of the narrative: by the time we have established certain crimes beyond a reasonable doubt, we have spent so much time with Yalo that it is tough to judge him too harshly, especially when we often see him as a victim of torture. Although it is true that in many ways Yalo is a despicable protagonist, and in all cases he would be a difficult person to like, he is still not deserving of having a broken Coke bottle rammed up his anus (to name just one of the true-life practices Khoury adapts for his novel). Such harsh and degrading treatment, especially when narrated with Khoury's nightmarish flair, makes it hard not to side with its victim.

Eventually Yalo is given paper and pen and forced to write his life story, another true-life tactic Lebanese interrogators use to wring false confessions. After repeatedly displeasing his interrogators with his increasingly dense narratives, Yalo is given the Coke-bottle torture, after which his identity fragments more radically than ever. It is here, in roughly the book's last third, that *Yalo* pulls away from the political realities of Lebanon's civil war and terrorist paranoia to focus solely on Yalo's character. The narration finally settles into the first-person it has long been courting, and Yalo attempts to construct his identity, now serving only himself in an attempt to understand. It is in this difficult moment that Yalo assumes responsibility for his life while also stepping out from the shadow of his parents. The 31-year-old finally comes of age, and although he cannot rescue himself form the authorities (Yalo's fate

was sealed the minute the Lebanese police arrested him), by novel's end he has nonetheless achieved a measure of victory.

Despite its formal complexity, *Yalo* is very much a fast-moving, approachable book, a novel that shows how multiplicities of stories and intricate metaphors can coexist in a fast-flowing narrative. It would take the skills of a cartographer, and perhaps more patience than any mapmaker has, to fully chart out the mixed strands of lies, deceptions, and misunderstandings that go into Yalo's many stories, but even were someone to chart it all out, I think the job would be impossibly complicated by paradox and the fine gradations of interpretation. This is quite clearly for the best, as in *Yalo* Khoury embodies the fact that we can know a man without fully comprehending who he is.

3.2 A critical Study on the Themes of Elias Khoury's Novel *Yalo*

Khoury's theme is the effect on the human mind of torture, shown through many vivid and excruciating scenes. Yalo ironically congratulates his tormentors for the inventiveness of the forms of torture he employ and on his capacity to extract confessions from the accused as easily as extracting his soul. However violent torture may be, its physical effects wear off quickly and all that remains is the spiritual effect, which makes us feel the soul is about to depart.

In Khoury's novel Yalo, Lebanese writer Elias Khoury chooses the theme of the civil war in Lebanon. And all he wants is the author of war that took place in Lebanon during the 1975-1990 and was officially ended by the Taif Agreement, no other war in Lebanon, but the civil war. It's the novel which tells the tale of non-irrigated date to Beirut before and during the war with unique scenes of this war through Yalo the real hero of this novel. The experience of the novelist Elias Khoury takes the true tales

and stories of the form feature in the novel through unique narrative techniques.

Tells the writer to write a novel about Palestinians heard dozens of women and men in the Burj El-Barajneh and Shatila camps, Ain El-helweh. This method of assembling facts is a slightly novel fantasy. The novel tells the story of a young Armenian born in Beirut in August. And since birth he has not seen-Yalu-from Beirut but war and poverty. Before the death of his grandfather, a civil war breaks out in Beirut. You see this same teenager engaged in doesn't know, and he found himself in the Lebanese forces, is the only incubation Center. Not a ferocious fighter Yalo changes the course of the war in 1989. Yalo and his companion Toni was stealing a box of the barracks and fled to Paris. And there was a single friend left without money, beggar in the subway, and you like coincidences to shop him, Michel Salloum warlord, who became rich thanks to the wealth that landed him in the arms trade. Bless Michel Salloum to Lebanon, as guardian of his villa, and there the Yalo tharishet adventures with women and lovers, and then grow up to extort money, arrested and interrogated, and here begins the novel through debriefing sessions, and torture sessions, and session's oral and written confessions. And two years after this death continued the Yalo to 10 years imprisonment.

It is important in this novel is not a method of torture used in Arabic countries and third world countries, and no way to investigate the inhuman, but a novelist Elias Khoury in shedding light on the history of the people through the protagonist, the novel introduces the reader to the tales of Armenians, and recognize the massacres and genocide practised against them. For the million and a half million Armenians had been wiped out by orders issued by Talat Pasha, and today rising by Memorial

on liberty heights in Istanbul as an affront to the world and as an affront to the conscience of all humanity. It was just as now practised genocide against Kurds. What did the Ottoman Empire with Armenians in 1951 do now the Turkish State with the Kurds. The difference is very simple. And what he wants to say a novelist is the call history. The memory of the Armenian teenager after torture extended to his father's and grandfather's memory. The repetition in the novel and especially during the investigation of the Yalo is an essential tool of the writer for the Armenian genocide and displacement in the world. So finally, the writer tells us that torture and confessions again and again made the Yalo memory extends to the memory of his grandfather, and also to the memory of the history books.[160]

Despite the tight focus on Yalo's torment, the exterior settings and culture of Lebanon and Beirut still come through especially in Yalo's reveries of his Assyrian family, dominated by his grandfather, a priest of their sect, who still remembers the ancestral massacre of Ward Ein in Kurdish Turkey and tries to keep the quaint old (Eastern Christian Orthodox) practices going. Khoury's highly concrete and sensual style not only reflects Yalo's basic maleness but also the hedonistic culture of Lebanon.[161]

Yalo is a political novel. In an overtly political framing, Khoury not only delves into his usual themes of identity and dislocation, but he condemns the brutal Lebanese justice system and exposes the international preference for tortured convenience over truth. The scene in which Yalo is forced to stand waist deep in a burlap sack with an angry cat chewing

[160] Mahmud Luqman, *Culture and art: Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury in the novel Yalo*,
[161] http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?id=795--works

his genitals will haunt me for as long as memory., but not merely that. It is philosophical and so much more. It's almost too much.

3.2.1. Theme of Torture in the Novel *Yalo*

The torture is designed to not only obtain Yalo's confession to rape and robbery, but to force him to admit involvement in a bombing plot. To avoid further torture, Yalo is required to write the story of his life. But what he writes is often unacceptable to his captors, resulting in more torture. The torture reaches the point "felt that time was frozen, and that I was living the last moments of my life; yet that my life was long never-ending. I wanted it to end so that the pain would be over, but it stopped ending. That is eternity.

In struggling to write his life story and avoid torture, Yalo examines the events of his life and that of his mother, the question of love and the events which led him to his present situation. The scenes are at times confusing. Did Shirin love him or was he simply stalking her? Which ruminations on who his father was are correct? Which recounting of his love affairs and his crimes are accurate? But, ultimately, the torture and the burden of coming to grips with and articulating his life become too much for Yalo.

The torture that Yalo undergoes, for example, is brutal but never literal, bodily but not pornographic. The torture imagery turns into a bizarre sexual fantasy in which he becomes a squid making love to Shireen, another squid. The squid imagery naturally leads to ink. He dived into the depths, stretched out his eight hands and flew through the water he squirted his ink to mislead them, and the ink came out the colour of blood.

And of course the ink links to Khoury's ultimate topic is writing itself. Yalo has been assigned the task of writing his confessions. Although these are as confused as his thoughts, the process of self-creation by means of that mystical substance ink helps Yalo to reach truths about his life that although irrelevant to the police show the reader that Yalo has understood his crimes and matured.

3.2.2 Theme of Historical Memory and Identity in the Novel *Yalo*

The historical traumas in the Arab world refer to the 1967 defeat as well as the Lebanese civil war, two wars that destroyed the two major Arab cities and cultural centers, Egypt and Beirut. These historical traumas reworked Arab literature's relation to the real. Hence, the textual trauma discussed in context of Elias Khoury's Yalo recalls Hafez's textual manifestations of the aesthetic changes of the literature of the second period.

Thus, in its attempt to mediate the Arab worlds' traumatized and radical redefinition of selfhood, the novel enacts these historical traumas by adopting an ambiguous relationship to the real, violating the mimetic aesthetics of the novel of the first period, and placing the de-centered main character in floating spaces that randomly intersect.

In Elias Khoury's novel, fragmentation is intensified as it reflects off the immediate backdrop of the Lebanese Civil War and its aftermath. The Lebanese Civil War delineated a visible boundary that severed the Eastern region of the country from the Western one in the same way as the American Civil War marked out a more visible American frontier. The devastating results of the Lebanese Civil War, along with the losses it wreaked on those involved, brought about an overwhelming feeling of shame that has further problematized the definition of Lebanese identity.

Khoury tackles the issue of regional versus national identity in depth through his revision of the region's history.

Elias Khoury's novel *Yalo* includes two appendices. However, the appendices to Yalo were published simultaneously with the novel and are not purely historical accounts; rather, the first appendix contains the facts of the main character's trial while the second is a diary entry detailing the experience of Yalo in Roumieh prison. Trauma in the case of Khoury's novel figures on two levels: prison life and the ever-present background of war. A prisoner's diary, the appendices to Yalo consciously manifest the relationship between the act of remembering and the act of writing. I will use the same theoretical framework to locate the appendices the text of the novel and to look into possibilities or lack thereof of writing as a means of working through.

Essentially, Khoury's novel is set against a more immediate backdrop of dissolution and is thus fuelled by the urgency to redefine and frame the collective. The interaction among individuals and groups, as social objects, is contingent upon the articulation and reciprocal affirmation of identities. The multifarious aspect of Lebanese society specifically and the Arab world in general precludes any attempt at essentializing an Arab identity. Faulkner's essentialization of Southern identity can be better understood as an endeavor to resist an all-engulfing mainstream Americanness that threatens to erase the distinctive Southern region entirely.

Khoury refrains from consolidating Lebanese identity; rather, in delineating the interactional roots of identities, he depicts these identities in an engaging, incessant contact with each other. As such, he does not even make a claim for what is distinctive of an Arab collective identity.

Just as social and personal identities are different, even if occasionally overlapping, constructs, the relationship between collective, social, and personal identities is also marked by difference and convergence. Decreeing a rigid categorization of collective identity would result in overlooking the differences that run across the boundaries of Arab states and their citizens. Thus, Khoury sees collective identity as a process and not a fixed property of social beings. Collective identity is continuously evolving and it is best located in its unremitting development.

Yalo and its appendices reflect this process in their structure, forms, and contents. The emergence of the new Arab text and the reconfiguration of reality in the Arab world materialize in the novel's questioning of the boundaries between truth (the real) and fantasy (the imagined). The novel is primarily preoccupied with the limitations of articulating a finalized version of historical truth and proclaiming characteristics of a fixed national (or even regional) identity. Writing his life narrative, Yalo is repetitively forced to acknowledge the elusiveness of the textual. Thus, he writes and rewrites, revisits and revises, and concludes in the last line of the second appendix that there is no ending to what he is writing. The conclusion of the novel is not to be read as a pessimistic repudiation of the hope of attaining meaning or truth; rather, the conclusion emphasizes that the process of rewriting, like the process of forging a collective identity, is never really final and fixed.

Elias Khoury is configuring the real picture of Palestine in his novel Yalo. In the context of Arab culture and identity politics, the construction of a historical memory delineates the encounter between past and present. The possibility of remembering is shaped by a concern for validation: even if this memory is possible, there is no guarantee that it would be recognized or acknowledged. Elias Khoury hints at the significance of

this quest for legitimacy in understanding the limitations of subjectivity in the Arab world. After the 1967 defeat, the Arabs were devoured by a sense of loss and confronted with the realization that Arab identity could only be defined through negotiation. The emergent Arab identity has to negotiate its definition through an engulfing sense of defeat and a threatening loss of memory. Elias Khoury contends that war in the Arab world is the war of memory. The series of actual, historical wars that have plagued the Arab world result in an abstracted war of memory. Since these wars threaten the possibility of remembering the Arab novelist attempts to reconstruct historical memory.[162] In his novel Yalo, Khoury parallels the possibility of salvaging a historical memory to the possibility of writing one, monologic representation of truth and reality. The 1967 defeat resulted in the emergence of what critics term the new Arab text, which has to reflect the debilitating effects of war on Arab identity. In his earlier writing, Khoury asserts that memory in the Arab world is the process of forgetting and that consequently, the new Arab text that can represent this memory has become impossible. It is war which has left the Arabs without a memory; thus, the new, emergent text can no longer be a text in the traditional sense. The reality that we want to read as a text and the realistic text are no longer possible mediums of representation.[163]Unlike Western modernist literature of the early 20th century which laid claim to the representation of the real though the representation of fragmentation, the new Arab text refrains from configuring the real aesthetically[164].

Yalo is set in the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1995). Khoury contends that the Lebanese Civil War did not only take place

[162] Khoury, *Lost Memory*, 26
[163] Ibid,p-29
[164] Elias Khoury, Adonis, Yumna el Eid and others do address this issue in detail.

historically, but also takes place in the memory of the people. The civil war has produced not only a sense of amnesia (loss of memory) but has also internalized and eternalized terror; and the heart of this terror, writes Khoury, "is that I was living in a war whose destiny might be similar to the destinies of the wars that had preceded it. So my obsession was to write it. And from here, I started looking for a way to articulate memory" [165]

In Khoury's article *The Unfolding of Modern Fiction and Arab Memory* Khoury evokes two integral terms, inheritance and change, that delineate the relationship between modern Arabic literature. He breaks down the problematic of this relationship into what he calls three elements: the inability to represent the changes that came about after WWI; a redefinition of the sacred in the Arab world[166]; and the third element is the historical background which gives the dichotomy (ancient and modern) its nature as part of a historical dichotomy between the apparent and the veiled: the sacred and the human, poetry and prose, and the modern and the ancient. The opposition between the ancient and the modern is understood in terms of the apparent and the veiled. The appendix, discussed as an example of a mystic writing pad, reveals the same dynamic between the apparent and the veiled. The mystic writing pad in representing the unconscious may hold the traces of experiences but not the experiences themselves. Thus, how much of the appendix can be read in conjunction with the novel. Indeed it does represent the novel's unconscious and the possibilities if any of reading through the unconscious. Naturally this comes to bear some problems on the

[165] qtd. in Saidawi 165
[166] The sacred was no longer only the Coran, but extended to include pre-Islamic poetry which was generally discussed according to the Cartesian model of history (Khoury 2).

interpretation of the novel; an interpretation that comes to rely primarily on the appendix in answering the infamous Jamesonian question.

Edward al-Kharrat studies three distinct trends in the development of modern Arabic literature and all three are "non-representational, non-figurative work. They do not assume that 'reality,' a finished project, is there to portray or to try to change. They are 'modern' by virtue of trying to create (or re-create as the case may be) their own parallel reality, by setting out to grasp the various modes of reality. The new Arab text is a witness to the trauma of the collapse of an older, familiar social order; however, it grapples with the new lived reality of defeat to create open literary forms that constitute a space for political struggle and ideological probing. Nonetheless, these open forms are contingent on a traumatic loss of historical memory.

The Arab and specifically Lebanese writer, is confronted with this punctured historical memory; one which attempts to write over its gaps by referring to a new, global and unifying memory. To read historical memory, one has to read historical events and after The Kingdom of Strangers (1993), Khoury no longer read the Lebanese Civil War in its historical development. Rather, in Khoury's later novels, "rereading the war in the time of peace … appears to be affixed by the writer's personal vision of the *necessity of writing down what has been absented*. Two key ideas are foregrounded here: first, the need to write things down and second, the necessity of writing down what is absented. The use of the passive in the verb "absented" is significant because it implies that these gaps in historical memory have been purposefully left out; moreover, it allows the writer to *supplement* the account according to his/her "personal vision." The absences in the narrative of history not only allow the writer

to supplement the absented events but also enable him/her to construct a new version of historical memory. Elias Khoury's Yalo not only acknowledges but also engages the constructed nature of memory in its content and form. Because the text has no stable referent that documents historical events and memory experiences a textual trauma markedly different from the one Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury undergoes. The fear of an irretrievable loss of meaning due to the use of modernist aesthetics defines epistemic trauma in The Sound and the Fury. The textual/epistemic trauma experienced in Yalo is noticeably different although it also results in not one but two appendices.

3.2.3 Theme of Trauma in the Novel *Yalo*

In Khoury's novel, textual trauma is an immediate result of the emergence of the new Arab text. Khoury's style in all of his novels is necessarily fragmented because of the awareness that the new Arab text can have no claim over representing reality. Both the perforated historical memory and the absented historical moments leave Khoury no means of representing the fragmented world around him other than in a fragmented style. Thus, the loss the text experiences cannot be a loss of meaning: this is because the representation of reality and the creation of meaning have become impossible in the context of the new Arab text. Rather, the trauma the text experiences is a result of its inability to rely on a historical narrative that may seal the fissures within its memory. It is the trauma of witnessing the death of the old Arab text (as referred to by Khoury and other critics) and the emergence of a new text, one that has to exist without a validating historical memory: "For the new reality, the reality of conflicts, wars, civil wars, and social destruction is a completely new

text"[167]. Thus, the text has no stable referent that can articulate its identity and shape its identity politics.

The appendices to Yalo make no claim to imparting truth or to asserting the meaning of the novel. More exactly, they are symptoms of a compulsive and neurotic urge to repeat. As Freud suggests, repetition in treatment may result in the awakening of actual memories and may thus effect healing. Repetition in Khoury's novel is specifically about that: the novel repeats so that it can remember. Because of repetition and transference, the novel may get to partake in the real that is no longer possible in representation.[168] This is not to say that Yalo succeeds entirely in working through the *évennement* of trauma; however, the novel and its appendices do not restrict the process of constructing memory and do not attempt a fixed representation of objective reality. The next chapter will tackle how such an absence of fixity broadens the possibility of extracting a sense of identity from a stifling postwar context.

The novel begins with an intense interrogation scene at a police station where the main character Yalo is being accused of rape, theft, and collaboration in several bombings. From its onset, the novel puts questions of truth and memory to the test. Yalo is not told entirely through stream of consciousness. Rather, Yalo's account is related in the third person until he is asked to write down his life story in the form of an indicting confessional. Yalo seems to acquire a voice the very moment he begins to *write* his life narrative. The incessant cross examination that forces Yalo to confess to crimes that he has or has not committed ends when he begins writing. Yalo writes two initial drafts of his life narrative and adds a third one which extends approximately until the end of the

[167] Khoury, Elias. *Yalo*. 2nd ed. Lebanon: Dar el Adab, 2004, p-42
[168] Freud, Sigmund. *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis II) (1914).* P-150

novel. The first two editions have a different print format than both the previous chapters related in third person as well as the subsequent third edition of Yalo's personal narrative. The two editions are indented further than the rest of the text. This distance from the default margins sets the two drafts apart from the rest of the book. The third draft is primarily what Yalo calls "additions" to the earlier drafts and is markedly different in tone, content, and approach. Furthermore, the several drafts of his memoirs follow a conspicuous literary progression as Yalo discovers the destabilizing forces of writing. For instance, while the earlier journal entries are restricted to an objective disclosure of his name and background, the later drafts take up the psychological implications of each event in detail. Moreover, Yalo's voice as narrator/writer intervenes to comment and reflect on the details discussed. As a result, the reader is further engaged and the highly subjective nature of writing is foregrounded.

All three drafts of Yalo's memoirs are part of the main text of the novel. However, the book ends with two short chapters whose language and tone are markedly different from those that characterize the previous narratives. The first of the two is written in third person, and it relays to the reader the chronology of Yalo's indictment and sentencing. The second chapter is a personal account situated in Roumieh prison and communicates Yalo's introspective reflection. Although they are not labeled appendices, these two accounts (one legal and the other personal) can be considered appendices because they are severed from the body of the narrative. They are not an extension of the final scene of the novel, in which Yalo lies in tears on the ground, but are rather an explanation of Yalo's fate after the interrogation. The abrupt shift to an objective tone in the first appendix stands in stark contrast to the distinctly personal tone

that ends the last pages of the main text: "Yalo looked at the papers, read a little and asked me to stop writing because the story had ended"[169]. Moreover, the very last chapter of the main text ends with Yalo already in Roumieh prison. The reader does not learn of the final legal sentence before the first appendix. Since the ending is left unexplained at the end of the main text, the two final chapters (appendices) help elucidate Yalo's fate after that last scene. Moreover, unlike the other chapters of the novel, these last two chapters are given titles that historicize them, listing dates, names of people and places, as well as specific epithets of the Lebanese law.

The first appendix is entitled "Verdict in the name of the Lebanese People" and includes an introduction and two sections. The first of these is entitled "First: The Facts" and the second one, "Second: The Law." The introduction lists Yalo's complete name, Daniel Habil Abiad, and the names of the authority figures present at his trial. The "Facts" section includes a description of what Yalo has been accused of as well as the names of witnesses who have testified against him. It ends with a record of eight indictments that justify the verdict (these generally fall under possession of weapon, theft, and rape). The next shorter part divulges the verdict: Yalo is sentenced to ten years of hard labor.

The second appendix has as its title: "March 1995- Roumieh Prison- El Qaoush Number 12." It is written in the first person and denotes a shift from the earlier memoirs. Yalo/Daniel is now in prison serving his sentence, and all he asks for are white papers on which he can write his story: "For when I look at my life I feel it is a story. I want to read the story so I can tolerate the pains that keep inflicting me"[170] Although he

[169] Khoury, Elias. *Yalo.* 2nd ed. Lebanon: Dar el Adab, 2004, p-362
[170] Ibid, p-375

tries to remember what he had written before, his memory fails him Now he is writing in small fonts so that only he can read his narrative . As he tries to remember, Yalo/Daniel sees letters as black shapes on a white background but is unable to decipher them. Daniel addresses his writing to "Yalo" so that Yalo would return to him . During the span of a year, Yalo manages to write only one sentence (which, if written in a normal, legible font, would take up several pages of space) because he lacks the imagination to give Gaby (his mother) a happy ending. The concluding line resonates with the novel's dominant themes of writing and memory: "And if I do not find an ending to the story, how do I write?"[171]

The two appendices to Khoury's novel display a different portrayal of the relationship between writing and memory. Primarily, Khoury's Yalo reveals a more immediate and literal concern with writing as a means of preserving or creating memory: "Can one remember his whole life story? And if he did remember it, then the time to write it would not be shorter than the time it took to live it. He will say to him, yes, sir, before he announces his theory that no one in the world can write his whole life story"[172] Yalo remembers as he writes his life narrative: the digressions and repetitions that characterize his narrative reflect a fragmented consciousness. Thus, when asked about his crimes in the interrogation, Yalo digresses and is not able to supply the inspectors with an answer: When thrown in prison, lonely and isolated, how can Yalo organize his memory? He is confused because things come to his memory all at once, so the images get mixed up in his head, and the dates overlap in his consciousness, as if he became old. Writing allows Yalo to confront all these surging memories and moments as he writes them down. The act of writing separates moments and events in Yalo's memory and results in an

[171] Ibid,p-379
[172] Ibid,p-256

avid questioning of the possibility of remembering and the reliability of memory: "Yalo discovered … that his life was not real. The life that he was writing came to him like torn-up stories that do not add up, and he would see himself in the stories as if it weren't him. That is why Yalo hated writing and why he hated himself"[173]. The last appendix to Yalo returns to the subjective voice of the main character. Thus, the final answers to lingering questions on Yalo's culpability are never answered but only reworked as *creative* details in Yalo's diaries.

For instance, when interrogated about his involvement in the bombings, Yalo first denies but then acquiesces to the accusations. His first memoir verifies his complicity in the bombings because he writes that he hid the ammunition in his cabin. In the chapter after his second memoir, Yalo claims that he has fabricated his account of the men and the bombs hidden in his cabin. As he continues his account, he explains how fate arranged his encounter with Haikal who convinces him to store the bombs in his hut . Yet right after this account, Yalo writes in his memoir: "I am now remembering and not imagining, and there is a big difference between the two, remembering is also imagining, for memories come to me like imaginations and push me into a long night. But I cannot point you to the place of the bombs, because I am not writing a story; I am writing the truth"[174]. Yalo writes that had it not been for a similar encounter he had with a Mounir Mansour, he wouldn't have been able to imagine the scenario with Haikal. He then describes his encounter with Mansour and tells the officials to use his account of his association with Haikal and the bombers as they please. However, in the final interrogation scene where the head official dismisses Yalo's narrative, Yalo is absolved of the accusation.

[173] Ibid,p-275
[174] Ibid,p-329

In the last journal piece the second appendix, Yalo asserts that he has been found innocent of these charges and has only been found guilty of rape and theft. Thus meaning is constantly delayed through the differences in the repetitions. These differences in the repetitions are immediately conjoined to the novel's prevalent claim that writing cannot possibly offer an accurate preservation of memory (contra Freud's claim that neurotics preserve their memory of details by writing them down). The novel thrives on the destabilizing act of writing and renders its pivotal moments embedded in this instability that seems to hold the text of the novel together.

The novel asserts the constructedness of memory because Yalo only begins to remember when he starts writing and is able to alienate himself from his subject matter: "I remember things now as if they had happened to someone else. I used to think that the idea of someone else who resembles me is part of my childhood, meaning that when I remember my childhood, I feel that the child who was I is someone else"[175]. Khoury maintains that a text's inability to detach itself from the moment leads to the breakdown of its representation of memory.[176] Yalo is able to detach his text from the moment by insisting on the fragmentation of subjectivity. Thus, towards the end of the novel, we witness a more radical splitting in subjectivity when Daniel literally separates from Yalo. In the second appendix, Daniel the "author" addresses his writing to Yalo, his subject matter. However, this split subject is not the subject of psychoanalysis whose unconscious precedes history and discourse. Rather, the split subject here is a direct result of discursive trauma and it tackles the possibility of the failure of textual representation. This implies that the unconscious cannot be separated from the immediacy of the

[175] Ibid,p-210
[176] Khoury,Elias:*Lost memory*, p-29

context that envelops it, and thus the unconscious in Khoury's novel necessarily exists within (and not without) history and discourse. The last assumption allows the textual to explore its psychic dimension though the notion of the split subject. This split in subjectivity not only shapes the novel's identity politics but also problematizes the narrator relationship. The novel's particular take on subjectivity and identity politics will be addressed in the third chapter. However, the destabilization of the hero construct is consequential to the possible reading(s) of reality that the text proposes.

This instability distinguishes between the "Compson Appendix" and the appendices to Yalo. When Faulkner insists that the objectivity of the "Compson Appendix" is more consistent than the novel, he is assuming that one memory of the past can be represented and as such that only one interpretation of his novel is possible. The conclusive tone of the "Compson Appendix" reflects Faulkner's attempt to represent this single, coherent memory of "what really happened" to the Compson clan. On the other hand, Khoury's two appendices confirm Yalo's own experience with writing: "He writes his name and sees his picture attached to the name, so he has to erase the picture to be able to go on writing. But the name is erased with the picture, and Yalo finds himself lost in the silence of the black ink".[177]Although the first appendix to Yalo entitled "Verdict" contains names and figures and also documents how Yalo's prison sentence came about, its details enter into a dialogue with the details of the book and further destabilize the "truth" of what really happened to Yalo. For instance, in his accounts, Yalo describes in detail the time he spent with Shireen. From his descriptions, the reader is assured of her interest in Yalo (responds to his phone calls, meets him at odd hours of

[177] *Yalu*,p-236

the day, goes with him to the beach and listens to all his stories). However, the first appendix confirms that he has raped her repeatedly as do her confessions in the book. The truth of their relationship is never revealed and the last appendix confirms only Yalo's unrequited love for Shireen.

As mentioned before, the breach between Yalo and Daniel towards the end of the book is reflected in the relationship between the hero and the narrator. This breach is crucial to an understanding of how the text destabilizes its several projections of truth (the various accounts of Yalo's criminality). Khoury's narratives break down the concept of narrator/hero specifically because the author allows his characters to form their own sentences[178]. The author no longer anchors the plot through the stabilizing hero construct. Rather, the characters enter into a dialogic relationship with the hero/narrator and are not determined by authorial intention as embodied by the narrator. The hero of the contemporary Arabic novel stops and listens to the voices of the other characters as they struggle against his over-bearing presence. The hero is no longer invincible and the narrator (o longer omniscient) has become a *witness to* rather than the creator of his characters. The novelist's presence as a witness is also partly due to the emergence of the new Arab text and the ensuing textual trauma. Even if a historical memory cannot be reclaimed, the validating act of witnessing the event is particularly important to an understanding of the necessary breach in subjectivity. In the fifth draft of his confession, Yalo gives up hoping and separates between Daniel the writer and Yalo his subject matter. Daniel struggles to rewrite Yalo into his life by declaring that he writes only for Yalo and Yalo's mother.[179] Moreover, the separation is a re-enactment of Yumna el Eid's contention that the

[178] Eid, El Rawi 85-6
[179] *Yalu*,p-379

writer of the contemporary Arabic novel does not direct his characters authoritatively but rather allows them to have their own distinct voice. Even when writing about Yalo, Daniel cannot guarantee Yalo's return because he is not inscribed within the binding parameters of the author's (Daniel's) words. Daniel as author is rendered powerless, a mere witness to Yalo's reconfiguration of an identity. For instance, he explains how the civil war has furthered the dissolution of his sense of identity. Now Daniel refers to Yalo in the third person and claims that "Yalo's story is entitled the war".[180] The condition of war allows Daniel to separate between Daniel the reformed writer and Yalo, the guilty sinner. Daniel will write his narrative while Yalo refuses to.

The separation between Daniel and Yalo is significant in that it sets the writer/artist apart from his subject matter, here, an indicted citizen. Daniel as the writer/subject vanishes into his text while Yalo, the individual, thrives. It is as though for Yalo's account to exist and be validated, someone else (Daniel) needs to write it. Unlike Faulkner's appendix which is an obvious assertion of authorial presence, the appendices to Yalo emphasize the disappearance of the writer/subject into the text and the survival of them text itself. For the text to exist, its author needs to disappear. The author dissolves into his text so as to validate the autonomy of the text itself. The new Arab text needs to exist in its own space, severed from its producer, so as to be able to articulate its own representation of reality. However, through emphasis on the constructed nature of memory and its relation to writing, this representation is repetitively contested and shown to be unstable. This is accomplished through the use of a narrator's voice juxtaposed against that of the

[180] Ibid,p-290

character as well as through the separation between writer and subject matter.

In Yalo, the shift from a detached narrator's voice to Yalo's voice in his journals highlights the instability of truth and the impossibility of an objective retelling of Yalo's crimes. The first appendix seems to claim an objective voice in its listing of the crimes, of the law, and of Yalo's sentence. However, the second appendix negates the authority that the first one claims in that it re-inserts Yalo's voice and forces the first one to enter into a dialogic relation with the novel. The details of the first appendix cannot be taken at face value; they have to be understood vis-à-vis what the narrator and Yalo have presented in the novel. Thus, the text employs a narrator, a hero, and a narrator-hero. The first narrator relays a third person, detached account of Yalo's experience. The hero of the novel is Yalo who also becomes the narrator when he recounts his life narrative. Towards the end of the novel, Daniel becomes the narrator and the hero, his subject matter, remains Yalo. However, the narrator Daniel realizes that for the hero Yalo to exist, Daniel has to separate himself from Yalo. Daniel then becomes a narrator within the text that is writing his own account of Yalo's life. For Yalo to survive, someone else needs to write his story down. Thus, the relationship of hero to narrator reenacts the function of writing that the text is predicated on. Writing can be used to construct the absented, and this absented serves to verify presence (Yalo's in this case). However, writing is also equated with death in the novel.

The last appendix to Yalo expresses a preoccupation with writing a story although Yalo has by now resigned himself to the self-erasing implications of the act of writing. Writing, the narrator holds, is the worst form of torture that he has been subjected to during the interrogation:

> If he manages to overcome death by poisoning or because of a hemorrhage, he will be given a bundle of white papers, and he will be asked to write his life story. Here the real torture begins, for writing becomes a means of murder and a road to suicide. Words become like knives stabbing their holder. So the prisoner slides into a self-dug hole, slides on the letters and falls into his own blood whose color becomes that of ink.[181]

Not only is writing the most exaggerated form of torture but it also ends in death: "He wrote first that one cannot write his life story, and he has to choose between living and writing"[182]. While Faulkner thought the "Compson Appendix" would verify the presence of both its author and the novel's meaning, Khoury's Yalo is keenly conscious that writing results in the death/absence of its author. Yalo writes in the third draft of his autobiography: "I know my story because I have written it, and I will write it again if you want, because I feel, and I am in prison, that I no longer have any connection to the past"[183]. He understands that to write things down necessitates a forsaking of a stable self and its relationship to a validating past, because writing foregrounds absence.

The notion that writing implies death is in tune with Derrida's claim that Western discourse privileges speech to writing because, in the Western imaginary, the first validates presence whereas the second affirms absence. According to Derrida, meaning is always deferred because, for instance, the sentence can only be understood *after* all its constituent words have been read. Thus, we can only read presence at the bottom of the page. The appendix, located at the end of the novel, is expected to

[181] Ibid,p-229
[182] Ibid,p-258
[183] Ibid,p-262

materialize the meaning of the text. If meaning in the text is constituted by deferral, then one would expect the Yalo appendices to affirm the final meaning of the text. If the appendices offer no final, "correct" version of Yalo's story, where does the meaning of the text lie? The second appendix to Yalo ends with Daniel lamenting his inability to imagine a different kind of ending for Yalo's mother, concluding that he cannot write if he doesn't find an ending. Essentially what the last line verifies is the instability of writing and the production of meaning. Daniel's conclusion needs to be understood in context: he is unable to conceive of a fitting ending for Gaby and that is why he is unable to write. The novel's ending foregrounds the theme of writing and its ability to create a sense of the real, of the absented. Daniel seeks an ending not to establish meaning but rather to be able to resume writing. Thus, the novel insists that the presence of the meaning of the text is contingent on the continuous deferral of meaning, since the appendices to Yalo do not comfort the reader with the finalized, neatly-accessible meaning of the text. The presence of meaning in Yalo and its appendices is verified in the differences that characterize the repetitions of Yalo's accounts.

Yalo is replete with repetitions, repetitions with differences. According to Berger, the differences between the repetitions give them the force and power to produce meaning. Because Faulkner's appendix attempts to contain the meaning of the text, the repetitions in The Sound and the Fury fail to produce meaning by virtue of their repetitiveness. However, because the final appendix to Yalo is another version of Yalo's diary, it emphasizes the repetitive structure that holds the novel's plot together. Moreover, the appendix ends with Yalo questioning the absence of one meaning or truth: "And if I do not find an ending to the story, how do I

write?" [184] Thus *Yalo* does not offer any finalized versions of truth, rather, it produces meaning in its repetitions. These repetitions destabilize the notion of one memory; furthermore, they present several accounts that foreground the constructed nature of memory that can only be understood in relation to writing.

Yalo understands that both endings and selves are written: "The life that he was writing came to him like torn stories that do not add up, and he saw himself in the stories not as himself. Because of that, Yalo hated writing and hated him"[185]. For example, one of the witnesses against Yalo, George Bin Asaad Ghattas, informs the investigators of Yalo's attack on him and the woman with him in the Ballouneh forest. Yalo is asked to literally fill in the gaps of George Bin Asaad Ghattas's testimony and to add to it what happened to the woman after George had passed out. The investigator asks Yalo to "fill in the gaps; meaning write what happened after the man passed out"[186]; nevertheless, Yalo does not even understand the officer's request and is dragged to solitary confinement. When he is coerced to remember, Yalo is incapable of calling on his memory of events. At the beginning of the novel, even when he is being accused of several arraignments, he does not defend himself. Rather, throughout the interrogation, Yalo digresses and the narrator describes to the reader Yalo's memories of his childhood and his encounter with Sherine. This is especially evident when Yalo begins to write his journals. These digressions cross through different times and bring varied moments of the text together: "But the past is the problem. The past scares him Yalo and me Daniel because events have strangely blended together. He

[184] Ibid,p-379
[185] Ibid,p-275
[186] Ibid,p-281

says yesterday and he means twenty years ago, and he says a long time ago and he means a week ago"[187].

The juxtaposition of different moments in the novel reflects the obstruction of the narrator's memory and the failure of memory allows Khoury to rewrite historical memory while insisting on the absented[188]. Even if his novel is preoccupied with the validity of historical memory, it does not intend "to tie the past specifically to the neither Lebanese Civil War nor does it propose that this opening up to historical memory serves to stabilize the fragmented identity of the narrator"[189]. Rather, by juxtaposing different moments and places, Khoury is able to revisit and rewrite what has been absented from historical truth. For instance, Yalo's digressions concern his "Russian" comrade at war, Alexy, the Armenian genocide, and the encounter with the Turks in the region. The significance of extending historical memory so far back broadens the scope of the approach to the war, thus surpassing the Lebanese framework to encompass an Arab, and even global, one[190]. The last chapter will tackle the implications of the extension of historical memory on the construction, or lack thereof, of subjectivity. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be, contra-Freud, on the impossibility of representing an accurate, coherent memory in writing. Khoury's novel not only acknowledges this impossibility but also relies on writing. This recursive operator allows the novel to work through moments of, both, its physical trauma (torture) and its textual trauma (writing as death).

Recursion takes over Khoury's novel: the subject of the tale becomes the teller and thus the narrative becomes excessively complex. One reason

[187] Ibid,p-293
[188] Saidawi, Rafif. *Al Nadhra al Riwaiyya ila al Harb al Libnaniyya* 1995-1975, p-169
[189] Ibid,p-156
[190] Saidawi,op.cit,p-239

for this complexity is that it foregrounds the constructedness of memory and leaves the reader with the overwhelming realization that whatever really happened, happened in Daniel's and Yalo's narratives. Donald P. Spence discusses the uncanny nature of narrative recursion: repetition when stylized becomes mechanical and the narrative then loses its explanatory force. On the other hand, repetition with difference is more welcome and it relies on a recursive operator. A recursive operator is essentially an underlying pattern that gives shape to a recursive narrative.

Because it denotes a pattern, the recursive operator is a formulaic configuration that somehow structures the recursive pattern of the text. In Khoury's novel, this recursive operator is expressed in Yalo's/Daniel's journal entries in the relationship between writing, presence and absence, and the possibility of forging a historical memory. In other words, writing signifies a necessary absence, and it is this absence that makes the presence/retrieval of a form of memory possible. Thus, the unconscious is not read as a transposition unto the conscious but it is located in this recursive operator. In this sense, the appendices to Yalo are not privileged to the text of the novel as is the case with the "Compson Appendix" and The Sound and the Fury. Rather, the dynamic of the exchange between the unconscious and the unconscious is understood in both Yalo and its appendices as a continuum. The relevance of the operator in Khoury's case is that it allows for numerous manifestations of the latent/unconscious: "The 'discovery' of the formations of the unconscious is reduplicated in practice by a problematic of writing and, even more, by an unheard-of disjunction of writing and knowledge, related to this theoretical innovation, the split subject"[191]. The split subject is represented in the Daniel/writer and Yalo/subject matter dichotomy.

[191] Rey,op.cit,p-306

Spence finds a similarity between recursion and clinical repetition and concludes that recursion happens during transference where the original conflict is always acted out with variations. Thus, if the analysand can locate the operator, he can better treat the patient.

In recursion there are similar but not identical accounts of the same event and as such a recursive narrative never returns to a single, defining moment. The recursive operator operates on itself in that it allows for the differences in the repetitions to be read against its specific pattern. In his analysis of Barbara Johnson's essay on Poe, Lacan and Derrida, Spence concludes that Johnson locates the recursive operator with respect to the three authors in the act of analysis itself: Once again, we have themes and variations because each time the operator (the act of analysis) is put to work, the field of action is slightly different from what it was before. For instance, writing his life narrative forces Yalo to confront the necessity of death/absence and this explains the separation between Daniel and Yalo. The ten drafts of the memoir demonstrate how the recursive operator operates on itself: every draft intends to rewrite the new constructed self and thus has to literally write over the previous draft. Yalo is aware of the recursive nature of his journal and that is why he begins every new draft by justifying to the reader why he has to come back and "add" to his previous account.

Spence identifies the significance of recursion in clinical transference and argues that a recursive operator can facilitate treatment because it creates an expected pattern: But if we can discover a truly recursive operator, then we have an explanation which is not only exhaustive but reversible; given the operator, it follows that anyone can generate the dream. The first chapter dealt with transference on the textual level concluding that textual transference is the result of the quest for hidden meaning in the

text. If The Sound and the Fury is the text of the unconscious and the "Compson Appendix" is the text of the conscious, then the novel should be transferring onto the Appendix. However, because the Appendix is in tune with Derrida's notion of the supplement, the transference is inverted and it is the Appendix that begins to transfer its "real" onto the novel. The two appendices to Yalo are also concerned with filling in the gaps of the novel; nonetheless, the novel foregrounds the ambivalent process of remembering and thus establishes the impossibility of filling the gaps (Yalo for instance does not even understand the meaning of the order that the officer gives him). This is not to say that the appendices to Yalo are not analogous to Derrida's notion of the supplement. Both appendices signify that the meaning of the text has been deferred and that it can only be present or deciphered at the bottom of the page, or here, at the end of the novel[192]. However, the appendices to Yalo are different from the "Compson Appendix" in that they rely on a recursive operator; one that highlights the constructed fabric of memory, since the possibility of remembering is predicated on writing.

Khoury's novel enables the possibility of working through specifically because it refrains from fixing the moment of trauma and loss. The appendices establish no fixed referent which delineates the boundaries of the novel. Thus, the repetitions with differences that infiltrate the novel create a recursive operator that establishes writing as a means of constructing memory and celebrates the contractedness of memory as a means of establishing presence. Since the distinction between remembering and imagining is blurred in the novel and in the second appendix, the appendices to Yalo cannot be read as a transposition of the novel's conscious, as most critics have read The Sound and the Fury. The

[192] For the sake of brevity, I will not be repeating the argument that the appendix is a form of supplement here. The first chapter deals with that adequately.

absence of a stable portrayal of memory (historical and personal) obscures the dividing line between the imagined and the real. Thus, the appendices to Yalo are in line with Derrida's critique of Freud's method in the interpretation of dreams:

> The conscious text is thus not a transcription, because there is no text present elsewhere as an unconscious one to be transposed or transported everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, belatedly, supplementary.[193]

The appendices to Yalo, as forms of the supplement, are not a transcription of the unconscious of the novel onto the conscious space of the appendices. This is primarily because of the intentional blur between the conscious and the unconscious in the novel and because of the recursive operator that insists on the involvement of the unconscious in shaping the conscious. Thus meaning (represented by the conscious) is never present but is continuously deferred. The digressions that infiltrate Yalo's account reflect the emphasis on the unconscious: writing becomes Freud's talking cure. Yet the conscious or the real is never really differentiated from the unconscious so the digressions blend in with the details of the event to highlight its ambiguity. Furthermore, by its very nature, the supplement implies that the author is never really in control of the production of meaning. Khoury is well aware that meaning is independent of its producer. Even though the appendices to Yalo make no claim to containing the meaning of the novel, they imply that the deferred meaning of the text is in its recursive operator, which is fuelled by the

[193] "Freud and the Scene of Writing" 212

text's repetitions. Because they emphasize this recursive operator, Yalo and its appendices have a different take on textuality and identity politics.

3.2.4 Theme of violence in the novel Yalo

Elias Khoury's novel Yalo expresses about the torture and violence. In this novel the protagonist Yalo is jailed and tortured physically and psychologically. As a technique of psychological torture, he is given blank sheets of paper and a pen in order to write the story of his life. Through Yalo's writing and rewriting of his life story, and through his continuous questioning of the truth of the events of his life, the reader follows Yalo's journey: his childhood within the Assyrian minority community in the museitbeh quarter of west Beirut; the relocation of his family to the Ein el Roummaneh quarter of East Beirut after the breakout of the civil war; his coming of age and participation in militia fighting; his escape to Paris after he and his friend Tony stole the militia money; the hardships he goes through in Paris after Tony runs away with all the money; his return to Lebanon with the lawyer Michel Salloum; his voyeurism, robberies and crimes of rape while working as a night gourd at Salloum's Villa Gardenia in Ballona, Jounieh; and his love affair with Shireen, who eventually reports him to the police and accuses him of rape.

Through narrating and articulating the details of his life over and over again in order to convince his torturers and jailors of his innocence, Yalo goes through a long and painful process of transformation and self exploration. It is Daniel (Yalo's alter ego) who narrates the story in the third person from beginning to end, while revealing his identity only in the later part of the novel.

In Yalo, victims turn into victimizers. Khoury expands on this notion and complicates its consequences through the process of transformation which Yalo experiences as a result of journeying through a discourse of violence. Yalo is a victim of his ancestor's history, and lives in a society marred by violence and instability. However the victim turns into an oppressor, as Daniel, the narrator explains;

> We need to understand him. He's a victim, sir, and the victim will become more savage than the torturer if given the opportunity. The war was Yalo's opportunity….The war was his opportunity, but he wasted it, and instead of setting himself up for life, like many others, he left his native land and went to France…[194]

When writing his life story in prison at a later stage after the end of the war, Yalo narrates the details of his experience as a militiaman, while adding new information with every attempt at rewriting the full story. Remembering the details of the savagery, the murders, and the blood which was everywhere during the fights, is a painful process for Yalo. He saw how his childhood friend Alexai was killed and left to rot until he turned into a collection of bones. Yalo wants to forget this horrific time of his life, but he is forced by his torturers to remember and delve into his memory to reveal what lies beneath his crimes of robbery and rape.

Khoury portrait one of the complex examples of Yalo's exercise of violence in the novel is the raping of women, even though he repeats over and over again to himself and to his interrogators that he did not realize that coercing women into sexual intercourse was called rape. In the prison when Yalo write his life story through a horrific process of torture, he begins to understand that he he violated women and raped them. In one incident during his night excurtions to chase lovers, Yalo meets Shireen

[194] *Yalo*,2009,p-259-60

and raped her. After raping her he feels emotionally attached to her. He starts following her to places while forcing her to meet him, and finally asks her to marry him. Yalo reveals that he completely fell in love with Shireen. However, this feeling was far from mitual, as Shireen eventually reports Yalo to the police, accusing him of rape. The reader gets to know about Shireens feeling towards Yalo through the narrators account of interrogation process, and through Yalo's writing. His love for Shireen forces Yalo to delve deeper into his emotions toward her and remember in detail their sexual relationship and every feeling associated with.

Thus Elias Khoury has created a broad spectrum of images, motifs, symbols, metaphors and other narrative stylistics revolving around the concept of violence during and after the civil war, and also in relation to the Palestinians' struggle and resistance to achieve freedom and justice. Violence figures in Khoury's fiction as a process integral to power relations between individuals and groups and within institutions. It is a process that leads to specific consequences, despite its seemingly chaotic nature. Indeed, Khoury has created a narrative discourse on the notion of violence through his fiction.

3.3 A Critical Study on the Style of Writing of Elias Khoury

Elias Khoury uses narrative Style to write his novels. He uses colloquial languages of classical Arabic in his writing. According to Elias Khoury as he says in a lecture that Khoury's writing based upon multiple narrations. Khoury says that he never wrote in a linear way. Because Khoury thinks that literature is a combination of memory and imagination.

According to Elias Khory, writing must be in the service of Justice. In terms of this sentence Khoury quotes that "I am a very engaged writer in

the sense that I thought, always, that writing is a way of expressing our commitment to justice, our commitment to the marginal in society that do not have ways to express themselves. That writing is a way of discovering the deep human experiences which is a very complex experience, and that writing must be in the service of justice, I continue to be like that."[195]

3.3.1. Narrative Style of Elias Khoury in the Novel *Yalo*

The novelist Elias Khoury uses narrative style to write the novel *Yalo.* He begins the story the novel with the narration of a third person. It portrays the life of the protagonist *Daniel Jalu* nicknamed as *Yalo* who was born into a family of Syriac Orthodox. He is being interrogated for multiple crimes, including robbery, rape and storing arms and explosives. Under trial he was forced to make confessions by the interrogator. Each time he makes his speech, he was interrupted by the interrogator, asking him to fill the gaps of his narrative as it is incomplete. Thus *Yalo* goes over his confession over and over again, giving us further insights into the character and his life.

In the earlier part of the novel, *Yalo* emerges as a character that has little inclination to reflect on the situations in which he finds himself. He seems overwhelmed by them and assumes a largely passive attitude towards external challenges. By presenting his thoughts and feelings as they are, however, and not mediated through an omniscient or judgmental narrator, the text helps its readers relate to *Yalo*, possibly sympathize with him or possibly even dislike him. On the other hand, later on in the novel, the activity of writing will eventually lead Yalo to comprehend better the causes of the misunderstandings between him and others.

[195] Wlizlo,Will, *Elias khoury reads from "as though she were sleeping"* November,05 , 2012,

Most of the remaining chapters of the novel are taken from the confessions. *Yalo* himself has been forced to write in prison which is alternated with chapters narrated in the third person. In fact, after he has failed to defend himself from the accusations of having raped and stalked his beloved *Shirin,* the police force him to write the story of his life as a kind of confession of his crimes, those which he has committed and, especially, those which he has not committed. It becomes clear that *Yalo* has indeed been guilty of criminal activities while working as a night watchman at *Mishal Sallum's* villa. But after being tortured he agrees to confess to having worked for a terrorist group which had planted bombs in Beirut, and this is clearly untrue. Thanks to writing and the reflection which writing initiates in his mind, however, *Yalo* becomes aware not only of his past but also of his present circumstances, and he begins to resist the police attempts to make him a scapegoat.

As *Yalo* struggles to write the story of his life, he starts reflecting on his past more critically and imaginatively, remembering telling details, asking himself fun comfortable questions. As a consequence, *Yalo* constructs his own narrative of obscure episodes in the lives of his relatives. For instance, the vagueness surrounding aspects of his grandfather's life is eventually dispelled by *Yalo's* linear narrative, which sharply contrasts with Khoury's usual fragmented style. Such a switch in style can be interpreted in contrasting ways. The unusually orderly passage could be seen as an ironic dramatization of a writer's need to impose a clear narrative through which he or she can make sense of the past. On the other hand, this linear narrative could also be seen as a superfluous element which jars with the surrounding text, as if Khoury eventually gave in to a more conventional form of expression in order to shed light on fragmented and obscure parts of the narrative. The

following passage is more in line with Khoury's convictions about writing, as it shows how *Yalo* learns that words can sometimes lead their writer to follow their logic, rather than his own:

"لكن الحرب علمت يالو ان يصدق عينيه لا عيون الكلمات، و لن يتصالح مع الكلمات إلا في السجن، حين سيجبره المحقق علي كتابة قصة حياته و كلها من أولها إلي أخرها، مرات عديدة. عندها سوق يكتشف أن جده كان علي حق، و أن الكلام حين يكتب، ينظر إلي كاتبه و يتحاور معه، و يفرض عليه ما يجب كتابته"[196]

(The War, however, taught *Yalo* to believe his eyes, not those of words, and he would only make his peace with words again in prison, when the police interrogator would force him to write the story of his whole life, from beginning to end, several times. Then he would discover that his grandfather had been right and that words, when written down, look at their author and conduct a dialogue with him and impose on him what he has to write)[197]

There is another turning point in *Yalo's* learning process which occurs later in the novel, when he realizes that what he has written so far will not convince anyone, let alone satisfy the authorities. Writing is a gradual and painful process which is hardly ever idealized by Khoury. At the end of the first chapter *Yalo* compares himself to a squid which uses its ink to try to hide from its enemies but at the same time is aware that, if it fails to do so, it will end up being fired in its own ink. Apart from the ironic image of the dangerous-living writer, it is not incidental that the activity of writing is coupled with the physical tortures of *Yalo*.

Thus The third person narrator even reminds us how writing is used as the most common form of torture in the Arab world for political

[196] *Yalo*,2002,p93
[197] *Yalo,*2009.p-80

dissidents if they survive, as *Yalo* does, the brutal 'torture of the bottle'[198]The references to the torture of writing whether corresponding to actual practices or thoroughly fictional, to the nightmare of the blank page, to writing as an activity which requires complete isolation and is met with scorn are all self-referential, as they can be understood as ironic comments on the writing of fiction in a country like Lebanon.

The tone and style of the third person narrator (with Khoury's characteristic lyrical moments and switching of topics through the association of ideas) gradually subsumes and merges with *Yalo*'s own voice: what he writes at the end is different from what he wrote at the beginning of his ordeal with pen and paper. It resembles the free indirect discourse in which the character's language mixes with the author's. As noted earlier, the switches in the narrative methods are significant in this novel. They are the formal outcome of the split in *Yalo*'s personality which occurs when he is subjected to torture. This split is a survival technique: *Yalo* is said to abandon his body to his torturers and watch the scenes of torture from the outside. In other words, he is trying to put a distance between himself and the unbearable physical pain.[199]

Reflecting this split in Yalo, the narration is split into the first person and thethird person narratives. Starting from the ninth chapter the protagonist is both *Daniel Jalu*, the body which is writing the story of his life, and *Yalo*, the soul which is dying. Such a separation of *Yalo*'s body and soul, as well as dramatizing the distance *Yalo* requires to write about himself, also reinforces the depiction of *Yalo* as a sort of contemporary Christ. *Yalo* dies; at least spiritually he loses all hopes for a better future. When

[198]*Yalo*,2002: 228–9
[199]Caiani,Fabio ,*Contemporary Arab fiction,Innovation from Rama to Yalu,* p106

his soul leaves his body but, unlike Christ, his body and soul are not reunited and therefore he is not resurrected.[200]

The birth of a new *Yalo* (i.e. the reunion between body and soul) will remain hypothetical and will never materialize in the course of the novel. The finale of *Yalo* is unmistakably bitter and gloomy: the protagonist is left asking for more paper on which he now desperately wants to write his mother's story. He concedes, however, that in order to write a new, better story for his mother he needs to imagine a different finale(the actual ending of *Ghaby'*s life is grim and Yalo is well aware of this), but he is unable to imagine any alternative.

The issue of language is central in Khoury's works. As he mentioned in his novel *Yalo's* mother *Ghaby* who does not share her father's anxieties regarding the disappearance of the ancient Syriac language she depicts the assimilation of their mother tongue into spoken Lebanese Arabic as the blossoming of a rose. [201] The same concept of peaceful assimilation is reiterated when Yalo become disillusioned with the Civil War recalls with sadness his mother's words echoing his grandfather's ideas: the Syrians are like the leaven which penetrates the dough to become bread this is why they do not have to fight. Another recurrent feature of his novels is the fact that characters are given more than one name: this could point at the characters' crisis of identity but also at their rich and heterogeneous culture.

The most prominent feature of his writing to set him apart from the other novelists studied here is his language. His style represents a significant shift towards the more agile syntactical structure of the vernacular language, while fundamentally remaining a standard variety of written

[200]Caiani,Fabio,p105
[201]*Yalo*,2002,p289

Arabic, understandable to all literate Arabs. The style is not an aesthetic exercise. It is a suitable vehicle for an oral-like narration, in a style much influenced by the oral tradition, of a large number of stories which reflect on various matters, including war and violence and their impact on the victims and marginalized individuals from the lower strata of society. In developing such a style, draws on the folk tradition of storytelling, with its repetition of situations and sentences and lack of unnecessary detail. The language and the highly fragmented narrative are innovative features, to which Khoury adds a self-reflective dimension.[202]

Khoury treats the violence of war in a way which gives dignity to its victims. In so doing he underlines the importance of his craft as a writer, though he is ready to be self-critical and skeptical. Khoury's character finds himself compelled to write even if such an enterprise might not bring about any immediate change. As underlined earlier, Khoury's writing seems to reject focusing exclusively on one main story and one main theme. Another aspect of violence investigated by Khoury is the way it affects the memory of its victims. Typically, even this phenomenon is ambivalent and controversial: the characters are depicted as they alternatively attempt to recall what they have suffered to make sense of their lives and learn from their mistakes, try to edit some of the events they have lived to make political use of their narratives and finally decide to forget in order to go on with their lives.

Khoury is undoubtedly one of the Arab authors most involved in using metafictional techniques. In his novels the stress is often on ways of writing and storytelling. *Yalo* represents a turning point in Khoury's fictional production. This novel presenting most of the characteristic features of his writing which is the first in which the key metafictional

[202] Caiani,Fabio,p128

character of the narrator is not played by an authorial persona but by somebody extraneous to the activity of writing, somebody who does not even intend to write but is eventually forced to. In typical metafictional fashion, the third person narrator comments on *Yalo's* inability to write as follows:

> " لو كان شاعرا لكتب أنه غرق في بئر الكلام و أنه عانق الليل. و صار حبره أكثر سوادا من الليل. لو كان روائيا لكتب مذكراته بإيقغ واحد و أسمعها "عين ورد". و بدأ الحكية من الفتي الصغير الذي كان جده، و كيف عاش مجزرة القرية التي تقع في الطور عابدين ، و كيف قادته قدماه إلي قامشلي و منها إلي بيروت، و كيف تحول من بلاط إلي كوهنو ، و من جاهل باللغة السرينية إلي باحث عن إحياء لغة تموت في فمه. "[203]

(Had he been a poet, he would have written that he had drowned in the well of words and embraced night, and that his ink has become blacker than might. Had he been a novelist, he would have written his memoirs all in the same tone, calling them *Ayn Ward*, starting with his grandfather as a young boy and how he lived through the massacre of his village in Tur Abdin and how his feet had led him to Qamishli and from there to Beirut, and how he'd been transformed from tile-maker into *kohno*, and from someone who knew no Syriac to someone who sought to revive a dying language in his own mouth.)[204]

In order to fully appreciate *Yalo* as a metafictional text which portrays a man gaining self-awareness through writing, it is appropriate to focus on the shifts in the narrative, which occur less randomly here than in Khoury's other texts. This novel begins with a third person narrative. The lengthy first two chapters of the novel introduce the main characters through a third person narrative which is mainly focused on *Yalo's*

[203] *Yalo*,2002,p177
[204] *Yalo*,2009,p-160

perceptions of events and people. As a consequence of this narrative method the novel never attempts to offer an objective or judgmental point of view.[205]

3.3.2 The new text in the writing of Elias Khoury

As we know that Elias Khoury uses classical Arabic in his writing and use the colloquial language of Lebanese people. On behalf of this Elias Khoury said: "I write colloquial, what my friend calls slang. I use colloquial, and I don't agree with him - I think we have to use colloquial. And when I read any novel in any language there are some parts which I don't understand - you make an effort, if I am reading an English novel I make an effort. So if you are reading an Arabic novel why not make some effort to understand that the Tunisians say nejim to mean I can. It seems very bizarre to us in the Levant. (To laughter to he said that 'ma nejimish' means "I cannot" and that he knows Tunsian very well). So I don't agree about this point. I think the only way a language will be alive and renew itself is through the spoken, we cannot write without the spoken. I think one of the merits of what we can learn from the Egyptian novel actually, from writers like Sonallah Ibrahim and others is the use of colloquial."[206]

Khoury argues that the Arab nation is the only place in the world where language has not changed for 1,500 years. All other languages have changed except ours, because our language is derived from the Quran and related to the sacred. Khoury's main theme of his various novels is civil war. That's why he calls the war a great school in which he learned a great deal, not only about his society and its history, but about the human experience in general. In Lebanon, war and civil war have been a crucial factor in shaping literature and the novel. In contrast to Egypt, the novel

[205] Caiani,Fabio,p102
[206] http://thetanjara.blogspot.in/2009/08/bahaa-taher-elias-khoury-at-frontline.html

had been rather marginal and intellectual, but afterwards it was able to mirror society and express real life.

But now a day's Khoury feels the necessity to change the language of his writing. He says that: "I don´t think my literature could be written except in Lebanon. Here we can examine the relationship between the real and the unreal, because we are in a way in a real country and an unreal country. Lebanon is a very special case. The war opened literary language to the spoken language. This is the big evolution that Arab literature must go through. Yet as a result of this, we also went through centuries of quietude. For someone like me who experienced the civil war, it was very important to write how people actually lived and spoke. There is nothing like this in modern Lebanese literature. The important thing this war taught us is that, to express reality, we have to change our language. I don´t mean that we have to abandon classical Arabic. I mean we have to introduce the syntax of colloquial Arabic into the syntax of classical Arabic".[207]

Khoury essentially suggests a reading of Arabic culture between the strictures of the dichotomy of apparent between what he calls the language of expression and that of concealment, of veiling. Khoury argues that Arabic literature had to struggle against the veiling powers of language as Khoury say that modern Arabic literature is a long journey to rediscover language as expression and not a veil, and to reestablish the relationship between the spoken and the written, story and reality, writing as a journey and journey as a way of writing. In the context of disquieting political and social upheaval, the Arab novel emerged as a formless literature. Its use of the language of the past to reflect the present aided its

[207] BeirutReview Issue No.5 Index, Spring 1993

survival in colonial times. The novel in the Arab world redefined the dichotomy of past or present and authentic or borrowed.

While the "Nahd *modernity* in the early decades of the twentieth century was calling for a return to classical language, modernism opted for integrating new forms that can faithfully partake in the real conditions that produce real individuals. Thus, the model of the lived, of the relationship between imagination and reality, between the picture and the mirror, remains marginal inside a culture which re-adapted the concept of the poet-king and rebuilt the image of a veiled language as a tool in the structure of a totalitarian state. Consequently, this heralded what Khoury calls the new Arab text which had to redefine on its own terms its relationships with the past. The new text had to confront the transformation of the oral into the textual: in Derridean terms, the spoken word was privileged in the Arab world because of its direct relation to the real, to the lived. The fear of writing was not so much a fear of absence but of the ideological constraints that writing might impose (the apparent versus the veiled). After all, the struggle was always for Arab originality and a detachment from Western influence. The confrontation with the past allows for what Khoury calls the open form to exist. The crossroads between the past and this new writing is the discovery of the present, i.e., the discovery that literature is a language of its time, and is not a repetition or an attempt to create similarities with the past.

Rewriting in the Arab world is not repeating; rather, it is what we name creativity. A powerful statement on modern Arab aesthetics, Khoury's conclusion reads the process of rewriting as a necessary result of reconciling the past with the present. Thus, the new Arab text is inevitably a rewriting: a rewriting of the past in the face of an engulfing present that threatens its identity. By opening up to new forms, Khoury

suggests that the Arab text ensures its own survival. What this new text has to struggle with, however, is an incomplete historical memory. Khoury suggests that Arab writing will continue to open up to new forms by understanding its present as a historical process and rereading history as a contradictory one.

I have concluded this chapter as that Khoury's engagement with the performance throughout *Yalo* is illustrative of the crisis that he sees besetting the modern Arabic text, as he elaborates in his critical essays. Regarding the effect of the Lebanese civil war on modern Arabic literature, he states: "Our modern memory rooted in the *Nahdah* (*dhākiratunā al-nahdawiyyah al-hadīthah*) was pierced, and then fragmented with the war's escalation. A war of memory that erases memory, none of the pre-existing modes of expression could withstand, the texts were collapsing, the establishments collapsing, and memory collapsing"[208]

We can expand this to include a similar crisis of memory within the Palestinian diaspora, in which a people's forced exile and separation from their land and history necessarily created an analogous crisis. A new kind of text was needed to preserve the communal memory. Khoury explains his view of the novelist's role as follows: "The novelist has begun to resemble a historian or sociological analyst. But he writes his history outside the rigidity of the history of power, he writes history for the communal consciousness, to form it"[209] For Khoury, the novelist's role is much like that of the epic singer, he is the preserver of tradition, the creator of the community's consciousness of their own history.

[208] Khoury, *al-Dhakirah al-mafqudah,* p-26

[209] Ibid, p-85