Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam & the End of Time in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's *al-Zilzāl*[1]

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the use of Qurʾanic rhetoric and imagery in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's 1974 novel *al-Zilzāl* (*The Earthquake*). More specifically, it emphasizes Waṭṭār's employment of Qurʾanic eschatology to blur the boundary between 'religious' and 'secular' forms of discourse in the construction of Algerian nationalist discourse. The paper investigates *al-Zilzāl's* critical engagement with the rhetoric of Arabism and Islamism in post-revolutionary state politics, highlighting the novel's hybrid genre, its conscious manipulation of narrative time and space, as well as its incorporation of various registers of the Arabic language. Through the mobilization of eschatological notions of struggle, death and sacrifice, *al-Zilzāl* unsettles a number of authorized narratives on Algerian national identity, language and literature.

Keywords

al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, Earthquake, Algeria, Qurʾan, Hadith, Sura, Islam, Salafi, Salafism, ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, Eschatology, Apocalypse, Imperialism, Postcolonialism, Arab Socialism, Hybridity, Bakhtin, Chronotope, Hybrid Utterance, Globalization, Capitalism, Nationalism, Arabism, Arabization, Islamism, Bin Badis, Secularism, Narrative Time, Narrative Space, McDougall

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The nursing female will be distracted from her nursling. Every pregnant female will abort her pregnancy. And people will be drunk but not in intoxication.

No. More likely, every hoarder of oil, sugar and semolina will abandon what he's hoarded. Everyone carrying a basket or shopping cart will drop it and everyone will stop talking for a moment. This is the description of The Earthquake of Doom for Constantine. The nursing female will be distracted from her nursling only after she runs through the streets chasing after food. All the fetuses in the stomachs of these cows of Satan are less valuable than five gallons of oil, or five pounds of sugar. And could these people possibly be drunker than they are now? They've been showing signs of drunkenness for a long time.

<div align="right">al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, al-Zilzāl[2]</div>

Beginning with an invocation of the Qurʾanic sura *al-Ḥajj* [The Pilgrimage], this passage from al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's 1974 novel *al-Zilzāl* (*The Earthquake*) resignifies Islamic eschatology in its portrayal of post-revolutionary Algeria.[3] Invoking Constantine's 1947 earthquake, as well as the Qurʾanic foretelling of the earthquake of the Day of Resurrection, Waṭṭār represents the apocalypse through both prolepsis and analepsis. Satirically narrated through the perspective of the misanthropic Shaykh ʿAbd al-Majīd Bū al-Arwāḥ, the novel traces his return to the city of Constantine after an absence of sixteen years.[4] Bū al-Arwāḥ seeks to evade the nationalization of private property planned under the 1970s agrarian revolution by registering his extensive land holdings with distant relatives. His plans are thwarted, however, when he is confronted with Constantine's transformation under Algerian socialism. Disturbed by the seeming dissolution of social hierarchies, Bū al-Arwāḥ is haunted by increasingly prescient images of the Earthquake of Doom. A caricature of the religious elite who prospered under French imperialism, Bū al-Arwāḥ employs the sura *al-Ḥajj*—which warns of the major signs of the apocalypse—to critique Algeria's post-revolutionary socialist regime.

  Waṭṭār seamlessly integrates the sura into Bū al-Arwāḥ's monologue, even removing the Qurʾanic voweling. He further shifts its tone by excluding the cautionary warning that opens the sura with: "One day you will see…" Not only does this signal Bū al-Arwāḥ's self-appointed role of the messiah, but it

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[2] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 83-4; *The Earthquake*, 88 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 1. I have modified the opening lines referencing the sura *al-Ḥajj*, replacing "suckling females" with "nursing females," "discharge her burden" with "abort her pregnancy," and "men" with "people" to indicate the gender neutrality. I have also substituted Granara's "heathen bitches" with "cows of Satan" per the Arabic.

[3] The referenced portion of the sura (*al-Ḥajj*, Qurʾan 22:2) is included in the Arabic Appendix alongside Waṭṭār's rendition, in order to illustrate the changes. Appendix, 2.

[4] Bū al-Arwāḥ's name is rendered as two words: *Bū*—a contraction of *Abū* meaning father— and *al-Arwāḥ* meaning 'the souls.'

also transforms the temporality of apocalyptic rhetoric. Bū al-Arwāḥ removes the sura from its moral context of spiritual accountability and inserts it instead within a material economy of consumption and greed. He further infuses the sura's symbolic representation of the apocalyptic end of life—invoked through its references to aborted fetuses and abandoned infants—with a markedly gendered critique of Algerian society. Such subtle manipulations of Qurʾanic text are performed throughout the novel and contribute to Waṭṭār's attempt to turn the Qurʾan into a living literary discourse.

This article investigates the manner in which *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological register allows the novel to overturn various historiographical, political as well as social orders and hierarchies in order to challenge dominant narratives of Algerian national identity. My focus on Waṭṭār's mobilization of Islamic eschatology emphasizes how the literary use of theological concepts can blur the boundaries between 'secular' and 'religious' forms of discourse, illustrating their relationship as co-constructed epistemes. In its broader theological sense, eschatology denotes an apocalyptic end of time, history or humanity. Islamic eschatology encompasses a complete reordering of the world through the foretold major and minor signs of the apocalypse, the Day of Resurrection [*Yawm al-Qiyāmah*], as well as the final judgment. However, Islamic theologians offer a diverse range of exegetical interpretations of Islamic eschatology.[5] While many emphasize the literal end of the world, some Sufi theologians interpret eschatology as a metaphysical end to reality and unification with the divine.[6] *Al-Zilzāl* integrates Islamic eschatology into both its thematic content as well as its narrative structure. The novel is replete with references to Islamic figures, events and symbols, in addition to its strategic incorporation of Qurʾanic suras

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[5] The most prominent exegetes of Islamic eschatology include: Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (810-870), Abū Hamed Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111), Ibn al-Nafīs (1213-1288) and Ismaʾīl ibn Kathīr (1301-1373). For a discussion of the Islamic eschatological tradition, see: David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2002); Timothy Gianotti, *Al-Ghazali's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Ihyaʾ* (Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill Press, 2001); Al-Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife—Kitab dhikr al-mawt wa-ma baʿdahu*, Book XL of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences—Ihya ʿulum al-din*, trans. T.J. Winter (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1989).

[6] A detailed discussion of Sufism, broadly defined as a mystical form of Islamic practice and piety, is beyond the scope of this article. For an overview of Sufism see: *Al-Qushayri, Principles of Sufism*, trans. B.R. Von Schegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990); Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); and Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾan, Miʿraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

and hadith.[7] The primary concepts of eschatology—namely the end of time, resurrection and states of limbo—here translate into an aesthetic lexicon that upends historical time, constructing narrative time and space anew in the pages of the novel.

My analysis of *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological motifs and structure expands on Mikhail Bakhtin's delineation of the eschatological chronotope in his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics." Bakhtin defines chronotopes as structuring principles for narrative time that demonstrate "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."[8] The eschatological chronotope manipulates representations of mythological, historical or religious events in order to enact historical inversions. It transforms present and past events through their literary insertion into a voided future time-space:

> [T]he future is emptied out […] The future is perceived as the end of everything that exists, as the end of all being (in its past and present forms) […] Eschatology always sees the segment of a future separating the present from the end as lacking value; this separating segment of time loses its significance and interest, it is merely an unnecessary continuation of an indefinitely prolonged present.[9]

In the eschatological tradition, the apocalypse is often interpreted as a linear trajectory towards an inevitable 'end'—of humanity, existence or the world. Apocalyptic rhetoric in *al-Zilzāl*, however, does not simply expose a totalizing end in itself. Rather than ordering history as a series of colonial ruptures, the novel's eschatological structure transforms the present into a suspended state of destruction, chaos and trauma bound to an emptied future. In so doing, it looks to free the present (and by extension the future) from the ideological projections into which it has been conscripted. By reworking the symbols and mythology of Islamic eschatology, I argue that *al-Zilzāl* stages a political, aesthetic and historiographic intervention into the very foundations of Algerian nationalist discourse.

Through *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological framework, Waṭṭār unsettles a 'postcolonial' model of historical time. Rather than reading Algerian national history as

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[7] Hadith refers to sayings and practices ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad that were largely collected in the 8th and 9th centuries. While it is considered a distinct body of religious scripture from the Qurʾan, hadith is highly regarded, particularly among orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence, as a valuable resource in Qurʾanic exegesis, the establishment of shariʿa [Islamic law] and *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence that builds on shariʿa law].

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

[9] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 148.

tethered to a violent 130-year French occupation, bookended in the 'pre' and 'post' colonial, Waṭṭār demonstrates the mutual implication and structural affinities of these historical moments. The novel therefore re-signifies the apocalyptic concept of 'the end' to illustrate the untenability of teleologically staged historical narratives. *Al-Zilzāl* critically investigates emerging discourses in late twentieth-century Algeria surrounding issues of national language, literature and identity. It explores the deep history of Algerian nationalism, Arab socialism, nationalization and agricultural reform, Arabism [ʿurūbah] and Islamism, highlighting their dialogic relationship to ideological debates surrounding: the early Islamic period, the Arab invasion of North Africa, the institutional reforms of the French colonial administration, and globalization.[10]

"Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my homeland"[11]

In order to contextualize the political nuances of *al-Zilzāl* it is crucial to frame the novel within a broader discussion of the history of Algerian nationalist discourse. As historian James McDougall argues, the modernist discourse of Algerian national identity borrowed in large part from the Algerian Salafi reformers who promoted a "unitary, undifferentiated and exalted model of community upon which the revolutionary order would come to rest."[12] It is precisely this purist model of community that *al-Zilzāl* seeks to unsettle. Waṭṭār's novel does this by employing eschatological symbolism to reorient Algeria's complex history of colonial-era pedagogy and language policy, the Algerian Islamic reformist movement, and post-revolutionary policies around education, Islam, as well as agricultural and economic reform.

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[10] My use of 'Arabism' throughout this article echoes James McDougall's definition of the term as "connoting a positive identification with 'being Arab' (culturally) and with 'Arab solidarity' (politically) and to denote the political programs organized around such (self-)identification." "Dream of Exile, Promise of Home: Language, Education and Arabism in Algeria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011): 251-270, 266. A more neutral equivalent would be the term 'Arabness' which is favored by some scholars and more closely resembles the French *arabité*. For the purposes of this piece I have opted for 'Arabism' because I believe it more precisely captures the social and political policies that promote 'Arabness' as such. Similarly, my use of the term 'Islamism' is not meant to imply any affinities with sensationalist representations of 'political Islam,' 'Pan-Islamism' or 'Islamic fundamentalism.' It merely indicates a cultural, social and historical identification with Islam as a source of religious identity.

[11] This was a popular nationalist slogan mobilized by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) during Algeria's battle for independence.

[12] James McDougal, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

This plays out in the novel against the heterogeneous history of Islam in Algeria. While the majority of the Muslim population is Sunni of the *Mālikī* school, there remain small *Ḥanafī* and *ʿIbāḍī* contingencies, as well as a minority community of schismatic *Khawārij*.[13] Algeria also has a long tradition of Sufi brotherhoods, to which a number of the ʿulamāʾ themselves belonged during the medieval period.[14] This delicate balance of 'orthodox' Sunni Islam with more localized iterations of Islamic practice, which included saint-reverence, was further disrupted by various French colonial policies.[15] A major figure signaling this history in Waṭṭār's novel is the Algerian reformer Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ḥāmid Bin Bādīs. One of the prominent reformers of the early twentieth century, Bin Bādīs (1889-1940) founded the Algerian Association of Muslim ʿUlamāʾ in 1931. He was also largely influenced by the Muslim reformist schools of the Mashriq to which he was exposed during his studies at Zaytūnah University in Tunis—particularly by the writings of Muḥammad ʿAbdu (1849-1905) and the great scholar and mentor Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-97).[16] As Islamic sociologist Charles Kurzman explains:

> Ibn Bādīs formulated a program that asserted the Arab and Islamic identity of Algerians, stressed Arabic and Islamic education, and prepared Algerians for independence from the French. In addition, he proposed a modernist interpretation

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[13] *Mālikīs* represent one of four schools of orthodox *fiqh* in Sunni Islam along with the *Ḥanafīs, Shāfiʿīs,* and *Ḥanbalīs*. They believe that Islamic jurisprudence should be based on the Qurʾan and the sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad—which is defined as including both hadith and the legal rulings of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs—and the practices of the *Salaf*. The *Salafiyyah* are an orthodox sect of Islam referring to followers of the *Salaf*—the first three generations of Muslims known as *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* or the pious predecessors. They consisted of the *Ṣaḥābah* [Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad], the *Tābiʿūn* [Followers of the Prophet Muḥammad] and *Tābiʿ al-Tābiʿūn* [Followers of the Followers]. The practices, interpretations and exegetical writings of these three generations are considered doxa among the *Salafiyyah*.

[14] For a history of Sufism in Algeria, particularly the prominent Rahmaniyyah *ṭarīqah* [order] of the 19th century, refer to Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters—Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 138-168.

[15] See Leon Carl Brown, "The Islamic Reformist Movement in North Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 2.1. (1994): 55-63, 56.

[16] On the relationship between the reformist schools of the Maghrib and the Mashriq, please refer to Charles Kurzman, ed. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93. It is worth noting that the Islamic Modernists Muḥammad ʿAbdu and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī were also concerned with the intersection of science and Islam. Their conceptualization of modernity linked Western progress to the early Islamic world, thereby reorienting the axis of modernity outside of a Eurocentric worldview. For more on the Islamic Modernists see: Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 49-51.

of the Qurʾan that attributed the decline of Islamic society to mystical practices, intellectual stagnation, disunity, and political despotism.[17]

This rhetoric was largely spread through the reformist journals *al-Muntaqid* [The Critic] and *al-Shahāb* [The Meteor]. It also informed the pedagogical practices of the network of free Islamic and Qurʾanic schools established by the association in order to provide an Arabic alternative to the French educational infrastructure.[18]

Algeria's first independent president Ahmed Ben Bella (1962-1965) inaugurated the country's aggressive Arabicization [*taʿrīb*] policy, primarily through the implementation of mandatory hours of Arabic study.[19] He also instituted a number of Soviet-influenced economic policies such as the nationalization of private industry and an agrarian reform policy.[20] Additional reforms emerged under president Houari Boumédiènne (1965-1978) who shifted attention to urbanization and the industrial sectors of Algeria's economy, funded in large part through the nationalization of Algeria's oil industry. Boumédiènne's *revolution culturelle* continued to emphasize Arabic and Islam as the primary vehicles of Algeria's modernization and its reinstatement to pre-colonial glory. While these reforms carried on the political projects initiated by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) during the battle for independence, they privileged "an Algeria founded on ('pure') Arabic and ('pure') Islam [that] left little room for other languages—the Berber and Arabic dialects of the population— and cultural expression, including the everyday, lived Islam of both Berberophones and Arabophones."[21]

Under both Ben Bella and Boumédiènne, the rhetoric of the Algerian reformists was apparent in the state's self-fashioning as a "technocratic

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[17] Kurzman, 93.

[18] The French educational system in Algeria was highly centralized and administered largely by the Jesuit missionaries *Pères Blancs* and *Soeurs Blanches*. Arabic was marginalized in the domains of education, cultural production as well as state bureaucracy, and its instruction largely fell under the jurisdiction of Islamic schools or madrasahs. For more on the pedagogical practices of these Qurʾanic schools see: Brown, 59 and Kurzman, 93. An overview of France's policies with respects to education and language is offered in Farid Aitsiselmi and Dawn Marley's "The Role and Status of the French language in North Africa," in *Studies in French Applied Linguistics* ed. Dalila Ayoun (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2008). The data they reference is from M. Benrabah, *Langue et pouvoir en Algérie: histoire d'un traumatisme linguistique* (Paris: Séguire, 1999), 79.

[19] Farid Aitsiselmi and Dawn Marley, "French language," 197.

[20] Phillip Chiviges Naylor, *France and Algeria: a History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 2000), 56.

[21] James McDougall, "Myth and Counter-Myth: 'The Berber' as National Signifier in Algerian Historiographies," *Radical History Review* Issue 86 (Spring 2003): 66-88, 68.

orthodoxy" that fused together religious authority and the promise of modernization.[22] *Al-Zilzāl's* eschatological register reconfigures precisely this double invocation of a glorious religious past and a future of progress and development. The reformist rhetoric was further reflected in the very model of Algerian socialism that *al-Zilzāl* critiques for its inherent contradictions. This political constellation entails what Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui refers to as *double ideologization*: the manner in which ideologies, particularly Marxist, simultaneously became assimilated, 'Arabized,' and prone to dogmatism.[23] The post-revolutionary government "made itself legitimate by claiming that it alone could do both in upholding religion and in modernizing the country. The intercessor between God and development is no longer a saint, a prophet, or a mufti, but rather, the state apparatus."[24] Indeed, one could argue that there is a certain structural parallelism between this technocratic orthodoxy and the emergence of orientalism as defined by both Edward Said and Abdelkebir Khatibi. For as Said demonstrates, orientalism's very authority was derived from a restructuring of the religious order, such that God was replaced by the secular sciences and the cult of modernity.[25] The very need to fortify the state apparatus with the authority of religion (specifically *Mālikī* Sunni Islam) can therefore be read dialogically with the pervasive colonial infrastructure created under French rule. Both hinge on colonial teleologies that envision a future modernity, precisely the framing of historical time that becomes unraveled in Waṭṭār's novel.

Narrative Apocalypse

Born to an Amazigh family in Sedrata in eastern Algeria, al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār (1936-2010) was a prominent journalist, critic and writer, as well as an active member of the FLN.[26] While his primary spoken language was Tamazight and

[22] Jean-Claude Vatin, "Revival in the Maghreb: Islam as an Alternative Political Language," in *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1982), 233.

[23] See Abdallah Laroui: *La crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalism ou historicisme?* (Paris: Libraire Françoise Maspero, 1970), 106-7.

[24] Vatin, 233.

[25] Said states that: "having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 121. Abdelkebir Khatibi makes a similar observation in "L'orientalisme désorienté," *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denöel, 1983), 122-3.

[26] The Imazighen (singular: Amazigh) are the indigenous populations that inhabited North Africa west of the Nile valley prior to the Arab conquests of the 7th century. Between the 7th and 12th centuries the Imazighen—who spoke a variety of dialects from the Afro-Asiatic language

politically Waṭṭār was a notable defender of Berber languages, his formal education was almost exclusively in Arabic. He began his studies at an Islamic madrasah and eventually moved to Constantine in 1952 to study Islamic jurisprudence at the Ben Bādīs Institute. Waṭṭār continued his religious education at Zaytūnah University in Tunis between 1954 and 1956, eventually leaving the university to join the ranks of the FLN. Though initially formed as a revolutionary body that led the resistance movement in Algeria's war of independence (1954-1962), the FLN controversially emerged as the dominant and only constitutionally acknowledged party in Algeria's post-independence government. The party fused together three primary ideological tenets: Algerian nationalism, socialism and Islamism. Following independence, Waṭṭār moved back to Algeria where he assumed the position of FLN Party Controller. While he held his post until 1984, Waṭṭār's political leanings eventually diverged from the FLN's official party line, and he was increasingly marginalized for his Marxist views—a conflict that is played out in Waṭṭār's 1974 novel *al-Lāz* [The Ace].[27]

Deeply invested in Algeria's language politics, Waṭṭār infamously stated when asked by an interviewer whether the murder of the Francophone novelist Tahar Djaout in 1993 was a loss for Algeria, that it was "a loss for his children, a loss for his wife, and a loss for France…"[28] Djaout's murder was among the first of a wave of violent killings targeting Algerian journalists and intellectuals, many of whom were Francophone, that took place during the 1990s.[29]

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family including Tamazight—were dispersed throughout various parts of the Sahara. The history of the Imazighen, particularly in relation to various attempts to assimilate them under an Arab-Islamic model of Algerian national identity, is beyond the scope of this article. James McDougall offers a highly nuanced analysis of Algeria's Berberophone populations in relation to various articulations of Algerian nationalism in his article "Myth and Counter-Myth."

[27] One of the novel's protagonists, Zaydān, is investigated by the FLN for his involvement in the Algerian Communist Party, which is seen as a threat to the unity of Algeria's anti-colonial nationalist efforts. For a more in-depth discussion of the novel *al-Lāz* see: Debbie Cox, "The Novels of Tahar Wattar: Command or Critique?" *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 No. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 94-109 and "Symbolism and Allegory in the Algerian Arabic Novel," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (1998): 193-204; Ronald A. T. Judy, "On the Politics of Global Language, or Unfungible Local Value," *boundary 2* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Summer 1997): 101-143; and William Granara, "Mythologising the Algerian War of Independence: Tahir Wattar and the Contemporary Algerian Novel," *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 4 No. 3 (Autumn 1999): 1-14.

[28] This comment is from an interview that aired on the Franco-German station *Arte* in 1994 and over the BBC in the U.K. All references to the interview are from my translation of the Arabic, available online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3RREPoRp0A.

[29] According to the organization Reporters sans frontières, at least 57 journalists were murdered between the years 1993 and 1997. See Julija Šukys, *Silence is Death: The Life and Work of Tahar Djaout* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 29.

While the exact details of his murder remain a mystery, many believe it to be the work of the militant Islamist organization Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA). Due to his controversial statement, Waṭṭār's works have often been read as promoting an Arabist or Islamist agenda.[30] While I argue that *al-Zilzāl* reveals the ambivalent and complex position that Arabism and Islamism occupy in Algerian history, it is necessary to contextualize this within Waṭṭār's broader views on Francophonie. During the interview Waṭṭār explained that it was precisely over "the issue of the Arabic language and national identity" that he and Djaout had a falling out. He continues: "Tahar Djaout was mistaken when he considered the French language to be an Algerian and national language. French, in Algeria, is the language of the administration, the language of the elite [...] This is one form through which French colonialism continues and it is our right to refuse this. It is [in fact] our responsibility to refuse it." Although *al-Zilzāl* contests the unilateral institutionalization of Arabism and Islamism as statist policies, Waṭṭār's denial of Tahar Djaout as a 'legitimate' voice of the Algerian nation simultaneously renders legible Waṭṭār's refusal of a Francophone legacy for post-revolutionary Algerian national identity.

While there is limited English language scholarship on al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, the work of William Granara, Debbie Cox and R.A. Judy are significant contributions that further situate Waṭṭār's oeuvre and politics. Cox's analysis of Waṭṭār's fiction emphasizes his political and religious affiliations, in addition to the state's regulatory influence on the literary milieu of the time. She argues that the anticipation of government censorship shaped many of the structural and thematic motifs of his fiction. Cox thus reads the political ambivalence of Waṭṭār's writing as simultaneously symptomatic of and in opposition to the state ideologies of 1970s Algeria, a time he would come to revisit in *al-Zilzāl*. In her reading of *al-Lāz* for example, Cox highlights the novel's representation of the conflicts and contradictions that plagued the FLN surrounding questions of "unity, identity, the role of religion, and history itself," a theme continued in both *al-Zilzāl* and Waṭṭār's 1975 novel *ʿUrs Baghl* [A Mule's Wedding].[31]

Although Cox's analysis offers a productive lens for understanding the manner in which state ideologies and policies can shape cultural production, my

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[30] Some examples include: Lahouari Addi's "Les Intellectuels qu'on assassine," *Esprit* (January 1995): 130-38, and "Algeria and the Dual Image of the Intellectual," *The Century of the Intellectual: From the Dreyfus Affair to the Rushdie Affair*, eds. J. Jennings and T. Kemp-Welch (London & New York: Routledge, 1997). The controversy is also discussed in: Patricia Geesey, "Exhumation and History: Tahar Djaout's *Les Chercheurs d'os*," *The French Review* Vol. 70 No. 2 (December 1996): 271-279, 278; Madeleine Dobie, "Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23.1-2 (2003): 32-40, 35 and Debbie Cox, "Command," 95.

[31] Cox, "Command," 99.

focus on *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological framework emphasizes Waṭṭār's political project to resignify Algerian nationalist history—a crucial aspect of his literary oeuvre that cannot be overlooked. In this respect my argument builds on William Granara's analysis of Waṭṭār's fiction as mythological reworkings of Algerian national history. Granara argues that Waṭṭār's novels incorporate events and rhetoric surrounding the Algerian war of independence, while simultaneously reimagining Algeria through "mythological themes of quest, voyage, descent into the underworld, rites of passage from youth (innocence) to adulthood (experience), death and resurrection, hero-births, withdrawal and apotheosis."[32] In addition to touching on the prevalence of Islamic motifs in Waṭṭār's writing, Granara's reading—which expands on Northrop Frye's taxonomy of mythology—taps into the structural and thematic significance of how time is both represented and generated in these works. While I build on Granara's exploration of mythology in Waṭṭār's writing, my analysis focuses more specifically on *al-Zilzāl's* re-signification of eschatological symbolism. I argue that it is precisely through the novel's eschatological movement between the past, present and future that Waṭṭār critically reimagines early Algerian history, French imperialism, the Algerian war of independence, as well as the post-revolutionary state.

Al-Zilzāl's eschatological register resonates in both the apocalyptic representation of Constantine as a site of ruin, decay and death, as well as in the tormented temporality through which Bū al-Arwāḥ navigates this dystopic space in the compressed span of one afternoon. The novel is composed of a polyphonic array of narrative voices and temporal spaces that derail any sense of either a linear narrative or singular subject. Bū al-Arwāḥ's account is highly fragmented and alternates between dialogue, stream of consciousness, memories, dreams and hallucinations. This is further interrupted by the frequent intrusion of voices representing the masses of Algerian society. The novel's constant shifts between speakers, genres of speech, past and present, as well as reality and fantasy, generate a disorienting narrative structure. Like Bū al-Arwāḥ's consciousness, the city of Constantine occupies a threshold past-future temporality—it is both a relic of an atavistically imagined pre-colonial past, and a haunting reminder of utopian colonial modernity gone awry.[33] To

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[32] Granara focuses on the novels: *al-Lāz*, *al-Zilzāl* and *al-Shamʿah wa-l-dahālīz* [The Candle and the Underground Tunnels]. William Granara, "Mythologising," 1-2.

[33] On the subject of the threshold, partcularly in relation to Islamic thought, anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo's work on the Qur'anic concept of the *Barzakh* is rather relevant. Focusing on Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Khaldūn, Pandolfo reads the Barzakh as a "heterological space […] a partition, a bar or barrier, an isthmus between two; the intermediate zone between two states or things […] both a limit and an *entre-deux*, the *entre-deux* of the limit: something that stands between two things, both separating and joining them, combining the attributes of both." Stefania Pandolfo,

return to his work on time and narrative, Bakhtin theorizes the threshold as a physical, psychological, social or temporal site of liminality and transgression. Due to the interconnected nature of narrative time and space, the threshold is also linked to our very understanding of consciousness in the novel.[34] *Al-Zilzāl's* eschatological chronotope functions precisely within a threshold economy in so far as it generates a temporal and spatial suspension that brings together worlds—historical and mythical, past and future—in the time and space of an Algerian afternoon.

Al-Zilzāl achieves this sense of suspension as it shuttles between a variety of discursive traditions, as well as their attendant historical and ideological narratives. The framework of eschatology allows the novel to demonstrate the multiplicity but also simultaneity of cultural, linguistic, political and religious influences animating Algerian history. To follow Bakhtin further, we can read these divergent registers and discourses as so many hybrid utterances that still emerge from a single locus of enunciation.[35] Intentionally distorting the boundaries between various kinds of speech, *al-Zilzāl* undermines authoritative historical narratives, state-endorsed social and political configurations, as well as narrative genres and structures. The novel integrates a variety of tropes from the classical Arabic tradition ranging from the genre of travel writing [*riḥlah*], to the archetype of the corrupt shaykh.[36]

While the novel's hybrid structure plays an important role, *al-Zilzāl's* use of different registers of Arabic likewise challenges the institutionalization of Arabism and Islamism as discursive orthodoxies that exclude other possible iterations of Algerian national identity. Bū al-Arwāḥ's thoughts and speech are almost exclusively delivered in Qurʾanic and classical Arabic, standing in marked contrast to the masses that drown out his Qurʾanic recitations with their discussions of poverty, corruption and globalization. Their dialogue is rendered in a modified Modern Standard Arabic that is infused with the rhythm, cadence and inflection of colloquial Algerian Arabic. This distances

Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 9/188. Ebrahim Moosa also explores the concept of the threshold or *dihlīz* in his book *Ghazālī and the Poetics of the Imagination* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[34] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 167-172.

[35] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 60-61.

[36] In his critical introduction to the English translation of the novel, William Granara makes the observation that "[t]he basic structure of the novel is the journey (*rihlah*), a popular subgenre in Arabic literature in all its phases." Granara, *The Earthquake*, 18. This point is further discussed in Granara, "Mythologising," 7.

Bū al-Arwāḥ's Qurʾanic Arabic from the everyday lived discourse of the Algerian social body, a distance the novel compels its readers to mediate. In so doing, *al-Zilzāl* presents a heteroglossic rather than binary model of Arabic that encompasses a wide array of registers of speech. Furthermore, Bū al-Arwāḥ's self-interested use of the Qurʾan and hadith to justify his abusive relationships with women and expand his land holdings, demonstrates the ability of religious discourse to be manipulated.[37] The Arabic language is thus the form of official discourse, as well as the very currency of its undoing.[38] Waṭṭār's novel lays out these contradictions most explicitly in Bū al-Arwāḥ's simultaneous externalization and internalization of the Qurʾanic vision of the end of times.

Engaging with the long history of travel writing in the Arabic literary tradition, *al-Zilzāl* uses geography and time to reorient social, historical and political mythologies.[39] In addition to Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ's journey from Algiers to Constantine being a *riḥlah* or voyage as Granara argues, it also figures as a hijrah. The novel here plays with the Qurʾanic sura that opened this article, *al-Ḥajj*, which references the journey of the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. As miriam cooke argues, the Prophet's hijrah is rhetorically invoked in literary travel tropes in part because "Islam's insistence on actual and symbolic travel allows for simultaneous self-positionings in the local and global and then back to another local, in the present and the past, and then back to a transformed present."[40] Indeed Waṭṭār re-signifies the sura, demonstrating Bū al-Arwāḥ's spiritual journey as one towards religious disillusionment rather than enlightenment.

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[37] This conforms to Waṭṭār's representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ as an unreliable narrator. Such archetypal figures feature prominently in satirical Arabic literature of both the classical and modern period. Scholar David Fieni for example compares the 'picaresque' Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ with Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī's 9th century *Maqāmāt*. "Decadent Orientalisms: Configuring the Decay of Colonial Modernity in French and Arabic," Diss. (Los Angeles: University of California, 2006), 116.

[38] As Cox demonstrates, this also features prominently in Wattar's earlier novel *al-Lāz* where he hybridizes various registers of Arabic (Qurʾanic, vernacular and Modern Standard) and resignifies Qurʾanic words to connote more secular, nationalist or political meanings. Debbie Cox, *Politics, Language and Gender in the Algerian Arabic Novel* (London: Edwin Mellon Press, 2002), 108.

[39] This tradition is discussed extensively in Fathi A. El-Shihibi, *Travel Genre in Arabic Literature: A Selective Literary and Historical Study* (Florida: Dissertation.com, 2006); *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the 17th Century,* ed. Nabil Matar (New York & London: Routledge, 2002); *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998).

[40] miriam cooke, "Women, Religion, and the Postcolonial Arab World," *Cultural Critique* No. 45 (Spring, 2000): 150-184, 158.

Constantine, the urban backdrop of Bū al-Arwāḥ's hijrah, provides the ideal setting for *al-Zilzāl's* apocalyptic unfolding. Situated on an elevated plateau and framed by a deep ravine, Constantine is a city intersected by seven bridges. In the novel, Constantine is suspended between unfulfilled dreams of colonial grandeur and the harsh reality of post-revolutionary contradiction, as the promise of modernity has been replaced by the destruction of the very idea of a future: "This is what happens to every netherworld [*al-ʿalāwin al-suflā*]. It deteriorates, crumbles, until nothing of it remains except its lowliness [*sufliyituhā*]."[41] Structured over seven chapters—each named after one of Constantine's bridges—the novel's temporality mirrors the spatiality of the city. Relics of the colonial French past, the architecturally impressive suspension bridges were constructed as part of the French geo-political domination of Algeria.[42] The bridges function as physical signposts along the way to Constantine's foretold demise. Beginning with *Bab al-Qantarah*, the reader then moves to *Sīdī M'sid*, *Sīdī Rashīd*, *Majāz al-Ghanam* [The Bridge at Flock Crossing], *Jisr al-Maṣʿad* [the Elevator Bridge], *Jisr al- Shayāṭīn* [Demons' Bridge], and finally *Jisr al-Hawā* [the Bridge of the Abyss]. The successive movement across these threshold bridges mirrors the eschatological overtones of the novel, which ends with the psychotic breakdown of Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ and the possible demise of the city.

As Bū al-Arwāḥ traverses the city of Constantine he is troubled by what he perceives as a perverted social(ist) order that unites people of all classes, ethnicities and genders. He reads this social upheaval as symptomatic of the disarray Algeria had fallen into after the departure of the French, who maintained order through a clearly demarcated social hierarchy. He is also highly critical of socialist programs that allow for unchecked social mobility: affordable medical care, social welfare and even public education. With an almost ethnographic focus on identifying phenotypes and dialects, Bū al-Arwāḥ criticizes the hybridization of the city and interprets it as a sign of the coming apocalypse:

> The faces are all distinct in Constantine. Facial features vary from one person to another, as do people's physiques. At the time of the occupation, features were more generic: Arab and European, but not now. Today, you can tell the difference between the Shawi Berber from ʿAin al-Baidaʾ or ʿAin M'Lila, from Batina,

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[41] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl,* 112; *The Earthquake*, 109; Appendix, 3.

[42] The French colonial restructuring of Algeria resonates with the 'Hausmannization' of Paris in the 1860's. On the geo-spatial policies of French colonial urbanization, architecture and city planning, see: *Walls of Algiers: Narratives of the City Through Text and Image*, eds. Zeynap Celik, Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Terpak (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2009).

> Khanshala or Shalghoum al-ʿId [...] Their facial features, like their smells, reveal their true identities in loud screams that echo throughout the city.[43]

Bū al-Arwāḥ's recent awareness of Constantine's diversity reveals a reality previously occluded, at least for him, by the racial dynamics of French imperialism; Algeria is not simply 'Arab.' His emphasis on the ethnic diversity of the Imazighen not only demonstrates the heterogeneity of Algeria's 'Berber' populations, but also their increased presence throughout the country. While Bū al-Arwāḥ's surprise exposes his own perceptual blindness, it also reflects the evolving social and economic realities of post-revolutionary Algeria, fueled in large part by socialist policies that nationalized and centralized industrial development and agriculture.

Al-Zilzāl's representation of Constantine's hybridized social makeup undermines the very idea of cultural homogeneity within the diverse ethno-linguistic context of Algeria. Furthermore, Waṭṭār's satirical portrayal of Bū al-Arwāḥ's inability to reconcile himself with post-revolutionary Algerian socialism calls into question the complicity of the religious elite in conscripting Algerian national identity. More crucially, *al-Zilzāl's* use of eschatological symbolism allows Waṭṭār to critique these modes of thinking from within the very discourses themselves. Through the novel's complex reworking of the Qur'an, Arabic and lived Islam, Waṭṭār seems to be proposing a more nuanced vision of the role of Islam and Arabic in post-independence Algeria that breaks away from atavistic understandings of religious consciousness and national identity. To illustrate, in the below passage Bū al-Arwāḥ explains Constantine's fate as the epicenter of the Earthquake of Doom by invoking the country's repeated occupations:

> Maybe that's the history of the city from the first day. It ended with the end of the Berbers and started with the beginning of the Romans. It continued beginning and ending between Berbers and Romans and other peoples until the Arabs came. The city resumed its history with them until the Turks arrived. It ended and began until the French came. And now it is ending and beginning all over again. The earthquake which is going to be the demise of this whore of a city has not come yet. When it does, it will do so with a vengeance against its dark and soiled past.[44]

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[43] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 10-11; *The Earthquake,* 29 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 5. I have replaced Granara's "different" with "distinct" to emphasize Bū al-Arwāḥ's reading of physical markers of race. I have also replaced "odours" with the neutral "smells" and kept the Arabic "features were more generic" to highlight the racial bifurcation of occupier/occupied during the colonial era.

[44] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 75-76; *The Earthquake*, 81 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 4. My translation modifications emphasize the cycles of ending/beginning referenced in the Arabic,

The emphasis on Algeria's cyclical colonial occupations touches on the temporal manipulations of the eschatological framework. Algerian history is represented as continuous iterations of endings and beginnings, repeated until the city's inevitable demise. Bū al-Arwāḥ also describes Constantine within the sexual economy of prostitution, claiming that the apocalypse will come in order to avenge its sordid colonial past. While Waṭṭār seems to be contesting a 'pure' Algerian ethnic, linguistic or religious genealogy, it is worth noting that he begins the historical narrative with the destruction of the Berbers. In light of Waṭṭār's Amazigh background and vocal support of the community, as well as his choice to write in Arabic and study Islamic jurisprudence, no singular form of cultural self-identification is privileged here. However, his animosity to the French colonial legacy is sharply palpable in the novel's critical representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ's nostalgia for French rule and the bourgeois privilege it afforded his class.

The Soviet influence on Algeria's post-revolutionary model of Arab nationalism is one of Bū al-Arwāḥ's primary targets in *al-Zilzāl*. His fervent defense of Arabism and Islamism borrows from the reformist rhetoric of Shaykh Ben Bādīs under whose tutelage his character studied. Like Ben Bādīs, Bū al-Arwāḥ proposes an orthodox model of Islamic jurisprudence that relies on the Qurʾan, hadith, and practices of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. However, whereas Ben Bādīs situated his reformist rhetoric vis-à-vis French colonialism, Bū al-Arwāḥ romanticizes French rule. He blames all of Algeria's challenges on the new socialist regime, which he argues has deviated from the proper Islamic path: "Religion is being loyal to our ancestors [*al-Salaf*]. Any reckless innovation [*bidʿah*] is an aberration [*ḍalāl*]."[45] Mobilizing Islamist rhetoric, Bū al-Arwāḥ distinguishes between the model of Algerian nationalism promoted by the Ben Bādīs school of reformers, and that of the post-revolutionary state. Moreover, he historically situates the reformist school as the 'true' Arab people:

> Ibn Khaldūn will burn in hell for what he wrote, that it was the Arabs who brought the one, true, monotheistic religion, and that it is impossible that they symbolize the destruction of life. But the fact of the matter is that they not only destroyed life, they destroyed religion as well. The Arabs build with one hand and

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and include: "the end of the Berbers," "the beginning of the Romans," and "It ended and began until the French came." I have also maintained the order of "And now it is ending and beginning all over again" over Granara's "And here we are beginning and ending once again" because it captures the inverted eschatological temporality. Finally, I have replaced Granara's "sordid" with "dark and soiled" as it echoes the darkness and filth imagery throughout the novel.

[45] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 12; *The Earthquake*, 31 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 6. I have modified Granara's translation to signal Bū al-Arwāḥ's specificity of "Salaf" rather than "ancestors" and the harsher "aberration" over "leads us astray."

destroy with the other. […] These are not Arabs, nor are they Berbers, nor Vandals, nor Tatars, Mongols or Copts. They are either Russians whom God has sent to devastate our land, or they are people without roots, religion or denomination. When we as Arabs, pure and free of mind, labored to defend Arabism and our religion, alongside Ben Bādīs and his companions and disciples, men of nobility and learning, we did so as builders and not destroyers. We spread the pure Arabic language, the language of the Holy Qurʾan, and we opened people's hearts to the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad [hadith and sunna] and the sacred customs of the Salaf.[46]

Bū al-Arwāḥ's animosity towards the Tunisian polymath Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) stems from his disagreement with Ibn Khaldūn's universal glorification of Arabs. Bū al-Arwāḥ believes that post-revolutionary Algeria is governed and populated by an entirely different genus of 'Arab.' His alignment of modern Algerians with Russians or people without racial or religious affiliation, demonstrates his fear of Soviet-influenced Arab nationalism. More crucially, Bū al-Arwāḥ sees the socialist policies of the new regime as incompatible with the true principles of Arabism and Islamism espoused by Ben Bādīs and his followers: the promotion of the pure Arabic language [*Lughat al-Ḍād*], Qurʾanic Arabic [*Lughat al-Qurʾan al-Karīm*], the practices of the Prophet Muḥammad [hadith and sunnah] and the conventions of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. What is striking about his speech on the decline of Algerian civilization is the relative invisibility of French imperialism. Bū al-Arwāḥ cites the major groups who had an occupying presence in the region—the Arabs, Berbers, Vandals, Tatars, Mongols and Copts—with the exception of the French. This touches on a critical point in Bū al-Arwāḥ's revisionist history. Although Ben Bādīs' rhetoric was largely anti-colonial in its condemnation of French decadence, the Algerian reformist movement of the 1930s also generated an elite class of religious scholars who prospered under French rule. Bū al-Arwāḥ's family lineage is testimony to the various collusions that helped facilitate France's occupation of Algeria. From his great-grandfather through his father, his patrilineage entails cooperating with the French in exchange for illustrious military honors and large quantities of land.

While Bū al-Arwāḥ's criticisms of Algerian socialism are largely inspired by his material self-interest, they also reveal the contradictory logic of the new state. *Al-Zilzāl* highlights the incongruity of post-revolutionary socialist rhetoric and reforms, with the reality of the country's rampant capitalism. Bū al-Arwāḥ maps the Qurʾanic rhetoric of the apocalypse onto the growing

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[46] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 33-4; *The Earthquake*, 47 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 7. I have replaced Granara's "race, religion or state" with "roots, religion or denomination" to emphasize the religious overtones, and "ancestors" with "Salaf."

overconsumption and waste that plague the city of Constantine: "Perhaps it's the incessant feeling of the earthquake that compels people to spend every bit of money that falls into their hands and to snap-up every good that hits the market. They pillage away like criminals sentenced to die."[47] Waṭṭār goes further, offsetting his character Bū al-Arwāḥ's anti-capitalist critique by linking the country's capitalist consumption with the French economic investment in Algerian infrastructure under the occupation:

> It is jam-packed with merchandise and loaded with millions of tons of goods, hundreds of thousands of gas bottles, millions and millions of tons of lead and cement, canals and pipes [...] From this netherworld the water seeps out, and escaping in its every drop is a particle of earth and a fragment of this wretched rock.[48]

The very materiality of the list highlights the geographic restructuring of Algeria according to French colonial policies of expansion, settlement and development, a legacy of an older order romanticized by his conflicted character Bū al-Arwāḥ as the novel charts his hijrah through Constantine.

Aborted Pasts, Sterile Futures

During the Friday prayer that Bū al-Arwāḥ attends immediately upon arriving in Constantine, the sermon is on the Qur'an's description of the Earthquake of Doom. The Imam employs the image of destruction and upheaval to describe the moral implications of the end of times: "Disorientation, terror, and the filling of the soul with darkness. This is how Almighty God has described the condition at the final hour, and the Almighty has chosen to use the earthquake to allegorically illustrate that final hour."[49] The Imam here invokes the Qur'an's metaphoric use of the earthquake to describe a more spiritual and psychological experience. He even uses the literary term *istiʿārah*—meaning metaphor or allegory—to demonstrate its figurative use in

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[47] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 35; *The Earthquake*, 48 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 8. I have modified Granara's translation by maintaining the materiality of "goods" over "anything in sight." I have also removed "looting in a mad rush against what little time they have left," and retranslated it as "They pillage away…"

[48] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 37; *The Earthquake*, 50-1 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 9. I have replaced "junk" with the more neutral "merchandise."

[49] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 14-15; *The Earthquake*, 33 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 10. I have modified Granara's translation of this passage significantly to indicate the Imam's emphasis on the passage's 'allegorical' use of the earthquake. I have also replaced "confusion, restlessness" with "terror," and "dark shadow" with "darkness."

the sura. It is Bū al-Arwāḥ who interprets the passage literally and envisions an actual earthquake destroying Algeria. Even though Bū al-Arwāḥ interprets the earthquake physically, he himself experiences it psychically, spiritually and ethically as precisely a darkness invading his soul [*al-lawn al-dākin*]. Bū al-Arwāḥ complains of a viscous liquid [*al-māddah al-sāʾilah*] that spreads throughout his body: "The darkness was spreading in his heart. That viscous fluid was melting. It was getting hotter. He was growing weak in the knees. His neck was getting stiff and his head was pounding. He felt an enormous weight on his shoulders."[50] In these moments Bū al-Arwāḥ enters an epileptic-like trance and is often driven to violent thoughts and acts. In line with *al-Zilzāl's* eschatological register, the novel uses the grotesque and the corporeal to reconfigure the world both symbolically and materially, thereby inverting and suspending social and political hierarchies.[51] While Bū al-Arwāḥ manipulates religious discourse to serve his own personal and financial interests, it is ultimately the Qurʾanic sura that turns on him. The Day of Reckoning forces Bū al-Arwāḥ to confront his past and ultimately be defeated by his former indiscretions, both ethical and religious. As Cox astutely observes, "[t]hat this critique [of the religious elite] is expressed in Bu al-Arwah's Quranic language functions to subvert the link between Arabic and the religious elite since the Arabic of the Quran is mobilized by the text *against* Bu al-Arwah."[52]

The legacy of social transformation in post-revolutionary Algeria, and its troubled relationship with teleological understandings of time, is further reflected in *al-Zilzāl's* representation of Bū al-Arwāḥ's violent relations with women. Symptomatic of his frustration with his own sterility, the victimization of women in Waṭṭār's novel is represented as trans-generational and incestual. Bū al-Arwāḥ's first marriage is to a child-bride named ʿĀʾishah when she is nine and he fifteen. On their wedding night they are unable to consummate the marriage until Bū al-Arwāḥ's father forces them to sleep together. The father later attempts to rape ʿĀʾishah and strangles her to death when she refuses him. The cycle of sexual violence continues with Bū al-Arwāḥ who becomes sexually involved with his father's sixteen-year-old wife Ḥanīfah whom he eventually strangles to death. Bū al-Arwāḥ then kidnaps the wife

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[50] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 82-3; *The Earthquake*, 87 (Translation Modified); Appendix, 11. I have replaced Granara's "The dark shadow was moving inside him" with the slightly less poetic "The darkness was spreading in his heart" to maintain Wattar's image of the gradual colonization of Bū al-Arwāḥ's body and soul by this darkness.

[51] This resembles Bakhtin's delineation of the Rabelaisian chronotope, whose primary aim is to "destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchal links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata." Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 169.

[52] Cox, "Command," 103.

and nine-year old daughter of a sharecropper, both of whom he rapes and murders. While this graphic portrayal of sexual violence is certainly disturbing, I believe it serves a more complex function within the novel.

Waṭṭār's choice of the name ʿĀʾishah for Bū al-Arwāḥ's first wife, and the synchronicity of her age with that of the Prophet Muḥammad's third wife ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr at the time of their marriage, is crucial to understanding the broader implications of how gender is represented in the novel.[53] Often considered the Prophet Muḥammad's most beloved wife, ʿĀʾishah remained married to him until his death when she was eighteen years of age. She spent the last fifty years of her life as a powerful political, social and religious figure in her community as well as in early Islamic history.[54] One of the better-known *muḥaddithāt* or female teachers and transmitters of hadith, ʿĀʾisha was also a trusted exegete of the Qurʾan: "ʿĀʾishah, as Moḥammad's favorite wife, received the state's highest pension: acknowledged as having special knowledge of his ways, sayings and character, she was consulted on the Prophet's *sunna*, or practice, and gave decisions on sacred law or custom."[55] Upon the murder of the third Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān—a notable supporter of a woman's right to practice her faith publically—it was ʿĀʾishah who led an army into battle against ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to avenge his death.[56]

As the symbol of a parallel Islamic genealogy, one that actively includes women as political, social and religious agents in the Islamic past, Waṭṭār's inclusion of ʿĀʾishah in *al-Zilzāl* is significant. Referred to as *Umm al-Muʾminīn*

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[53] While there are some discrepancies, most historians and scholars of Islam believe that the Prophet Muḥammad was betrothed to ʿĀʾishah when she was six and he around fifty-three, though the marriage was not consummated until she was nine.

[54] It is worth noting that the Prophet Muḥammad's first wife Khadījah, who was nearly twenty years his senior, was his first convert to Islam and used her social status and financial resources to help him promote the new religion. Furthermore, Muḥammad's closest companions, the four Caliphs that followed him, were all bound to the Prophet through marriages—Abū Bakr and ʿUmar were his fathers-in-law, while his daughters married ʿAlī and ʿUthmān. This demonstrates the significance of marital bonds in early Islamic history for the propagation of Islam.

[55] Leila Ahmed, "Women and the Advent of Islam," *Signs* Vol. 11 No. 4 (Summer 1986): 665-691, 689. Based on the biography of ʿĀʾishah by Nadia Abbott: *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohammed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 3. Some accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad's life further claim that he told his followers to take half of their religion from ʿĀʾishah, though this is vehemently discredited by more orthodox Muslim exegetical traditions. For more detailed discussions of the life of ʿĀʾishah and her place within various discursive, exegetical and historiographical traditions, also refer to: miriam cooke's "Women" and Hoda Elsadda's "Discourses on Women's Biographies and Cultural Identity: Twentieth-Century Representations of the Life of ʿĀʾishah Bint Abi Bakr," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Spring, 2001): 37-64.

[56] Ahmed, 689-690. As the daughter of the Prophet's companion Abū Bakr and an opponent of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's claim to the Caliphate, ʿĀʾishah is rather critically represented in much Shiʿa religious scholarship. The above-cited sources elaborate on this issue.

[Mother of the Believers], ʿĀʾishah represents the possibility of a coeval female Islamic tradition. The attempted rape and murder of ʿĀʾishah's character in Waṭṭār's novel reflects the occlusion and silencing of this very history.[57] Furthermore, Bū al-Arwāḥ's mirroring of the Prophet's life in taking a nine-year old bride demonstrates the dangers of transposing cultural practices from seventh-century Arabia onto twentieth century Algeria. More crucially, it undermines the Salafi principle that Islamic practices during the time of the Prophet can be recovered in any trans-historical sense. While this is certainly germane to discussions of socio-sexual politics in Islam, it also has broader implications for the manner in which Islam is recorded, transmitted, interpreted and practiced. Through his satirization of Bū al-Arwāḥ, Waṭṭār yet again demonstrates the diverse hermeneutical possibilities of Islam. He also seems to be suggesting that Islam be contextualized and adaptive; or, to borrow the words of Leila Ahmed, that we question "whether the religion is to be allowed to remain permanently locked into replicating the outer forms of the specific society into which it was revealed, or whether the true pursuit and fulfillment of the Islamic message entails, on the contrary, the gradual abandonment of laws necessary in its first age."[58]

Unable to locate any suitable heirs who are not martyrs, government officials or communists, Bū al-Arwāḥ abandons his mission. As he crosses his sixth bridge, *Jisr al-Shayāṭīn* [Demons' Bridge], he finds himself part of a carnivalesque procession of faceless people. Overpowered by the viscous fluid, he runs towards *Jisr al-Hawaʾ* [the Bridge of the Abyss] where he sees scores of children that he imagines to be the impossible progeny of his barren marriages. Bū al-Arwāḥ is forced to reconcile with the women of his past as they appear to him one by one and mock his sterility before he throws each of them into the ravine. It is then that the apocalypse begins: tanks explode, flesh sizzles, and the earth begins to buckle. Bū al-Arwāḥ's final appeal before he attempts to hurl himself off the bridge is to the daughter of ʿUqbah bin Nāfiʿ (622-683), an Arab general of the Umayyad dynasty that led the Islamic invasion of the Maghreb and eventually died in battle in Algeria. Bū al-Arwāḥ's appeal to the daughter of ʿUqbah Bin Nāfiʿ speaks to his attempt to trace a

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[57] In this regard Waṭṭār's novel bears comparison to the works of the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi and the Algerian novelist Assia Djebar. Their texts actively seek to read female agency back into hegemonic historical narratives, particularly with respects to early Islamic history, the colonial encounter and anti-imperial revolutionary activities. See: Fatima Mernissi's *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Books, 1996) and *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); as well as Assia Djebar's *Loins de Medine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991) and *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattes, 1985).

[58] Ahmed, 677.

lineage, and notably a feminine one, with the original invaders responsible for Algeria's Arabicization and Islamicization. He further reconciles with his own lack of progeny, for it is precisely before his attempted martyrdom that Bū al-Arwāḥ asks her to mourn for him in lieu of a daughter: "You, daughter of ʿUqbah bin Nāfiʿ from Biskra, exchange trances with me, yours against mine. Cry for me before I jump off this bridge. Cry for all us Bū al-Arwāḥs."[59] The inclusion of a female Islamic lineage, embodied in the figures of ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr and the daughter of ʿUqbah bin Nāfiʿ, realizes the novel's eschatological vision by generating a not-filiative Islamic history. In so doing, it also ruptures a progressivist model of Algerian national history.

At the Threshold of the Abyss

Through its mapping of eschatology onto Algeria, *al-Zilzāl* creates an eerily fragmented temporality of Algerian national history.[60] The apocalypse unfolds in its narrative recounting of the physical chaos of the city of Constantine, the moral corruption of its inhabitants, but most crucially in Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ's own psyche. However, *al-Zilzāl* is unique in that it does more than simply demonstrate a site of postcolonial rupture through the fractured consciousness of its narrator. Rather, it transforms the traditional form of allegory, whereby the personal narrative serves to explicate a larger political and often national agenda. Waṭṭār presents the national narrative—the postcolonial destruction of Algeria—as symptomatic of the personal narrative—Shaykh Bū al-Arwāḥ's psychotic breakdown—while also demonstrating their mutual imbrication.[61] Furthermore, the novel's constant shifts in time, speakers, and states of consciousness deliberately disrupt the concepts of linear narrative form,

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[59] Waṭṭār, *al-Zilzāl*, 197; *The Earthquake*, 178; Appendix, 12.

[60] The temporal and spatial ruination that marks the city of Constantine resonates with Ann Laura Stoler's theorization of the unique historicity of imperial formations. See Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 23, No. 2 (May 2008): 191-219.

[61] Allegory then functions in the words of Gil Hochberg as a: "form of representation that contains a representational crisis: it connects the 'personal story' with the 'public (national) story' but at the same time it shows the link between the two stories to be a type of illusionary link, one that is 'too much of a link.' " Gil Hochberg, "National Allegories and the Emergence of Female Voice in Moufida Tlatli's *Les silences du palais*," *Third Text* Vol. 14 No. 50 (Spring 2000): 33-44, 39. Hochberg's analysis offers a productive reworking of the debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad over the question of national allegory. See: Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* No. 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65-88, and Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory," *Social Text* No. 17 (Autumn, 1987): 3-25.

temporal and spatial continuity, linguistic purity and subjective coherence. *Al-Zilzāl* thus restructures the very temporality of 'postcolonial history' and the notion of a 'pure' nationalist discourse—be it linguistic, literary, religious or identitarian.

Al-Zilzāl explores the complex cultural and political histories of Islamism and Arabism in Algeria. Specifically, it is through the novel's engagement with Qurʾanic eschatology that Waṭṭār resignifies the genealogies of these traditions, positioning them within a more expansive view of 'Algerian national identity.' *Al-Zilzāl* reveals the disjuncture between Arabism's appropriation by state ideologies and Salafi schools of Islam, and its ability to function as a rich medium of cultural expression and resistance. For as McDougall argues: "the significance of Arabism has largely lain precisely in its ability to evoke a 'dream' or promise; it has been double-edged, nourishing aspirations, providing a powerful idiom of self-expression and political action, as well as serving to frustrate aspirations, attempting to enclose its own promised possibilities in the limiting power of the national state."[62] It is precisely within this complex political, social and cultural matrix that I situate *al-Zilzāl's* engagement with Arabism and Islamism. For the novel, like much of Waṭṭār's literary oeuvre, touches on the fundamentally radical potential of Arabic and Islamic discursive traditions, as well as the dangers of binding them within exclusionary state or religious politics.

Due to the novel's rhizomatic and polyphonic narrative structure, *al-Zilzāl* avoids replicating the progressivist tendencies of either orientalist or nationalist readings of 'postcolonial' subjectivity. While the orientalist model situates colonial subjectivity in an alternate time and space outside of or behind that of western modernity, the nationalist one is predicated on a teleological model of historical time with colonialism as its point of departure and independence as its ultimate telos. By engaging with structures of discursive authority in relation to other hegemonic orders—national, sexual, religious and familial—al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār stages a reconfiguration of these very relationships. *Al-Zilzāl* shifts attention to the question of representation as a means of interrogating authorized narratives and structures of power. Working with eschatological manipulations of time and space, *al-Zilzāl* adopts authorized national narratives, only to then implode them both structurally and literally.

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[62] James McDougall, "Dream of Exile," 253. Similar arguments have been made regarding Islam, which Jean-Claude Vatin argues was ideologically bifurcated in Algeria, largely due to its need to fight French imperialism. He claims that during the post-revolutionary period Islam emerged as "the language both of the state apparatus (and of those who control it) and social and political protest groups." Vatin, 228.

Arabic Appendix

(١) تذهل المرضعة عما أرضعت . وتضع كل ذات حِمل حملها . ويسكر الناس وما هم بسكارى . لا . إنما يذهب مدخر عما ادخر من زيت وسكر وسميد ، ويضع كل ذي سلة سلته ، وكل ذي بضاعة بضاعته . ويسكت الناس لحظة عن الحديث . هذه هي صفة الزلزال في قسنطينة ، فالمرضعة ذاهلة عما ترضع بعد ، وهي في الشوارع تركض خلف المواد الغذائية . الأحمال في بطون بقرات إبليس هاته ، ليس أعزّ من خمس لترات زيتاً ، أو خمسة كيلو سكراً . أما هؤلاء ، فأي سكر أكثر مما هم فيه ، إنهم على ما يبدو ، في هذه الحال ، يهيمون على وجوههم ، منذ أمد طويل .

(وطار ، ٨٣ – ٨٤)

(٢) يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمْلٍ حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَارَى وَمَا هُم بِسُكَارَى وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ .

(القرآن الكريم ، سورة الحج ، ٢٢:٢)

(٣) هذا هو شأن العوالم السفلى . تتردّى . تتردّى ، حتى تذوب . حتى لا يبقى فيها سوى سفليتها...

(وطار ، ١١٢)

(٤) لعل هذا هو تاريخ المدينة من يوم كانت . انتهت بانتهاء البربر وابتدأت بابتداء الرومان ، وظلت تبتدئ وتنتهي بين البربر والرومان ومختلف الأجناس حتى جاء العرب . استأنفت تاريخها معهم حتى جاء الأتراك . انتهت وابتدأت ، حتى جاء الفرنسيون . وها هي تنتهي وتبتدئ من جديد .
إن الزلزال الذي يضع حداً لحياة هذه العاهرة لم يحدث بعد . وحين يحدث ينتقم من كل ماضيها الأسود الملطخ .

(وطار ، ٧٥ – ٧٦)

(٥) الوجوه أيضاً تتميّز في قسنطينة . الملامح ، تختلف من شخص لآخر ، القامات كذلك . زمن الاستعمار ، كانت الملامح عامة : أوروبية ، وعربية . أما الآن ، فلا . ملامح الشاوي

الصاعد من أعين البيضاء (أو من أعين مليلة) ، أو (باتنة) ، أو (خنشلة) ، أو (شلغوم العيد) [...]
الملامح ، كالروائح ، تعلن عن نفسها بنفسها ، بشكل صارخ في هذه المدينة .
(وطار ، ١٠ – ١١)

(٦) الدين الإخلاص للسلف . وكل بدعة ضلال .
(وطار ، ١٢)

(٧) ابن خلدون يخلد في النار على عبارته ، فالعرب الذين جاؤوا بالدين الحنيف ، لا يمكن أن
يكونوا شعار لخراب الحياة . . . لكن ها هو الواقع يصدقه ، فلم يقتصروا على تخريب الحياة
فقط ، وإنما انطلقوا إلى الدين أيضاً يخربونه .
— العربي يبني بيد ويخرب بأخرى .
[...] هؤلاء ليسوا عرباً . وليسوا بربراً ، ولا حتى وندالاً أو نتاراً أو مغولاً أو أقباطاً . هؤلاء إما أن
يكونوا روساً سلّطهم الله على البلاد ليحطموا مقوماتها ، وإما أن يكونوا بلا أصل ولا فصل ولا
دين أو ملّة ، فيوم كنا نعمل بدافع العروبة والدين ، وبضميب العربي الحر ، إلى جانب ابن باديس
وأهل الفضل والعلم من صحابته وتلاميذه كنا نعمر ولا نخر . نعمر الألسنة بلغة الضاد ، لغة القرآن
الكريم ، نعمر الأفئدة بالدين ، بالحديث والسنّة ، وما كان عليه السلف .
(وطار ، ٣٣ – ٤٣)

(٨) لعلّ إحساس الناس المتواصل بالزلزال يدفعهم إلى إنفاق كل قطعة نقود تقع بين أيديهم ، وإلى
التهافت على كل بضاعة تنزل . أنهم ينهبون لعلهم ، كالمحكوم عليهم بالإعدام .
(وطار ، ٣٥)

(٩) ملأى بالبضائع ، وتختزن فيها ملايين الأطنان من المؤن ، ومئات الآلاف من قوارير الغاز ،
وملايين الملايين من أطنان رصاص وإسمنت القنوات والمجاري [. . .] من هذا العالم السفلي ،
حيث تناسب المياه ، هاربة في كل قطرة من قطراتها ، بذرة من طين وأكلاس الصخرة
المسكينة .
(وطار ، ٣٧)

(١٠) الذهول ، والهلع ، وامتلاء النفس باللون الداكن ، تلكم هي الحالة التي وصف بها تعالى ، قيام الساعة ، وهي حالة شاء تعالى أن يخصّ بها الزلزال الذي استعاره سبحانه للتعبير عن قيام الساعة .

(وطار ، ١٤– ١٥)

(١١) اللون الداكن يتحرّك في القلب ، بل المادة السائلة ، تشرع في الذوبان . الحرارة ترتفع . الركبتان يسارع إليهما الوهن . العنق يودّ التلوي . الرأس فوقه ثقيل . الذراعان تصبحان عبئًا كبيراً على الكتفين .

(وطار ، ٨٢– ٨٣)

(١٢) أيتها البسكرية ، يا ابنة عقبة بن نافع ، أعيريني صرعك . خذي عني صرعك . ابكيني قبل أن أقذف بنفسي من أعلى الجسر . ابكي كل آل بو الأرواح .

(وطار ، ١٩٧)

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