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The "Missing Testimony" of the Precarious Migrant in Hassan Blasim's Short Stories

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Abstract

This article argues that Hassan Blasim's short story selection, *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*, distinctively portrays the migrant resistance to the state of precarity inherent in the experience of migration and statelessness. Adopting Agamben's concept of "testimony", this article offers a comparative analysis of how migrants use language to narratively construct their testimonies within the context of the global North and global South, respectively. Narrative qua testimony-giving will be shown to highlight a linguistic form of resistance that redefines the meaning of precarity and safety upon which migration law is founded. It is within this linguistic form of resistance that the promise of salvation from precarity lies, a salvation, however, that can only be achieved through an Agambenian 'play with the law', potentially creating alternative meanings of safety and precarity fundamental to *all* law.

Keywords

Hassan Blasim

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About Article

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Hassan Blasim'in Kısa Hikayelerindeki Göçmenin "Kayıp Tanıklığı"

Öz

Bu makale Hassan Blasim'in kısa hikaye seçkisi, *Ceset Sergisi ve Başka Irak Hikayeleri*'ni inceler ve seçkinin göç ve devletsizlik tecrübeleriyle ilintili olan, "prekarite" diye de adlandırılan yoksunluk halinin kendine özgü, yetkin bir temsili olduğunu savunur. Agamben'in "tanıklık" kavramından yola çıkan makale göçmenlerin küresel Kuzey ve küresel Güney bağlamında devletsizlik tanıklıklarını hikayeleştirirken nasıl bir dil kullandıklarını karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısıyla inceler. Tanıklık yapmak ya da ifade vermek olarak anlaşılabilecek bu anlatı şeklinin, göçmenlerle ilgili kanunları şekillendiren "prekarite" ve güvenlilik kavramlarının anlamlarını tekrar yorumladığını, böylelikle dilsel bir tür direnme şeklini ortaya çıkardığını gösterir. Bu dilsel direnişin vadettiği "prekarite"den kurtuluş ancak, bütün kanunların temelindeki "prekarite" ve güvenlilik hallerine dair alternative anlamlar yaratan, Agamben'in tartıştığı "kanun içinde oyun" aracılığıyla ulaşılabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Hassan Blasim

Giorgio Agamben

göç edebiyatı

anlatı çalışmaları

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Introduction

> The "true" witnesses, the "complete witnesses", are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness. They are those who "touched bottom": the Muslims, the drowned. The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony (Agamben, 1999b, p. 34).

Migration literature is a genre of literature that has become increasingly popular in recent years.[2] As a genre, it refers "to all literary works that are written in an age of migration —or at least to those works that can be said to reflect upon migration" within the twentieth and twenty-first century (Frank, 2008, p. 2). In this sense, migration is "generally about dislocation and the potential alienation of the individual from both old norms and new contexts" (White, 1995, p. 6). These works of literature depict characters who are in a state of exile and estrangement from both their home country from which they have fled and the host country which they cannot yet, if ever, call home. Famous works within this literary tradition include Tayeb Salih's *Seasons of Migration to the North*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter Maladies,* Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner,* and Salman Rushdie's short story "Good Advice is Rarer Than Rubies". Of particular interest to me in this article is what Homi Bhabha refers to as a "poetics of relocation" within which the "language of rights and obligations, so central to the modem myth of a people" is subjected to revision. This revision has been rendered necessary due to "the anomalous and discriminatory legal and cultural status assigned to migrant, diasporic, and refugee populations" where migrants find themselves on "the other side of the law" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 175). Deprived of the protection of the law, migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees struggle to find a voice to depict their struggle to adapt. Migration literature is this voice – a voice which gives poignant and urgent utterance to the "legally precarious and persistently indeterminate" state of the refugee (Woolley, 2014, p. 3). It is precisely this state of precarity and indeterminacy which lies at the heart of the three short stories I shall be critiquing below.

Within the context of the Middle East, the recent Arab Spring revolutions, the ongoing Syrian civil war, and the Iraq war (2003-2011) have bred an influx of migrants and refugees whose stories have become the focus of contemporary migrant literature. One author whose texts offer a "vision of this new world order" of diasporic refugees is the Iraqi-Finnish Hassan Blasim, whose short stories present "a twenty-first century rewriting of the paradigmatic Middle Eastern Refugee" (Atia, 2017, p. 2-3). Highly contentious and in some cases subject

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to censorship, Blasim's distinctive short stories present "unnatural narratives" and "impossible storyworlds" which reflect the traumatic aftereffects of war (Shang, 2019, p. 67-8). In a number of these narratives, Blasim depicts the struggle and failure of asylum-seekers to translate their experiences into the requisite foreign language at refugee reception centers. As such, Blasim's narratives afford the reader an "insight into asylum itself" through the dual lens of language and translation (Chambers, 2012, p. 146). By depicting the linguistic struggles of the paradigmatic asylum-seeking refugee, Blasim's works call into question migration law and the justice of the political system as a whole. Through these narrative interrogations of the interrogatory asylum process, Blasim presents his reader "with the farcical or macabre representation of the operation of power" (Atia, 2017, p. 2) and in doing so highlights the fundamental and deterministic role that language and law play in the experience of the stateless refugee.

In one of his most famous collections of short stories, entitled *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq,* Blasim's characters negotiate the complex relationship between language and law that defines the refugee experience. This collection of short stories explores the state of precarious migration across different borders within the context of the global South and global North. Through his "nightmare realism", he presents "stories [that] explore a variety of border subversions, linking the crossing of borders in undocumented spaces to ways of imagining belonging and interconnections beyond citizenship" (Sellman, 2018, p. 752). Three short stories from his selection, "The Reality and the Record", "The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes", and "The Killers and the Compass", invite a comparative exploration of the narratives that migrants employ to negotiate belongingness and subvert borders in transit zones. While the first two seem to offer "survivor" accounts of the precarious migration of the Iraqi refugee heading to the North, the third offers an embedded narrative that bears witness to the "missing testimony" of the failed migration of a Pakistani boy within the global South. Here, the global North is taken to indicate the "global West" that has been in a controversial relation with the "global East" defined by colonization, continuous political upheaval and economic instability (Boaventura, 2016, p. 19). In both accounts, however, the figure of the migrant invests in language through the act of narrative-telling in order to subvert borders and renegotiate the state of precarity in which they find themselves.

As precarious migrants, the refugees in the three short stories invest in Agamben's sense of linguistic "potentiality" of the "not to be" in the narratives they present as testimony to their resistance to precarity (Agamben, 1999a, p. 182). Narrative sharing becomes the

migrants' attempt at resisting their state of precarity caused by the absence of their legal grounding in citizenship. Adopting the framework of Agamben's sense of the "missing testimony", this article asks: what role does testimony-giving play in the migrant's resistance to precarity? How does the narrative offered by the precarious migrant in the global South differ from that in the global North? And, finally, what implications does this comparative reading of the role that testimony plays in redefining the experience of precarity within the two zones hold in relation to the experience of migration in general?

By comparatively reading the experiences of precarious migration within the global South and the global North, the stories highlight the role that language plays in resisting precarity, specifically legal precarity. By legal precarity, this article means the state of the migrants who are in a "temporary or restricted or altogether lacking legal status" as citizens protected by law (Balcaite, 2019, p. 66). In that sense, the dichotomy of safety/precarity becomes a fundamental basis for law. As individuals, migrants and refugees stand for Agamben's "*homo sacer*" or "life unworthy of being lived" whose precarious state is caused by the deprivation of legal protection and the legal status of the citizen (Agamben, 1998, p. 123). This article is specifically interested in how narrative-telling or "testimony-giving" thus becomes a linguistic tool for the migrant's "resistance against the global, systemic, and unjust human suffering caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy" for which the North is a "metaphor" within the discipline of border studies. In this reading, the North and South acquire significance as metaphorical, "deterritorialised" concepts that show how refugees resist and redefine the dichotomy safety/precarity within the law through narrative construction (Boaventura, 2016, p. 222-3, 66). These constructed narratives lay bare Agamben's sense of the "event of language before or beyond all particular meaning" where language ceases to be concerned with communication and delivery of a message (Agamben, 1999c, p. 41-2). This "event of language", enacted by the refugees within these narratives, appears to introduce a new formulation of the political: the dichotomy within the law.

Within the global South, testimony seems to take the form of the testimony within the testimony, or an embedded narrative, that assumes an aesthetic significance. In "The Killers and the Compass", Waheed is a Pakistani migrant whose unfortunate migration journey to England through Turkey becomes a narrative that other migrants share in constructing as they narrate their own stories of failed migration. The embedded narrative highlights the act of sharing and narrative construction in order to commemorate a life and a struggle to overcome precarity. Each instance of narration imbues Waheed's story with an aesthetic character as it

becomes a mosaic narrative concerned with the act of piecing together the narrative as well as a commemoration of the narrative subject and bonding among the victims of failed migration. Narration becomes a vehicle for Agamben's "Nachleben" or the "continued life . . . of works of art over long periods of time" (Agamben, 1993a, p. 112). In that sense, narrative-sharing redefines the migratory legal concern with safety/precarity in aesthetic terms concerned with narrative construction and commemoration.

Contrarily, the testimony within the North represents the precarious migrant's struggle to define their narrative roles in terms of Agamben's "true witness", on the one hand, and the "survivor", on the other. The precarious migrant in "The Reality and the Record" takes the figure of the asylum-seeker at the refugee reception center in Sweden and that of the Dutch migrant who struggles with assimilation in "The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes". Both depict the refugees' linguistic negotiation of legal precarity within the context of the global North. In the former, the anonymous asylum-seeker offers a double-narrative that obscures the "true witness" account of the *homo sacer* by introducing a survivor account of escape from horror-abduction by terrorist groups in Iraq. In the latter, the refugee is an Iraqi migrant survivor who seems to have successfully reinvented himself as Carlos Fuentes. However, his survivor narrative becomes that of a struggle to exercise control over nightmares that highlight the "true witness" struggle with using the language of the host country. In their double narratives that fuse the roles of the "survivor" and the "true witness" within that of the narrator, the asylum-seeker and migrant highlight the significant role that language plays in redefining the migrant struggle as a political reformulation of the precarity fundamental to the migrant experience.

In this comparative reading of the migrant narratives within the South and the North, Waheed, on one hand, and the anonymous asylum seeker and Carlos Fuentes, on the other, represent a linguistic attempt at resisting legal precarity. In their resistance, these migrants seem to initiate Agamben's sense of "play with law" that frees law from its "canonical use" by problematizing the dichotomy safety/precarity upon which law relies (Agamben, 2005, p. 64). In their narrative testimonies, these migrants seem to outline a unique soteriology that seems to define the life of the precarious migrant. Within the North, the migrant/citizen dichotomy assumes a linguistic function of the narrator/ documenter, a citizen concerned with enclosing the irrationality of precariousness within the rational medium of linguistic documentation. On the other hand, the migrant-narrator within the South is concerned with offering a commemoration that assumes religious significance as the frame narrator shares in

this narration as part of his education on how to be a "god" (Blasim, 2014, p. 13). By offering a posthumous commemoration, the migrant transposes the embedded narrative into a salvation narrative that warrants "followers" as uttered by a narratively-constructed god (Blasim, 2014, p. 13). Narrative-sharing, this article argues, constitutes a resistance soteriological narrative and an aesthetic regrounding of the dichotomy safety/precarity upon which law builds.

The Migrant "Testimony" Within the Global South

Within the South, a testimony to the failed migration of Waheed finds voice in the narratives offered by other migrants, specifically Murad Harba and an anonymous fellow migrant. Their narrative commemorates his death through reconstructing the story of the "holy compass" that is "inseparable from his person" and that his father found at a terrorist attack scene in Pakistan. In this sense, the only witness to Waheed's missing testimony is a compass that loses its "holi[ness]" and that becomes the focus of the narratives that other migrants share to reconstruct the narrative of failed migration within the South (Blasim, 2014, p. 20).

Waheed's narrative of precarious migrancy is voiced through another witness statement that a fellow migrant, Murad Harba, makes on his behalf. Harba is an Iraqi who met Waheed in his attempt to escape to Iran in the hopes of going to Turkey and "putting this fucked-up country behind" him. In his failed attempt, Harba lived in the "filthy house in the north of Iran" while waiting "to [be handed] over to the Iranian trafficker". This is Harba's first acquaintance with Waheed who "hangs himself in the bathroom the day before Iranian security raided the house". In jail, Harba meets another anonymous migrant who was "born in Iran" whose family was "deported from Baghdad after the war broke out on the grounds that he had Iranian nationality". Iranian authorities caught him for selling hashish. Although he is Iranian by birth, Harba refers to him as a "young Iraqi" (Blasim, 2014, p. 19). This young Iraqi ends up supplying the missing details from Waheed's story to Harba. In that sense, Waheed's story becomes a shared narrative that the pseudo-witnesses exchange and share in constructing. In their testimony, they end up preserving a missing testimony to the true witness of the failed migration whereby the migrant ends up committing suicide and dying. As a medium, language takes the form of narrative that preserves the silence of the true witness to the precariousness. Within the global South, testimony seems to take the form of the testimony within the testimony, the story of the compass embedded in the survivors' testimonies to depict the silence of bare life.

Waheed's story or the testimony within the testimony is further enclosed within what the migrants refer to as the "story of the compass". The compass is employed in this survival narrative as a metonymy- synecdoche by referring to Waheed symbolically but also physically. This compass is described as being hidden in a "special pouch that hung around his neck like a golden pendant" and that "is inseparable from his person" (Blasim, 2014, p. 19). The literal translation from Arabic emphasizes that the compass became a "part" of his body. This "story of the compass" revolves around the army compass with the words *Allah* and *Muhammad* engraved on it. It has been the property of "Abdallah Azzam, the spiritual father of the jihad in Afghanistan" whose car is "blown up" but whose body "was seemingly untouched" with "[n]ot a single scratch" on it. The compass was the sheikh's holy compass, "blessed by God and a conduit for his miracles". The compass acquires religious significance as the mujahideen claim that "the compass turn[s] blood-red when God intend[s] good or evil for the person carrying it (Blasim, 2014, p. 20). It was "Malik, the muezzin" who spots and rescues this compass and takes good care of it until the time comes for him to share it with his son, Waheed, who "wanted to smuggle his way into England". The compass represents a "secret" that has "powers and significance" that is supposed to "help [Waheed] on his journey and throughout his life". However, the compass's power to offer security and protection fails Waheed when he is raped while working at a building site in Iran to "save enough money to make the crossing to Turkey" (Blasim, 2014, p. 21). The transgression upon Waheed's body, in this sense, presents an instance of desacralisation. As a part of his body, the compass fails to protect Waheed. This compass that is protected by holiness and that is supposed to provide security is desacralized as the body is desecrated. Within the global South, the embedded testimony thus provides a medium to aesthetically commemorate and celebrate this instance of desacralisation; the dichotomy security/precarity acquires an aesthetic significance that undermines and rewrites all pre-established legal and religious definitions.

The linguistic testimony that the migrants give is not concerned with delivering the truth or falsity of Waheed's actual story; it transposes their stories or narratives into the field of aesthetics as it is concerned with the act of sharing the story or the witness statement among survivors. In this act of sharing, narrative-sharing allows for bonding among the survivors that seek to commemorate Waheed's testimony. In all these testimonies, what seems to be set as sacred and to offer protection or safety is profaned as security and holiness acquire aesthetic significance. In this sense, every instance of story-telling represents an instance of an after-life or Agamben's "Nachleben" that indicates the "survival" or "continued life" of "forms – of images, poses, postures, and gestures – in cultural artifacts and works of art over

long periods" (Agamben, 1993a, p. 112). In this sense, each narrative becomes an instance of survival or continued life of the "sheikh's holy compass" which is inseparable from Waheed's story. Survival narratives thus provide Waheed with the security and salvation that his actual physical life could not provide him with.

The Migrant "Testimony" Within the North

Within the North, linguistic resistance in the form of embedded narrative takes the form of the double stories that the narrator claims the asylum-seeker presents at the refugee reception centre. The first is "the real stories [that] remain locked in the hearts of the refugees, for them to mull over in complete secrecy" while the second is the "stories for the record [that] ... are the ones the new refugees tell to obtain the right to humanitarian asylum, written in the immigration department and preserved in their private files" (Blasim, 2014, p. 157). The refugee's "story 'for the record' is necessarily a tactical one about trauma, persecution, and likely death if the refugee does not leave his or her country" (Chambers, 2012, p. 146). For the narrator, these stories "merge and it becomes impossible to distinguish between them" (Blasim, 2014, p. 157). This is why the asylum seeker finds it necessary to comment on his narration as he wonders "what details matter" and would guarantee him the "right of asylum" as he figures out that "it would be best if [he] summarize[s] the story ..., rather than have [the reception officer] accuse [him] of making it up" (Blasim, 2014, pp. 161; 167-8). Although the asylum-seeker is not silent, he presents his narratives as witness statements in which the second narrative for the record is simultaneously a witness statement or testimony to the other that is hidden in the hearts of the refugees as "true witness". In other words, the narrative preserves silence or absence at the heart of the narrative. In this sense, the refugee becomes the "pseudo-witness" and a "complete witness" at the same time.

In his fusion of the "true" and the "pseudo-witness", the narrator presents narrative-telling or testimony-giving as a representation of the creative potential of language that transcends its use as a tool for communication. The creative potential of language is summarized in the emergency department director's claim that "the world is all interconnected, through feelings, words, nightmares, and other secret channels" (Blasim, 2014, p. 162). Captivated by his "affection and admiration" for the director's words, the narrator calls him the "Professor". A curious figure, the director is both "a philosopher and an artist" who has an "enigmatic way" of speaking (Blasim, 2014, p. 159). The interconnection of secrets, images and feelings shows in the "Iraqi poet in London [who] was writing a fiery article in praise of the resistance" and "out of the poet's article jumped three masked men" in

Iraq (Blasim, 2014, p. 162). The article presents the creative potential of language that gives rise to three masked men.[3] In this sense, the poet's article becomes a conduit for Agamben's sense of "revelation" as an "event of language" (Agamben, 1999c, p. 41). This event of language lays bare the fact that we "dwe[ll] in language" where language or words give rise to masked men (Agamben, 2006, p. 92). By including the event of linguistic revelation in his narrative testimony, the refugee highlights the creative potential of language to provide interconnection and belonging, which does not build upon language's communicative function.

The creative potential of language that builds on the fusion of the true and "pseudo-witness" through the embedded narrative assumes a political significance through the medium of nightmares or dreams in "The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes". Entitled "The Forgotten Language", dreams or nightmares become the medium for the "realm of freedom" where the "existence of the ego becomes the only reference point for thoughts and feelings" (Blasim, 2014, p. 192). In an attempt at controlling this realm, Fuentes tries to "control the dreams, to modify them, purge them of all their foul air, and integrate them with the salubrious rules" of life in Holland. He tries to subject the world of dreams to the rules of actual life and teach his dreams "the new language of the country so that they could incorporate new images and ideas" (Blasim, 2014, p. 193). However, language's creative potential challenges Carlos through his dreams. In his first nightmare, he finds that he cannot speak Dutch to his Dutch boss. In another, he finds that he fails to speak Dutch in a court while he is being tried for planting a "bomb in the center of Amsterdam" (Blasim, 2014, p. 191). Here dreams lay bare the legal significance of language where failure to speak the language of the host country deprives Carlos of the ability to defend himself before the court. Even when he uses his first language, Arabic, he becomes an object of derision for his "incomprehensible rustic accent" (Blasim, 2014, p. 192). In his dreams, language appears to challenge its legal and instrumental use as a means to provide for security through being a medium of communication to defend oneself. Instead, language assumes a force of its own that problematizes its instrumental use. This is why Fuentes finds it difficult to comprehend how "freedom" can coincide with a lack

[3] For Sakr (İn "The More-Than-Human Refugee Journey: Hassan Blasim's Short Stories"), Blasim Places "Life And Truth At Their Limits İn Real And İmagined Sites […] To Suggest More-Than-Human Futures For The Paradoxical Project Of Reclaiming Human Rights". Sakr Highlights The Significant Role That The Fusion Of "Forest And Border, Human And Non-Human" Plays İn Blasim's Short Stories (767). In This Sense, This Article Argues That Language, Through Story-Telling, İs But A Vehicle That Allows For This Fusion To Take Place And To Dispense With The "Bordered Vision Of Territoriality, Life And Truth" (778). The "Fraught Project Of Human Rights" Needs To Be Supplemented With A Revisionist Study Of The Structure Of Law That Is Employed To Guarantee These Rights (773).

of "control" over dreams (Blasim, 2014, p. 192). In other words, Fuentes's experience with language and nightmares becomes a political experiment and attempt to establish a link between freedom and rational control that provides a subjective sense of security. As a consequence to these dreams, Fuentes engages in "mysterious secret rituals" that defy rationality. He "paint[s] his face like an American Indian, sl[ee]ps wearing diaphanous orange pajamas, and put under his pillow three feathers taken from various birds" (Blasim, 2014, p. 194). As he "veer[s] between what he imagined and the information he found in books", Fuentes lays bare how irrational dreams, in which language escapes the control of rational instrumental use, become a vehicle for Fuentes to experience escape. Though temporary, this escape from rational control allows Fuentes to come in touch with his imagination, thus, experiencing freedom through the narratives found in books (Blasim, 2014, p. 193). Between language as an instrumental tool that is used as a means to an end and language as a faculty that fails Fuentes in his dreams, Fuentes experiences the "event of language" as Agamben's sphere of politics as "pure mediality without end" (Agamben, 2000, pp. 115,6–116,7). His dreams represent a disruption of communication or communicability that renders language into an element of pure means or mediation. In turn, this state of mediation acquires political significance as it marks the migrant's resistance to the rational, legal sense of precarity. In Carlos's world of dreams, interconnection within the world of language assumes a legal significance whereby politics is defined in terms of the pure mediation of the imagination that subjects "control" and "freedom" to irrational, aesthetic redefinition.

In this state of linguistic belongingness, the narrator discovers that story-telling, narrative-writing, or testimony-giving are but facets of mediation which take language as but one of its many forms. Mediation allows the precarious migrant to experience all identifiers without assuming any legally defined identity that law would legitimate. In mediation, the world becomes "just a bloody and hypothetical story, and we are all killers and heroes" (Blasim, 2014, p. 170). Story-telling and narrative writing become the experience of language that loses its communicative function as it becomes a vehicle for revelation of the multiple and hypothetical possibilities of identities that this anonymous asylum-seeker can have. Mediation allows the linguistic to extend and intermingle with the visual which takes the form of videos in which the narrator had to wear different uniforms and read a "piece of paper" in which he takes the blame for killing and raping (Blasim, 2014, p. 164). In the narrative he offers at the reception center, the anonymous asylum-seeker narrates how he was kidnapped and "sold" to three different "groups" who made him enact "videotape roles" of a terrorist who confesses to different crimes (Blasim, 2014, p. 169). In these roles, the anonymous

asylum-seeker highlights mediation through the medium of the image or the video that capitalizes upon the mediation of language. In these incidents of kidnapping, he was forced to acquire new identities and become "a treacherous Kurd, an infidel Christian, a Saudi terrorist, a Syrian Baathist intelligence agent, or a Revolutionary Guard from Zoroastrian Iran. On these videotapes [he] murdered, raped, started fires, planted bombs, and carried out crimes that no sane person would even imagine" (Blasim, 2014, p. 168). With each script he reads for every video, he is given a new identity. As "tapes were broadcast on satellite channels around the world, experts, journalists and politicians sat" and "discussed what [he] said and did" (Blasim, 2014, p. 168). In these "videotape roles" as "spectacular charades", mediation takes the form of the discussion of the journalists and politicians (Bahoora, 2015, p. 198). Similarly, in one of his many nightmares, Carlos Fuentes becomes "Salim the Dutchman, Salim the Mexican, Salim the Iraqi, Salim the Frenchman, Salim the Indian, Salim the Pakistani, Salim the Nigerian." (Blasim, 2014, p. 198). Although these nightmares and the videotapes stand for charades that stage "falsehoods", their concern is in displaying the creative potential inherent to falsehood through setting the characters free from the need for pre-established legal identifiers (Bahoora, 2015, p. 198).

In this intermingling of linguistic and visual mediation, the migrants within the North find themselves in direct relation with their own "lack" or Agamben's sense of "impotentiality" or being "in relation to one's own incapacity" (Agamben, 1999a, p. 182). In each recorded narrative that he recites, the anonymous asylum seeker assumes a new identity that multiplies with each instance of mediation, whether through script, video or narrative-telling that he offers at the refugee reception center. His story ends up being "filed away in the records of the immigration department" (Blasim, 2014, p. 170). As "reality" and the "record" intermingle, it becomes impossible to separate one from the other. In this sense, the "border between the primary", record, and "secondary" real narrations corresponds to a "border between sanity and madness" (Al-Masri, 2018, p. 277). The real story that fuses this sanity and madness is summed up in four words "I want to sleep", the instance where a man loses connection with the legal identifiers (Blasim, 2014, p. 170). In a similar ending that takes death rather than sleep as a form of escape, Fuentes sees himself "naked" as he jumps to meet his death (Blasim, 2014, p. 195). In this sense, Fuentes assumes the guise of Agamben's *homo sacer* who despite attaining citizenship preserves his original status as indistinct and belonging to different nations simultaneously. As *homo sacer*, they indicate a "life unworthy of being lived" (Agamben, 1998, p. 123), a life which Fuentes escapes through death while the anonymous asylum-seeker requests the right to sleep in a "humble entreaty" to escape

from (Blaism, 2014, p. 170). In mediation, the newspaper takes on a mediatory role by commemorating the state of the dead body through an article announcing Fuentes's death accompanied by an image of the covered body with an "outstretched right hand" (Blasim, 2014, p. 196). Similarly, in "Reality and the Record", the record commemorates the story of the anonymous asylum-seeker who is then taken to a "psychiatric hospital" (Blasim, 2014, p. 170).[4]

The Narrative-Testimony: Between North and South

Through sharing in narrative exchange and transmission, these individuals between the South and the North differ in the manner of narrative-sharing or the medium or manner of linguistic resistance that enacts Agamben's sense of "play" with the legal categorisation of the migrant and the citizen (Agamben, 2007, p. 75). The anonymous asylum-seeker and Carols Fuentes provide a subjective retelling or documentation of their journey to the North. Language takes a legally sanctioned medium of the official record and of the newspaper article that warrants a listener or a reader as a passive documenter. This is why the immigration officer, in the first short story, recommends that the anonymous asylum seeker be transferred to the psychiatric hospital to be seen by a doctor who will "ask him about this childhood memories"; the migrant can only exist in the legally sanctioned medium of medical discourse. In the North, it seems that linguistic resistance to legal precarity, which is defined by the absence of the legal protection of citizenship status, renders the citizen into a reader who can only document the suffering of the migrant. This is why language takes the irrational media of the dream or the poem to disrupt and play with the "sacred" legal script of migrant as asylum-seeker vs. citizen and render it into a narrator and a documenter/ passive reader (Agamben, 2007, p. 75). In this sense, the citizen as receiver or listener to this script becomes subject to the effect of linguistic mediation. The citizen assumes a linguistic role of pseudo-witness who lives to document and verbalise, to find the linguistic tools to grapple with, the irrationality of the precarity or the suffering of the migrant. This is why perhaps the citizen in "The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes" takes the role of the documenter as an "amateur photographer". The citizen as documenter takes a photo or an "image" of the covered dead

[4] In "Writing The Dismembered Nation: The Aesthetics Of Horror In Iraqi Narratives Of War," Bahoora Analyses Blasim's "The Reality And The Record" And Argues That The "Inconclusiveness, Confusion, Ambiguousness And Lack Of Resolution That Attend The Narrative" Depict The "Horror" And The "Impossibility Of A Rational Conclusion To The Social And Political Turbulence It Represents" (201). While The "Macabre Horror Of The Postcolonial Gothic" Could Be Read To Be A Literary Technique That Responds To The Actual Sectarian Violence, This Article Holds That The Resulting Confusion Within The Narration Holds A Promise That Transcends Its State As A Response. Confusion Within Narration Takes The Linguistic Medium As A Means To Translate And Grapple With This Inconclusiveness And Problematize The Foundations Of The Law Upon Which It Builds.

body of Carlos Fuentes (Blasim, 2014, p. 196). In this sense, the citizen at the receiving end of the narration is reduced to the mediating role of listener, reader or photographer. By disrupting the role of law in defining citizenship within the North, language displays its potentiality as a form of resistance to precarity caused by the legal apparatus.

Within the context of the global South, language continues to play a unique yet distinct role. While the linguistic medium within the North finally reduces the citizen with whom the testimony is shared into pseudo-witness as a documenter struggling to find the proper medium to enclose or to encapsulate the irrationality of suffering, it takes on a breeding mechanism within the South. The narrative of the failed migrant, Waheed, becomes a shared narrative undergoing construction with each act of narrative-telling, whether by the Iranian or Murad Harba. Migrants seem to share and contribute to this act of narrative-telling and narrative-making as they echo and piece-together the story of Waheed's failed migration, or the "story of the compass". In this sense, the shared-ness of narrative construction allows these failed migrants to redefine the state of the illegality in which they all share. With the absence of law that causes their sense of precarity, they share in the reconstruction of their resistance to the need for a pre-defined law of citizenship. Whereas in the North, the migrant seeks to be recognised and legitimatised by the law, the failed migrants within the South seem to be negotiating the need for law and for the grounding of safety or security within the law. They resist the sense of law as categorisation and present narrative-telling as an instance of disrupting the categories of precarity/ safety upon which the law relies. One instance of this disruption is the "holy" compass that is supposed to be a "conduit for [God's] miracles" and a warning of the "good or evil" that "God intended" but which ultimately fails to rescue Waheed in his moment of need when being raped (Blasim, 2014, p. 20). Another similar instance is marked by the betting game that Waheed innocently engages in, only for it to turn out to be a "malicious trick" that leads to his end (Blasim, 2014, p. 22). In narrative-sharing, the opposition between good and evil, right and wrong, safety and precarity, cease to matter.

In narratively sharing the confusion of the safe and the precarious, the contributors seem to be outlining a new narrative of salvation. In other words, the contributors seek to save Waheed by commemorating his struggle, life and death, in their narratives. While law presents the *prima facie* salvation narrative that necessitates Waheed's pursuit of citizenship and safety in countries of the global North, narrative-sharing or commemoration offers an alternative narrative of salvation, albeit posthumous. In the South, he survives in the shared narratives. Their linguistic resistance takes the form of the substitute narrative of salvation

from legal precarity that they share in the act of narrative construction. However, in this substitute narrative, it is neither safety nor security that indicates salvation. In this posthumous narrative of salvation, Harba shares Waheed's story with Mahdi, the actual narrator of "The Killers and the Compass". Upon listening to this story, Mahdi declares that the story had "no effect" on him as he is entranced by the "company of [his] brother Abu Hadid and by the chance to enter his various worlds" (Blasim, 2014, p. 22). Listening to Waheed's story is but one world to which Abu Hadid exposes his brother, Mahdi, in order to teach him to become his "own god" where "there is no god without followers or crybabies willing to die of hunger or suffer in his name". Waheed's narrative is supposed to teach Mahdi not only how to be a "lion", to not be afraid, but also how to gain "followers" and "crybabies" (Blasim, 2014, p. 13). In other words, it seems that the act of narrative-sharing embraces precarity as a theme that invokes emotional reaction and sacrifice on the side of the listener as a potential "follower". However, the ultimate narrator who lives to share and on whom the narrative has "no effect" is the narratively-constructed god who can now offer his own narrative of salvation to his followers or crybabies.

Conclusion

To return to the question of the role that language plays in the migrant's resistance to legal precarity, this article has shown that narrative-telling and narrative-sharing constitute a linguistic form of resistance that seeks to redefine the sense of precarity and safety upon which the law relies. By disrupting the foundation of the law, the migrants appear to bring back the political into its first instance of theorization. Within the context of the South and the North, the migrants attempt to carry out Agamben's sense of "play[ing] with the law" by means of investing in linguistic potentiality (Agamben, 2005, p. 64). The political no longer invests in "fear" in juxtaposition to safety or security; instead, it indicates an act of narrative-sharing that explores the possible roles that the listener or narrator can take. This comparison between the testimonies of and about the refugees in the two transit zones lays bare the migrants' resistance to legal precarity through their differing manners of narrative-sharing that manifest language as mediation. Through the depiction of this struggle, Hassan Blasim's main characters reflect Agamben's figure of the refugee as preliminary to "a coming community" where language is a medium for reinvention and promise (Agamben, 1993b, p. 1). It is a means to play with law, a play wherein the promise of reaching justice might possibly lie. However, it is also a narrative of play that carries the risk of raising followers or crybabies who are to believe, repeat and offer themselves in sacrifice for a narratively constructed god.

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