

**CRIME FICTION AS A LENS FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE
IN THE MODERN ARAB WORLD: ELIAS KHOURY'S *WHITE MASKS*
AND YASMINA KHADRA'S *MORITURI***

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Dedicated to Lizzie and Julia

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that *Morituri* by Yasmina Khadra and *White Masks* by Elias Khoury use the genre of the detective novel as a pretext for social and political critique of Algeria and Lebanon respectively. This thesis links the generic (crime fiction) and the conceptual (Political and Social Critique in Modern Arab World). While the detective novel is traditionally thought of as a non-academic, entertaining part of popular culture, the use of the genre to critique the failure of nation building after colonization elevates the genre and transforms it from mere entertainment to a more serious genre. Both novels are emblematic of a shift in the use of the detective and crime novel to address the political disarray in their respective states and the Arab world as a whole. As modern examples of detective novels in the modern Arab world, *Morituri* and *White Masks* transform the genre through their complex interweaving of aspects of the popular genre of detective fiction with the more serious political novel. The historical and political context of both countries at the time of the novels' settings are an intrinsic part of understanding the crimes and the obfuscation of the perpetrator. In both of these novels, the technical and generic aspects are connected to the thematic, and the detective novel structure is not just there for suspense and entertainment. Instead, this structure points to the neocolonial system, benefitting the most powerful and the most affluent at the expense of the weak, poor, and disadvantaged.

INTRODUCTION

Crime fiction as a genre encompasses a wide range of subgenres and topics. In a Western context, novels categorized as crime fiction are sometimes called detective stories, mysteries, police procedurals, whodunits, or in a French context, *polars*, *romans policiers*, or *littérature de gare*. All of these terms are used interchangeably but are sometimes used to differentiate and emphasize different aspects of the form and content of novels dealing with crime and mystery. Even though “crime fiction” is often used as an umbrella category, it is possible for a crime novel to not necessarily be a “detective story.” For example, Leila Slimani’s 2016 novel *Chanson Douce* could be considered a crime novel, but because of the specifics of the plot, which involves a murder but not a detective or an investigation into who committed the murder, *Chanson Douce* is not a detective story. At first, one might have the impression that *Chanson Douce* is a detective novel because it shares many of the characteristics of a detective novel, including a tragic murder, a culprit, and a feeling of suspense. This feeling of suspense often comes from the mystery of the identity of the perpetrator, but in *Chanson Douce*, the perpetrator is revealed from the very beginning of the novel. Instead, this suspense comes from the question of why the perpetrator carried out her crimes. Regardless of the sources of suspense, we live in a society where we accept the law, and the detective story is an escape from reality (Symons 15). According to Freud, the detective story is rooted in the “primordial scene” of early childhood: murder represents a sexual act between parents and the victim is the parent (Symons 14). The reader of a detective novel rediscovers an innocence reminiscent of the innocence of Mila and Adam in *Chanson Douce* (Symons 15). While Mila and Adam are reminders of this innocence, the primary difference between *Chanson Douce* and most detective stories, besides the lack of detective character, is that even though we know who the murderer is, there is no sense of the restoration of order or that

society can return to normal. Because of the choice of focus, the lines between victim and perpetrator are blurred, and the reader feels an uneasy sense of sympathy for the perpetrator, suggesting that the real perpetrator is not wholly to blame: there are larger societal factors at play.

In addition, an important aspect of detective novels is that they tend to attract those with a lifestyle and social position to preserve, because at the end of the story the detective always brings society back to normal and the criminal is punished. The traditional detective novel always has a “good guy” and a “bad guy” - even if the detective breaks the rules a bit, it's always in the name of solving the crime, and despite minor offenses of protocol, he has a code of ethics. This escape for the reader, where the detective uses logic and deduction to bring the world to order is what gives readers solace and satisfaction and is part of what makes detective fiction so popular. Additionally, most detective stories have no explicit violence: there is no graphic description of blood; if the detective solves a murder, the body is discovered after the fact and the victim's character is usually not very developed. There are exceptions to this, but most detective stories focus on the investigation of the crime.

Another important aspect of the detective novel is that the genre is almost always associated with Western popular fiction. The detective novel was intrinsically part of American literature because of the American Revolution, according to Joseph Scott Walker, author of “Committing Fiction: Crime as a Cultural Symptom in Contemporary American Literature and Film” (3). While this article deals with the subject of crime in American literature, it can apply to French literature as well, especially because France had an even bloodier revolution. The French version of crime fiction is described in much the same way as the English version. Walker says that modern literature explains crime as a rupture in society, since crime does not happen outside of society: “... through crime, the individual may rediscover the primal, true self that precedes

social indoctrination and remains uncorrupted,” and this is true even for horrific crimes, such as murder (Walker 4) . In other words, criminal characters are free from social constraints, following the desires of the id, to use Freud's term for instinctive drives. Walker goes on to say that, “Crime increasingly cannot be understood or even narrated from the point of view of the individual or seen as empowering and uncovering the self: it must now be repressed within the context of larger cultural structures that produce and authorize it as an expression of underlying conflicts and problems” (Walker 9). For this reason, instead of focusing on the detective, crime fiction focuses on the criminal and those affected by the crime in order to understand the larger cultural structures that lead to crime (Symons 174). In *Chanson Douce*, for example, a large part of the novel takes place in Myriam's world. Myriam is the mother of the victims; a traditional detective story would not focus at all on the victim's family members, if it even mentioned them at all. Traditional detective stories focus on getting society back to normal, while modern detective stories such as *Chanson Douce* use crime to interrogate society (i.e. why the criminal behaves the way they do) (Symons 175). In general, this idea of normality in traditional detective novels reinforces a very conservative view of society.

Detective fiction, no matter what language it is written in, is usually viewed as a non-canonical, non-academic, and overall less serious genre compared to the canonical genres like classic novels, poetry, or drama. Detective fiction is usually seen as a less serious genre or part of popular culture because of its association with entertainment and pleasure: it is something that you can read while relaxing at the beach. The sense of pleasure that is associated with reading classic detective fiction, like the novels of Agatha Christie or Arthur Conan Doyle comes from the satisfaction of the discovery of the murderer and/or the solving of the mystery. However, an equally significant aspect of detective or crime fiction, whether in an English or French context,

is that it has the concept of the restoration of the social order at its core. These two aspects together, the satisfaction of discovering the culprit or the solving of the crime, and the restoration of the social order are linked, and thus reinforce social conformity in a way that reduces the possibility for nuance in the plot of the detective story: the criminal is always condemned as evil because of his transgression, and the detective that restores the social order, represents goodness and morality in his triumphant discovery of the criminal's transgression.

In contrast to the traditional Western detective story, although they both have the concept of the restoration of the social order at their core, Arabic detective stories began much earlier and have an important thematic difference. The earliest model of the detective tale in an Arabic context is "The Story of the Young Man and the Three Apples" in *Arabian Night Tales of 1001 Nights* (Arabian Nights 1:21-27).¹ Modern non-canonical Arabic detective fiction as we think of it today began in the early 20th century, mainly in Egypt (Bawardi et al 23). Basilius Bawardi and Ali Faranesh argue in "Non-canonical Arabic Detective Fiction: The Beginnings of the Genre" that the first Arabic encounter with detective fiction as a genre began with translations from Western detective stories, including translations of other "low culture" genres of literature, such as science fiction (25). The most significant of these translations were the French adventures of Arsène Lupin, as well as translation of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novels and Agatha Christie's detective novels (Bawardi et al 25). In addition to these translations, original Arabic detective stories began to develop, which according to Bawardi and Faranesh began with children's versions of this genre, like *Detective Stories for Children (Qışaş Būlīsīyya)*, where "the title always began with: The Mystery of... (Lughz...)" and the stories were numbered as part of series (28).

¹ This is contained within "The story of Harun al-Rashid and the Fisherman's Chest," Nights 19-24, *Arabian Nights*, 1: 121-73.

In “Wanted: National Algerian Identity,” Beate Burtscher-Bechter traces the development of the genre in Algeria from spy novels of the 1970s, which closely modelled the ideal Algerian national identity propagated by the government, to Khadra’s Inspector Llob series, of which *Morituri* is the first novel to appear under the pseudonym of Yasmina Khadra.² Another area of modern original Arabic detective fiction was a series of individual detective stories and other publications in “low-brow” genres like science fiction and adventure stories, which were published in Egypt in the 1980s by Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya alḤadītha (The Modern Arabic Institute) (Bawardi et al 30). Many of these stories blurred the lines between detective fiction and other “low-brow” genres.

As modern examples of detective novels in the modern Arab world, *Morituri* and *White Masks* transform the genre through their complex interweaving of aspects of the popular genre of detective fiction with the more serious political novel. The historical and political context of both countries at the time of the novels’ settings are an intrinsic part of understanding the crimes and the obfuscation of the perpetrator. In both of these novels, the technical and generic aspects are connected to the thematic, and the detective novel structure is not just there for suspense and entertainment. Instead, this structure points to the neocolonial system, benefitting the most powerful and the most affluent at the expense of the weak, poor, and disadvantaged. This thesis will argue this in three parts: first, through the background and history of the two countries, which share a remarkably similar history, especially because both were colonized by the Ottomans and the French and experienced civil war; second, through an analysis of the violence

2 There are a total of six Commissaire Llob novels. The first two appeared in Algeria under the pseudonym “Commissaire Llob”: *Le Dingue au bistouri* (1990) and *La Foire des enfoirés* (1993) (Burtscher-Bechter, Algerien 202-03). The first of these was reprinted in Paris in 1999 under the authorship of Yasmina Khadra, as were the other four were published in Paris: *Morituri* (1997); *Double blanc* (1997); *L’Automne des chimères* (1998); and a prequel, *La part du mort* (2005). Four of the novels are available in English: *Morituri*, trans. David Herman, and three translated by Aubrey Botsford, *Double Blank*, *Autumn of the Phantoms*, and *Dead Man’s Share*.

and trauma experienced by the characters in both novels, and finally through an analysis of how the genre of the detective novel is used to critique the failed project of nation building in Algeria and Lebanon.

CHAPTER 1. ALGERIA AND LEBANON: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

1.1 Colonial Legacies in Modern Algeria

By the sixteenth century, both Algeria and Lebanon were colonized by the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, both countries were colonized by the French, and although both countries are now officially independent from France, the legacy of colonization affects every aspect of these nations. However, even though the Ottoman Empire colonized both countries for a longer period than the French, the legacy of French colonization has had more of a lasting effect on Algerian culture and society. The French colonization of Algeria began in 1830 on a pretext involving the Dey of Algiers calling the French consul “a wicked, faithless, idol-worshipping rascal” (qtd. in Horne 29). Although the French used this incident as an excuse for invasion, the truth is that one insult was not the entire motivation for the invasion. The causes of these hostilities are more complex, and the unfortunate result is that the ensuing invasion and capture of the country involved a bloody and violent war, which caused the death of 825,000 Algerians (Kiernan 374).

However, before one can discuss the implications of the French invasion of Algeria, one must understand the concept of Algeria that existed before 1830. As John Ruedy explains, the notion of a nation-state is a relatively modern one (1). Before the nation-state, defined as “the political expression of a single or a dominant and relatively homogenous ethnic group,” groups of people, both in Algeria and elsewhere, were divided in a much less formal way into communities based on geography, ethnicity, religion, and class (Ruedy 1). Additionally, establishing a national identity was especially difficult in this region because the land that is now Algeria was “little more than a corridor for successive conquerors and known little but turbulence over many previous

centuries,” including the Romans, the Vandals, the Spaniards, and many other groups (Horne 29). The result was that there was no real concept of Algeria, at least in the same way the countries exist today, and instead people identified with smaller communities. Despite the absence of a concept of Algeria as a nation-state in the way that we think of it now, Algeria was still somewhat developed, especially in the area of education. According to Nevill Barbour, in *A Survey of North West Africa: The Maghrib*: “all Algerians know how to read and to write. There were two schools in each village” (Barbour qtd. in Benlahcene 32). This system of education was organized with the mosque as its centerpiece, meaning that “those schools not only educated children, but they also preserved the very essential features of Islamic culture, the traditions and the identity of Algerian society (Benlahcene 33). Therefore, despite the lack of a unified nation state, and besides their identification with individual smaller communities, North Africans were also aware of their belonging to a larger group of Muslims (Ruedy 1).

The violence of invasion and colonization prevented the people of North Africa and what is now Algeria from continuing their country’s progression to becoming more of a formal nation-state, permanently altering the nation’s course of development. This progression was stilted because of the foreign influence of the Ottoman Empire and France, even though Algeria was essentially free from direct Ottoman control at the time of the French invasion (Benlahcene 31). The French foreign influence in Algeria was especially present because the French directly took control of the government and did not rule indirectly through existing native elites (Ruedy 4). This created administrative problems—for instance, in 1956, only eight of the 864 higher administrative posts were held by Muslims (Horne 34). Instead, the French utterly destroyed the political power of tribal elites, by war, legislation, and through removing the tribe’s economic base (Ruedy 4). These tactics are how the French cemented their control over the majority population, although the

Ottomans had used similar techniques when they originally pacified the indigenous peoples of the region. The native Algerians were seen as “less than” the Europeans because in the French colonialists’ view, “the natives produced no national entity in the past,” so “they need not expect participation in one in the future” (Ruedy 4).

As stated earlier, the formal reason for the French invasion, colonization, and domination of Algeria was the Dey of Algiers’ insult, but the real reason was that Algeria was an advantageous area of land for the French. This was especially true because the French Consul was insulted in 1827, and France did not invade Algeria until 1830. The reason for this lull in carrying out revenge for this insult was because Charles X of France decided to use this incident as an excuse to start the invasion (Horne 29). In truth, the invasion was a way for Charles X to draw attention away from his disastrous domestic policy, which eventually led to Louis Philippe overthrowing him and establishing “La monarchie de Juillet” (Horne 29). Ultimately, the French colonized Algeria to “appropriate the major means of production” (Ruedy 1). French colonization not only dispossessed the native Algerians from their land and sense of nationhood, but also impoverished them economically. The French saw the people of North Africa as less civilized than Europeans and used this racist viewpoint to justify their domination and control of resources that belonged to North Africa (Horne 29). For instance, although French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville saw Muslim society in North Africa as “not uncivilized” he still said that it “had a backward and imperfect civilization” (qtd. in Horne 29).

Part of this viewpoint came from clashes between Christian European ships and Barbary pirates, who were based in what is now Algeria. After Ottoman control of Algiers ended, Algiers made its living from trade and the capture of slaves and goods on the Mediterranean (Balci 13). Even the

United States became involved in this conflict, in the Second Barbary War, before the French finally invaded in 1830 and gained full control of all of Algeria by 1875. After this, many Europeans moved to Algeria, paying little attention to the consequences this had for the people who were already living there—Marshal Thomas Robert Bugeaud, the Governor General of Algeria at the time, proclaimed that, “wherever there is fresh water and fertile land, there one must locate colons, without concerning oneself to whom these lands belong” (qtd. in Horne 30). Settlers from France and elsewhere in Europe came to Algeria seeking refuge from the revolution of 1848 (Horne 32). Others came because they were peasant farmers, unemployed and unwanted elsewhere (Benlahcene 34). Eventually, these French colonists, or *pieds-noirs*, became the majority of the European population of the city of Algiers by the early 20th century and by 1955, “constituted 13 percent of the total Algerian population” (Benlahcene 34). Furthermore, the native Algerian population was not considered to be French citizens, until the Code de l’Indigénat allowed for citizenship, if and only if the native people renounced being governed by Muslim law (Benlahcene 38).³ The famous French architect Le Corbusier embodied the French view of the native Algerians when describing the difference in living standards he perceived between the “civilized” European versus the “uncivilized” African residents of Algeria, saying that “the native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs” (Celik 4).

The desire for independence from France grew after World War I, in which many Algerians fought, despite the fact that they did not have the same rights and privileges that Europeans or *pieds-noirs* had. After World War II, the Algerian nationalist movement became even more vocal.

³ However, the majority of Jews in Algeria could become French through the Crémieux Decree (1870), which was a law that granted French citizenship to the majority of the Jewish population. This meant that following Algeria’s independence, the Jews were also considered to be French, and the majority left Algeria for France (Roughi).

The National Liberation Front (FLN), founded in 1954, claimed that the native Algerian population opposed French control “from the beginning,” and Muslim Algerian intellectuals like Djamila Bouhired and Sheik Abd-al Hamid Ben Badis encouraged this sentiment (Evans et al 5). Frantz Fanon provided the intellectual justification for the violent struggle for independence, saying that continued violence was the inevitable result of the violence of colonization:

Avoir un fusil, être membre de l’Armée de Libération Nationale est la seule chance qui reste à l’Algérien de donner à son mort un sens. La vie sous la domination, depuis longtemps est vide de signification... (Fanon 9).⁴

As part of this violent rejection of French colonization, native Algerians returned to traditional cultural practices that the French had tried to stamp out, since “la domination coloniale dénature jusqu’aux relations qu’entretient le colonisé avec sa propre culture” (Fanon 118)⁵. Violent clashes between the natives and the colonists, which had always been a feature of the occupation, began to occur more often and with more casualties, such as the Sétif and Guelma massacre of 1945, in which French soldiers killed somewhere between 6,000 and 30,000 Muslims which became a catalyst for the events leading up to the Algerian war for Independence, which began in 1954 (Horne 27).

The violence of colonization did not end after the invasion and instead continued during the war for Independence, which started out with France trying to repress the revolt of native Algerians and eventually transformed into a full-blown war. Even Alexis de Tocqueville admits that, “to succeed in colonizing to any extent, it would necessarily be necessary to come to measures not

4 Translation: “Having a gun, being a member of the National Army of Liberation, is the only chance the Algerian still has of giving a meaning to his death. Life under domination has long been devoid of meaning...”

5 Translation: “Colonial domination distorts even the relations that the colonized have with his own culture”

only violent, but visibly iniquitous” (Toqueville 30). When France first invaded Algeria in 1830, and during the Algerian War of Independence in the 1960s, when the FLN finally rebelled for independence after years of colonial rule, the army massacred or deported villagers en masse; raped women and took children hostage; stole crops and livestock and destroyed orchards (Toqueville 13). The FLN was violent towards the pieds-noirs, and as Sartre said, “abattre un Européen c’est faire d’une pierre deux coups, supprimer en même temps un oppresseur et un opprimé” (Sartre qtd. in Fanon 29).⁶ France was also responsible for atrocities during the war of Independence, resorting to torture, although it is difficult to verify the extent and scale of these war crimes (Horne 196). Although torture was “expressly abolished by the French Revolution,” at least “isolated incidents” of torture occurred even before 1954 (Horne 196). As time went on, France’s occupation, military interference and rumors of torture and other atrocities made the war and France’s continued presence and control of Algeria increasingly unpopular among French citizens. It was clear that France needed either to relinquish control of Algeria and allow the people to govern themselves, or to grant the native Algerians citizenship with all the rights that someone born in mainland France would have. De Gaulle, who had entered office fully intending to keep France’s control of Algeria, ended up preferring that Algeria was independent rather than grant native Algerians full citizenship rights. He said:

Nous faisons l’intégration, si tous les Arabes et Berbères d’Algérie étaient considérés comme Français, comment les empêcherait-on de venir s’installer en métropole, alors que le niveau de

⁶ “To shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor, and the man he oppresses at the same time” (qtd. in Shatz “The Torture of Algiers” 1).

vie y est tellement plus élevé? Mon village ne s'appellerait plus Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, mais Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées ! (qtd. in Peyrefitte 66). ⁷

Ultimately, the conflict in Algeria almost caused a civil war in France and caused the end of the Fourth Republic.

After Algeria gained its Independence from France, the country did not become an idyllic paradise, free from the violent tendencies of the colonialist powers. Instead, violence continued, both in a literal sense, with terrorist attacks, bombings, assassinations, and random acts of violence, and in a metaphorical sense, with native Algerians and Berbers' identities forever changed by the colonial influence and control of the French, even after France was legally not in control of the country. The FLN wanted to restore and "recover an uncomplicated Arab-Islamic identity" (Evans et al 5). However, simply winning the war was not enough to make the Algerian identity "uncomplicated". The native cultural system in Algeria was "a blend of universal Islamic values and indigenous customs" but after colonization, "European values of individualism, secularism, liberalism, capitalism, socialism, nationalism become more valuable" (Ruedy 4). Colonization "affected all aspects of the Algerian natives' lives" and intrinsically changed the structure of society itself. Furthermore, because of the colonization of Algeria, there was essentially a "continual sequence of war between 1945 and 2002" (Rahal 118). The legacy of colonization and the upheaval that it caused in relation to nation building eventually resulted in a civil war, as well as a crisis of identity, on a national and personal level. Violence resulted from different factions at

⁷ If we integrate them, if all the Arabs and the Berbers of Algeria were considered French, how could they be prevented from settling in France, where the living standard is so much higher? My village would no longer be called Colombey-les-Deux-Églises but Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées" (Shatz "The Torture of Algiers" 1).

odds with each other, and because those in power did not want to give up any semblance of power gained through opportunistic means.

After the French were ousted from Algeria, the FLN took over the government. This did not mean that Algeria became a democratic egalitarian paradise. In fact, the conflict was not over, although this time the French were not directly involved. After Algeria became officially recognized as independent from France through the signing of the Évian Accords, two prominent FLN leaders, Ahmed Ben Bella (1916-2012) and Benyoucef Ben Khedda (1920-2003) fought for power, with ben Bella winning in a very one-sided election (Shatz “The Torture of Algiers” 1).⁸ Ben Bella then banned all political parties except for the FLN (Fois 107). Algeria was relatively stable in the following years, although radical Islamists and inflammatory preachers promoted the creation of an Islamist state. These inflammatory preachers and worsening social conditions, especially unemployment, led to an Islamist victory in the election of 1991, although this was short lived (Kepel 262). The military led a successful coup against the Islamist government, which officially started the Algerian Civil War in December of that year. What followed was a complex conflict of guerilla tactics, terrorist attacks, car bombs and assassinations of many groups of people, including musicians, sportsmen, unveiled women, university academics, intellectuals, writers, journalists, and medical doctors (Kepel 262).

As seen in *Morituri*, the civil war was not simply a war between two sides: it was much more complicated, and anyone could become a victim. Although law enforcement officers like Inspector Llob in *Morituri*⁹ and public intellectuals and artists were targets, even regular citizens who had

⁸ ben Bella was ousted in a bloodless coup by Houari Boumédiène, an army general, and put under house arrest. Since then the army has ruled in Algeria.

⁹ The title of the novel is taken from the Latin Phrase: "Morituri te salutant" (They who are about to die salute thee), Suetonius, De vita Caesarum. Suetonius. [Lives of the Caesars]. Ed and trans. J. C. Rolfe. Rev. ed. 2 cols. Loeb.

nothing to do with these targeted groups could become victims. As described in *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity*, the government tried to promote the idea that the civil war was a result of the conflict between “terrorist bands” and law enforcement, actually it was “between the state and guerrilla organisations” (Martinez et al 4). During the civil war period, in which *Morituri* is set: “More than 1.5 million people fled zones of violence and took refuge in cities” (Martinez et al 4). According to Luis Martinez and Rasmus Alenius Boserup in *Algeria Modern*, “At its peak in 1994–95, the Islamist guerrillas numbered 40,000 combatants and occupied ‘liberated areas’. Three years of ‘total war’ by the regime were necessary for the ‘liberated areas’ to be reconquered and for the various groups composing the Islamist guerilla to be defeated. In 1999, the violence was called ‘residual terrorism’ (Martinez et al 4). In short, especially since Khadra’s novel came out in 1997, the violence and fear experienced by Llob and his colleagues in *Morituri* is not an exaggeration.

It is obvious that this background of colonization, war, and violence is an intrinsic part of Algeria’s past, and the “impact of these violent episodes on individual memories” affects every Algerian, even the fictional characters of *Morituri* (Rahal 118). Whether it is spoken about or not, Algeria’s history haunts the country and “...in Algerian society, history is expected to play a role in straightening out the past” (Rahal 118). Straightening out this past and making sense of the violence that is such a huge part of it is necessary for Algeria to construct a stable nation. As Malika Rahal explains, “a unified national history is often used to construct a nation” and the FLN “constructed a history that glorified armed struggle over political reformism,” meaning that

Classical Library 31, 38. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997-1998), 2 (“Life of Claudius, chap. 21): 42-43. In the Latin, the phrase is directed toward the emperor Claudius by gladiators about to participate in a naval “battle” for the emperor’s entertainment. In the novel the truncated form refers to the novel’s protagonists “They who are about to die”! Thus, the title *Morituri* calls to mind that every time Llob goes out, he is risking his life.

violence still occurs and is glorified in Algeria today (120). The civil war “defined Algerian culture as Arabic in language and Muslim in religion (Rahal 120). This is evident in the Algerian constitution, which glorifies the War for Independence and allows for no competing narratives (Rahal 121). The trauma of the civil war “continues to haunt numerous families,” and in order to avoid further violence, those haunted by these traumas are reluctant to rock the boat with political objections to those in power in Algeria’s government, which “has destroyed Algeria’s political class and rendered parties useless in the eyes of broad segments of the population” (Martinez et al 4).

The result of European colonization and settlement in Algeria is a crisis of identity, including gender, race, and class identity, as well as conflicts of language, representation of different groups, and the interpretation of the violent colonial past. The resulting Algerian identity is a product of European and native Algerian hybridity because European traditions and customs replaced the native traditions and customs, or the two became so entwined that it is impossible to disentangle them. Thus, part of the project of Algerian national building is reclamation of native customs, language, and overall identity. Since it is true that “the winner writes the story and endeavours to have the loser forgotten,” the result is that “Algeria’s civil war happened behind closed doors and neither protagonists nor witnesses tried to publicise the tragedy they endured. The absence of media coverage adds to the difficulty in defining this civil war” (Martinez et al 4). *Morituri* reflects this characterization, in that Llob is aware that his life is in constant danger and many of his friends and colleagues die as a result of terrorist attacks or other violence, but it is hard to pin down exactly who is responsible for these acts of violence. Even when Llob seems to be making progress on tracking down Sabine’s killer, which is obviously connected to the civil war, the culprits are just one small part of the machine of violence and corruption that is causing the civil war.

Although *Morituri* is set during the civil war, and thus the civil war is a large part of the plot, the major military leaders who were players in the civil war are unmentioned. This fact may be an allusion to the fact that Khadra had to be careful to not criticize military personnel directly to avoid becoming a target himself, or it may be a reflection of his true sympathies, since Khadra was a high ranking member of the military himself. *Morituri* was published during the thick of the Black Decade, when it would have been death to discuss or criticize the government's process for dealing with the constant bombings, assassinations and terrorist attacks. This was true until 2014 because "it was taboo to discuss and criticise the security services, which in the decades since independence had imposed themselves as a hegemonic force within the political system" (Martinez et al 2). Now, the situation has changed slightly because "Competition and rivalry between political and military actors makes the headlines of national newspapers. While such struggles remained hidden inside the FLN in the decades following independence, they are today publicly exposed as a matter of course" (Martinez et al 3).

1.2 Lebanon: The Legacy of Colonialism and Sectarianism

Like Algeria, Lebanon was also affected by French colonization, although because of its diverse demographic and unique geographical position between Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, it became an object of desire for many outside political and religious interests. Lebanon was once a part of greater Syria and was not a separate country at all. However, this did not mean that this area of land was exempt from sectarian conflict. Prior to World War I, Lebanon was part of the vast and once powerful Ottoman Empire, with primarily Maronite Christians allied with France and Druzes, an Arabic speaking, monotheistic and esoteric religious and ethnic sect living in this geographical area (Hirst 9). The many different religious and political groups that had an interest in Lebanon, namely the French and Maronites, the former Ottoman Empire, the

Arabs, the Druzes, Britain, and Egypt, struggled for control until the Druzes massacred a group of Maronites in 1860 (Hirst 9). After this bloody event, France came in in support of the Maronites, which resulted in Europeans, primarily the French, having more a control over the country (Hirst 9). This conflict was a result of a conflict of nationalism between the Maronites and the Druzes, with each group seeing Lebanon as “their” country. The Maronites contributed to the idea of a “pan-Arab nationalist ideal,” but because of their connections to Rome and Paris, had a smaller, separate vision of this ideal, as opposed to the Druzes, who wanted to be part of a larger Arab nation (Hirst 10). In 1860, the Druzes became embroiled in a civil war with the Christians living in the area as a result of the previously mentioned massacre. The conflict spilled over to Damascus and resulted in 20,000 people being killed.

The continuation of this sectarianism is what led the French to eventually intervene and exert their colonial influence on the country. During World War I, Britain’s acknowledgement of the idea of a “pan-Arab nationalist ideal” affected its future in a significant way. In 1915, Britain promised Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashim (1854-1931), Sharif and Emir of Mecca, that it would support an independent Arab nation, which was to be created out of the dregs of the Ottoman Empire at the end of war (Hirst 6). Britain agreed to “recognized and support the independence of Arabs” except for the portion of Syria that was to become Lebanon, because this section could not “be said to be purely Arab” (Hirst 7). Britain made the exception for Lebanon because of the French claim to this territory. Thus, after World War I, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Vilayet of Beirut, the Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon and the Vilayet of Syria, became under French influence— Faisal bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashem (1885-1933) third son of Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashim, took Damascus and tried to create the independent Kingdom of Syria in 1920, only to be defeated by French troops in the same year, making Damascus and all of Syria part of the

French colonial enterprise (Hirst 7). Lebanon was thus created by Britain and France, since they were the winners of the First World War (Hirst 5). This was done despite Britain's 1915 promise because of another agreement between Britain, France, Russia and Italy, who each received part of the former Ottoman Empire (Hirst 7). In theory, each of these colonial holdings was an "independent state," but according to the French Mandate of the League of Nations, were "subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they [were] able to stand alone" (Hirst 8).

France held control of Lebanon until World War II. After Germany invaded France in 1941, Free French forces announced that Lebanon and Syria were independent countries. Elections were held in 1943 and the new government voted to abolish the Mandate. French Marines landed in Beirut and dissolved the government (Salibi 189). Ultimately, the Free French were forced to give up control of Lebanon because of pressure from Churchill and his government. Charles De Gaulle claimed in his memoirs that Churchill and his government manufactured a crisis in Syria in order to force France out of Lebanon, but this claim was dubious until rather recently, when documents in the French archives were discovered that proved this claim (Zamir 792). The reason that Britain wanted to force France out was to maintain its intelligence ties with Arab leaders in the region, and this endeavor was ultimately successful.

As with Algeria, peace and stability were not a guarantee even once France was legally and politically separate from Lebanon itself. In fact, establishing peace and stability in the newly independent nation was probably even more complicated in Lebanon than in Algeria. Although Algeria was and is also religiously diverse, because of the sheer number of different religious sects that all lived in the same small physical area, conflict between the different religious groups was

much more likely.¹⁰ The Maronites had dominance in Lebanon, both in terms of population and in control of government power. The Maronites' power was formalized through the signing of the National Pact after Independence from France was achieved in 1943. In this pact, the Maronites "recognize[d] Lebanon's Arab character and membership of the Arab family, agreed to renounce any protective links to European powers" while the Druze gave up on their ideal Arab Nation and hopes of remaining part of Syria (Hirst 11). The Pact also formally shared power between 17 different religious groups (Hirst 11). Each religious sect had a portion of political power: for example, the Maronites had control of the Presidency and the Muslims had control of the Premiership (Hirst 11).

Additionally, the establishment of Lebanon as an independent nation was further complicated by conflict in neighboring countries, most significantly the establishment of Israel and the dispossession of Palestinian land, which was occurring around the same time as Lebanon gained its independence from France. First, the Zionists were not happy about the creation of Lebanon, because it meant that they would get less territory (Hirst 22). The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 created even more tension, as Palestinians fled or were forced out due to violence and ethnic cleansing (Hirst 47). Refugees from Palestine fled to Lebanon, and Lebanon itself experienced some violent attacks and bombings as the Israeli militia forced the Palestinians out (Hirst 49). This was impactful for Lebanon, not just because of the violence and rise in tension with Israel, but because it meant that the Lebanese population became more Muslim due to the thousands of Palestinians

10 The Maronites has pushed for the doubling of the territory of the Mutasarrifate in 1920. During the period 1914-1918 the Mutasharifat had suffered a severe famine. In particular the Maronites lobbied for the addition of the fertile valleys to the east in the *kazar* (juridical district) of Baalbek, the Beqaa, Rashaya, Hasbaya in the hope that in the future the new country would be self sufficient in food.

who fled to Lebanon and settled in several refugee camps.¹¹ The violence continued, this time in relation to tensions between the Maronites and Muslims, which caused the “mini civil war” of 1958 (Hirst 69). Additionally, some Muslim factions wanted to join the United Arab Republic along with Syria and Egypt, while the majority wanted to remain independent.

In the 1960s, Lebanon was relatively calm, although the number of Palestinian refugees eventually reached 12% of the population (Hirst 75). Some of these refugees were able to integrate into Lebanese life and eventually become part of the middle class, but the majority were confined to refugee camps and essentially the country’s peasants (Hirst 75). Some Lebanese were kind to the refugees, but others were decidedly not and were looked down upon by the local residents (Hirst 76). Some Lebanese blamed the Palestinians for their horrid conditions because they “had sold their land or fled it in cowardice” (Hirst 76). The Lebanese also made it difficult for the Palestinians to work in their country, with work permit requirements and caps on the amounts that Palestinians could earn even if they could get a work permit, which furthered the class divide between locals and refugees (Hirst 77). Moreover, the majority of the refugees were confined to temporary camps and were not allowed to make improvements to their dwellings by law (Hirst 77). The fact that most Palestinians were Sunni Muslims who believed in a pan-national Arab state gave the Maronite Christians another reason to harass them, meaning that Palestinian sympathizers were squashed out the delicate system of political parties in Lebanon (Hirst 78). Additionally, a significant portion of Lebanese Muslims were and are Shi’ia, especially in the east. This group was generously supported by Iran which had established a Shi’a state in Iran after the revolution of 1978 (Valbjørn 8).

11 As of 2018, there are approximately 500,000 long-term Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, as well as an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees, who are in Lebanon because of the ongoing violence in Syria (Kiwani 283).

It was the Palestinian refugees and increasing sectarian violence in general which caused the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. This war lasted until 1990 and was a complicated violent war between the many political and religious factions within Lebanon, although Syria and Israel also intervened at various points over the long war. Although sectarian violence had always been a part of Lebanese history, and a smaller civil war (mentioned earlier) had broken out in the 1950s, this Civil War was different because it lasted so much longer, and in some ways has not been fully resolved. The Lebanese Civil War began on April 13, 1975 when the Maronite militias attacked a bus full of Palestinian refugees, killing 27 people (Toaldo 44). Palestinian and Sunni Muslims revenged these deaths by killing four Christians (Toaldo 44). The fighting and killing on both sides continued, especially worsening in December on “Black Saturday” when drivers were killed at random, simply for being at the wrong place at the wrong time (Toaldo 44). In 1976, the Lebanese president (1976-1982), Elais Sarkis (1924-1985), asked Syria to intervene to help the Christians, beginning a trend of outsiders influencing the course of the war within Lebanon (Toaldo 45). The United States also became involved by approving Syria’s intervention on behalf of the Christians (Tolado 45). Additionally, the secretary of state of the United States of America at the time, Henry Kissinger, intervened to ensure that Syria and Israel would not attack each other as Syria entered Lebanon to help the Maronites (Henriksen Waage et al 1081). Syria agreed to this to help end the instability in the region and because they did not want a “revolutionary Palestinian state provoking Israel into war,” which would eventually provoke Syria into the fight as a matter of course (Tolado 45). The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), a militant group formed by the Arab League in 1964 to free Palestine from Israeli dominance, became involved in the civil war in Lebanon, but its main focus was against Israel, simply using Lebanon as a base to send bombs and militia into Israel because so many Palestinians were displaced there (Toaldo 45).

Since Israel obviously wanted to stop the PLO's bombing, and it would be more advantageous to have Lebanon be a Christian state, Israel began supporting the Maronite side by sending weapons to the Maronites (Toaldo 45). The equivalent of 150 million U.S. dollars also went to the Maronites during the course of the war (Toaldo 45). After an endless series of massacres, bombings, terrorist attacks and other violence, the Lebanese began to put an end to the war with the Taif agreement (National Reconciliation Accord) (1985). Although they did not leave until 2005 and only then after Syria was implicated in the assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri (1944-2005), the Taif agreement eventually withdrew Syrian forces from the country (May 122). Additionally, this agreement tried to create a more equal balance of power between the different sects (especially by reducing the Maronites' amount of power, since they had more power than any other group), and affirming the "Arab-ness" of the country while protecting Lebanon's independence from any other Arab countries (Hirst 212). The war was a disaster on many levels: it destroyed the country's economy and caused massive damage to the infrastructure. More importantly, it is estimated that 150,000 people were killed and 200,000 were wounded (Wood). Additionally, even after the civil war in Lebanon ended, conflict between Lebanon and Israel, with Israel attacking Palestinian refugee camps, did not officially cease until 2000 (Haberman).

The violence in Lebanon, while in some ways similar to that of Algeria, given that both were colonized by France, is characterized by deep tension and discord between the different religious and political groups in the country. The geographical position of Lebanon, its history with the Ottoman Empire and the larger Arab World, as well as European imperialist interests meant that Lebanon "...was *designed* to be the everlasting battleground for others' political, strategic, and ideological conflicts" (Hirst 3-4). Rosemary Sayigh, who studied the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, has speculated that "Lebanon's peculiar combination of religious divisions and class

polarization sharpens inter-group aggression far beyond that of any other Arab country” (qtd. in Hirst 77). Additionally, Lebanon’s unique way of sharing power between the different religious sects, beginning right after the country’s independence from France, has been blamed for “political instability, sectarian division, recurring conflicts, and foreign intervention” and an overall feeling of “inter-community mistrust” (Baytiyeh 223). However, Hoda Baytiyeh argues in “Lebanon’s Power-Sharing System and the Rise of Sectarianism” that the true cause of this instability and violence is not the country’s political system of dividing power between the three main sects, but “the manipulation of the power-sharing system by political elites who seek to enhance their control” (Baytiyeh 224).

1.3 Consequences of this history for both countries

Political corruption and the rich elite level of society using the system to their advantage is something that Algeria and Lebanon have in common, making it nearly impossible for both countries to move beyond the colonial influences of the Ottoman Empire and France. Using violence to maintain this power and control is another phenomenon that both countries unfortunately share. The threat of violence and the fear that it causes makes it difficult for a regular citizen to make change or to even point out that the system is flawed in the first place. Additionally, another complication is that there is no single cause for the state of upheaval in both countries in their mission to build an independent nation after colonization. There is no one leader or politician, no single event or tragedy that can be blamed for the entirety of the situation. Identifying the root cause of a problem is usually the first step to solving it but identifying the cause of the problem is yet another way for more tension to erupt. Both *Morituri* and *White Masks* (first published in 1981 in Arabic as: البيضاء الوجوه *Wujuh al-bayda*) make it clear that these murders, besides being carried out by individuals with different ideological affiliations, are also attributable to the failure of

Algeria and Lebanon in their respective modern nation building projects. This failure is also due to the entanglements with neoliberal capitalism and its politics that characterize both countries.

Since both countries are part of the Arab world, the goal of many people is to “recover an uncomplicated Arab-Islamic identity,” but even from this very simplified and shortened version of the histories of the two countries, the situation is much more complex and this goal is not easy. The people in power, such as the FLN in Algeria and the different religious sects in Lebanon, try to reduce the people and their conflicting interests and goals into one, but “this narrative reduced complex history to a narrative of heroes and villains” (Evans et al 51). Like *Morituri* and *White Masks*, what actually happened in history is more complicated—grayer—than what is told. Both countries are still profoundly affected by political corruption, as the recent ammonium nitrate explosion that killed 180 and injured thousands of people in Lebanon in August 2020 has shown (Ur Rehman). Algeria has a shadow of democracy, but in reality, they are still run by the military, and tensions with France have not disappeared. The military took over after Independence and the people haven’t recovered from the Civil War. The Arab Spring in 2011 erupted because people became fed up with the military still remaining in control. Similarly, in Lebanon after the Civil War, there was relative peace, but there is no final resolution for the heart of the conflict. There is no democracy, resources are not distributed fairly, and human rights are still being violated. The country is still affected by the war of proxy between different the different interests: the Saudi and Sunni, the Christians and the French, and the Iranians and the Shia. Both Algeria and Lebanon, despite their legal independence from the colonizer, are states that have not been able to build a modern civic society with a stable government and democracy in a way that was originally intended. The effect of this inability is that these countries’ citizens are still dealing with the consequences of a neocolonial dependence on the colonizer, and because of the resulting civil wars,

even though they have technically come to an end, the Algerians and Lebanese still must live with the effects of violence and trauma.

CHAPTER 2. VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN *MORITURI* AND *WHITE MASKS*

As seen in the previous section discussing the historical context for *Morituri* and *White Masks*, both Algeria and Lebanon have been profoundly affected by the violence of colonization and war, especially the civil wars that erupted after independence from France. Although Lebanon and Algeria are in many ways different, it is significant that both novels set the mystery and the solving of a crime against the backdrop of their respective countries' civil wars. The choice to set both novels during these civil wars is significant because it makes violence and trauma an intrinsic part of the plot of both stories, even beyond the expected violence related to the crime itself. Violence and trauma are important aspects of the characters' experience of their country's civil wars because it means that the choices that these characters make during the course of the novel are often a result of the trauma that they experienced in the past and/or trauma that they are currently experiencing.

Since trauma is the result of a "life threatening experience accompanied by horror or fear [and] it can endanger the physical and/or psychological well-being of a person," the distress that the characters experience while living through their country's civil wars causes them to act in ways that are often detrimental to their personal lives and their relationships and even affects their sense of identity in ways that they might not even realize (Resick qtd. in Mostafa 210). In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman, a psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of incest and traumatic stress says that

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community...[they] have primary

effects not only on the psychological structures of the self, but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community (51).

Especially because both country's people experienced and continue to experience violence and trauma as a result of colonization, in addition to the civil wars, "it is important to understand how trauma has shaped the history and culture of people. Traumatic events have shaped the identities of the protagonists" (Caruth 91). In other words, the trauma that results from colonization and civil war does not just affect the individual characters, but the entire population, their outlook, and their attitudes about the world. Because the stories are so combined with violence and trauma, and the relationship between the crime that the detectives are trying to solve and the war itself is so complex, both *Morituri* and *White Masks* are not just detective stories or crime fiction, but part of the tradition of both political novels and war literature. Just as crime novels of metropolitan France underwrite "...popular culture's shaping of war memory...", *Morituri* and *White Masks* contribute to how the civil wars of Algeria and Lebanon respectively are remembered (Gorrara 1). This is one of the things that the two novels have in common—both are set during their country's civil wars, and through telling these stories, it contributes to the memory of the wars in popular culture's memory. Additionally, since in the course of the investigation, both Llob and the journalist rely on the memories of the people they interview. As Mostafa says about *White Masks*, "the narrative style fictionalizes the themes of memory, trauma and identity to motivate the reader to piece together stories and rethink what happens from different perspectives," and this is just as much true for *Morituri* as it is for *White Masks* (Mostafa 213). Khoury and Khadra could have chosen to write purely political novels without any mystery or detective plot if they wanted to explore themes related to colonization and civil war in their countries. Therefore, by including the historical and political context and making these contexts such an important part of understanding the plot of the

“mystery” or “detective” plot, Khoury and Khadra are expanding the genre of the detective story to create a blended genre that makes a postmodern political critique of the societies in which they live.

The first clue that *Morituri* and *White Masks* are not just a regular Agatha Christie-style detective novel is the overall atmosphere. In both novels, there is an absence of hope: there are no good guys, no glimmer of optimism, and everyone is living in a state of paralysis. This absence of hope, which can be seen in multiple, if not all of the characters. This absence of hope is a symptom of the trauma inflicted by the violence and war. The unnamed journalist/narrator in *White Masks* has a fatalistic tone from the beginning of the novel and describes symptoms of trauma that he experiences himself when he describes skipping over the photo of Jaber’s dead body as it appears in the newspaper, saying “...the terrifying visions that fill my nights are enough for me, I do not need new nightmares” (Khoury 7). Similarly, Superintendent Llob in *Morituri* begins his narration in a fatalistic, “it is what it is” tone, “Saigné aux quatre veines, l’horizon accouche à la césarienne d’un jour qui, finalement, n’aura pas mérité sa peine” (Khadra, 15).¹² He seems to use his job as a way to anchor himself and prevent himself from being paralyzed by fear like his coworker, Lt. Lino. In order to keep functioning, Llob has the attitude that he will continue his life more or less in a normal fashion, despite the fact that he is a target for assassination because of his job as a police officer, and in fact buries himself in his work in solving the case. He does not let the imminent possibility of death affect him, or at least he wants to give off this impression. However, this attitude and Llob’s tendency to be a workaholic does seem to cause a rift in his familial relationships. For example, Llob is no longer sexually attracted to his wife, describing her as “ma

¹² “Deprived of everything, the horizon gave birth by cesarean section to a day which, in the end, will not have been worth its pain.” *Morituri* trans. Herman, 1. All English translations are taken from this edition.

bête”¹³ and saying that, “Elle n’a plus d’attrait qu’une remorque couchée en travers de la chaussée...”(Khadra 13).¹⁴ He spends very little time at home, and the reader does not get to know his wife or his children, especially since his son chooses to leave Algiers to make a better life for himself elsewhere. Llob professes to Lino that, “La vraie carrière d’un homme, Lino, c’est sa famille”¹⁵ and that “Le reste, tout le reste—promotion, consécration, gloriole—n’est que tape-à-l’œil, fuite en avant, diversion,” this does not seem to be something that Llob lives out in practice (Khadra 70).¹⁶ However, despite the fact that Llob and the journalist have a pessimistic attitude, they have the most hope of any of the characters because of the fact that they are even attempting to solve the crimes of Sabine’s disappearance and murder and Jaber’s murder.

Another way that the atmosphere of *Morituri* shows its hopeless atmosphere is the way that the city of Algiers is depicted—it is so atmospheric that one could say that Algiers becomes just as much a character as Llob or Lino. *Morituri* tells the story of a police detective, Superintendent Llob, and his fellow police officer, Lieutenant Lino, who are both trying to find a missing young woman named Sabine. Sabine is the daughter of Ghoul Malek, a powerful and affluent mobster. However, although this is Llob’s main objective, the situation is more complicated than simply trying to find a missing girl because of the political situation and the violence in Algiers, especially after Sabine is found dead. Through this murder, *Morituri* offers a glimpse into Algerian society during the “Black Decade” or the “Decade of Terror” (1990s). Algiers itself is a city that Llob loves but is marred by the violence of the civil war. One example of the city becoming a character is the way that it affects Llob—one passage that exemplifies this occurs after Llob has been

¹³ “beast of burden” (Khadra 1, translated by Herman. All future translation from *Morituri* will be taken from Herman.)

¹⁴ “...she holds no more attraction than a trailer lying across the road” (Khadra 1)

¹⁵ “The true career of a man...is his family” (Khadra 47)

¹⁶ “The rest, all of it—promotion, dedication and vainglory—is nothing but ostentation, forward flight, diversion” (Khadra 47)

assigned to the case, where he is sitting up in his armchair, unable to sleep because of the noise of guns and sirens:

...je regarde l'aube prendre son temps pour se lever. Les coups de feu et les sirènes n'ont pas arrêté de s'invectiver de toute la nuit. Des flammes ont ingurgité un dépôt sur les hauteurs du quartier. Une bombe a pété derrière la colline. Ensuite, il y a eu ce sacré courant d'air qui taquine les esprits frappeurs de mon immeuble et qui m'oblige à rester aux aguets jusqu'au matin (Khadra 30).¹⁷

Violence like this is connected to the city from the very beginning of the novel, which opens with a C-section metaphor. This comparison calls to mind an intervention in birth, or an unnatural beginning of life, which can be connected to the violence created at the birth of Algeria as a nation after the war for independence, and emphasizes the violent intervention that was necessary to extricate Algeria from France's grasp. The negative connotations of this unnatural beginning underscores the fear that Llob has during every waking moment because as a policeman, he is a target: "Chaque pas est un péril" (Khadra 16).¹⁸ Despite this, Llob seems to be relatively unafraid, especially compared to some of his colleagues, especially Lino, who even spends the night in the police station because he is so afraid to go home for fear of being killed. However, because he is a target, and because the entire population of Algiers (and Algeria as a whole) is so afraid, any opportunity he had for positive change because of his position of power as a cop is gone. Llob's inability to cause change despite his relative position of power is very demoralizing for him because his position is part of what puts his life in danger. More importantly, Llob loves his country

¹⁷ "I watch the dawn taking its time to rise. The shots and sirens have not stopped hurling invective at one another the whole night long. Flames have devoured a depot on the heights of the quarter. A bomb exploded behind the hill. Next came this damned draught of air which tease the noisy spirits of my apartment block and which obliges me to remain on my guard until the morning" (Khadra 15)

¹⁸ "Every step is fraught with danger" (Khadra 2).

and wants to make it better. Mirroring the meaning of his name, hard core, pure heart, A sense of altruism and of the search for social justice is the reason that he became a cop in the first place, so his impotence is a sore spot for him, and often causes him to act recklessly and imprudently, such as when he shoots the fundamentalist terrorist who has kidnapped a child, killing the terrorist, but at the same time putting the child's life in danger.

Because the country is so rocked by murders, assassinations, terrorist attacks, bombings, and other violence and because the government is so corrupted, the missing person case that Llob is assigned to (that eventually becomes a murder investigation) is not the only violence that occurs in *Morituri*. Even in the first chapter, Llob walks into work to discover that, “Deux écoles, une usine, un pont, un parc communal, [et] quarante-trois poteaux électriques [sont] bousillés”¹⁹ meaning that “Trois flics, un militaire en permission, un instituteur et quatre pompiers”²⁰ are all killed (Khadra 17). In most detective novels, the case that the detective is assigned to is the main way that violence is depicted. Although detective novels may have other depictions of violence besides the main murder or crime, usually any other violence is directly linked to the crime. In this case, violence is a given and is just a fact of life. Because of the civil war, there is a sense that there are far too many murders and disappearances for the police to ever possibly solve or seek justice for. Adam Shatz has even described the Algerian Civil War as “one big murder mystery” (Shatz “One Big Murder Mystery” 3). Because of this, and because Sabrine's murder is in fact connected to the larger problem of the Civil War, it is easy for the reader to forget that Sabrine's disappearance and murder is in fact the main “mystery” that Llob is trying to solve, especially since the novel gives very little time or attention to describing Sabrine, either in her physical appearance

¹⁹ “two schools, one factory, a bridge, a communal park, [and] forty-three electric pylons [are] wrecked” (Khadra 4)

²⁰ “three cops, a soldier on leave, a schoolteacher and four firemen” (Khadra 4)

or what she was like in life. Instead, she becomes more of a symbol, or a stand-in metaphor for Algeria as a country.

It is no accident that it is a woman who is the victim of the crime in *Morituri*—this is one way that the novel stays close to its traditional, masculine hard-boiled detective genre, since most detective novels involve a female victim. There are very few female characters in the novel, and the few that are depicted are not well-rounded or important to the story that Llob is telling the reader. In fact, all the women in *Morituri* are either housewives or prostitutes. Sabine, the victim in *Morituri*, does not speak at all and the novel does not develop her character at all except for the fact that her father is Ghoul Malek, and she seems to have liked to spend time in the least wholesome areas of the city, like the seedy bar/cabaret Limbes Rouges. She is just a symbol and a pawn for the powerful to play with as they seek to carry out their own selfish goals. Llob's wife, Mina, doesn't speak at all either and it is obvious that Llob doesn't like her, even though he says that family is the most important thing. In *White Masks*, women do not fare much better: although Jaber is the main focus of the detective aspect of the novel, other female characters are victims of abuse and misogyny. Most female characters in this novel are also either housewives, like Noha, Nada, and Fatimah, or exist to serve the sexual pleasure of men, like Bahiyya, Mahmoud's mistress and later his second wife. Noha, Jaber's wife, is left to pick up the pieces after Ahmad's death and care for Jaber as much as she can after he goes catatonic. Even before the tragedy of the war and Ahmad's death, Jaber mostly ignored Noha and spent very little time at home with his oldest children because they were girls, only caring to spend time at home once Ahmad was born, since he was a boy. Other female characters in *White Masks* fare even worse: Dr. Harout Khatchadourian's wife is raped and murdered by young men who broke into her house with the intent to steal and end up raping her simply because she is there, and Fatimah Fakhro, the caretaker

of an apartment building near where Jaber wandered before his death, is abused by her husband and left nearly destitute after his death, with no way to provide for her children except for the kindness of Professor Nabeel Assi. Nada Najjar, Ahmad's friend Nadeem's wife, is verbally, physically, and sexually abusive also. and All of these incidents emphasize that women are particularly vulnerable to the violence cause by war—both directly and indirectly—and the ones who have to deal with the consequences of the violence, even though this violence has nothing to do with their choices or behavior.

Another important aspect to the violence of the civil war and the resulting trauma is the question of who is responsible for the violence. Because of the complicated nature of the civil war in both Algeria and Lebanon, placing the blame on one specific person or institution is difficult to determine. The government's corruption is something that always seems to lurk in the background in *Morituri*, although it is hard to pinpoint exactly how this plays a role in Sabrine's disappearance and murder. As a police officer, Llob is supposed to serve civil society, but the question of from whom does Llob receive his orders makes this goal murky. At the beginning of the novel, Llob's "boss" calls him into his office to order him to attend Ghoul Malek's party, which is where Llob first learns about Sabrine. Llob's boss was originally the one who had been invited to this party, along with political and cultural elites, businessmen, and other wealthy people, but Llob is sent in his place. Since the novel does not even give the reader his name, there is no sense of Llob's boss's rank or if he is at all connected to the military, although he might be connected to the military in some way, given the state of the Algerian government. The looming question that follows Llob throughout his search for Sabrine is what is the hierarchy among the powerful and how much power does Llob really have? Llob is evidently Lieutenant Lino's superior, but beyond the initial assignment to attend Ghoul Malek's party, Llob seems to act mostly on his own, since he is the

one who decides who to interview and investigate, and where to go in his investigation into Sabrina's disappearance. In other words, his boss does not give him any additional direction about what he should do or not do in relation to the case. Llob's independence gives the reader the impression that he has more power than he does in reality. Government corruption is also in the background of *White Masks*, but always in vague passing references—for example, the young men involved in Mrs. Khatourian's rape and murder say that the only reason that they do not get away with their crimes is that they "...have no connections in high places" (Khoury 53). Another instance occurs in Zayn Alloul's section, he has just begun picking up trash again after weeks of "...no rubbish collection and rats practically eating people alive" due to the disorganization of the government and the inability of the government to organize city services in the chaos and turmoil of the war (Khoury 125). Alloul is personally a victim of this corruption since he is arrested and taken to jail for seemingly no reason and is only released after agreeing to sign papers of dubious intent. Because Alloul does not have political connections, he is prey to these types of arrests and interrogations: as he says, "You needed special favours from friends in high places just to stay out of trouble" (Khoury 138). *White Masks* also makes the connection between the police, the government, and the military clearer, since when Zayn Alloul reports the discovery of Jaber's body, a man in "military fatigues" is clearly the one in charge (Khoury 146).

Additionally, Llob seems to be more idealistic than most people, but struggles to put his idealistic goals into practice because of the fear and rampant violence in Algiers and the country as a whole. No one knows who is responsible for what. Some are religiously brainwashed fundamentalists, but some are people using the guise of fundamentalist terrorism as a front to get away with atrocities—the system perpetuates terror but blames it on others. This obfuscation is purposeful in the novel because it reflects how the corrupt "secular" elite class, like the mobsters,

businessmen, bankers and others who attend Ghoul Malek's party, is taking advantage of the Islamists and fundamentalists to expand their business and murder their enemies so that the crimes can be easily assumed to have been committed by religious extremists. The state is also taking advantage of this confused situation to settle score with intellectuals/artists who dare to criticize the current situation or ask for democracy, accountability and transparency, namely through a shift to civilian democracy instead of a military cartel, which we can see in the novel through the assassination of Ait Meziane, a comedian who interacts with Llob a little bit before he is abruptly killed (Khadra 99).

Similarly to *Morituri*, *White Masks* is also about a detective trying to solve a murder, although this time instead of a police detective, it is an unnamed journalist who is trying to solve the case. In *White Masks*, Jaber Ahmad Jaber, the father of Ahmad, a "martyr" of the Lebanese Civil War, also goes missing before his beaten and bruised body is discovered near a trash dump. This murder is also complicated by the political situation in Lebanon. Every person that the journalist interviews while trying to uncover who murdered Jaber and why he was murdered are also forever scarred by the unpredictability of the violence of the civil war, which went through periods of intensive violence and periods where it seemed to end, only to start up again. The unpredictability of the level of violence, best described by Jaber's wife Noha when she says, "The war stopped, or subsided..." makes the war even more traumatic, since it makes it impossible to know whether they can relax and go back to their regular lives or not (Koury 21). The reason why Jaber goes missing in the first place is because of the trauma of losing his only son in combat. At first, the Jabers seem to not be affected by the war, and Jaber does not want to let it change how he works, although eventually he has to switch offices and then work from home because the shelling was so bad in the area of the city where his office was located. Jaber says that he does not

want to get involved in politics, explaining that ““We are just the playthings of foreign powers...kicking us around like a ball! It’s nothing to do with us”” (Khoury 18). The catalyst for changing Jaber’s viewpoint on the war and politics in general is that eventually Ahmad joins the military, against his parents’ wishes. Finally, Khalil discusses politics with Ahmad, especially after the price increases in necessary goods due to the war make them more aware of the consequences of the war (Khoury 18).

Beyond the price increases, the Jabers learn the ultimate consequence of war through the death of their son. After Ahmad is killed, Jaber ages overnight, and his hair even turns white (Khoury 19). He eventually enters a sort of catatonic state where he refuses to leave his bedroom and barely eats. Eventually, he leaves his room but becomes obsessed with the posters proclaiming Ahmad to be a “martyr” of the civil war. However, instead of becoming obsessed with making sure the posters are displayed, as he is at first, he becomes obsessed with taking them down and whitewashing the walls of the city where the posters are displayed. The posters are part of propaganda that promote the idea that the young men have died for a cause, and that their death is not in vain. Although most people who knew Jaber assume that he has gone crazy because of the trauma and grief associated with losing his son, and people who do not know him just think that he is a crazy homeless man, Jaber is not crazy: instead he has realized the pointlessness of the war and that Ahmad and the other young people have died in an unending and senseless war, and that glorifying their deaths is only a way to encourage violence.

Because *White Masks* weaves elements of war literature, crime literature, and political critique, Khoury's work has become part of a heritage amongst Arab writers that pays close attention to creating new forms of narrative. Specifically, as Dalia Said Mostafa points out in “Literary Representations of Trauma, Memory, and Identity in the Novels of Elias Khoury and Rabī

Jābir,” the novelistic form and structure of *White Masks* reflects how trauma does not follow a linear or conventional type of narrative. Mostafa points out that traumatic experiences are not experienced linearly, and as a result *White Masks* is not written in a conventional or linear manner (209). The interviews conducted by the journalist/investigator provide a framework, but this framework sometimes deviates: for example, the text is written as if the people he is interviewing are speaking directly to the narrator, but sometimes the reader gets glimpses into the character’s thoughts, and these thoughts are not part of what they told the journalist. The narrator has a journalistic style of investigating Jaber’s murder as opposed to the investigating style of a hard-boiled detective like Llob—he interviews people who knew him or encountered him. Each chapter begins with a brief explanation of who the person is that he is interviewing, along with some background on them, but sometimes the perspective will switch away from this character. One instance of this occurs when the chapter begins with Mr Ali Kalakesh, but then switches to Dr Khatchadorian’s son. Also, all the people that the journalist interviews have some connection with Jaber, but often this connection is not very significant, and these characters end up speaking about events that have nothing to do with Jaber or his murder. For example, Fatimah Fakhro has very little interaction with Jaber—she gives him some food when she sees him but does not know him very well at all. Despite this, she ends up narrating almost her whole life story, including describing how she was married off at a young age to a man that she barely knew, the subsequent infidelity of her husband with an older woman, lost her son Ali to suicide after a head injury, and lost her husband due to the war, leaving her to the mercy of her neighbors. During this narration, it is easy to forget that the reason that the journalist is speaking with her is because of her interaction with Jaber. However, this does not mean that her story is irrelevant. On the contrary, her story gives further context to the complex violent situation in Beirut at the time of Jaber’s death.

Throughout the novel, there is a sense that the people the narrator interviews just need someone to talk to about their traumatic experiences, even those traumatic experiences that are not directly related to Jaber or his murder. The result of this is that the reader has to piece together a cohesive narrative of what happened to Jaber on his own from the bits and pieces that are given by each interviewee. Particularly in the representation of such traumatic symptoms or responses, like Jaber's disorientation, the novel shows that there is no one way to capture the complexity of the Lebanese Civil War into a coherent narrative that takes into account all of the conflicting factions and their goals in perpetuating the war and violence. At many points, the characters state that the war ended, when in fact it was only a lull in the level of violence that is then abruptly ended when the violence starts up again, as when Noha says, "The war stopped, or subsided..." (Khoury 21). These representations are significant in relation to living through the Lebanese civil war because this trauma influences the protagonists' identities: their memories and traumas are part of who they are, and this trauma has completely altered their worldview, opinions, and overall outlook. The characters in this novel inhabit a world that constantly shifts "between the factual and the fictional, the real and the imaginary, dream and reality" (Mostafa 215). One aspect that embodies this part of the obfuscation of how exactly Jaber was murdered, and by whom. These questions are never fully answered, and every time a possibility of full closure arises, such as when Fahd Badreddin suggests that Jaber may have been murdered by the police/military men who interrogate him, there is no way of verifying this course of events. It is obvious that Badreddin does not want to believe that this could be possible, since he believes that Jaber was harmless, and that the whole matter of Jaber being interrogated to be "...one of those senseless, meaningless incidents..." yet because of his experiences of other atrocities during war, he has to admit that it is a possibility (Khoury 192). He asserts that he is sure that "...the boys didn't do anything to him, it was just a straightforward

interrogation and then they let him go” but then immediately undermines this idea by questioning his own certainty, saying “Could it be...?” (Khoury 192). Importantly, Badreddin is careful to not name the person he is thinking of when considering who Jaber’s murderer is, since this could cause him to end up exactly like Jaber.

In a Western context, contemporary traumatic experiences are defined by the traumas of historical events and the aftermath of “...post-war Germany, post-9/11 America, Eastern Europe after Communism, or post-colonial Britain” (Luckhurst 2). The postmodern features of literature, like metafiction and self-reflexivity, mimic the human response to trauma, which supports the idea that “The postmodern unfolds between the evocation of traumas past, mainly the Second World War, and the anticipation of disaster yet-to-come...” (Arizti 238). Although *White Masks* is obviously grounded in the real-life historical events of the Lebanese Civil War, the novel does use some postmodern techniques to blur the line between fact and fiction, especially in the way that the characters characterize aspects of the events as a “story” or not. From the prologue, the text is self-reflexive in referring to the work itself, where the journalist character explicitly acknowledges that he is writing this down “is no tale” and that the events of the story “really did happen” (Khoury 7). Even the fact that this narrator character tries to report the events as a journalist would, despite the fact that he works in a travel agency and is not actually a reporter, in an attempt to learn the truth about Jaber’s murder, emphasizes that the narrator wants to be believable and show that this is not just a fictional story. Although the violence that happens to Jaber and other characters is so horrible that it might be easier to think of it as fiction, following the convention of having the narrator tell readers that this really did happen is meant to underscore that horrible violent events did happen during the course of the Lebanese Civil War. Noha Jaber describes this perfectly when she first begins speaking to the narrator about what happened to her and her family, saying, “We’ve

turned into a story, a tale people tell” (Khoury 14). Then after Ahmad’s death and Jaber’s behavior drastically changes, she continues with the story metaphor, saying, “What can I say, we’d become a story, a mirror,” meaning that the loss of her son combined with the trauma and embarrassment of her husband’s strange behavior after Ahmad’s death seems like something that would happen only to someone else, not something that would happen to her (Khoury 34). Additionally, the comparison of her family to a mirror means that she see what has happened as a reflection of what had been happening throughout Lebanon because Ahmad’s was not the only poster spread throughout the city’s walls—there were countless other young men on the posters, who were also held up as martyrs.

The concept of martyrs in *White Masks* embodies the Lebanese Civil War’s perspective on violence, especially through the posters that honor the “martyrs” after their death. They are displayed as “...obituaries in public spaces, primarily around where the deceased lived and worked” (Maasri 88). Giving the dead the honorific “martyr” was one way to deal with trauma, especially since the majority of the dead were young and had their whole lives ahead of them. If someone is a martyr, their death contributes to a larger cause, and it holds more meaning and purpose than death through natural causes. The posters’ stated purpose was to commemorate the lives of the martyrs, but ultimately becomes a form of exploitation of the dead, which is a critique that is brought up in the novel. Even at the beginning of the novel, the narrator refers to Ahmad as Jaber’s “‘martyred’” son (Khoury 9). The use of quotation marks around this word in this instance and in other instances throughout the novel suggests that the narrator is skeptical of this concept. However, the posters end up being very symbolic to Jaber—they are “...how the political discourses of the different Lebanese warring factions were visually materialized and diffused...” (Maasri xxiii). The posters are important because they honor regular, common people instead of

just high-ranking leaders or famous people whose death would be reported on anyway. For those in power in the various sects, “The number of fallen heroes becomes an indicator of a party’s share of participation on a front and a proof of its commitment and sacrifice in the defense of an existential cause” (Maasri 87). In a way, these posters act as a way of “recruiting potential fighters, encouraged by the ‘noble’ example of their friend, neighbor, relative, and comrade” that everyday people see in the posters emblazoned with the word “martyr” (Maasri 88). The posters help reinforce a system that sees young men as a commodity that can be exploited to further the cause of the various factions involved in the war. Furthermore, another effect of the posters is reminding passerby of the death of a member of their community, a reminder that reinforces the sheer number of people who were killed because of the violent civil war.

Although the posters might initially seem like a good thing—a way to honor the dead and thank them for their sacrifice—the true nature of the posters is more complicated. At first, Jaber seems to be in favor of the posters, and even seems to find comfort and pride in the fact that his son is seen as a martyr, but as time goes on, Jaber sees through the rhetoric that the posters are promoting and goes “insane.” However, the novel seems to imply that he isn’t insane, he is just the only one who sees this exploitation because he is the only one who sees through the revolutionary rhetoric, and this affects him so much that he begins acting in a way that other people do not see as normal. Other characters in the novel who encounter Jaber briefly during this phase of his life describe him to the journalist investigator as a beggar or homeless man—Fatimah gave him a piece of bread when he asked, and other try to give him money (Khoury 74). Jaber was killed because they don’t like that by taking down the posters, he was undermining the rhetoric of martyrdom. Because of his strange behavior, Jaber became disconnected from his family and social

network as a whole, so he became an element of subversion, even if he was not aware of his subversive stance.

In contrast to Jaber and his reaction to his son Ahmad's death, Sabine's death does not seem to affect Ghoul Malek even though she is his daughter. Beyond requesting Llob to investigate her death and find those responsible, Ghoul Malek does not seem to be concerned about his daughter, even after Llob discovers that she is dead. Although this way of behaving perhaps makes more sense after the revelation that Ghoul Malek is connected to her kidnappers, he still seems to show a sociopathic level of apathy. Llob seems to be desensitized to violence as well, often describing the violent scenes that he witnesses with a clinical explicitness. For example, when he shoots a terrorist who has taken a young girl hostage he describes the scene by saying: "Le temps de s'apercevoir que ses carottes sont foutues, sa tête pète comme un énorme furoncle" (Khadra 76).²¹ Llob's desensitization to violence is a result of the constant violence he deals with. Every time he walks into work he hears about another dramatic bombing where countless people are killed or injured. Someone that he had just recently spoken with/was friendly with like Ait Meziane, the comedian, could end up being assassinated with no warning. Llob's trauma response thus seems to be to throw himself into his work, and to not think about the potential for him or his family to be killed. This makes him come across as even more hard-boiled or grizzled, like the traditional detective figure, but as we see when his son decides to leave Algiers, it affects him more than he will admit.

Llob's desensitization to violence makes him more similar to Ghoul Malek than seemingly meets the eye. After all, Ghoul Malek's name means "King Monster" which is highly suggestive, and in some ways, Ghoul is Llob's alter ego. Ghoul Malek believes that violence is necessary to

²¹ "With just time enough to notice that his goose is cooked, his head explodes like an enormous boil" (Khadra 52)

cause change in Algeria, which is why he is willing to do morally dubious things in the name of justice. By killing Ghoul, Llob is symbolically ending the temptation to adopt Ghoul Malek's "the ends justify the means" mentality. At the same time, by taking justice into his own hands, Llob is falling into what Ghoul Malek was arguing for—by killing him, he is committing another act of violence in the name of ending violence. Furthermore, it is doubtful as to whether the killing of Ghoul Malek will do much to end violence in Algeria, since by killing him, Llob has eliminated one thug, but there is always going to be another. By killing him, he is slipping into Ghoul Malek's way of thinking, because at what point does the killing stop? Who is going to determine who is a thug and who is not? In some ways, Llob's assassination of Ghoul Malek and therefore taking justice into his own hands, turns Llob himself into a thug. Ghoul Malek thinks that all he is doing, including the violence, are all for a higher cause. This is a very similar explanation to the explanation given by some of the soldiers in *White Masks*, as well as Ali Shuayb, who said: "Ali always said that without the armed struggle, there would be no solution" (Khoury 132). In *White Masks* as well as *Morituri*, corruption and profiting off the war is common. The thieves who rob and rape the Khatchadourians justify their horrible violent acts because "Everyone else has got rich in this war..." and are only caught because they "...have no connections in high places" (Khoury 53).

The question of whether Llob has done a morally good thing or not by killing Ghoul Malek at the end of *Morituri* raises complicated questions of ethics and philosophy about violence. Ghoul Malek's theory is that in order for Algeria to become a modern civil society, violence is necessary. He says :

Tout pays a besoin de crise pour se recycler. Bien sûr, il y a de la case. Mais qu'est-ce qu'une poignée de martyrs face à la renaissance ? C'est même une exigence. Ça

fait croire en la patrie et ça prépare les sacrifices de demain (...) Les seules taches
qui échoient au peuple sont le vote et la guerre (Khadra 182).²²

This was the same way of thinking that led to the Algerian War of Independence, and as Fanon explained, this violence was supposed to heal the violence inflicted by colonization. However, it is unclear at what point the violence will end, and how much people like Ghoul Malek and Llob are willing to sacrifice to meet this goal. It is obvious that the violence of the War for Independence did not heal the violence inflicted by colonization. As Llob observes in his investigation into Sabine's disappearance and murder, which takes him to all areas of the city of Algiers, there is a clear difference in class and economic benefit—for instance, the elite of the Oliviers district and the rich privileged people at Ghoul Malek's party at the beginning of the novel are not affected by the political turmoil or the violence of the war for the most part, and live a luxurious lifestyle that shields them from the reality that independence from France did not create a stable country with a free, democratic and modern government for all the people of Algeria. For the majority of the population, the fear of death and the threat of violence makes it impossible to truly have a life, and consequently the country is paralyzed. The only way to possibly escape the violence and create a better life for yourself and your family is through money, and often the only way to make the amount of money necessary for this is to resort to corruption and/or doing the dirty work for elites like Ghoul Malek, like Omar Malkom, owner of an electrical goods store who is corrupted because he needs money (Khadra 139).

²² "Every country has need of a crisis to recycle itself...Naturally there is some damage. But what is a handful of martyrs compared with a renaissance? It's actually a necessity. It makes one believe in the motherland and it prepares one for the sacrifices of tomorrow. The only areas where people have any say are the vote and war" (Khadra 132).

It is significant that Ghoul Malek brings up the idea of “martyrs” specifically because it makes another connection with *Morituri* and *White Masks*. However, there is a difference in the way Ghoul Malek uses the term compared to *White Masks*. In *White Masks*, the concept of a martyr refers to the young men, usually soldiers, who were killed in the course of battle. Their deaths are honored by calling them martyrs, as well as creating a rhetorical appeal that justifies their death. However, in *Morituri*, the way that Ghoul Malek uses the term martyr makes it clear that the martyrs are not necessarily soldiers who willingly chose to enter battle and use violence for whatever cause they believe they are fighting for. Instead, Ghoul Malek’s martyr seems to refer to the “collateral damage” of the innocent men, women and even children who are killed in the process of re-making Algeria as a country, even if they are not killed in a battle. In fact, most of the time, they are killed in the random bombings, attacks and assassinations that occur because of guerrilla warfare, terrorist attacks, or violence disguised as a terrorist attack. By dismissing these deaths as “martyrdoms” Ghoul Malek is judging these lost lives to be less valuable while disguising his morally dubious value judgement with respect by referring to them as martyrs. Ghoul Malek’s use of the word martyr is similar to the way “martyr” is used when referring to Jaber in *White Masks*, since Jaber was not a soldier—because he was “crazy” or seen as a homeless beggar with not family or community connections, his life was seen as less valuable, but to justify his death and make it seem like it had a purpose, he was labelled as a martyr.

Another important aspect of Ghoul Malek’s justification of violence and his concept of martyrdom is the question of how much is Ghoul Malek aware that this viewpoint would result in his own daughter’s death—how much did he really know about her disappearance and murder? Since Ghoul Malek is somehow connected with the men who ultimately killed Sabrine, he is at least partially responsible for her death, but the text does not make it clear if this was part of Ghoul

Malek's plan or not. Either way, Ghoul Malek seems to regard Sabrine's death as a necessary sacrifice that is made for the cause of the "renaissance" of Algeria. As he says, "Pour passer d'un système socialiste caricatural à l'ouverture du marché, il faut s'acquitter de la taxe douanière" (Khadra 182).²³ With this statement, Ghoul Malek makes it clear that his version of an Algerian renaissance involves an alignment with neoliberal capitalism, and he wants to abandon the socialist system that was the goal of the FLN after independence. If this is his goal, and martyrs are part of the collateral damage necessary when starting this "renaissance," it means that Ghoul Malek views his daughter as a commodity that can be sacrificed with the purpose of a higher goal. Sabrine could be seen as a metaphor for the 'new' post-Independence Algeria itself, especially because nations are often metaphorically depicted as women. She (Sabrine/the old Algeria) has to be sacrificed in order for the rebirthed "new" Algeria to emerge as part of the globalized economy. This is supposedly supposed to create a more equitable, "free" country, but if the poor, disadvantaged, and lower classes have to be sacrificed in order for this to happen, the question becomes exactly who will benefit from this reborn Algeria?

Furthermore, and related to this theme of trauma, both novels do not provide the narrative closure that one would expect in a classic detective novel. In *Morituri*, the reader knows that Sabrine has been killed, and that Ghoul Malek and Sid Lankabout alias Abou Kalybse are involved in her murder, but it is not clear exactly how or why she is murdered by them. The key questions of: Why was Sabrine killed? Why kidnap her if she was just going to be killed? And ultimately, who is pulling the strings? remain. The novel does not provide an answer to these questions. In *White Masks*, there are several suspects put forward as the culprit, but the narrator explains that any of them could have been the responsible party. Not only does this lack of closure rob the reader

²³ "To progress from a caricature of a socialist system to the opening up of the market, we must pay the customs duty" (Khadra 133).

of the satisfactory ending expected in a detective novel, but it also goes against the conclusion of a classical Arabic detective story, as explained by Fedwa Malti-Douglas in “The Classical Arabic Detective.” In this article, Malti-Douglas uses the twelfth-century “The Case of the Painted Hand” as an example of a classic detective story, in which a caliph not only has the knowledge and skill to solve the crime and discover who the murderer is, but also the power to provide justice through punishment of the criminal and restitution for the victim’s family. The punishment and justice provided at the conclusion of the story are an important part of the closure of the story, both for the reader and the character’s family. Both *Morituri* and *White Masks* are a part of the Arabic literary tradition (especially *White Masks*, since it is written in Arabic), but they subvert this genre convention. Especially because the criminal cannot be conclusively apprehended, the families of the victims cannot obtain justice. Even when Llob and Lino discover a criminal and the extent of his crimes, they cannot truly carry out justice, because the criminal kills himself or is killed off by someone else connected to Ghoul Malek’s mafia or by other murderers, who may or may not be connected to the government itself. This applies to the criminals involved with Sabrina’s kidnapping and murder, as well as other criminals that Llob and Lino encounter in the course of their investigation.

The lack of closure and of a conclusive solving of the crime not only speaks to the trauma experienced by all the characters because of their circumstances, but also further emphasizes the state of society in both countries in *White Masks* and *Morituri*. By denying detectives the power to solve the crime and serve justice for the victims’ families, the writers deny the reader the satisfaction of knowing what really happened to the victims. Thus, the resulting discomfort that is created in both the characters and the reader accentuates the conviction that the true culprit is not an individual, but the system of government and society that caused the political, economic, and

societal state of upheaval in both countries. The ultimate source of the trauma experienced by the characters is the government's failure to conduct the affairs of the country in a way that leads to stability and serve its people's interests.

CHAPTER 3. THE DETECTIVE NOVEL AS A CRITIQUE OF THE FAILED NATION-BUILDING PROJECT

As discussed earlier, Detective fiction, no matter what language it is written in, is usually viewed as a non-canonical, non-academic, and overall less serious genre. However, postmodern crime fiction, especially in French context, is more likely to incorporate social or political issues within the traditional detective story than the classic Sherlock Holmes-type English language detective story. After discovering the crime, whether it is Sherlock Holmes himself or the French equivalent of Sherlock Holmes, Émile Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq, the detective works to investigate the crime and understand the events that led up to it. A key difference between English language detective fiction and French detective fiction is that French detective fiction is much more likely to discuss the reason why the perpetrator committed the crime. The reason why often engages with social or political factors that complicate the genre from being one purely associated with the pleasure of solving the riddle of the crime. Related to this is concept of the restoration of the social order. A crime, usually a murder, is committed, and the detective must solve the crime so that the perpetrator can no longer commit the crime and kill more people, so that society can continue to exist with a feeling of safety, and so that justice can be carried out. As Hamilton explains in "The French Detective Fiction Novel 1920's to 1990's: Gendering a Genre," "Formalized discourse has portrayed detective fiction as a literature inspired by a universal moral code, where truth and justice are the two pillars supporting an egalitarian society" (Hamilton iii). Therefore, crime fiction is a way to explore politics because it considers questions like: What is considered a crime? Who commits the crimes and why? Who enforces the law? Who gets away with what? How is justice carried out (or not?) In a traditional detective novel, the detective spends most of the novel gathering clues and evidence about the crime, and may possibly come across a

few red herrings that defer him (and the reader) from too quickly discovering the murderer, the motive, and how the crime was carried out.²⁴ The process of solving the crime provides an escape for the reader, wherein the detective uses logic and deduction to bring the world to order in a way that brings satisfaction and closure for the reader.

However, both *Morituri* and *White Masks* are detective novels that differ from the Western conception of this genre because they are part of the Arabic tradition of the detective tale. More specifically, *Morituri* and *White Masks* continue the idea of the restoration of the social order by critiquing the society in which the novels take place. As mentioned previously, the earliest model of the detective tale in an Arabic context is “The Three Apples” in *Arabian Nights/One Thousand and One Nights*.²⁵ Another early example of the detective tale in an Arabic context is the previously mentioned twelfth-century classic detective story called “The Case of the Painted Hand”. Both of these tales have in common the concept of a “good ruler” that is concerned about solving crime in his domain. The “good ruler” has the motivation to resolve the murders because he is concerned about the social impact of the crime and because in order to be a “good” ruler, he must maintain the good will of his subjects, which can only be achieved if the people feel that justice has been served. Because of this, the “detective” in both stories is someone who has been ordered to solve the crime for the sake of achieving justice for the victim and her family. This

²⁴ In a French context, the traditional detective novel is sometimes referred to as “littérature de gare” because of the tendency to read these types of novels while travelling and because of their availability in train stations and airports.

²⁵ Summary of this tale: This tale is one of Scheherazade’s tales that involves the discovery of the cut pieces of a body of a murdered young woman in a heavy chest that a fisherman accidentally fished out of the Tigris River. Caliph Harun orders his vizier, Ja’far, to solve her murder within three days, or face execution. Just as he is about to be executed, a young man and an older man suddenly both claim to be the murderer, and Harun orders them to explain their motives. The younger man explains that the murdered woman was his wife, and he murdered her after he sees a slave with the exact rare apple that his wife had requested. After questioning the slave about how he got such a rare apple, he says that he received it from his lover, which led the young man to suspect his wife of cheating on him. The young man slit her throat as a consequence, and the older man was attempting to take the blame to spare his life. At the last second before his execution, Jaf’ar discovers that it was own slave who had stolen the murdered woman’s apple, which was the cause of the woman’s murder.

differs from other detective stories, where the detective solves crimes because they have a desire to do so, as is the case with most Western detective stories, like Sherlock Holmes, and the journalist character in *White Masks*. The “detectives” in “The Three Apples” and “The Case of the Painted Hand” thus have more in common with Llob than the journalist in *White Masks*, because while Llob has noble aspirations in his job as a police officer, he is not enthusiastic about being assigned Sabine’s case—he merely does it because he is ordered to by his boss.

Another area of modern original Arabic detective fiction was a series of individual detective stories and other publications in “low-brow” genres like science fiction and adventure stories, which were published in Egypt in the 1980s by Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya alḤadītha (The Modern Arabic Institute) (Bawardi et al 30). Many of these stories blurred the lines between detective fiction and other “low-brow” genres. Bawardi and Faranesh explain this conflation by pointing out that:

...many Arab authors who wrote detective mysteries and adventures also wrote science fiction, an indication of a link between these two literary genres, especially at the start of original writing, and probably the result of the confusion and lack of distinction or the merging of the two (35).

Basilus Bawardi and Ali Faranesh argue in “Non-canonical Arabic Detective Fiction: The Beginnings of the Genre” that Arabic crime fiction differs from Western crime fiction. One way that Arabic crime fiction differs is that the first Arabic detective stories, like “The Three Apples” and “The Case of the Painted Hand” developed much earlier than the first detective stories in a Western context. Another way that Arabic crime fiction differs from Western crime fiction is that it adapts an ethic of inclusion, or in other words that it has characteristics that are “supposed to reflect, a broad popular experience,” but “does not oppose the existing order, values and politics”

(Bawardi et al. 24). However, what makes *White Masks* and *Morituri* unique compared to other Arabic detective stories is that they manage to oppose the existing “order, values and politics” through using the genre a shield for this opposition. The use of the ‘mystery’ motif as a pretext for critique is what elevates *White Masks* and *Morituri* from the less serious traditional genre of detective fiction to something new. The fact that the true culprit is left as a mystery is part of the is that the strategy to navigate the censorship that authors might also be subjected to if the novels point explicitly to the real culprits.

There are several things that *White Masks* and *Morituri* have in common, and these factors are what make these novels different from a traditional Western detective novel. The factors are: a body with an ambiguous murderer, a society that exhibits a lack of responsibility/accountability and a total lack of morality, and a complex social and political reality, emblematic of a larger failed nation building project. All of these factors make the goal of a traditional detective novel more difficult to achieve because there is no social order to return to: the social order has been completely destroyed, and the system that would normally seek to punish transgressions of the social order is in disarray. Additionally, despite these key differences between the two novels and traditional detective novels that might make the label “crime fiction” seem more accurate, both *White Masks* and *Morituri* have a detective who is attempting to solve the crimes, meaning that although there are some key differences between a traditional Western detective novel and these two novels, *White Masks* and *Morituri* are reinventing the genre as opposed to creating a new genre entirely. The structural elements of the genre of the detective story, especially the plot elements of the “whodunit”, the investigation involving a detective figure tracing clues, and the delay of satisfaction in discovering the who, why and how are connected to the political elements of the genre, especially violence and trauma experienced by characters because of the civil war. Thus,

the expansion of the genre of the detective story to include more of these political elements becomes a pretext for examining the nations of Algeria and Lebanon. Because of the expansion of the genre to include more of these political elements, the genre is elevated from popular culture's view of detective stories as something that is only read for fun to a more serious, academic genre with a larger goal of political critique.

One of the most important political elements of the two novels involves the circumstances of the crime. When it comes to the crimes in both novels, the murder itself involves a body with no one culprit or no specific culprit. For both Sabrine and Jaber, it is a social and national crime as opposed to an individual crime—responsibility for their murders cannot be attributed to one person. The vagueness of the true culprit implies that the responsibility for these murders is shared. Although both victims were logistically murdered by one person, this one person is neither named, nor is this one person the only one who has responsibility for the crime. In other words, at the end of the novels, there is not a trial wherein the murderer is found guilty and sent to jail, nor is there even an arrest made, or an attempt to gather enough evidence to find the logistical culprit guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, as is the case with most traditional Western detective stories. Even if this were the case, there would not be a sense that justice was served, or that this crime would be prevented from happening again by placing the murderer in jail. Because responsibility for these murders is shared, it is inevitable that other murders similar to Sabrine's and Jaber's will happen again. In most detective novels, there is a sense that the detective is the unequivocal "good guy" and the murderer is the unequivocal "bad guy". In both *Morituri* and *White Masks*, the sense of good vs. evil is much less black and white, and the cases are much less about the individuals involved, and more about the larger evils of society, which are much more difficult and complex to understand. Not only does this prevent the reader from gaining a sense of pleasure and

satisfaction at the conclusion of the novels, it also makes the ending of the novels quite bleak, leaving the characters and the reader with a sense that there is no solution.

The failed project of nation building is reflected in lack of responsibility and accountability, and a total lack of morality, reflected in the crime of focus and the other morally depraved events and descriptions encountered by the characters. In both novels, atrocious acts go unpunished, (such as the implication that the young boys who Llob sees in Limbes Rouges are raped by older men in *Morituri*) and characters are left to deal with the consequences of these actions on their own, with no sense of justice, either because these crimes are not seen as crimes (as is the case with the marital rape of Fatimah Fakhro) or because the government does not have the structure in place in terms of the justice system to adequately deal with the perpetrators, especially when the perpetrator is killed, either in a standoff with police (as in Llob's and Lino's incident in the Oliviers district in chapter nine of *Morituri*) or in a suicide bombing, meaning he cannot be punished. In both countries, there is not a normal, stable society: it is completely destroyed because of the civil war and government corruption. The lack of social structures causes everyone to live in a state of permanent crisis mode. Morality is non-existent and there is no voice for ethical responsibility. Most people have an egoistic attitude toward life. Through these circumstances, communicated in the descriptions about the characters give about their lives in *White Masks* and the experiences that Llob and Lino have in the course of their investigation of Sabine's murder and through their day-to-day job duties as police officers in *Morituri*, the novels criticize the social decay and the absence of order. From the dark tone of both novels, there is no sense of national identity, and a sense that there is no future for the country.

Another characteristic of the detective novel genre "mystery" involves the choice of victims and the information that the text gives (or does not give) the reader. Part of this mystery

comes from not knowing much about the victims themselves: in most detective stories, the detective spends a significant amount of time looking into the victims' backgrounds, relationships, and affiliations that could make a connection between the victim and the perpetrator or perhaps a motive for why they were killed. Yet, both novels do not give a lot of information in this area. Significantly, *White Masks* gives more information about Jaber than *Morituri* gives about Sabrine. In *White Masks*, most direct information about Jaber comes from the journalist's interview with his wife, who explains Jaber's life with her in detail, at least until he has his psychotic break and leaves home. After this, Noha loses contact with him, and what happened to him during this period is much vaguer and more fragmented. Yet, Jaber's background is more discussed than Sabrine's because of his social position as the father of a martyr. Another factor playing into why more information is known about Jaber than Sabrine is that Ghoul Malek is reluctant to give Llob information about her because of his connections to the mafia that carried out her kidnapping. Additionally, the difference in gender between the two victims plays a role and is one way that the novels play into the hypermasculine tradition of detective novels. Since Sabrine is a woman, and especially because she was a woman known to be involved with sex work, her life is deemed to be less valuable by society, and the fact that she was murdered is seen as a fact of life or an inevitability of her lifestyle. The mere fact that Sabrine was known to frequent the seedy cabaret Limbes Rouges is enough for most characters to draw unsavory conclusions about Sabrine. Almost no one expresses regret at the news of her death, and most are reluctant to give up information that could be helpful in solving her murder. This reluctance is probably born out of a sense of self preservation, since almost everyone that Llob speaks with during the course of his investigation end up dead before the end of the novel. In contrast, in *White Masks*, although they are quick to distance themselves from Jaber, the people that the journalist interviews express sympathy for him,

and they regret that he died. Although most try to emphasize that they had nothing to do with Jaber beyond a passing interaction, they do try to give as much information as possible.

The fact that no one wants to admit to knowing Sabrine or Jaber shows that both societies are egoistical. No one wants to admit that their actions (or inaction) might have played a role in causing the murders, or that if they had acted slightly differently, the murders might have been prevented. These attitudes and overall social fragmentation are reactions to the societal trauma experienced in both Algeria and Lebanon. Because of the war, their fight or flight instinct has taken over in a semi-permanent capacity, and they cannot think about anyone other than themselves and their families. There is no sense of community, and in a larger sense, there is no sense of common nationhood that would normally cause people to have compassion and concern for another member of their community. This egoistical attitude is part of what makes it impossible to name the perpetrator in the murders, because all of society is at least somewhat responsible for the murders because the community surrounding Sabrine and Jaber does not deem them valuable enough to care about.

Because of the historical and political context of the novels and since the detective theme is a pretext for analyzing the nations of both novels, *White Masks* and *Morituri* have a complex social and political reality, which is emblematic of a larger failed project. There are two “mysteries” in *Morituri*: the disappearance of Sabrine and how her murder is connected to the mysteries of the political system, just as there are two “mysteries” in *White Masks*: the murder of Jaber and how his murder is connected to the politics of the posters and the larger system of propaganda and the different factions. These two mysteries are inseparable and intertwined. In both texts, the narrators suggest many clues about the potential culprits for the failed project of modern nation building without directly naming names, and that there may not be one single

culprit, but rather a multiplicity of culprits. Khoury and Khadra manipulate the form and structure of the detective novel to reinvent the genre and mold it to their way of seeing in order to critique the corruption and moral disarray in their respective countries in a subtle way. For example, the classical detective novel is more concerned with intrigue/suspense as a thriller but in these two novels, the content is serious and is about the formation of nation, symbolized through the characters of Sabrine and Jaber. Because of this, it is significant that readers do not have a resolution as in the classical detective or crime story. The array of possibilities for who killed the two victims, the extent to which it was pre-planned or premeditated, and the exact way that it plays out is presented in the vaguest possible way: there is no definitive culprit, no smoking gun, no conclusive autopsy, all of which is emblematic of the larger disarray of Algeria and Lebanon. Thus, the structural or generic aspects of the novels are connected to the larger themes and conceptual content.

Another reason why the genre of the detective novel and the ambiguity of the culprit is connected to the political aspects is that the “mystery” motif is a strategy to navigate the censorship that the authors might be subject to if the novels explicitly pointed to the real culprits. Khadra was particularly vulnerable to censorship because of his position as a high-ranking member of the military. Because of this, he was held to a higher standard of maintaining the status quo and tolerance for critique of the government and social order, especially because of the Algerian military’s enmeshment in the Algerian government. In some ways, Llob seems to be a first person stand in for Khadra himself, and the character of Llob allows Khadra another layer of protection—if he was accused of critiquing the government or of creating civil unrest, he can use the defense that it is the fictional character of Llob, not himself, who is drawing attention to the government’s corruption. First person also makes it more immediate for the reader, and contributes to the feeling

that Llob is reliable, even though he is part of the state apparatus itself. In “Wanted: National Algerian Identity,” Burtscher-Bechter sees *Morituri* as a way of constructing a national Algerian identity, and sees Llob as an everyday Algerian man who cares deeply about his country, and instead of mirroring the ideology of the government, shows his patriotism through his critiques of the government. *White Masks* also uses first person, at least in the “frame” part of the story with the amateur journalist interviewing people. *White Masks* emphasizes the social fragmentation caused by civil war because of the myriad of narratives and perspectives that are presented to the reader, whereas *Morituri* is a much more personal story. *Morituri* is much more personal because it is presented through Llob’s perspective and narrated exclusively in the first person by Llob himself and no other characters. Even though *White Masks* also makes use of the first person, there are a multiplicity of characters who narrate their own stories, as well as explaining what happened to Jaber through their individual interactions with him. Because the narrative constantly switches perspective, the result is much more fragmented, and it is difficult to remember that their statements have connection to Jaber’s death. The frame technique draws attention to the fact that this is a novel. For Khoury, censorship is still a concern even though “In Lebanon, publishers do not submit books to the censorship review before printing, but printed books can sometimes be banned if their contents seem politically sensitive or threatening to raise sectarian issues” (Abouzeid 96). The novel deals with sectarian issues very sensitively and is very vague and ambiguous when it does point fingers. One example of the vagueness of the culprit and the cause of the war in *White Masks*: one of the young men involved in the rape and murder of Dr. Khatourian’s wife is a “card carrying member of one of the political parties” and no further indication is given as to which party he is a member of (Khoury 50). Since *White Masks* is set during the Lebanese Civil War, when sectarian tensions were at the most violent, the possibility for censorship would have

been very high. This is why the text is very ambiguous about which sect each character belongs to and is very careful to not blame a specific sect either for causing the war or for the individual instances of violence that occur in the novel.

Another indication that both writers use the genre of crime fiction as a way to escape censorship and explore the problems of their countries is the violent political upheaval that is the setting of both of these novels. In *Morituri*, the military is absent, even though the military played, and continues to play, a significant role in the government of Algeria. Khadra especially feared censorship because “Yasmina Khadra” is in fact Commandant (Major) Mohammed Moulessehouli’s wife’s name, which was adopted to avoid military censorship (Deckard 75). In “Mythologies du roman policier algérien” by Dr. Miloud Benhaimouda explains that Algerian detective fiction in particular is different from the traditional “roman de gare” precisely because of the political situation in Algeria:

... La fiction policière algérienne ne saurait être, à rigoureusement parler, ni désignée par la formule « roman de gare », ni traduire au plan littéraire l’espace de la modernité que symbolise un réseau ferroviaire. En effet, ce que l’on convient de désigner péjorativement par la formule « littérature de gare » suppose en premier lieu des gares, mais encore une gestion rationnelle du temps, une infrastructure industrielle, commerciale et financière moderne, des moyens de transports fonctionnels, confortables, un dense circuit de distribution du livre en perpétuelle rotation, et enfin un quotidien décent et des loisirs satisfaisants. L’anémie d’un genre (indissociable d’une industrialisation réussie, d’une prospérité conquise,

d'une conception scientifique du temps), signale l'échec du décollage économique en Algérie (Benhaimouda 69).²⁶

Thus, as Benhaimouda explains, the lack of economic development and formation as a modern nation state following Independence is exactly what makes the Algerian detective novel different and is one reason why the political situation is such an intrinsic part of the plot of *Morituri*. This lack of development and the effects of violence and failure to build a modern nation following Independence is also true for Lebanon and *White Masks*. Ultimately, both writers adapt this genre with the fear and lack of transparency in these two postcolonial countries.

The detective genre provides a veil of protection for the two authors to engage in political critique because of their backgrounds. The background of the authors is especially important for Yasmina Khadra because of his position as a member of the military. Khadra served in the Algerian military from 1985-2000 and eventually was forced to leave Algeria for France because of “an escalation of death threats provoked by his critique of the regime and of Islamic fundamentalism” (Deckard 75). Khadra was nominated for the Prix Femina and was lauded as an Arab woman writer with a unique perspective on Algeria and who was breaking barriers in the masculine, sexist hard-boiled detective fiction genre, until he finally revealed his true identity in *Le Monde* in 2001 (Deckard 75). This revelation complicated the critique made by *Morituri* (and the other novels in the Inspector Llob series, including *Double blanc*, *L'Automne des chimères* and a prequel to *Morituri*, *La Part du Mort*) because it meant that Khadra himself participated in the violence of

²⁶ “Algerian detective fiction cannot be, strictly speaking, neither categorized by the formula of a traditional “station novel”, nor translate on a literary level the space of modernity that symbolizes a railway network. Indeed, what one agrees to refer to pejoratively as “station literature” firstly presupposes stations, but also a rational management of time, a modern industrial, commercial and financial infrastructure, functional means of transport, comfortable, a dense book distribution circuit in perpetual rotation, and finally a decent daily life and satisfactory leisure activities. The anemia of one kind (inseparable from successful industrialization, from conquered prosperity, from a scientific conception of time), signals the failure of the economic take-off in Algeria” (my translation)

the Algerian civil war. In fact, he defended the military's actions despite other soldiers like Habib Souaïdia (in his book *La sale guerre*) testifying that the army attacked the civilian population to "...répandre l'impression qu'ils constituaient la seule force capable de restituer la paix dans le pays" (Pawlicki 100).²⁷ Additionally, the question of the targeted audience, according to various interviews Khadra has given about the novel, seems to be the elite and the French, since it is written in French. French, or a foreign language in general, is yet another layer of protection because of Arabic's sacred dimension. The public at large is not ready to read political critique or a genre associated with entertainment and the West in Arabic. The choice to use French is also due to his educational background and limited Arabic proficiency, because Khadra's French is stronger than his classical/modern Arabic. At the same time, this choice gives his novels a wider Francophone audience while simultaneously limiting the target audience to only those who can read French, which ultimately undermines the goal of the text, because not all Algerians can read in French.

Both novels are emblematic of a shift in the use of the detective and crime novel to address the political disarray in their respective states and the Arab world as a whole. In both of these novels, the technical and generic aspects are connected to the thematic, and the detective novel structure is not just there for suspense and entertainment. Instead, the mystery points to the complex imbrication of crime with the neocolonial system that benefits the most powerful and the most affluent at the expense of the weak, poor, and disadvantaged. The fact that the most powerful people are benefitting from the war is apparent to Jaber's mourners in *White Masks*, who say: "But all we see are politicians in fast cars, living it up like the rich, while we grow poorer by the day" (Khouri 208). Both novels not only ask the classic detective novel question of "whodunit?" but also "who is pulling the strings?" In other words, what are the social, political, and economic

²⁷ Translation: "spread the impression that they were the only force capable of restoring peace to the country."

reasons that led to these crimes being committed? Both novels make it clear that the individuals who actually physically murdered both victims are part of larger structures of power and control: these murders are the result of a failure of post-Independence nation-building project, the devastating effects of the neoliberal postcolonial states policies and social inequities in the Global South.

Although the term “Global South” is sometimes used as a synonym for Third World countries in the geographic south, it has come to refer to “spaces and peoples negatively impacted by globalization, including within the borders of wealthier countries” (Mahler 32). The term “Global South” accounts “for subjugated peoples within the borders of wealthier countries, such that there are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South” (Mahler 6). Algiers and Beirut are both Global South cities and setting these stories in these cities serves to criticize the new colonial enterprise. There is a compatibility between the detective novel genre and the fear and lack of transparency in these two postcolonial countries which are also part of the problems that plague the Global South. The vagueness of the culprits points to the vagueness of the complex problems created by colonization and continued neocolonial control and influence of Algeria and Lebanon by the West. The novels’ use of the urban setting, a traditional part of the detective novel, emphasizes the lack of economic development in Beirut and Algiers and the difficulties in the formation as a modern nation state following Independence. The novels also highlight the disparities in class and wealth in different areas of the city: in *Morituri*, Llob takes note of the rich area of the city, which has been untouched by the civil war (Khadra 73). Because of his line of work, Llob is perfectly positioned to see the inequalities created by neoliberal capitalism. Through his investigation, he can experience all the vices money can buy, exactly as Ghoul Malek does, and in the same day, see the consequences of the exploitation of the poor: the

political mafia, a vague entity used as a stand-in for the military controlled government, often disguised themselves as Islamic terrorists or poor people sucked into fundamentalism to give them hope, or they are brought in with promises of material wealth. In *White Masks*, because of the backdrop of an unending civil war, the idea of the revolution is invoked to justify corruption and unconscionably violent acts. The disparity between classes is also highlighted: in the same city, some people can afford to take expensive trips to Europe to escape the violence, while others live among actual garbage because Beirut has a problem with garbage because of corruption. The garbage becomes a point of leverage, and part of the criticism of social decay.

Ultimately, although the novels use their genre to point out and critique the political and social problems of Algeria and Lebanon that are created in the process of nation building, they do not have the answers. One of the limitations of using literature for social and political critique is that it is not always the best way to propose solutions to the problems that it points out. This causes both novels to end on a bleak and depressing note, leaving the reader confused not only to the resolution of the crime itself, but also what direction that the country will take as a response to the political crises at hand. However, the first step to solving a problem is to identify what the problem is, and both novels do a good job in representing the complexity and seriousness of the problems of both nations.

CONCLUSION

Morituri and *White Masks* are set during their respective countries' civil wars. The political situation created by these wars makes it impossible to understand what is happening in both novels without understanding the historical and political context of Algeria and Lebanon. Although the causes and circumstances of these wars differ in some key respects, namely that Algeria's war was more between the state, Islamists and fundamentalists, whereas Lebanon's conflicts were more sectarian, both connect the crimes to rampant corruption and to certain individuals and groups taking advantage of the situation. The civil war in Algeria was a direct result of the legacy of colonization and the upheaval that it caused in relation to nation building. This also caused a crisis of identity, on a national and personal level. As seen in *Morituri*, the civil war was not simply a war between two sides: it was much more complicated, and anyone could become a victim (as will be the fate of Llob himself in *L'Automne des chimères*). Although law enforcement officers like Inspector Llob in *Morituri* and public intellectuals and artists were targets, even regular citizens who had nothing to do with these targeted groups could become victims. As described in *Algeria Modern: From Opacity to Complexity*, the government tried to promote the idea that the civil war was a result of the conflict between "terrorist bands" and law enforcement, actually it was "between the state and guerrilla organisations" (Martinez et al 4). In Lebanon, although it has political corruption and the rich elite level of society using the system to their advantage in common with Algeria, the conflict is mostly a sectarian one between the many religious and ethnic groups that live together in one small area of land. Using violence to maintain this power and control is another phenomenon that both countries unfortunately share. There is no one leader or politician, no single event or tragedy that can be blamed for the entirety of the

situation. Identifying the root cause of a problem is usually the first step to solving it but identifying the cause of the problem is yet another way for more tension to erupt.

Since both countries are part of the Arab world, the goal of many people is to “recover an uncomplicated Arab-Islamic identity,” but even from this very simplified and shortened version of the histories of the two countries, the situation is much more complex and this goal is not easy. Like *Morituri* and *White Masks*, what actually happened in history is more complicated—grayer—than what is told. Algeria and Lebanon, despite their legal independence from the colonizer, are states that have not been able to build a modern civic society with a stable government and democracy in a way that was originally intended. As a result, these countries’ citizens are still dealing with the consequences of a neocolonial dependence on the colonizer, and the resulting civil wars, and their effects of violence and trauma.

Because of the backdrop of the civil war in both novels, violence and trauma are an intrinsic part of both novels. Violence and trauma are important aspects of the characters’ experience of their country’s civil wars because it means that the choices that these characters make during the course of the novel are often a result of the trauma that they experienced in the past and/or trauma that they are currently experiencing. Since trauma is the result of a “life threatening experience accompanied by horror or fear [and] it can endanger the physical and/or psychological well-being of a person,” the distress that the characters experience while living through their country’s civil wars causes them to act in ways that are often detrimental to their personal lives and their relationships and even affects their sense of identity in ways that they might not even realize (Resick 28). As Mostafa says about *White Masks*, “the narrative style fictionalizes the themes of memory, trauma and identity to motivate the reader to piece together stories and rethink what

happens from different perspectives,” and this is just as much true for *Morituri* as it is for *White Masks* (Mostafa 213).

Additionally, the two novels have used the genre to make a political critique, specifically through highlighting the failure of nation building. There are several things that *White Masks* and *Morituri* have in common, and these factors are what make these novels different from a traditional Western detective novel. The impact of using the detective novel for social and political critique is that the detective novel has been elevated from a novel of pleasure to a novel written and read to point out paradoxes in the societies of Algeria and Lebanon and cause social and political critique. The detective novel has taken on a deeper significance because of the political critique made by the two novels. Since *White Masks*, originally published in 1981 and *Morituri*, originally published in 1997, other detective stories throughout the early 2000s and 2010s have taken on aspects of political and social critique within the detective genre and have integrated other areas of political critique beyond critique of civil war, violence and corruption. Use of the mystery novel has expanded into the area of immigration, in novels such as *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* by Amaria Lakhous.²⁸ This novel, written by another Algerian writer, uses the frame of a murder mystery as a pretext to discuss immigration. The novel tells the story of the aftermath of Lorenzo “the Gladiator” Manfredini’s murder, told through interviews with his neighbors. In his neighbor’s monologues about their interactions with the Gladiator and the supposed murderer, Amedeo, the reader gets a glimpse into each character’s views on racial and geographic identity, anxieties and embarrassments of living life as a minority in Italy. The reinvention of the genre has allowed Lakhous to discuss the internal racism in Italy and address the larger conflicts of racism, immigration and xenophobia, as well as use different characters to

²⁸ First published as *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (2006).

personify stereotypes about different regions, groups and cultures. Lakhous exploits the genre in a way similar to Khadra and Khoury to explore identity politics.

Lastly, these detective novels are successful in their goal of raising questions about the consequences of colonialism and the failed project of nation building. While they do not propose concrete solutions, they do use the genre to critique the two countries and identify the problem in order to represent the paradoxes and corruption in their societies and involve the reader in finding solutions. Ultimately, the novels expanded the scope of popular culture by using the detective genre to foster understanding and memory of the Algerian and Lebanese civil war, which is an impressive task given that detective fiction is usually viewed as a less serious genre that is only read for entertainment.

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