Political Jail in the Novels of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, al-Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat*, Munif's *East of the Mediterranean*, and Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract. The theme of political jail reverberates in world literature blurring the boundaries of time and place and opening up new avenues for drawing parallels among various literatures. Hence, the main objective of this study is to delve into four celebrated twentieth-century English and Arabic novels, namely, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), al-Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat* (1971), Munif's *East of the Mediterranean* (1975) and Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) investigating the analogies in the pre-, in, and post- jail experience of political detainees stressing that any obstructions in the face of freedom will trigger similar feelings, thoughts and attitudes. The significance of this study emanates from the fact that scholarship on comparative jail fiction—particularly political jail novels—is insufficient and has not, to the best of my knowledge, set comparison among these novels. To achieve its purpose, the study relies on the concept of analogy as elucidated by two comparatists of the American school: René Wellek and François Jost as the basis for drawing parallels among the aforementioned novels. And for a thorough analysis, it draws on Michel Foucault's theory of the birth of the prison as its theoretical framework.

Keywords: jail novel, tyranny, dissension, freedom, political jail, will.

INTRODUCTION

Liberty is an intrinsic human trait and a fundamental need whose loss brings about terrible consequences on the personal and the collective level. As Diana Medlicott puts it, "just as plants grow toward light, so do human beings grow toward freedom, and shrink from the loss of it" (8). Aware of the cruelty of detention and the importance of freedom for the individual, the tyrannical state inaugurates political jails to consolidate the pillars of its reign on the one hand and subvert the infrastructure of any lurking insurrection. Jail represents the ultimate manifestation of power in a country and thus has paved the way to a new corpus of writings, that is, jail literature. Political jail fiction, in particular, published in the twentieth century mirrors the drastic events the century witnessed in the international and the Arab arena, the most traumatic of which were the breakout of the two world wars, apartheid, and the Palestinian disaster. Even the process of decolonization and independence that the Arab and the African countries underwent has, in most cases, resulted in dictatorial regimes aspiring to manifest their powers by force at the expense of the freedom of their peoples. This new phase of imperialism tended to gag voices of protest and to instill in people the fear of resistance. This prompts Ioan Davies to argue that "the twentieth century . . . has produced as many prisoners and prison writers as in the entire previous history of man" (7).

A thread runs through George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Jamal al-Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat*, Abd al-Rahman Munif's *East of the Mediterranean* and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for*

the Barbarians[1] as they centre on actual and metaphorical jail. Though the form in which the four novelists cast their narratives differs, the analogous events, themes, characterization, and above all the confining, suffocating atmosphere that pervades both the world of the novelist and his novel locate these works in one category, that of political jail fiction. Also, the autobiographical and the historical contexts are highly important in jail novels since they are marked by an "artful interplay of invention and actuality" (Sobanet, 17). As Jost puts it, "[h]owever dominant or striking a writer's talents may be, his work necessarily reflects a literary *Zeitgeist* because it was conceived and born at a specific stage of the culture that helped shape his intellectual and artistic personality" (viii). On confronting the challenges of their age, Orwell, al-Ghitani, Munif, and Coetzee find themselves like their heroes, standing on the threshold of a metaphorical and/or an actual jail.

In the case of Orwell (1903-1950), these challenges are represented by the major events of his age. According to Jeffrey Meyers, Orwell developed a great sense of humanity as he witnessed the devastating aftermaths of the two world wars on the European civilization and the persecution of civilians under the prevalent tyrannical regimes, Nazism and Fascism (28), and as he underwent "a traumatic experience of illness and hospitalization" during the Spanish Civil War (Stansky and Abrahams, 245). Thus, a prisoner of fatal illness and of totalitarian age, Orwell wrote his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in which the theme of detention loudly resonates. In his collected essays entitled "England, Your England," Orwell maintains that "[a]s I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me" (1957, 63). His feelings of being watched and chased reverberate in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Similarly, the South African novelist J. M. Coetzee (b. 1940), a committed intellectual, represents the voice of liberty and humanity in an age stigmatized with oppression and violence. Despite being a white writer who didn't experience the persecution and the detention the marginalized indigenous people underwent, Coetzee alongside a number of South African white intellectuals—André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Nadine Gordimer, etc. —took it upon themselves to fight all imperial enterprises and to fight for the black natives' cause through their novels. Just like Orwell who speaks from within an imperialist country, opposing and criticizing its policy through the intellectuals in his novels, "Coetzee is acutely aware that he speaks from a position of beneficiary of the apartheid regime" (Poyner, 11). He sets his renowned novel *Barbarians* in a nameless frontier town; still, the real target is South Africa under the National Afrikaner Party (NAP) and its system of apartheid.

While Orwell and Coetzee fancied imprisonment, the Egyptian novelist al-Ghitani (b. 1945) lived the experience literally. From 1966-1967, he underwent political incarceration and torture under Jamal Abd al-Nasir's regime on the charge of establishing a Marxist organization (Al-Ghitani, 1988, 49). The experience of detention, the year of the setback (1967), the political treasons and concessions which occurred during Nasir's reign, and the humiliating Camp David Accords (Al-Smadi, 107-08), all represent a series of grim ordeals which left an ineffaceable imprint on al-Ghitani's writings, particularly on *Zayni*. Al-Ghitani parodies symbols and events of the ancient past with those of the modern age. He depicts the early sixteenth-century Cairo at the end of the Mamluk era that is about to be terminated by the Ottoman invasion; his ultimate end is to heighten public awareness of the oppression of the present time, under Abd al-Nasir's regime, and the time to come stressing that history is a cyclical process.

The Saudi Arabian Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933-2004), a writer in exile and one of the prominent Arab novelists in the twentieth century, is best-known for his fiery political writings in which the issue of freedom, detention, and torture overtly recur. An inevitable

[1]I abbreviated *Zayni Barakat, East of the Mediterranean*, and *Waiting for the Barbarians* throughout the present study to *Zayni*, *Mediterranean*, and *Barbarians* respectively.

consequence of Munif's politics was his deportation from Iraq in 1955 and the revocation of his Saudi nationality in 1963 for identifying with Marxist thought and for criticizing the regime (Munif, 2003, 4-5). Munif considers political jail the biggest shame and the dirtiest stain on the history of the Arab World (2007, 14). He claims that his jail novel *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* (*East of the Mediterranean*) alongside other novels laid the foundation for the term "jail literature" (9). According to Ṣalih Ibrahim, "Jail in Munif's novels has its clamorous, painful presence. . . . It is a space for death, subjugation, and humiliation. It is deep-rooted in the novel and its hero. And it expands to encompass the homeland itself. . . . It also pervades exile and exceeds it to be ingrained in the human psyche (37).[2]

ON THE THRESHOLD OF JAIL

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, al-Ghitani's *Zayni*, Munif's *Mediterranean*, and Coetzee's *Barbarians* share a similar opening in which a panoramic view of an imprisoned land is introduced. The state imposes an iron-fisted system to ensure its subjects' utter submissiveness. Arrest, detention, indoctrination, torture and disappearance become a routine. Power is redefined by the powerful, and for the sake of maintaining it, the regime falsifies history, manages science, plays the media, and imposes censorship. Every word, footstep and gesture is monitored. And with the technological revolution evident in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* even thoughts are accessible. Like Jeremy Bentham's late eighteenth-century imaginary design of the Panopticon which, according to Foucault, "induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201), the state reinforces self-censorship and augments the police inside the subject to guarantee submission and total obedience. The populace are reduced to the status of animals and hence depicted using animal imagery. For example, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the Party considers the proles "natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals" (Orwell, 1949, 74). In *Barbarians*, the words "herds," "monkey," and "animals" are frequently used to describe the natives. In *Zayni*, the common people are also described as "herds" and "a beast with no minds" (Al-Ghitani, 2004, 131). Similarly, the words "animals" and "dogs" recur in *Mediterranean*.

Set in London in April, spring time, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* foreshadows the promise of a new life. But as it progresses, this promise fades gradually as the impulse of life in the city is slowing down. The city under Big Brother's tyrannical Party is transformed into Bentham's Panopticon in which "[t]here was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. . . . you had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in the darkness, every movement scrutinized" (Orwell, 1949, 7). The details Orwell provides on the Party's ideology and slogans are "responsible for one of the main effects of the book's power: the feeling of utter claustrophobia, of no exit" (Freedman, 138) as the party tightens its grip on all aspects of life. And to abort any thought of revolt the Ministry of Love is founded. In this disciplinary jail, offenders are physically tortured and mentally indoctrinated.

Similarly yet more shockingly, *Waiting for the Barbarians* opens with the first person narrator, the white Magistrate, parading images of hunted animals followed by scenes of torture in a granary. Most of the novel's chapters: one, two, five and six, open at the threshold of winter, a forewarning of death as expeditionary campaigns are sent to the frontier to obliterate any sign of resistance. The civil guards' censorship campaigns and arbitrary detention against the natives stand for the comprehensive censorship systems operated in

[2] All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

South Africa from the early 1960s until about 1980 (Coetzee, 1996, 204). Like the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which rectifies documents and writes its own history, the Empire in *Barbarians* fakes the natives' history to make its own.

Analogous to Orwell's London in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Coetzee's South Africa in *Barbarians*, Al-Ghitani's Cairo in *Zayni* is portrayed as an imprisoned city, "a blindfolded, supine man awaiting a mysterious fate" (Al-Ghitani, 2004, 9) due to the censorship imposed by the new Market Inspector (*al-Muhtasib*) Zayni Barakat ibn Mousa and Zakariyya ibn Radi, the head of the intelligence apparatus, *al-Bassassin.* The intense spying and the arbitrary arrest are feared even by the European Gianti since, as chronicled by Ali al-Sayrafi, many Europeans reported to be imprisoned in al-Maqsharah Jail under Mamluk reign (445). In an interview conducted by Muhammad Abu Zayd in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper, al-Ghitani maintains that Zayni does not stand for Nasir solely but for all dictators before and after Nasir as he represents the quintessence of authority in any time and place, and he holds that Zakariyya is the same warder who has tortured people in military jails in Egypt, Abu Ghreib jail in Iraq or anywhere since he represents the concept of coercion wherever its source might be (2004, Jun. 17). The language Zayni uses to describe the common people is akin to that used by the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and by Colonel Joll in *Barbarians*, and it throws further light on a dictatorial mentality, one that undervalues people's life and strips them of their will, dignity, and freedom.

Likewise, Munif sets *Mediterranean* in a nameless Arab country where a tyrannical regime crushes whoever dares to oppose it. And since defining the setting confines the topic's universal scope, he considers the generalization of the setting "the ultimate specificity" (2003). The reader could picture the socio-political scene in this country from different perspectives due to the use of the multiple-narrator device which, comparable to that in *Zayni*, sheds light on different aspects of the state's oppression and functions as a means of rebellion against the one-sided voice of authority (Al-Mousawi, 1986, 131). Rajab meditates: "Human in our country is the cheapest thing. Cigarette butts are more highly valued! If you look for a moment into one of thousands of cellars scattered on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and then far into the desert, what will you see? Remnants of human beings, panting and desperate waiting" (Munif, 2007, 204).[3]

The relationship between the state and the political opponent is brought to light through the heroes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Barbarians*, *Zayni*, and *Mediterranean*. Winston Smith, the White Magistrate, Sa'id al-Juhayni and Rajab Isma'il respectively find themselves thrown into an imprisoned land. In Al-Kawakibi's words, "the prisoner of tyranny who lost his/her will is robbed of his/her humanity because he/she works under others' command" (88).[4] But our heroes take the lead in resisting the oppression and the sense of apathy that prevail their societies. They are similarly depicted with respect to their physical features and personal traits. Their portrayal is harmonious with the general gloom prevalent in the novels under scrutiny. Physical weakness and illness characterize them and underscore the difficulty of their mission. Their resistance takes similar forms and stages. It secretly starts with a flow of independent thoughts which preoccupies their mind. Then, it is put into words and finally turns into action, a direct confrontation with the regime, when they free themselves from their fear and cowardice.

Smith struggles to stay human and is afraid to be hardened inside. As Orwell puts it, "[t]he first step had been a secret, involuntary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words, and now from words to actions" (1949, 164). The

[3] See: footnote 2.
[4] See: footnote 2.

white Magistrate is a parallel figure to Smith. According to several critics, he is complicit with the Empire, a benevolent colonizer, the other side of "imperial rule." But in my viewpoint, he is a political opponent and later a victim from within a racist regime. Coetzee contends that "[s]ome years ago I wrote a novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, about the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience" (1986, Jan. 8). The Magistrate's doubts about the Empire's policies and ends grow until they turn into confrontation once he witnesses the brutality with which the agents of his Empire treat the natives. Comparable to Smith who searches documents and contemplates faces to know the truth of Big Brother and the Party, the Magistrate deciphers the wooden slips he finds and the faces of the native captives he encounters for the truth of the Empire (Martin, 13-14). Akin to Smith's resistance, the young Azhar student Sa'id al-Juhayni's passes through stages. At the beginning of the novel, he is depicted as a sensitive, weak character agonized in silence while witnessing the demise of his city, wondering what the future has in store. He develops a critical eye to the current decline and discontent with the prevalent injustice. His will to resist and to uproot oppression leads him to pick up a quarrel with the authorities. While Zayni is delivering his speech on the pulpit giving promises to go after wrongdoers and protect the rights of people, Sa'id's shouts, "Liar!", resonates in the mosque (Al-Ghitani, 2004, 181), cutting off and defying the speech of authority. Similarly, Rajab's pent-up rage feeds his spirit of resistance driving him into direct confrontation with the regime. He reads political and intellectual books secretly and, like Smith, opens a diary where he finds an outlet to his imprisoned thoughts. He then joins an underground party that opposes the regime's ideology and starts participating in public protests. Consequently, having crossed the bounds established by the tyrannical authority, Smith, the Magistrate, Sa'id and Rajab find themselves on the doorsteps of jail where a new phase of their resistance starts.

HUNGER FOR BREATH

The novels under scrutiny aim at exposing the despotic practices of the one-party state through examining this site of power (jail), sketching its different aspects and staging its characters: both the jailors and the detainees. Foucault defines the jail institution in relation to power as "the place where the power to punish, which no longer dares to manifest itself openly, silently organizes a field of objectivity in which punishment will be able to function openly as treatment and the sentence be inscribed among the discourses of knowledge"(256). The jails into which Smith, the white Magistrate, Sa'id and Rajab are thrown share similar gloomy atmosphere and harsh conditions that enable the reader to envision what life is awaiting the detainee behind walls. Each is designed in a way to increase the psychological and physical pain of its dwellers and depicted in details to give immediacy and authenticity to the novels in question. In an interview I conducted with Al-Utoum, he contends that in jail novels the role of heroism is intensified in the setting and circulated among more than one character. The place (jail) which evokes the reader's imagination, and the time which hangs so heavily on the detainee's hands compete with the main characters (detainee and the jailor) for the role of the hero (Al-Utoum, 2013, Feb. 21).

The political detainees' experience starts with "the induction process" in which they suffer "an entry shock" as they find themselves in a hostile place driven from one cell to the other, from one jail to another, dehumanized and stripped of their identity (names) and innermost privacy (Alber, 130). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Ministry of Love, a frightening place where there are no windows and no darkness but an artificial blinding light, could be read as an allusion to "the concentration camps Orwell may have seen and had certainly heard of when reporting from Germany in 1945" (Meyers, 29) and to "the wartime hospitals of Spain" in which Orwell received horrible treatment under awful conditions (36). In *Barbarians*, the Magistrate is also

detained in a small dark room in the barracks where cockroaches, smell of decay and sight of soot-mark define the setting (Coetzee, 2010, 110). His arrest stands for that of the white intellectuals who opposed apartheid and consequently detained. In *Zayni*, Sa'id is incarcerated in al-Maqsharah (the Peeler), a real jail located in Cairo in the Mamluk period and known as one of the most atrocious at that time (Al-Rifa'i, 21, 23), which stands for Egyptian jails during Nasir's regime, and other detainees are left to rot in "a damp dark goal" whose cells are very small cavities in the walls. In *Mediterranean*, the reader could picture the jail setting through the lens of Rajab, whose reminiscences of imprisonment are fused with his present. The image of the cellar's door being opened and the blood stain covering a wide area of its floor (Munif, 2007, 123) represent the first sight of horror Rajab beholds in jail and the first site of torture where he spends seven months. The grave-like cellar, the low ceiling, the viscous, convergent walls, the smell of vomit, blood and excrement, the dim light that seeps through a very small window, and the narrow broken stairs where one cannot sleep, all are motifs that recur here.

Detention is a retrospective experience during which the detainee delves into his own being recollecting the past, escaping the present, and awaiting the future. It is useful when invested in reflecting on one's self and life and in creating a free world in one's imagination. But for some detainees, "the preoccupation of introspection" for long terms, in Roger Matthews' words, may lead to depression, insanity, and suicide (40). In the case of our four detainees, imagining a free world becomes a far-fetched wish because their jailors deal not merely with their bodies but mainly with their souls. Here, it is worth meditating Ayman Al-Utoum's question in *Yasma'una Hasisaha* [They Hear Its Slightest Sound]: "Can freedom be made in a wood of chains?" (75).[5] The detainee witnesses moments of strength and weakness as he/she finds himself/herself in the midst of numerous enemies. Time, compulsory routine, loneliness, silence, despair on the one hand and the jailor on the other hand, all collaborate to break his/her will and destroy his/her nerves leading him/her to madness. The shift that marks the twentieth-century jail is that from compulsory labour to idleness in which the detainee, in Jan Alber's words, suffers from constant feelings of ennui and uselessness (31).

These enemies become ferocious and the experience of detention grows severely bitter when the detainee is put in a solitary confinement for long terms. Human is a social being craving for relations, and hence to be isolated from others will negatively affect his/her communication skills, expression ability and mindset. Continuous silence and loneliness get on the detainee's nerves and may drive him/her to mental disturbance and eventually to insanity if his/her will to resist breaks and hope of freedom vanishes. Shane Graham sets a comparison between the solitary confinement and the traumatic accident maintaining that "prolonged confinement produces disruptions in the prisoner's sense of time, language and meaning production, in ways resembling the symptoms of trauma. Like the traumatic accident, solitary confinement becomes an event which cannot be comprehended or represented" (225-226). In the case of our four detainees, they find themselves on the verge of insanity due to their being locked in solitary confinement. For example, in the cellar Rajab talks to an aunt and in the cell the Magistrate behaves like a dog.

The encounters between the jailor and the detainee are, in Barbara Harlow's words, "remodulated into a historical struggle" (1992, 16). The detainee either resists or succumbs to his/her inquisitor's threats and/or compromises as the experience of detention either sharpens his will or destroys him/her. Warders in notorious jails under despotic regimes seem to be carefully selected. They are either sadistic or psychopathic, torturing their victims without any feelings of mercy, empathy, or remorse. Authoritative and egocentric, they appear to be "the

[5] See: footnote 2.

possessors of almost infinite power within their realm" (Sykes, 41). Their language is that of authority, and while investigating and torturing the detainees, it becomes abusive and demeaning, another weapon used in the face of the detainee. In interrogation sessions, the jailors (O'Brien, Colonel Joll and Mandel, Zakariyya, and Nouri) in our four novels resort to physical torture to assert their domination and power over the detainees and to feed on their fear and pain on the one hand and to force them into submission and confession on the other hand. In *Mediterranean* and *Barbarians*, physical torture dominates, and for this reason animal imagery manifests itself as a substantial literary device employed in the two novels. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Zayni*, however, the focus of the jailor is on the soul of the detainee.

After physical torture, offering seductions starts to extract confessions. Treatment gets better, torture becomes less frequent. When the fish is not deluded by the baits, the fisher resorts to a fishing net. The jailor uses psychological torture which is more severe and lasting. Foucault holds that "penal imprisonment, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, covered both the deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals" (233) and that "the penalty in its most severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body" but to the soul; it "acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations" (16). Interrogation sessions extend for long hours during which the detainee is forbidden from drinking water or leaving to urinate. The voice of the inquisitor and his repeated questions resonates in the detainee's ear turning into an irritating buzz. The jailor resorts to torture while the detainee is blindfolded in order to increase the detainees' terror. And he tortures a detainee in front of another to augment the pain of the witness.

At first we see a great animosity between the detainee and his jailor; all political detainees who are subjected to torture are haunted by the following question: how could the jailor lives normally after the cruelty he practices on innocent detainees. The Magistrate asks his jailor Mandel: "How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been . . . working with people? . . I have imagined that one would want to wash one's hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of cleansing" (Coetzee, 2010, 145). In *Zayni*, after torturing the Turkish merchant, Zakariyya goes to play with his baby, and then he heads to the garden where he watches the flowers and the birds in the cages, a blatant contradiction. It is ironic that the hand that carries and plays with a baby and little birds is the same hand on which detainees are tortured and burnt. Correspondingly, in *Mediterranean* after feeding his birds, Nouri subjects Rajab to hideous, unspeakable torture. As the detainees get used to this animosity, they grow sympathetic with their jailor, for they consider him a victim imprisoned too. According to Medlicott, "[p]rison staff have extremely high rates of sickness, mental breakdown and early retirement. Some get corrupted, disillusioned, crushed. Some start out rotten, drawn to work in prison because of their rottenness, others become rotten" (8-9). Rajab sees his jailor Abdu as a victim of the prison apparatus. The Magistrate as well meditates while looking at Mandel: "How he must detest me! To spend days of one's life keeping watch on a closed door and attending to the animal needs of another man! He has been robbed of his freedom too, and thinks of me as the robber" (Coetzee, 2010, 102). Surprisingly, intervals may come in which the detainee seems attached to the aggressive jailor. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Smith sees O'Brien the "tormentor," the "protector," the "inquisitor," and the "friend" (Orwell, 1949, 250). Thus, the relationship between the detainee and the jailor is very complicated and requires a thorough psychoanalytic study.

POST-JAIL: DEFEAT OR VICTORY?

The day of release is the day of victory for the political detainee who resists defending a principle. But for Smith, the Magistrate, Sa'id, and Rajab, who are cowed into submission and

whose will to resist are broken, it is the day of defeat. Their voice of resistance seems loud at the beginning of the novel, but afterwards it is muted with their release at the end of the novels. Pain, fear, doubt, cowardice, despair, absentmindedness, and reticence conquer them. They seem to suffer from personality disorder, depression and insomnia. They leave jail, but its indelible scars haven't left their body or soul. Their life cycle is constant incarceration; it begins with an imprisoned land, passes through detention and ends in an inward jail that will never leave them. Sitting under the Chestnut Tree, Smith looks desperate, absentminded, and his two tears that trickle down his cheeks represent the defeat of his will. The Magistrate too is depicted as a beggar distracted, powerless, "roaming around the stalls or sitting in the shade of the trees" (Coetzee, 2010, 146). Sa'id comes out of prison dead-in-life, whispering: "OH! They ruined me and destroyed my fortress" (Al-Ghitani, 2004, 235). Likewise, Rajab sees himself a traitor and keeps chiding himself, cursing his hand that signed the document of humiliation. He meditates: "The fall of human is like that of buildings which shake in the dark, quiver, and then fall. And what accompanies their downfall is that gripping clamor followed by dust, death, and curse" (Munif, 2007, 207).[6]

Some ex-detainees find solace in writing which becomes an escape from the grim reality they face and an outlet for the negative feelings they experience. Writing changes into a weapon with which the ex-detainee fights painful memories on the one hand and exposes the regime's atrocity on the other hand. According to Harlow, "[i]n the prison memoirs of political detainees, the 'power of writing' is one which seeks to alter the relationships of power which are maintained by coercive, authoritarian systems of state control and domination" (1987, 133). The Magistrate and Rajab seek relief in writing. The former decides to write a memoir and the latter a novel despite they find it a difficult mission, for they suffer psychological suppression and find themselves struggling with words and memories.

FORM OF JAIL NOVEL

The analogous experience of political detainees leads to affinity in the narrative forms (Abu Nidal, 119). Al-Mousawi argues that the European and Arabic novels by and large broke away from the traditional novel, which is unable to face the new life pressures as Forster indicates, taking on the modernist cast (1986, 215). He holds that the traditional novel is "weak to enfold these challenges and pressures since its regular structural formation . . . reflects a stable social frame at that time, and thus it is unable to reflect the outside chaos and instability" (215).[7] Therefore, the observer could trace the poetics of Modernism and the impact of Henri Bergson's real duration, Bradley's immediate experience, and William James' stream of consciousness in jail fiction. The fragmented form which reflects the content, the flashbacks, the allusions to mythical and historical figures, the interior monologues, the multiplicity of narrators, and the time disruption, all are literary devices employed in jail novels and in the four novels in question. Also, the documentary element characterizes such novels and adds to them a sense of authenticity. Besides, animal imagery is interwoven in jail novels as it intensifies the detainee's feelings of fear, threat, pain, and sorrow stretching out the reader's pity and giving a realistic dimension and immediacy to the novels. It also helps the reader discern the kind of relationships between the detainee and the environment (the jail) and the detainees and the jailor. Consequently, animal imagery creates a metaphorical mode of expression that involves the reader, evokes his/her emotions and helps the writer maintain an

[6] See: footnote 2.
[7] See: footnote 2.

aesthetic distance which leads to a multiplicity of readings of the novel and objectifies the detainee's experience raising it to a universal level.

In addition to the style of writing and the arrangement of events, the aforementioned novels differ in the order of events and the point of view. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Barbarians*, for instance, the events are by and large arranged according to their chronological order which sheds light on the strict order the state imposes. On the other hand, *Zayni* and *Mediterranean* open in *medias res* to command the reader's attention, suspend his belief and highlight the political instability. Concerning the point of view, Alber holds that "all narrative structures can be used to express various different attitudes toward the prison" (19). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, the third person narrator functions as a distance device through which Smith tries to keep himself intact from the Party's contaminating ideology and away from thought police and thus regain some of his lost privacy. Besides, it objectifies his experience raising it to a universal level. The first person narrator in *Barbarians*, on the contrary, gives authenticity to the Magistrate's experience. It helps him defend himself, justify his actions, speak his mind and restore his sequestered freedom of opinion. In *Zayni* and *Mediterranean*, the multiple-narrator device enables the reader to view the socio-political situation from different perspectives, leading to several readings of the novels. It also functions as a distance devise that objectifies the experience of political opponents raising it to a universal level. Above all, this device is used as opposed to the absolute voice of the authority which dominates the two novels (Al-Mousawi, 1986, 131). Despite these formal differences, the novels in question tackle the same issue—political jail–, follow a similar storyline, and share the same melancholic, cynical, bitter tone.

CONCLUSION

In light of the given analysis, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, al-Ghitani's *Zayni*, Munif's *Mediterranean*, and Coetzee's *Barbarians* highlight the oneness of the experience of detention. Political jail, as it is manifest in these novels, is a humanitarian experience that unifies settings blurring the boundaries between the east and the west, the present and the past, a theme emphasized by Orwell who maintains that "the conditions of life in all three super-states [Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia] are very much the same" (1949, 202) and stressed by the encounter between Rajab and Dr. Fali in *Mediterranean.* The image of the French doctor who experienced resistance, detention, and pain accords with that of Rajab (Al-Mousawi, 1999, 327). The novels being studied are thus comparable regardless of whether or how much their writers influence one another. As Wellek puts it, "[w]orks of art . . . are not simply sums of sources and influences: they are wholes in which raw materials derived from elsewhere cease to be inert matter and are assimilated into a new structure" (285). Though al-Ghitani and Coetzee read Orwell,[8] and one could trace his influence on their novels, each one of them renders the topic of political jail in an artistic, creative mold. Thus, these novels can be placed within the sub-genre of jail fiction as they expose experience behind bars to an outside public revealing the human response to this hostile environment (Sobanet, 9).

[8] Al-Ghitani admits that "[s]ome of the novels I read a quarter of a century ago continue to influence me now: I still recall George Orwell's *1984*" (1994, 18-19). Though Orwell is not mentioned amongst Coetzee's acknowledged influences, one could sense and trace the Orwellian impact on Coetzee's writings. See: J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offence***:** *Essays on Censorship.* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996): 208.

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