Introduction
Speculative Belongings in Contemporary Arabic Migration Literature

In the opening scene of the short story 'Lajiʾ ʿind al-Iskimu' ('The Arctic Refugee'), a weary narrator peers out of an igloo, surveying the Arctic landscape before him. The story, which was written by Sweden-based writer Ibrahim Ahmed,[1] was published in the 1994 short story collection *Baʿd Majiʿ al-Tayr: Qisas min al-Manfa* (After the Bird's Arrival: Stories from Exile).[2] As such, it is an early iteration of the kinds of novels, short stories and plays of forced and precarious migration that are explored in this book, literary narratives that have been rewriting the meanings and forms of Arabic exile literature from the 1990s to the present. How did the narrator end up in the Arctic? Although he has tried, we find out, the narrator has not been able to apply for political asylum in any of the nations that he has travelled through. Forced to leave Iraq and later, Libya, he is then deported from Germany, Denmark and Sweden. In the dreamlike short story, he now finds himself yet a few more degrees north in an Arctic wilderness, a space that functions as an imagined 'outside' of the kind of community that he had expected to join. The narrator explains,

> When I arrived at the Stockholm airport, the police interrogated me for hours and denied me asylum. I told them that I had come from Libya after the Libyans had terminated my work contract. They told me that Libya was a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and that I should have applied for asylum there. I was too embarrassed to tell them that I had tried in vain with the Arab brothers to let me stay in their warm and vast country. I even reminded them of our blood ties,

which they used to say were thicker than the ink of conventions. My truthfulness and naiveté had always plagued my life … I was expelled from Germany because I arrived there from Sweden, also a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, and then from Denmark because Germany is a signatory of the Convention. Then I was expelled from Norway, a signatory of the Convention like the others. I began to wonder whether this Geneva Convention was written in ink or in mercury, on paper in elegant offices or on my grandmother's gravestone.[3]

In a brutally ironic tone, the text evokes two common models of belonging and citizenship: blood ties and the rights of the refugee enshrined through 'the ink of conventions'. Both the *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* models of national citizenship, based on the biological family and place of birth respectively, fail the narrator and so does the international rights framework that the Geneva Convention is based on. The space that is left to him is one of imagination and fantasy. His query about the substance of the Geneva Convention also opens up a field of inquiry about the substance of citizenship. If it could be written in substances like mercury, which quickly rolls off surfaces, or on sites of intimate mourning, such as a grandmother's gravestone, what else might our shared belonging and ties to the space of the nation be made of? When the narrator arrives in an imagined (and exotified) Eskimo community, he is interviewed by the chief in a manner that retains the form of the political asylum interview. The chief asks him how animals are treated in his home country, and he responds through metaphors of political oppression, postcolonial conflicts and oil politics. 'How about the fish? How do you treat them?' the chief asks him. 'Very generously, sir. We feed them the flesh of our enemy soldiers and that of our own.'[4] The narrator is welcomed into the community to save him from the indirect cannibalism that eating such fish would entail. In part, the narrator's ultimate welcome into this community highlights how the available models of citizenship and international law created his exclusion in his pre-Arctic life. The community that he joins is, conspicuously, situated both outside the familial model of the nation with its fictionalised 'blood ties' and the social contract model of political community that is aligned with discourses on rights spelled out in 'the ink

of conventions'. On another level, the story draws on the resources of the imaginative and the literary to imagine belonging, especially in the outside spaces produced by citizenship.

'The Arctic Refugee' is one of a growing number of Arabic literary narratives that are evoking and reimagining the outside spaces that are often produced for people in contemporary settings of forced migration. While such spatiality evokes the ways that sovereignty and citizenship have often been understood through naturalised links to territory, it is also about ways of being that are situated outside of conventionally understood citizenship. Among the wide range of texts available, I have selected literary narratives that engage with contemporary forms of forced migration through creative defamiliarisation. The different forms of defamiliarisation that we see in this literature can, of course, be situated in a long lineage of writings on the productive role of defamiliarisation in art. Foundational to these is the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky's notion of *ostranie* (defamiliarisation),[5] which asserts that art intensifies our awareness of the familiar by slowing down and heightening our perception. The playwright and theatre artist Berthold Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement or distancing effect)[6] refers to techniques that prevent audiences from becoming fully immersed in a play and instead, make audience members critical observers of the concepts presented and the art form itself. On one level, defamiliarisation is a useful way to think of what literature and art does in general. But more than that, it often targets specific concepts and realities. In this book, I have drawn attention to a variety of defamiliarising modes in literature and hold that these techniques – though drawn from different genres – are an invitation to reimagine the often taken-for-granted categories of borders and citizenship that underpin forced, precarious and irregular migration. To see these categories from a distance is also to find space for reflection and, perhaps, movement.

Arabic Exile Literature in Europe draws attention to shifting approaches to writing Europe in Arabic literature. Specifically, it discusses the emergence of an Arabic literature of forced or precarious migration to Europe written from the perspectives of refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, and others who are situated outside of normatively defined citizenship, as well as emergent modes of writing migration and

exile. Drawing on conversations that are ongoing in border studies, it asks the following questions: how are literary narratives that use nonrealist and defamiliarising modes of writing contributing to broader questions and conversations about the liminal spaces produced by contemporary border policing and forced migration? In what ways has the emergence of these new approaches to writing about forced migration transformed the tropes and narrative styles associated with twentieth-century Arabic literary narratives of exile, travel and migration to Europe, which are anchored in colonial and postcolonial settings and relations? What are the aesthetic and political stakes of contemporary Arabic migration literature? How does Arabic literature of forced migration ask audiences to rethink belonging outside of the received notions about borders and citizenship?

The literary narratives explored in the book include novels, short stories and plays set on migratory routes and in contemporary Arab diasporas in Europe. These include northern Europe settings, such as Sweden, Germany and Denmark, and the routes of undocumented migration across the Mediterranean, Turkey and eastern Europe. This study also takes note of how literature of migration is being transformed in cities such as Paris and London, which have long histories of representations in Arabic literature. Most of the literary narratives discussed in the book are written by writers from Iraq, Syria, Algeria and Morocco, reflecting recent patterns of migration and trends in Arabic migration literature. Like 'The Arctic Refugee', the texts analysed in this book often depart from literary realism and from the assumption that narratives that deal with forced migration should be ethnographic or autobiographical.[7] Their approaches to writing migration often differ significantly from 'cultural encounter' frameworks, 'political commitment' and modernist understandings of exile, all of which were dominant in different genres of twentieth-century Arabic literary narratives of travel to and exile in Europe. Instead, many stage the liminal space of the border and the outside spaces that borders can produce.

Arabic Exile Literature in Europe argues that since the 1990s, there has been a marked shift in Arabic literature of travel and migration to Europe with the rise of a prominent literature of forced migration. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these texts represent a continuation of long-standing genres of writing exile, travel and migration to Europe in

Arabic literature, but draw on new aesthetics, styles and genres to render aspects of more recent forms of forced migration. Although these texts do not represent all the many different perspectives, aesthetics and concerns of Arabic diasporic writing in Europe, which encompasses a broad range of literary styles and explores a broad range of issues and types of mobility, the literary narratives explored in this book call for a comparative and sustained analysis of how literary, political and aesthetic categories are being rethought in response to contemporary contexts of forced migration.

On a related note, I use the term 'Arabic literature' in this book because the majority of texts discussed in the book are written in Arabic and respond to shared tropes and ways of writing exile that belong to an Arabic literary history. In this literary context, the term 'Arab' has for the most part been used in conjunction with specific national literatures written in local majority languages (Arab American, Arab Brazilian, Arab British). At the same time, and while recognising the inter-permeability of these categories, I broaden the definition of Arabic literature to include some narratives written in French, English, German and Swedish by authors whose belonging include ties to the Arabic-speaking region. I do this in order to show how the themes of the literature exceed the corpus of texts written in Arabic and to highlight the multilinguistic dimensions of migration literature, both in theme and in contexts of creation and circulation.

This study situates these approaches to writing migration within a recent flourishing of fantasy, science fiction, dystopian and future writing in Arabic literature, that are creating spaces to explore the unknown, imagine alternate worlds, and think outside of contemporary political impasses. Rather than explore one particular genre, a central query in this study is thus why nonrealist and defamiliarising modes of writing are such an important part of contemporary Arabic migration literature. To be sure, the analysis of specific speculative genres within Arabic literature is an important endeavour. Alexandra Chreiteh, for example, has shown that magical realism in modern Arabic literature has served to create heterotopia within the realist space of the nation. Magical realism, she argues, can create spaces of inquiry, especially for those (such as ethnic minorities) who do not align with the nation's dominant narratives.[8] This study, however, centres on how literary texts are stagings of forced migration and

uses a broader definition of the speculative, identifying texts that employ a range of speculative fiction genres and defamiliarising modes of writing to render and reimagine the liminal spaces of forced migration.

In some narratives, such as Nadhir al-Zuʿbi's 2016 novel *Yuru* (Euro), which is discussed in the conclusion, the entire narrative is fantasy as it writes mobility from the perspective of a conscious Euro coin that crossed borders and forms new coin communities at the hands of humans. In other stories, realism and the fantastic alternate, and in some, elements of science fiction enter narratives unexpectedly. Several texts discussed in this book use metaphors of the wild and the wilderness both to imagine alternate forms of hospitality and to evoke spaces that are outside of citizenship. Settings such as forests, the Arctic space in Ahmad's aforementioned story, and different imaginings of wilderness as well as narratives that include animals that can cross borders with fewer restrictions invite imaginings of the pre-political (or perhaps post-political) and extend an invitation to see borders and citizenship in nonhabitual ways. By focusing on a range of nonrealist modes of writing liminal and unaccounted-for spaces, *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe* highlights the capacity of literature to conjure the 'outside' of citizenship, the spaces between citizenships, and states of existing *on* the border, states that are being produced for more and more people even as our frameworks for citizenship are often unable to account for them.

This variety of genres notwithstanding, I draw on Darko Suvin's broad understanding of science fiction as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement' to think through the role of the speculative in contemporary Arabic migration literature (even if its speculative qualities do not necessarily fall squarely under the genre of science fiction). Suvin's clear distinction between science fiction versus genres such as fantasy and the fairy tale in European literatures does not accurately reflect Arabic literary debates or those of other non-European literatures. As many have noted,[9] the classifications of different speculative fictions emerge out of particular European and Western histories that respond to advancements in science, notions of progress, as well as colonial expansion and domination.

Nonetheless, by placing cognitive estrangement (in Suvin's analysis, 'cognitive' stands for science or ways of knowing and 'estrangement' for

fiction) at the centre of the selection and analysis of texts, I emphasise the ways that literature offers a space for thinking migration, borders and citizenship *differently*. Suvin writes that science fiction differs from fantasy because it is

> simultaneously perceived as *not impossible* within the cognitive (cosmological and anthropological) norms of the author's epoch. Basically, science fiction is a developed oxymoron, a realistic irreality, with humanized nonhumans, this-worldly Other Worlds, and so forth. Which means that it is – potentially – the space of potent *estrangement*, validated by the pathos and prestige of the basic cognitive norms of our times.[10]

The literary narratives of migration analysed in this book are immersed in the major questions and debates surrounding citizenship and migration of our time even as they elaborate on parallel worlds with and against current understandings of borders, one of the central 'cognitive norms of our time'. Literary texts have the capacity to transport us from the social structures, modes of belonging, and frameworks for understanding mobility and displacement that are often taken as givens or inevitable. Through defamiliarisation, they create spaces for imagining citizenship and migration in ways that can be dystopian, playful or mournful – powerful precisely because they are nonhabitual and invite us to imagine belonging differently. These nonrealist modes of writing, the book argues, open up productive ways of engaging with encounters with borders and with space and citizenship in their external and internal constitutive exclusions.

While the 'speculative' in speculative fiction refers to genres of fiction where narrative is unbound from the constraints of existing social structures or the scientific understandings of the world, the act of speculating or opening up inquiry into what might be otherwise is also inherent to its meaning. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's distinction between 'space' and 'place' is useful for thinking about the relationship between speculation and belonging, especially in relation to literary narratives of migration. Tuan famously theorised place as geographical location endowed with meaning, familiarity and established significance, and space as geographical location that has yet to be endowed with meaning and whose affective resonances range from freedom to fear. His assertion 'Place is security,

place is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other',[11] in his 1977 *Place and Place, The Perspective of Experience* points to the more circumscribed aspects of place and the more open-ended understanding of space. The unknowable dimensions of our future lives are amplified in times of mobility. In its most basic sense, migration might be understood as a speculation on a different future and calls for an exploration of space and the liminal.[12]

Of course, migration can be written through any number of literary genres and styles. My intention in this book is to explore how and why speculative modes of writing and a broad range of defamiliarising techniques are deployed in contemporary Arabic literary narratives of forced migration. One function of speculative genres is to render place, understood here as location endowed with established meaning and value, in ways that take on aspects of space, understood as a more open horizon of possibility, including the function of imagining differently and an acknowledgment of the real danger that many who migrate are exposed to. Speculative genres write outside of given conditions even as their inquiries often remain anchored in the social and political queries of their time. The narratives explored in the book defamiliarise borders as hegemonic concepts and speculate about different possible belongings. The two projects are inextricably linked. In the literary narratives explored in the chapters ahead we see the collapse of boundaries between human bodies, beings crossing between human and animal species, inversions of hierarchies between originals and translation, and new approaches to theorising national identities. In a time where borders and national identities are often dehistoricised and reified and where fixed narratives of forced migration proliferate (both from humanitarian discourses that tend to emphasise victimhood and political scripts that emphasise threat) nonrealist modes of writing migration remain anchored in real-world predicaments even as they transport readers to spaces that defamiliarise them.

The term 'forced migration' and the passive linguistic construction in Arabic – *tahjīr* – may conjure a lack of agency that is in line with the many images and discourses that represent the refugee or forced migrant as a passive victim. In line with Peter Nyers's *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency*, this book considers instead the creative ways that

people are actively theorising conditions that emerge from contemporary forms of mobility and displacement and how these are central to questions about what it means to be human in a rapidly globalising system. In his poem 'The Sweetness of Being a Refugee', Agustin Nsanzinesa Gus exposes the many contradictions and tensions simmering withing the idea of the 'refugee' as a definable category.

> … a refugee is a citizenshipless citizen
> A heartless human being
> A consciousless conscience
> An unbearable burden
> A society dirty and toy
> A spier and a spoiler
> And what not …
>
> We all belong to the family of Humans
> Did I say humans?
> No, sorry
> The world of potential refugees
> Or better than that
> The world of refugees to be[13]

Far from the discourses of 'burden' and 'consciousless conscience' that Gus's words challenge, new literary forms and themes are being forged to contemplate what displacement and mobility can mean in the twenty-first century, which has both been a time of increased displacement and mobility and a period of intensified policing of borders and national identities.

There is some understandable resistance to the idea of refugee literature existing as a genre or a generalisable category, perhaps in the field of Arabic literature in particular. This reluctance, which will be discussed further in the chapters of this book, can be traced to the way that stories of forced migration circulate in the news media and the way that publishers and other cultural actors often market and frame literary narratives that stage forced migration of various kinds. Migration studies scholar Elana Fiddian-Qasmieh, leading the project Refugee Hosts: Local Community Experiences of Displacement from Syria: Views from Lebanon, Jordan

and Turkey summarises three key tendencies in the representation of refugees. These include:

1. The persistent tendency of representing refugees as suffering victims and passive recipients of aid and the related tendency of the singling out of individual refugees as truly exceptional and worthy of aid.
2. The idea that international organisations as well as more economically privileged citizens and states are always the main providers of aid and support to refugee communities, thus obscuring the ways that displaced people support each other and how many people who become refugees have previous experiences with hosting or supporting displaced individuals and families.
3. The idea that the arrival of refugees in an area will inevitably lead to tensions and conflict.[14]

Pervasive narratives such as these simplify and flatten lives and agency of refugees and other migrants and, I believe, underly the resistance to thinking about some of the shared features and creative modes of writing about forced migration in Arabic literature. While there is sometimes a tension between presentation of Arabic migration literature as 'timely' or a humanising element amidst hostility to migrants and refugees, in particular for narratives published in European languages and translations, as a whole the narratives explored here are far from reducible to dominant narratives such as these. That said, many narratives do engage in a type of 'writing back' practice, reshaping and responding to implicit assumptions through literary means. Chapter 1 discusses in detail how expanding the scope of exile literature to encompass forced migration narratives requires a transition from the models of modernist exile literature and cultural encounter frameworks that were dominant in the twentieth century and makes a case for putting the literature in dialogue with critical border studies frameworks.

While this book emphasises new ways of writing migration many of its central queries have been posed for a long time by those who have theorised forced migration on a large scale. Hannah Arendt noted in her important 1943 essay 'We Refugees', 'A man who wants to lose his self

discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as is creation.'[15] Writing as the modern notion of the refugee was being formulated, Arendt suggested that those who have lived statelessness understand the constructed nature of citizenship and experience a condition that is both painful and generative of creativity. *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe* takes Arendt's insight as a starting point for thinking about the link between literary stagings of these outside and in-between spaces to narrative modes that suggest new possibilities or the not yet possible.

Even though we live in a period of rapid globalisation, mobility and displacement, an 'Age of Migration',[16] rights continue to exist within the framework of the nation state and citizenship, spaces that largely remain unaccounted for when it comes to legal frameworks, rights and belonging. *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe* considers how questions about subjectivity born in contexts of forced migration become the subject of literary practices and how these literary practices reimagine both citizenships and subjectivities. My understanding of subjectivity is shaped by cultural studies approaches that see literature as both embedded in and irreducible to cultural and political contexts. Subjectivity encompasses both the recognition that humans are constructed by/subjected to material, linguistic and discursive forces that are beyond the self and place us in particular positions, on the one hand, and the idea that people are able to creatively articulate and reimagine these subject positions, on the other.

A few disclaimers are worth noting. By focusing on subjectivities, I do not mean that I am reading literature as a window into particular individual and collective psyches. The literary narratives discussed in this book are not memoirs, nor do they purport to document migration or necessarily reflect the author's personal experience of forced migration; rather, they engage ways of being and encountering borders that are becoming increasingly common experiences among people who are mobile and displaced. Though the book invokes rather broad categories of analysis such as 'Arabic literature', 'Europe' and 'citizenship', it carefully unpacks the inherent complexities and regional and conceptual differences within each. Rather, its broad comparative approach aims to highlight shared concerns and themes that are emerging in contemporary Arabic literary narratives of migration and how they imagine citizenship and its outside.

While the scope of the book is broad, it is not a comprehensive survey of the vast number of contemporary Arabic literary narratives that engage notions of migration, diaspora and displacement. Such a survey would include myriad genres, themes and literary approaches that are not in the purview of this study. And more importantly, a survey approach would preclude the close readings that are at the centre of this book. Rather than aiming to be comprehensive, I have selected literary narratives that in my view explore borders, citizenship and migration in innovative ways and present shared themes and approaches that represent both a continuation and transformation of previous genres and modes of writing migration to Europe in modern Arabic literature.

Chapter Outlines

In Arabic literature of forced or precarious migration to Europe we see a variety of narrative and thematic approaches to writing citizenship, rendering the spaces that lie outside of it and staging the liminality of the border. We also enter into the aesthetics and politics of writing Arab diasporas in Europe that are relatively recent, where the meanings of exile are being remade through the dynamics and questions of forced migration. Each chapter of the book analyses a particular approach and context and contributes to a sense of how Arabic literary narratives are reshaping the meaning of exile literature. The different modes of defamiliarisation explored in each chapter invite a de-identification with current border practices and regimes on the one hand and mark a departure from both twentieth-century Arabic exile literature and expectations of refugee literature, on the other. Indeed, while the liberating aspects of losing the self or exploring transindividual being are present, the narratives are often haunted by the violence that is constitutive of border-building practices, especially in the spaces outside citizenship.

The introduction, 'Speculative Belongings in Contemporary Arabic Migration Literature', introduces the major themes, settings and modes of writing migration that will be discussed in this book. It shows that the rise of different forms of creative defamiliarisation in Arabic migration literature, including but not limited to speculative genres such as fantasy and science fiction, serves to unsettle received understandings of borders and

citizenship. On the one hand, this trend represents a subversion of expectations that literature of forced migration, often billed as a 'timely' literature, should be read through an ethnographic or autobiographical lens. The introduction makes a case for a broad understanding of defamiliarisation and speculative fiction, one that goes beyond any one particular genre (and the more general idea of defamiliarisation as a central feature of poetic language) to examine a wide range of approaches to writing precarious and forced migration. The introduction argues that these modes of writing have become an important feature of migration literature because they aim to transport us from the many social structures, modes of belonging, and frameworks for understanding mobility and displacement that are often taken as givens or inevitable, but also create the condition for violence in borderlands. Such defamiliarisation and speculation create spaces for imagining citizenship and migration in ways that can be dystopian, playful or mournful – powerful precisely because they are nonhabitual and because they invite us to imagine belonging differently. The nonrealist modes of writing that we see in some migration literature, the introduction argues, open up productive ways of engaging with encounters with borders and with space and citizenship in their external and internal constitutive exclusions.

Chapter 1, 'Shifting Frameworks for Studying Contemporary Arabic Literature of Migration to Europe: A Case for Border Studies', discusses literary and critical frameworks for understanding the emergence of a corpus of Arabic literary narratives that stage the experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and others who find themselves outside of normative citizenship. In this twenty-first-century Arabic literature of migration, earlier modernist and postcolonial discourses on exile and migration are giving way to writings that grapple with subjectivities born of mass migration and the encounter with borders and borderlands. This chapter includes a historical overview of some of the themes and frameworks of twentieth-century Arabic travel and migration literature and its critical frameworks and a discussion of how contemporary literature both continues and departs from its literary predecessors. This chapter connects the questions of the speculative explored in the book's introduction to borderland and migration studies. It suggests that the most urgent antihegemonic critiques

in contemporary migration literature pertain to borders, citizenship and belonging within the kinds of precarity created in contemporary contexts of migration. I make a case for reading recent Arabic literature of forced or precarious migration in dialogue with contemporary border studies, where we find multiple approaches to querying borders and borderlands: as barriers that uphold global inequalities, sites of transformations and as liminal spaces from which meanings can be reimagined. The close readings in the chapters that follow draw on the idea that borders are what Etienne Balibar calls 'transindividual' spaces where individual and communal relationships to the world are negotiated. Literature offers what Tarek el-Ariss has called a 'stage of confrontation' that exposes ideologies of belonging, in this case from the vantage point of precarity and in the encounter with borders, borderlands and new diasporas. Indeed, the kinds of creative rethinking of borders and borderlands that we see in the literature itself offer an invitation to imagine the very foundations of mobility and community differently.

Chapter 2, 'Harraga: Mediterranean Crossings in Arabic Migration Literature', argues that the emergence of North African harraga literature in the early 1990s was a harbinger of the broader shifts in Arabic literary narratives on migration to Europe explored in this book. The chapter analyses two novels by Moroccan authors, Mahi Binebine's Cannibales (Welcome to Paradise) (1999) and Youssef Fadel's Hashish (2000) and Eritrean novelist Abu Bakr Khaal's Taytanikat Ifriqiyya (African Titanics) (2008) and outlines the contours of a veritable literary genre staging Mediterranean crossings. To this end, in addition to the novels it focuses on (selected because they engage with the fantastic and with myth), it also covers the plot structure and themes in novels that had broad international circulation, Partir (Leaving Tangiers) (2006) by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Les Clandestins (The Clandestines) (2000) and Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits (2005) by Laila Lalami. On the one hand, these novels testify to the painful human toll of deaths in what Hakim Abderezzak has termed the 'seametery'[17] of the Mediterranean, that is, to the fact there are 'grievable lives'[18] behind anonymous statistics. In the novels that the chapter analyses closely, the liminal spaces outside citizenship that the characters enter align with storytelling and nonrealist literary modes. Welcome to

Paradise and *Hashish* evoke these spaces through tropes of wildness, such as nightmares of cannibalism, devouring seas and other forms of violence to migrants' bodies. In *African Titanics,* the *jurthuma*, or migration 'bug' that the narrator diagnoses as source of migration, intertextually conjures one of the central metaphors in Tayeb Salih's 1966 *Season of Migration to the North*, where the germ of colonialism and contact continues to resurrect cycles of violence. The main narrator, Abdar, initially posits that storytelling and literature can cure those affected/infected by the 'bug', but the role of literature in the novel gradually shifts to grieving, memorialising and mythologising lost lives. The three narratives thus call attention to different functions of storytelling and defamiliarise dominant narratives on undocumented Mediterranean migration.

Chapter 3, 'The Subversion of Borders and "Nightmare Realism" in Iraqi Migration Literature', probes the idea of 'nightmare realism', a term coined by Finland-based Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim to speak of the dystopian (ir)reality of his writing. Blasim's short stories, which are widely circulated and translated, have become emblematic of Arabic migration literature in Europe. This chapter links Blasim's approach to writing migration to a broader trend in Arabic literature that, like Blasim's stories, explores interconnectivity and porousness of the human body and other animate beings within contexts of violence. It reads Hassan Blasim's literary narratives of undocumented migration in his short story collections *Majnun Sahat al-Huriyya* (*The Madman of Freedom Square*) (2009) and *Al-Masih al-ʿIraqi* (*The Iraqi Christ*) (2013) and his play *Luʿbat al-Qubbʿat al-Raqamiyya* (*The Digital Hats Game*) (2015) with other recent Iraqi literary works that stage violence and war through nightmares, horror and the Gothic. Blasim's texts often link the hacking and irregular crossing of national borders with themes such as networked connectivity, parasitic relationships that challenge the integrity of the individual, and the breaking down of boundaries between what is human and nonhuman. Blasim's migration narratives imagine more porous ways of conceiving of ourselves and of community. The utopian ideal of opening up borders is continuously haunted by an undoing of the borders of the individual and community, a theme that connects Blasim's fiction of migration dystopian (and nightmarish) literary renderings of war in Iraq.

Chapter 4, 'Mistranslation and the Subversion of the Citizen–Migrant Binary', foregrounds how themes of failed translation and mistranslation in literary narratives of forced migration are used to defamiliarise, subvert and reroute discourses of authenticity, both in relation to the notion of the Arab exile writer and the notion of the citizen in twenty-first-century Europe. It analyses Hawra al-Nadawi's 2010 novel, *Tahta Samaʾ Kubinhaghin* (Under the Copenhagen Sky), a coming-of-age story of a young Iraqi-Danish woman, along with Abbas Khider's 2008 German-language novel *Der falsche Inder* ('The counterfeit Indian', published in English as *The Village Indian*) and Jonas Hassen Khemiri's Swedish-language play *Invasion!*. Al-Nadawi's novel is written in Arabic; however, the protagonist, Huda, writes her story through an Iraqi translator who, she hopes, can transform her Danish narrative into an Arabic novel and thus transform her image of an Arabic exile writer. The eventual failure of both the project and her attempt to reposition herself as an authentic exile writer challenges the gendered hierarchies that translation theorists have argued govern the relationship between 'original' and 'translation' and forces her to rethink hierarchies underpinning her desire to transform herself from migrant to exile, on the one hand, and the notions of authenticity in ethnic-based nationalisms, on the other. The chapter compares the collapse of the translation project in al-Nadawi's Arabic-language novel to the theme of mistranslation and counterfeit identities in the novel *Der falsche Inder* and the play *Invasion!*. Here too, mistranslation is linked to an undoing of discourses of authenticity, but the target in these texts is instead media discourses that would seek to make the figure of the male migrant both generalisable and *other*. This comparative analysis demonstrates that the theme of failed translations and mistranslations cross linguistic boundaries but serve to defamiliarise categories of belonging that rely on authenticity across different genders, genres and audiences.

Chapter 5, 'Writing Against "Crisis": Defamiliarising the Refugee Narrative in Arabic Literature and Theatre in Berlin', discusses the emergent Arabic literary, theatre and arts scene in Berlin shaped by the arrival of over one million Syrians in 2015–6. It analyses several of Rasha Abbas's short stories and Ziad Adwan's play *Please, Repeat After Me*, texts and performances that are defamiliarising migration in ways

that create generative openings for transformative reflection. In Rasha Abbas's 2016 collection, *Kayfa Tamma Ikhtira' al-Lugha al-Almaniyya*[19] (The Invention of the German Language) a newly arrived refugee grapples with the German language and Berlin hipster culture through parody and situational comedy. Many of the short stories in Abbas's 2018 collection, *Mulakhkhas Ma Jara* ('A summary of what happened' or, as in a forthcoming English translation by Alice Guthrie, 'The Gist of It')[20] render the Syrian war and migratory contexts through speculative modes of writing and altered states of consciousness. Both collections unsettle the discourses and vocabulary of contemporary forced migration, especially those that relay a prescriptive message or reproduce a discourse of 'crisis'. Ziad Adwan's experimental play, *Please, Repeat After Me* (performed in 2018 and 2019), explores the impact of performing mistakes on the power dynamic between audience and performers, especially when the actors are presumed to be Syrian refugees. The play confronts notions of authenticity and testimony and creates a space of productive discomfort and confusion that invites audience members to ask themselves what they are asking of the play. Both Abbas's short stories and Adwan's play creatively theorise exile created by forced migration yet ask how to reframe both categories. In their work, analysed in conjunction with examples from the emergent Arabic literary, theatre and arts scene in Berlin, we find a deep probing of subjectivity and choice that invites reader and audience members into the fashioning of new, perhaps yet unformulated, responses and imaginings of the meanings of mobility.

Chapter 6 is titled 'Decentring the Metropole: Forced Migration Literature in London and Paris'. While *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe* has foregrounded literary texts from more recent Arab diasporas, this chapter highlights forced migration literature in the historical centres of Arabic literature in Europe, namely Paris and London, and their attendant national spaces. Although as a whole, the literary geography of Arabic forced migration literature decentres these metropoles, they continue to be home to important publishing houses, institutions, established Arab diasporas born of colonial histories, and prominent writers, all of which are contributing to the shifts in the politics and aesthetics of Arabic migration literature discussed in this book. In the section on Paris, I briefly discuss

representation of clandestine space in the 2006 novel *La géographie du danger* (The Geography of Danger) by Algerian writer Hamed Skif. I then turn to the prominent Paris-based authors Samar Yazbek and Hoda Barakat and how their most recent novels stage mobility and forced migration. The central character of Yazbek's 2017 novel *Al-Mashaʾa* (She Who Walks) is a potent metaphor of the constraints and forced mobility created. The novel, which takes place in the Syrian civil war, relates the tale of a girl whose legs are shackled because they strangely refuse to stop walking. Hoda Barakat's IPAF-winning epistolary novel *Barid al-Layl* (*Voices of the Lost* 2018) explores different effects of migration and displacement, each character a migrant, refugee or expatriate. The chapter then turns to recent literary narratives of migration in London and in England more broadly. While there are numerous well-known Arabic diasporic novels from the early 2000s (for example, Hanan al-Shaykh's *Innaha London ya Azizi* (*Only in London*) (2000) and Haifa Zangana's *Nisaʾ ʿala Safar* (*Women on a Journey*) (2001)), there is also a more recent thriving literature and theatre scene that is integrally connected to the themes of the book, from the staging of plays (such as the adaptation of Hassan Blasim's story 'The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes' by Rashid Razaq) to the hosting of prominent film and literary festivals showcasing forced migration themes and the publishing of Arabic speculative fiction in translation (for example, the future writing collections published by Manchester-based Comma Press *Palestine + 100* and *Iraq + 100*). This final chapter revisits the questions raised in Chapter 1, which argued that the most urgent antihegemonic critiques in contemporary migration literature pertain to borders, citizenship and belonging and shows a number of ways in which traditional literary centres in Europe participate in such an inquiry and how they belong to a broad, highly connected and varied Arabic-European literary space.

The book's conclusion, 'Imagining Mobility', reflects on how the varied approaches to writing forced or precarious migration explored in each chapter constitute a new kind of Arabic exile writing. As a final gesture in this direction, the conclusion discusses Syrian writer Nadhir Zuʿbi's 2016 *Yuru* (Euro), a fantasy novel told from the vantage point of a Greek Euro coin which travels to Europe on the whims of commerce,

theft, collecting and chance. Though the coin can cross many borders without losing value or relevance, it deeply regrets its lack of agency over its mobility. Among the literary narratives discussed in the book, *Yuru* may go the furthest in its departure from literary realism. Nevertheless, it is part of a broad inquiry into how literature can imagine migration through themes and vantage points that are variously constituted as 'outside' in relation to our citizenship frameworks (translation, the animal, the forest, the database, capital, etc.).

Emphasising similarities across different contexts and modes of writing, the conclusion stresses a sustained literary engagement over the past two decades with the questions and contexts of forced or precarious migration that are so ubiquitous in our era. Different contexts notwithstanding, each chapter of the book probes how twenty-first-century Arabic literature of forced or precarious migration departs from twentieth-century modes of writing exile in Arabic literature by making the refugee, the asylum seeker and the undocumented migrant its central figures. Moving beyond the binaries of East versus West and that of the exile as a privileged yet pained voice of their time versus the refugee as the subject of large-scale politics and forces, the writing in these Arabic literary texts insists on the capacity of literature and art to create spaces where dominant understandings of borders and citizenship (and mobility across them) can be reconsidered from novel angles. The speculative and defamiliarising modes of writing discussed throughout the book do just this and furthermore, add to an ongoing discussion about genres of speculative writing in contemporary Arabic fiction more broadly.

Notes

1. Ahmed was one of the pioneers of the very short story in 1970s Iraq. Like several other Iraqi writers who came to Sweden in the early 1990s, he had previously lived in exile in the Eastern Bloc. Arriving from Hungary, he began publishing short stories that merged a style based on fantasy and dark humour with migration themes. The translation cited here is from Ibrahim Ahmad, 'The Arctic Refugee', in Shakir Mustafa (ed. and trans.), *Contemporary Iraqi Fiction: An Anthology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008). The implicit back story to the narrator's impossible situation is

the early efforts to harmonise EU migration policy. Specifically, the Dublin Convention, which was first penned in 1991, stipulates that asylum seekers must apply for asylum in the EU country of first entry.

2. Ibrahim Ahmed, *Baʿd Majiʾ al-Tayr: Qisas min al-Manfa* (Budapest: Sahari, 1994).

3. Ahmad, 'The Arctic', 192. In *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe*, unless otherwise noted, I cite from published English translations, when available. If the work has not been translated, the translations are my own.

4. Ahmad, 'The Arctic', 194.

5. Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Device', trans. Benjamin Sher, in Viktor Shklovsky, *The Theory of Prose* (Bloomington: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991).

6. Berthold Brecht, 'On Chinese Acting', trans. Eric Bentley, *The Tulane Drama Review* 6, no. 1 (September 1961): 130–6.

7. See Adrian Wanner, 'Moving Beyond the Russian-American Ghetto: The Fiction of Keith Gessen and Michael Idov', *Russian Review* 73, no. 2 (April 2014): 281–96, and Margaret Litvin and Johanna Sellman, 'An Icy Heaven: Arab Migration on Nordic Stages', *Theatre Research International* 34, no. 1 (2018): 45–62.

8. Alexandra Chreiteh, 'Fantastic Cohabitations: Magical Realism in Arabic and Hebrew and the Politics of Aesthetics', PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2016.

9. For example, Mona Kareem, 'To Translate Octavia Butler: Race, History, and Sci-Fi', Online Lecture, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, 7 December 2020.

10. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), viii.

11. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place and Place, The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3.

12. Here speculation includes the idea of a risk-taking venture, though not necessarily conceived in terms of capital.

13. Augustin Nsanzinesa Gus, 'The Sweetness of Being a Refugee', cited in Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 65.

14. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Disrupting Humanitarian Narratives: Reflections from the Refugee Hosts Project', paper presented at *Refugee Hosts International Conference: Without Execution – the Politics and Poetics of Local Responses to Displacement*, University College London, 24–5 October

2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XflyWu7kVqs&feature=emb_ logo (accessed 29 November 2020).

15. Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in Marc Robinson (ed.), *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile* (Winchester: Faber and Faber, 1994), 117.

16. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 4th ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

17. Hakim Abderrezak, 'The Refugee Crisis and the Mediterranean "Seamentary"', Lecture at Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 2 November 2018.

18. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (New York: Verso Books, 2010).

19. Rasha Abbas, *Kayfa Tamma Ikhtiraʾ al-Lugha al-Almaniyya* (Beirut: Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2016).

20. Rasha Abbas, *Mulakhkhas Ma Jara* (Milan: Manshurat al-Mutawassit, 2018).