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## TRANSITIONAL PORTRAITS: SYRIAN IMMIGRANTS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN MAHJAR IN 'ABD AL-MASIH HADDAD'S PROSE

### Abstract

This article argues that the 1921 collection of diasporic short stories *Hikayat al-mahjar*, written by 'Abd al-Masih Haddad, makes a unique and notable contribution to *mahjar* literature by mobilizing formal literary techniques and innovative thematic content to capture a Syrian immigrant community engaged in a transitional moment in America. This paper situates Haddad (best known as the founder of the biweekly Arabic newspaper *al-Sa'ih*, and a founding member of the literary society *al-Rābiṭa al-qalamiyya*) among his literary peers and provides an analysis of *Hikayat al-mahjar* that demonstrates the work's points of convergence and divergence from the literary norms of the Arab diaspora in North America. Haddad, in highlighting the ambivalence and tension that overwhelmed Syrian immigrant characters navigating the boundaries of new social and cultural realities, broke ranks with his contemporaries in the Arab diaspora, whose output in Arabic was primarily fixated on nostalgic and romantic depictions of the homeland.



When 'Abd al-Masih Haddad published a collection of short stories in New York City entitled *Hikayat al-mahjar* (Stories of the diaspora), in 1921, he was attempting to fill a void in the landscape of Arabic literature penned by Arab writers in America at this time. Haddad explained in the introduction to his collection:

Ever since entering America and joining its Syrian World<sup>1</sup> I've witnessed scenes and situations drawn from our social circumstances, as well as diverse depictions of our Syrian-American life. I'd often asked myself, when would one of our writers put these scenes to paper, so our people could learn from their secrets.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that Haddad lacked confidence in his ability to craft prose, since his forte was in editorial expression, he felt compelled to try his hand at fashioning short scenes, and the result was the collection *Hikayat al-mahjar*. Haddad's stories diverged from the literary geographies and thematic content present in the prose written by his better-known contemporaries in the North American *mahjar* (the Arab diaspora), like Kahlil Gibran, Mikha'il Nu'ayma, and Ilya Abu Madi, whose fiction was set in the homeland, and generally focused on romantic struggles over self-definition. Haddad pivoted toward settings populated by Syrian characters of the diaspora, authoring the first literary collection in Arabic that depicted Syrians in the United States, articulated their anxieties, and imagined their possibilities. Haddad's narrative sketches were also crafted – as the intentionality of his quotation above attests – to provide lessons to his Syrian readers. I will argue that Haddad's innovative collection is not simply offering lessons, but more importantly, is chronicling a Syrian community caught in transition in America. In developing this argument, I will first situate Haddad in the context of his era, expand on his motivations in writing these stories, and then examine three of the collection's stories.

#### HADDAD AND HIS MILIEU

Haddad was born in Homs, Syria, in 1890 to a Christian Orthodox family. He spent a year of secondary education at the Russian Eastern Orthodox School in Nazareth, Palestine, where he was a classmate of Nasib 'Arida and Nu'ayma, two future luminaries of the Arab diasporic literati in America. After a year in Nazareth, he followed his brother, Nadra Haddad, to New York City in 1907. In New York, he established himself in retail work like so many Syrian immigrants, and pursued his studies in the evening. After five years, he was able to turn his full attention to his passion for the written word, as he founded and became editor of the biweekly newspaper *al-Sa'ih* in 1912, which he would continue to edit – with a few interruptions – until 1960.

Haddad's journalistic goals were not limited to providing the Arabic-speaking community with news. Haddad saw his biweekly as a counterbalance to the heavy focus on politics in the Arabic journalism of the early twentieth-century Syrian community in America. *Al-Sa'ih*, he insisted, would include enlightening subject matter and provide a welcome forum for literary content.<sup>3</sup> In editing his paper, Haddad became closely linked to the *literati* in New York City, and was one of the founding members of the famed

Pen Bond (al-Rābiṭa al-qalamiyya), a literary association of like-minded Arab poets and authors. The Pen Bond officially came into existence in 1920, although the group of writers who made up its ranks had gravitated toward one another as early as 1916, holding meetings and discussing their goals. The Pen Bond members signed a charter committing themselves to the rejuvenation of the Arabic language, the promotion of ingenuity and freedom in writing, and the practical goal of providing a literature that represented and addressed the Arabic-speaking community in America.<sup>4</sup> Many luminaries of Arabic diasporic literature belonged to the Pen Bond, including Ameen Rihani, Gibran, Nu'ayma, Abu Madi, and others. Haddad's newspaper *al-Sa'ih* would eventually become the official mouthpiece of the Pen Bond, and he began publishing a special annual edition of the paper dedicated to the literary works of its members.<sup>5</sup>

Haddad's own contributions to this special edition were minimal, but would include stories later compiled in *Hikayat al-mahjar*.<sup>6</sup> Haddad was not a prolific writer of poetry or prose in comparison to his colleagues in the Pen Bond. His strength was in journalism, and this was reflected in the direct, objective writing style of his short stories. We can infer that Haddad was quite timid regarding his literary skills, as he admitted that it was only the early positive feedback he received from Gibran that encouraged him to continue writing these vignettes. Gibran wrote to Haddad after reading his first story, exclaiming, "I want to read a story like this by you in each copy of *al-Sa'ih*. You have no excuse to not carry this out, since the field you have entered is boundless, and you need to dive right into the depths and bring us what you find!"<sup>7</sup> Gibran's enthusiastic encouragement acknowledged that Haddad had embarked on a unique literary enterprise in depicting the lives of fellow Syrians in the North American diaspora. In addition, Gibran's insistence that Haddad produce more stories in this vein indicated a genuine need for a literature expressing their community's concerns and desires.

#### HADDAD AS AUTHOR AND PRODUCER

Haddad's responsiveness to his assumed reader, articulated in the introduction to *Hikayat al-mahjar*, offers insight into how he understood his role in the process of literary production. Not only was Haddad explicit about his intention to fill a void in the literary landscape of Arabic prose in America, but he further elaborated on what he hoped to accomplish, claiming, "we [Syrian Americans]

are in need of a mirror by which we can see ourselves and our behavior with our own eyes, so as to correct foolish transgressions.”<sup>8</sup> This statement opens a window into the relationship between creative writing and the sociology of literary production, as a sociological perspective involves understanding the relationship between author and audience in the development of literary genres and trends.<sup>9</sup> Haddad was not simply compelled by his assumed Syrian audience to pen these stories and represent their lives, but he also aimed to play a reformatory role in educating his audience by holding up a mirror so that readers would reflect on their actions and behaviors. Adopting this role established Haddad’s ties to reformist trends already present in Arabic literary circles, most notably in the work of the late nineteenth-century Egyptian author Abdallah Nadim, who emphasized literature’s ability to affect societal change.<sup>10</sup> Haddad, himself a novice in the realm of prose, borrowed from this reform-minded and didactic literary expression, meanwhile transporting these modes of expression into a new geographical arena by presenting a cast of Syrian characters in North America who had been absent from Arabic literary expression up until this point.

Haddad’s acknowledgment of his responsive role in this dualistic literary process aligns with recent trends in scholarship on Arabic literature broadly focused on the time period when Haddad was writing. Stephen Sheehi’s work on Nahda literature, for example, has urged scholars to consider how Nahda authors’ works are “determined, like all products, by social conditions,” instead of viewing these authors as geniuses whose literary production is detached from their historical moment.<sup>11</sup> Haddad’s introductory remarks to *Hikayat al-mahjar* align with Sheehi’s vision for understanding literature, especially in Haddad’s acknowledgement of his own role as author and producer of stories about, and for, a particular audience. Haddad certainly did not view himself as an individual genius, a fact made clear by his self-deprecating introductory remarks in which he expresses his wish that another author might have undertaken this task before him. And most importantly, Haddad’s introduction explains that his stories respond to the social conditions of the Syrian community in the United States, acting as a mirror through which this community can see and judge itself. Haddad’s recognition of his role in the dynamic sociological process of literary production underscores his responsiveness to the audience he imagined consuming his work. The deliberateness to which we are privy, by means of Haddad’s

introductory remarks, in part acts as a preemptive apologetic for the undeveloped narrative techniques utilized in his short stories, but also underscores Haddad's courage, as a novice in crafting prose, in breaking new literary ground in responding to the social imperative of representing the Syrian community in America.

#### HADDAD'S DIVERGENCE FROM MAHJAR WRITERS

*Hikayat al-mahjar* should be understood in the context of the prevailing stylistic and thematic trends in vogue among Syrian authors of the American diaspora circa 1920. Critical work analyzing the literature of the Syrian diaspora, in Arabic and English, has primarily focused on the poetry and prose of well-known writers like Gibran, Rihani, Nu'ayma, Abu Madi, and 'Arida.<sup>12</sup> This group drew inspiration from the Pen Bond's manifesto of infusing new life into the Arabic language, which they believed had suffered from decades of stagnation. A prime example of this innovation was the free verse poetry composed in the diaspora; poets of the Pen Bond were praised by some critics, and reviled by others, for experimentation that ignored the prescribed poetic meters that had dominated Arabic poetic expression for centuries. The multilingualism of this community also inspired innovation, since many writers were influenced by literary trends in languages they had learned, like Russian, English, and French. Distance from home also played a role in encouraging these new forms of narrative discourse. As the Arabic literary scholar Sabry Hafez explains, "It is probable that the birth of the new discourse away from home facilitated its liberation from the shackles of traditional literary canons, and enabled it to establish its own language and conventions more freely."<sup>13</sup> For his part, Haddad was undoubtedly influenced by this wave of literary renewal and experimentation, most clearly manifested by the direct and simplistic prose he utilized in his stories.

While the literature composed by Haddad and his contemporaries witnessed experimentations in form as well as influences from global literary trends, the prose Haddad's peers produced coalesced around some common thematic concerns. This thematic content featured characters seeking liberation from stifling traditions, criticizing the religious establishment, engaging in Sufi-inspired contemplation, and debating contradictions between faith and rationality. In addition, many stories presented a deep nostalgia for the homeland, and therefore were set in a Syrian or Lebanese village. The influence of romanticism infiltrated

many narratives, as characters explored their love of nature or pondered humanistic concerns while the narratives themselves probed characters' inner psyches.<sup>14</sup> In true romantic fashion, prose of the American diaspora frequently involved an epic search to understand the self. In 'Isa al-Na'uri's tome *Adab al-mahjar* about the writers of the diaspora, he describes the shared vision in the literature of the Pen Bond members with his own flare:

Just as a bee dances in the pastures among the flowers, extracting the sweetest nectar and transforming it into delicious honeycomb, the writers of the Pen Bond extracted a sweetness concealed deep in the self, and produced the finest turns of phrase inspired by nature and human society, and with these expressions their pens created literature sweeter than a honeycomb.<sup>15</sup>

Although many writers in the diaspora espoused romantic inclinations in probing the depths of the soul through poetry and prose, Haddad's short stories did not follow this trajectory. Haddad's deviation from the norms established by his peers was noticed by literary critics who studied *mahjar* prose. 'Abd al-Karim Ashtar emphasized the simplicity of Haddad's writing by claiming it read like straightforward conversation.<sup>16</sup> Ashtar also noted that Haddad was certainly *capable* of writing in a more ornate and expressive Arabic, citing his occasional forays into a florid writing style in the editorials he composed for his newspaper *al-Sa'ih*. Another critic, Hadiya Ramadan, described Haddad's style as *tasjili* or *watha'iqi* (documentarian).<sup>17</sup> When Ramadan analyzed Haddad's stories, she undoubtedly had the style and thematic content of his Pen Bond colleagues in mind:

These stories are dominated by a documentarian linguistic register, reliant on narration and conversation. The style is cold and objective, devoid of rhetorical flourish. There is no description of nature, no diving into emotions, and there are no philosophical musings.<sup>18</sup>

Ramadan's criticism reflects just how atypical Haddad's stories were in comparison to his peers. Sabry Hafez, also writing about Haddad and his contemporaries, was quick to point out the divergent thematic content of Haddad's collection, which he summarized as focusing on "the disparity between expectations

and reality, and the hardship of life away from the protection of home. His expatriates experience difficult cultural adjustments particularly related to ethical values and the relationship between the sexes, and they nostalgically yearn for the world they left behind.”<sup>19</sup> Hafez’s explanation of Haddad’s thematic concerns make clear that these themes did not align with those of his peers. Some of the thematic hallmarks of his colleagues in the diaspora, like criticism of the religious establishment, romantic depictions of the homeland, or probing the psyche of characters, are barely present in Haddad’s collection.

The consensus reached by the critics of Arabic diasporic literature is that Haddad’s simplistic, documentarian prose featuring the lives of Syrian characters in America set him apart from his peers. He simply did not emulate the literary sensibilities of his cohort. Because of this and because this single collection of short stories was the only work of fiction Haddad published,<sup>20</sup> he occupied a marginal position among his peers of the Pen Bond.

My intention in revisiting the stories of Haddad’s collection *Hikayat al-mahjar* is not to claim these critics are wrong, and that he is a literary genius who spent decades hidden in plain sight. Rather, I will analyze Haddad’s stylistics and thematic content to illuminate how this community of Syrians living in America, who had not previously been represented, imagined, and voiced in Arabic literature, were depicted for the first time. While Haddad’s writing is extremely direct—photographic even—there are implicit and explicit moments in his prose that feature striking layers of ambivalence and depth pulsing below his surface descriptions. In developing my argument, which relies on understanding the symbiosis achieved in Haddad’s deployment of form and content, I will expound the general stylistic and thematic trends that repeat across numerous stories in the collection and then shift to analyses of three stories in *Hikayat al-mahjar*. Shifting between generalities and particulars will demonstrate how seemingly simplistic stories can reveal complex contours of the “Syrian-American life” that Haddad referenced in his introduction.

#### HIKAYAT AL-MAHJAR: STYLISTIC FEATURES

The thirty-one stories that shape the collection *Hikayat al-mahjar* share stylistic attributes. Haddad’s use of a straightforward register is one of the most noticeable formal features of his collection. His choice of a simplistic, and conversational, Modern Standard Arabic register helped foster a direct connection with his audience,

unimpeded by erudite vocabulary or dense poetic imagery. What emerges is an alignment between Haddad's choice of language register and his admitted responsiveness to Syrian community in America. Haddad's stories featured Syrian characters across the spectrum of the community in both time and space; temporally speaking, textual references range from 1890 to post-World War I, and geographically, he depicts Syrian characters living in New York City, but also in Ohio and Florida. As would be expected from the historical record of early Syrian immigrants, many characters were peddlers of wares, worked in supply stores, and labored in factories: a collection of characters who were likely uneducated and semiliterate.<sup>21</sup> As the editor *al-Sa'ih*, Haddad was acutely aware of the fact that newspapers were often read aloud and consumed by groups in public spaces, so his employment of simple language was helpful in delivering his stories to the widest possible constituency.

Haddad's prose straddled the line between fact and fiction in depicting the Syrian diaspora community. In seemingly contradictory statements in his introduction to the collection, Haddad claimed that the stories were faithful recreations of events he witnessed, heard, or read,<sup>22</sup> and then a couple sentences later he wrote that he "set his imagination loose in studying Syrian life in the diaspora."<sup>23</sup> What seems to emerge from this apparent contradiction is that these stories were heavily based on reality – many being direct representations of events he witnessed – but at the same time, he took authorial license in enhancing, and even embellishing the details. Haddad wanted to occupy two roles in authoring this collection: a witness and faithful documentarian, as well as an inspiring creator whose artistry could affect his audience.

The purported veracity of the stories is amplified by Haddad's generous use of authorial intrusion as a narratological technique. This intrusion takes different forms and gradations. There are times when the authorial intrusion is extremely blunt, such as when a story narrated in the third person is suddenly interrupted by a first-person voice acting as an eyewitness. A more subtle form of authorial intrusion is employed in stories related through first person narration, faithfully recounting the events witnessed and conversations in which this narrator participated. This technique also filters the reader's experience through an eyewitness, thereby emphasizing the authenticity of the story. Approximately two-thirds of the stories in *Hikayat al-mahjar* have some form of authorial intrusion in their narration.

One might anticipate that the preponderance of direct and subtle forms of authorial intrusion would be didactic. Surprisingly, the opposite is true. Instances of authorial intrusion into the narration in *Hikayat al-mahjar*—perhaps due to the unemotional documentarian style—manage to present characters and scenes objectively and nonjudgmentally. The reader is given the freedom to identify with different characters, evaluate contradictory ideas presented in narratives, and develop opinions on the subject matter unfettered by explicit persuasion.

The formal techniques that Haddad employs—direct language, realistic accounts, authorial intrusion, and objective presentation of events—create an accessible, authenticated, and believable literary landscape. Haddad’s stories present the assumed Syrian reader in the diaspora with a world occupied by familiar characters and scenes, often revealing the challenges and triumphs of these characters’ lives in America. Contemplation of these accessible stories proffers the opportunity to pause and seek deeper meaning from the mundane, as readers bear witness to the daily challenges of Syrian lives in the United States.

#### HIKAYAT AL-MAHJAR: THE THEMATIC CONTENT

A discussion of the thematic content and motifs present in *Hikayat al-mahjar* requires summarization, given the sheer number of stories in this collection. In this section, the narrative concerns that recur in many stories will be highlighted, and particular examples from individual stories will be cited. There is no better point to begin this discussion than the financial motivation of characters in *Hikayat al-mahjar*. Every Syrian immigrant depicted in these thirty-one stories must navigate her or his financial future upon relocation to America. The economic aspect of characters’ lives in America is so pervasive, that it is the tacit foundation of the collection itself. Most Syrians who made the arduous trip to America were seeking opportunities to improve their financial situation.<sup>24</sup> This collection reflects this reality, and, in doing so, envisions America, first and foremost, as an economic structure to which the immigrant must attach himself or herself. As characters attempt to secure their future, some successfully, others unsuccessfully, we learn more about the financial anxieties tied to relocation, as well as the Syrian community’s developing web of connections and support systems in New York City and across America.

Haddad’s collection demonstrates an unwavering focus on characters’ financial decisions and how they integrate into

America's economic structure. Not surprisingly, an overwhelming number of characters in the collection work as peddlers, or in supply stores – the most common jobs for Syrians in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Haddad himself had worked in retail in New York City for five years before he was able to establish his newspaper, so he knew this world intimately. In New York City, where a sizable Syrian community consolidated in the Washington Street area of Manhattan, small businesses and provision stores multiplied in support of peddling and other commercial ventures. While most stories in Haddad's collection are set in New York City, he underscores the spread of Syrians outside New York City by featuring stories set in what he calls America's "interior" (*al-dakhiliyya*). Occasionally, the exact location of this "interior" is left unnamed, and in other instances, locations are identified as cities and towns in Ohio, Connecticut, or Vermont. Haddad in fact took a trip into America's "interior" in 1916: these stories were likely inspired by events he witnessed and heard while visiting these Syrian communities spread throughout America.<sup>26</sup>

A common motif that emerges in *Hikayat al-mahjar*, based on the dominance of peddling and provision work among Syrians, is the tension and disappointment of characters whose aspirations stretched beyond the preordained economic opportunities within the community. In multiple stories, educated Syrian men arrive in New York City hoping to find opportunities commensurate with their education, only to be demoralized by the lack of employment outside peddling and its supportive supply-chain work. One such young educated man, in the story "Hayy dafin" (Buried alive), is told bluntly by fellow community members, "America needs strong forearms, not knowledge and arrogance."<sup>27</sup> The story "Al-daraja al-thaniya" (Second class) highlights the similar fate of a young man from Beirut, who was not only educated, but had saved money to make the journey to America in a second-class cabin, in contrast to the majority of his brethren who rode in third-class squalor. This young man ends up with intermittent work unworthy of his education, and he falls prey to various vices, such as gambling and alcoholism. This motif dramatizes the economic limitations present within the Syrian community by representing the devastating personal toll on characters whose big dreams are stifled by economic limitations. Haddad's reformatory message is embedded in these stories, which act as a warning to prospective immigrants, especially the educated among them, regarding the

dangers of overestimating their economic value in an American workforce that primarily sought out laborers.

The collection is not solely focused on stifled dreams, as the flip side of this coin reveals how hard work and initiative can pay dividends in America. For example, the story "Ibn ghayr 'asrihi" (Not meant for his era) features two Syrian immigrants who share a deep connection: an older man who had been a servant to a wealthy family in Syria, and a younger son from this same family whom the older man had helped raise. The two emigrate at different times, but happen to run into each other many years later in New York City. When they reconnect, their fortunes have reversed: the older man reaped the financial fruits of his hard work and is prepared to return home, while the lazy and entitled younger man fell on hard times. This inversion of fortunes emphasizes the fact that America presented Syrian immigrants with a level economic playing field where hard work was rewarded and revered. The younger man had fallen prey to the temptations of materialism and consumerism, which were part and parcel of the American experience for Syrian immigrants. This motif is recycled throughout the collection, adumbrating the notion that hard work leads to financial success, meanwhile consumerist indulgences and materialist obsessions come at a serious cost to the well-being and financial future of individuals and their families.

Haddad focuses his stories on the negative outcomes of Syrian characters' financial and morally suspect decisions. This emphasis might give the perception that these failures were rampant in the Syrian community. The opposite was closer to the truth, as detailed in Alixa Naff's history of the early Arab community in America, which reveals that most immigrants gained a measure of the wealth they sought.<sup>28</sup> But it seems, for Haddad at least, that focusing on success stories was less entertaining and effective than presenting tales of foolishness and woe. After all, the reformative intentions he stated in his introduction would be wasted in depicting one success story after another.

The thematic content in Haddad's collection did not always hinge on financial matters. Criticism of the Syrian community's traditions is another recurring topic. Targets of this criticism included marriage customs, religious convictions, funeral rites, and the use of honorary titles that were transported to America from the homeland. Haddad mocks the wholesale transposition of Syrian customs onto the new American terrain. In one darkly comedic story, "Ta'asat al-bayk" (The bey's misery) a man who

worked as a peddler receives a letter from Ottoman authorities in which he is addressed with the honorary title of *Bayk* – the Arabic rendering of the Turkish title *Bey*. This Syrian man is so enthralled by his purported shift in status that he decides that he must open a supply store, so that his ostensible elevation in stature is matched by an elevation in profession. His commercial venture is a total failure and he is left distraught. Meanwhile, the reader is entertained by his foolishness in transposing Ottoman hierarchies onto his American reality. Similar criticisms of the Syrian community's traditions are embedded throughout *Hikayat al-mahjar* and suggest a community in transformation, grappling with maintaining certain traditions, while open to probing, poking fun, and contesting their logic. Akram Khater's work on the Syrian community in his book *Inventing Home* addresses how this process played out in the lives of this community. He writes, "the encounter with an imperious society only gave greater prominence and immediacy to contradictions that were inherent within the culture of the emigrants."<sup>29</sup> Haddad's stories provide ample proof of how such contradictions and missteps play out in the literary domain, as portrayed in *Ta'asat al-bayk*, but more seriously dealt with in the forthcoming analysis of three stories.

The insularity of the Syrian community in America represents yet another thematic foundation of Haddad's collection. This insularity could already be inferred from the limited diversity of employment opportunities, since many Syrian immigrants were siphoned into jobs in peddling, sales, and factories, regardless of their educational level and aspirations. When Syrian characters in other professions appear in the collection, such as journalists and real estate agents, they are exclusively serving the Syrian community. One of the few figures with employment unconnected to the community is a Syrian man who works as a fortune-teller on Coney Island. While his profession does not serve the Syrian community, the success of his performance depends on his "Eastern charm." Haddad's collection also emphasizes the Syrian community's insularity through a relative absence of American characters, and minimal interaction with American institutions. When American characters or institutions do enter the narration a sense of ambivalence develops that implies a distance between the Syrian community and their new home. For example, the story "Madaniyyat Amrika" (American civility) features a group of Syrians who visit popular landmarks in New York City with an elderly recent arrival, in an

attempt to entertain him and show him of the grandeur of the city. These attempts fall flat, resulting in comedic episodes: the newcomer claims that the pigpen at the Bronx Zoo is nicer than the apartments in lower Manhattan where Syrians reside, and later scoffs at the ridiculous value placed on a painting exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, concluding that Americans must be dimwitted. Meanwhile, this man's friends and relatives try to change his mind, but are incapable of convincing him. While the explicit content of this story focuses on a close-knit group of Syrians venturing into American cultural spaces, the subtext reveals an intergenerational debate among Syrians who are wildly conflicted over their interpretations of these spaces. *Hikayat al-mahjar* gives an overwhelming sense of an insular and self-sufficient Syrian community cautiously examining the contours of its American surroundings, but in most cases, not integrated into America.

The thematic foci of Haddad's stories, in addition to the formal techniques that he employs, reject the romantic literary inclinations of his peers in documenting a community of Syrians concentrated in New York City, but spread far and wide into the interior of the United States. Uprooted and experiencing significant transitions, this cast of realistic characters clings to their connections to one another, and remains attached, often tentatively, to traditions from the homeland. Economic anxieties are the burden Syrian immigrants carry as they try to establish themselves and their families in America. For the most part, Haddad's characters lack the nostalgia for the homeland conjured by his literary peers, and instead the collection focuses on characters' struggles and triumphs as they transition to America and navigate their relationship to their own community therein. The stories of *Hikayat al-mahjar* prioritize relationships among Syrians, and the events narrated are mainly internal to this close-knit Syrian community, but it is impossible to lose sight of the fact that these stories are predicated upon the relationship of these individuals, and this community, to America. In shifting to an analysis of three stories, we can better understand how Haddad represented and imagined this community.

#### 'ABD AL-FITRA: AMBIVALENCE OF THE DIVIDED SELF

The story "'Abd al-fitra" (Slave to instinct) revolves around the character Hanna Murqus, a Syrian teenager who emigrates to America and becomes a peddler. A quick study in English and American business, over time Hanna becomes an extremely

wealthy man whose commercial interests and investments spread from New York City to San Francisco. Despite Hanna's successful acclimation to American business culture, he is plagued by a desire to engage in certain cultural practices from his upbringing that are considered inappropriate in America. For example, he maintains an overwhelming desire to devour his food with his hands, and he abhors having to shave every day and wear a necktie. Hanna indulges his visceral culinary desires in Syrian restaurants, but in American restaurants these desires remain concealed, as he refuses to touch a piece of roasted chicken, letting it remain plated, lest he tear it apart piece by piece. As the narrator declares, "This was Hanna Murqus—he had two sides, an American exterior and a *baladi* interior."<sup>30</sup> *Baladi* is a charged word in Arabic, indicative of his rural, but also unsophisticated, background.

Having already made his fortune in America, yet culturally uncomfortable there, Hanna becomes fixated on returning to his village. When travel restrictions are lifted at the end of World War I, Hanna immediately sets sail, intent on settling down, and vowing to never return to America. The joy he experiences upon returning to the homeland—where he discards his necktie and lets his facial hair grow—is only commensurate with his incredible disappointment in the lack of modernization in his village during his extended absence. The lack of indoor plumbing, access to hot water, and significant investment opportunities baffles him. Where life in America presented him with certain strictures that inhibited his *baladi* character, his return to Syria comes with a loss of the comforts and opportunities to which he had grown accustomed in America. Breaking his vow, he decides to emigrate to America once again, a move that acknowledges his bifurcated understand of self and demonstrates his gravitation toward the material attractions of his adopted home.

Reflecting on the evolution of the meaning of the story's title – "Slave to instinct" – is an entry point for the story's analysis. This meaning seems obvious and stable at the outset, given Hanna's obsessive attachment to his *baladi* instincts, such as his ravenous eating habits at Syrian restaurants. The true expression of Hanna's servitude to his natural constitution, of course, is his return to Syria. But the fact that he cannot reacclimatize to Syrian village life and summarily returns to America appears to repudiate the story's title. Hanna, it appears, is not a slave to his *baladi* nature: rather, he is devoted to the bourgeois comforts to which he has become accustomed in America. The story's title is less a statement of

character than an open inquiry into the fixity of Hanna's cultural constitution and the strength of his affiliations.

"Abd al-fitra" utilizes an immigrant experience to assail the notion that a static natural constitution domineers the individual. Many flat, invariable characters populate *Hikayat al-mahjar*, but Hanna is not one of them. While the material success that he achieves in America is the catalyst for his transformation from a crass *baladi* Syrian to a successful American entrepreneur, this transformation also precipitates his identity crisis. Hanna's attempt to resolve his crisis by fully embracing his Syrian self and returning home fails. This failure reveals the impossibility of returning to a static identity and nostalgic version of home, since changes Hanna experienced in America inevitably affect his perspective on the homeland when he returns. Hanna's decision to return to America can be read as an embrace of his ambivalent feelings and conflicted understanding of self. By resettling in America, Hanna celebrates the heterogeneity, performativity, and code-switching imbedded in his identity as a Syrian living in the American diaspora. In effect, this character is offering a model of "ethnicization," as conceived by historian Sarah Gualtieri in her work on the early Syrian diaspora community in America. In rethinking the assimilationist model, Gualtieri's concept of "ethnicization" describes how immigrants "became involved in a process of selection, adaptation, and acculturation, and in each case new self-understandings developed out of the interplay of homeland and migratory identities."<sup>31</sup> In "Abd al-fitra," Hanna is depicted as a Syrian immigrant torn between two geographies and two models of acculturation, and his identifications with elements on either side of this divide, Syrian and American, offer a literary character study in his concept of "ethnicization."

"Abd al-fitra" is one of the only stories in Haddad's collection that features a return to the homeland. In making this return, Hanna achieves the dream that eludes so many characters in the collection: a heroic return after achieving a modicum of wealth in America.<sup>32</sup> The dream is underwhelming and short-lived, given Hanna's decision to return for a second time to America. While it is clear that his final decision to settle in America is justified by the economic opportunities and daily comforts only available to him there, this decision is also accompanied by the story's assertion that "he desired to return to America because God built America as a land to be settled, she is the land of the people."<sup>33</sup> This spiritual assertion infuses Hanna's move with an ordained motivation by

marking America as a divine place. This story presents a sublimation of economic opportunity and spiritual calling in America. This notion challenges the trajectory of Haddad's literary peers, who were fixated on the homeland as *the* place of spiritual fulfillment, in opposition to materialistic America.<sup>34</sup> Haddad therefore offers his readers an immigrant's tale that complicates the idealization of the homeland in two ways: by depicting the potential disappointment of the return home; and evoking the notion of spiritual gratification in America. With "'Abd al-fitra,'" Haddad questions and problematizes the idealization of the homeland, adding new layers of ambivalence to the experience of emigration and unsettling the more common representations of the immigrant's nostalgia for home.

#### AL-'AMAL WAL-'ALAM: ASSIMILATION PAINS

"Al-'amal wal-'alam" (Hope and pain) relates the story of a Syrian couple who decide to emigrate to America two years after the birth of their first child. The couple is hoping to "sweep gold" from America's streets and return home to build a villa in their village. The father imagines himself purchasing his neighbor's land, then relaxing and smoking his water pipe in blissful contentment on his expansive property. They mortgage their house and set off with their son, only to confront an American reality antithetical to their dreams, beginning with the realization that the streets are full of mud, not gold. Taken in by an acquaintance from their village when they arrive in New York City, the couple learns the basics of peddling, and resolves to begin their pursuit of wealth.

The couple has four more children in America, but they are so resolute in garnering wealth that they decide to admit all of their children to orphanages, lying to each institution with the claim that one parent is deceased, rendering child care impossible. Without the children to burden them financially, the couple begins to save money, transfixed by the notion of returning home wealthy. After a number of years, the New York City orphanages discover their deception, and all five of their children are sent home. This turn of events is utterly shocking for parents and children alike, as five children who had been raised and acculturated through American social services return to their Syrian parents. The father is unable to communicate with his children, as he only knows enough English to sell his wares, and the children do not understand a single word of Arabic. The Americanized children are ashamed of their Syrian ethnic origins, and even more ashamed of their father, who they

assail with slurs in public. The mother, whose English is more advanced than her husband, begins to reestablish her ties with the children, and garners their affection by siding with them in arguments with their father, effectively betraying her husband and their long-standing dreams.

While the story, as the title suggests, begins with tremendous *hope*—elusive as it may seem—it resolves with a remarkable amount of familial *pain*. The father is eventually driven out of the family home, while his wife stays to take care of the children. He is seen one day in “an American city” by the same countryman who took them in and taught them the basics of peddling. In an ironic twist, the father has become a street cleaner, as he tells his friend, “We came to sweep the streets of gold, but I lost my wife and children and began sweeping dirt.”<sup>35</sup>

On a very basic level, the events that “Al-'amal wal-'alam” relates dramatize the divide between the American dream and the American reality immigrants face upon arrival. In positing the idea that the parents believe a folk expression about sweeping gold from the streets, Haddad ridicules the notion that these pithy sayings gain currency among Syrians in the homeland. The story acts as a severe warning to those who have been fed lies about America. The real dream of these characters—to return home wealthy and acquire land—is never achieved. Instead, they are delivered into an American purgatory largely of their own creation, where the father will spend his remaining years alone and cleaning streets and the mother is burdened with raising five children with whom she is struggling to reconnect. Hence this story also sensationalizes the growing generational divide that factors into the Syrian community’s experience in America; while the older generation has trouble adapting to their new environment, the Americanized children assimilate, even though this assimilation comes at the cost of losing their Syrian identity altogether. This divide is further amplified through parents’ view of America as a temporary residence against that of the children for whom America *is* home.

Haddad’s choice of character names serves to accentuate the filial connections, or lack thereof, in this story. The parents are not called by their first names, as is common throughout Haddad’s collection, but are named Abu Hanna (father of Hanna) and Umm Hanna (mother of Hanna), directly linking their identities to their first-born son, Hanna. This nomenclature is extremely common in the Arabic idiom, but it is notable that Haddad rarely used this terminology elsewhere in his writing. Utilizing this particular

nomenclature heightens the painful irony of the parents' decision to deliver Hanna and his siblings to orphanages to pursue their financial dreams. Giving up their children is an act of total annihilation of the family unit. This aberrant act emphasizes the immoral depths to which these Syrian immigrants have fallen in pursuit of the almighty dollar. In fact, they have ceded parenthood—and the *Abu* and *Umm* rooted in their names—to America and its social service system. The complete surrender of self and family to this materialistic American dream represents a scathing condemnation of the parents' distorted value system, thereby offering a powerful warning to the Syrian immigrant community of how the pursuit of wealth can obliterate the family unit. "Al-'amal wal-'alam" refracts the false promise of the American dream into the living nightmare of a shattered family.

Tensions run high, and insults are hurled in "Al-'amal wal-'alam," and these fleeting moments offer insight into issues faced by the Syrian immigrant community in America. Two particular instances of name-calling are directed toward the father in this story after his children return from the orphanages. As the story relates, "The kids were most embarrassed if the other children in the street found out they were Syrian, so if they saw their father do something they didn't like they would shout 'Syrian, Syrian!' at him."<sup>36</sup> The usage of the word "Syrian" as an insult not only suggests a derogatory valence of this word in America, but also indicates how the children attempted to disavow their own ethnic origins. In a second instance of casting insults, Umm Hanna admonishes her husband with a different word, calling him a *fellah*—meaning peasant—in an effort to garner the support of the children. Her insult juxtaposes the "civilized" American tastes of the children with the peasant tastes of the father, ridiculing his simplicity. Ironically, in casting this insult, Umm Hanna implicitly derides her own peasant origins, in an effort to position herself as an ally to her assimilated children.

The episodes of name-calling vocalize familial tensions and characters' divided loyalties, representing one consequence of a story that witnesses the fracturing of a Syrian family in America. Haddad's signature documentarian language, which is cold and unfeeling in presentation, renders the events portrayed, and the choices made by the parents, chilling. A sense of solace is present only in the efforts made by the mother to reconnect with her estranged children. Where "'Abd al-fitra" concluded with a Syrian character beginning to understand and embrace his bifurcated self,

the divisions between Syrian characters in “Al-’amal wal-’alam” is much more severe. The severing of familial bonds exposes the potentially tragic emotional toll of emigration, especially when emigration is motivated by materialistic goals. The fact that this story ends without resolution, save the father’s exodus, forces the reader to contemplate the fate of these five Syrian-American children and their troubled relationship with their heritage.

#### TIMTHAL AL-HURRIYYA: GENDERED IDENTIFICATIONS AND EMASCULATION

The third story in the collection that I will explore is called “Timthal al-hurriyya” (The Statue of Liberty). This story focuses on Nakhla Ma’sub, who decides to emigrate to America just after he and his wife Adma are betrothed. Nakhla has reservations about making this life-changing journey so quickly after their marriage, especially since his bride Adma is only eighteen years old, ten years his junior, but they set off against their parents’ entreaties to stay. The couple arrive in New York City and head west, settling in a large town in Ohio. Nakhla’s attempt to build their future gets off to a rocky financial start, as a year elapses before he can secure a job to cover their daily expenses. By this time he has become deeply indebted to relatives and friends, a situation that plagues his conscience. One day, a successful relative visits and proposes a plan for Nakhla to climb his way out of debt. This involves having Adma work as a peddler while Nakhla continues working at the factory where he is employed. Nakhla’s immediate response is to refuse such an idea, thinking that having his wife work besmirches the family’s honor, but his relative convinces him, informing him that “the situation is difficult for newcomers in America, especially if they are from respected families from back home, but here in America women are more successfully employed in peddling than men.”<sup>37</sup> No sooner does Nakhla agree to the suggestion than Adma becomes one of the most lucrative peddlers in the region.

Adma becomes so successful that six years into her work the couple and their three children move to New York City so she can pursue grander commercial opportunities. As the family acclimates to New York City Nakhla stays home to raise the children, since the financial well-being of the family has completely shifted onto Adma’s shoulders. The financial and familial transitions Nakhla and Adma undergo during their time in America are profound. When they first arrived, Nakhla felt like a prince, and his wife treated him more like a master than an equal. But the transition that

witnessed Adma take over the breadwinner role altered these dynamics completely, as her rise in earnings is accompanied by a more assertive attitude, as she begins giving the orders in the household. These shifts overwhelm Nakhla, and one day, in the middle of the afternoon, he simply leaves, abandoning the kids at home. Adma returns to find their young children crying and Nakhla nowhere in sight. She tracks Nakhla down in Battery Park, where he is despondent over his fate. When he laments his status, she scolds him, telling him that if he repeats such an episode, she will expel him from the house and hire someone to look after the children. No sooner does he meekly push back against her threat than Adma interjects:

Yes, you are my husband, the father of our children, and the man of the house in your country, but here in America I am everything. The Statue of Liberty continues to raise its hand and it is a woman. I have the right to raise my hand in my home and do what I want whether it pleases you or not! Choose what you'd like.<sup>38</sup>

Nakhla then turns to the Statue of Liberty, for the first time really contemplating its presence, and replies to her powerful statement in a diminutive voice, "When we return to our country, I hope to return as a man, with the rights of men."<sup>39</sup>

This story stages the potentially powerful effects of financial and gendered shifts within America's Syrian immigrant community. The economic reality presented in the story, in which women can achieve greater financial success than men, causes an inversion of the traditional expectations of the Syrian man as the family's breadwinner. This inversion leads to a concomitant reversal of familial roles, as the husband assumes childcare duties customarily reserved for mothers. The effects of these changes are profound, resulting in Nakhla's emasculation, and conversely, Adma's tremendous sense of empowerment.

The use of the Statue of Liberty as an iconic and symbolic marker in this story is meaningful in understanding this charged moment. In terms of geography, placing the story's final scene in Battery Park, a site upon which the Statue of Liberty casts its gaze is fitting; New York City's earliest Syrian community primarily resided in the region of lower Manhattan bordering Battery Park. Therefore, the couple's dispute is embedded within a familiar setting, a spatial shift that is significant in heightening the synergy

between Adma and the Statue of Liberty, and also significant in increasing Nakhla's discomfort through this gendered rendering of the space. Adma's direct references to the Statue of Liberty imbue her argument with symbolic power—the Statue becoming a bold reflection of both Adma's empowered feminine perspective and her elevated financial status within family and community. Yet another level of symbolic meaning is developed in the story through Nakhla's confrontation with the Statue. In this dark moment for Nakhla, America has morphed into this powerful female statue in all of its symbolic and metonymic meaning; meanwhile, his homeland is represented as the place *without* this colossal female statue casting her empowering gaze over the land. Nakhla's perspective envisions the homeland as a place where he can return to his sense of manhood.

This story thereby exposes the anxieties inherent in gender expectations that the Syrian immigrant community in America may confront, offering a scene that intensely divides understandings of the American encounter along gendered lines. "Timthal al-hurriyya" enacts a literary dramatization of what historian Akram Khater has theorized regarding categories of identification like gender within this immigrant community in *Inventing Home*. In explaining the interdependence between elements of identity, Khater writes, "Gender shapes other sets of identity, like class and sect, and becomes an integral element in the making of other imagined communities, such as 'nation.'" <sup>40</sup> Adma's new identifications—real and symbolic—demonstrate this point, since they involve shifts in her financial status and her familial role; shifts that are inextricably intertwined with evolving gendered understandings of these roles. Nakhla is likewise impacted by these multiple shifts, not to mention his confusion over his financial and familial status. His confusion elevates to the level of crisis, leading to his idealization of the homeland, onto which he projects a fixed gendered status. This story unapologetically focuses on an intense transitional moment between two Syrian immigrants, and the implications of this marital crisis surge beyond these characters interactions in suggesting larger shifts within the Syrian community in America.

The reversal in traditional gender roles in "Timthal al-hurriyya" destabilizes the notion that gender roles are fixed and unassailable when traversing new geographies. Nakhla is pacified by his insistence on returning home, which he hopes will entail a return to his patriarchal hierarchies for which he longs. Adma, for

her part, is a character who points to a new promise, since America—which she refers to as ‘my home’ in the previous quotation—has presented her with opportunities allowing her to transgress gender norms that encouraged domesticity. The end of the story itself is filled with ambivalence and indecision; while her husband hopes for a return, Adma makes no such commitment to return to Syria, implying that this new American reality, and the empowerment that she has gained, should be their future. Haddad presents a story powerful in its symbolic interpretations of an iconic American monument, and even more powerful in its exploration of the impact of shifting gendered understandings within the Syrian immigrant community. Adma comes to embody the female power of the Statue of Liberty, and in doing so, represents new possibilities for Syrian women in America.

#### CAPTURED IN TRANSITION

*Hikayat al-mahjar* offers thirty-one stories that help articulate the experiences and anxieties of America’s Syrian community of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through a literary medium that blurs the lines of reality and fiction. At a time when fellow writers of the Arab diaspora in America remained fixated on representing the homeland in their writings, Haddad shifted his attention toward a new home of the Syrian diaspora community, and these stories can be viewed as a literary effort to more firmly, albeit tentatively, establish this community in America. Alixa Naff, an historian of the early Arab American community, determined that by 1924 this community really saw themselves as Syrian-American, as opposed to Syrians *in* America.<sup>41</sup> Haddad’s collection published three years prior to this purported paradigmatic transition, produces characters who are embodiments of this transitional period. Think of Hanna, the protagonist of “‘Abd al-fitra,” who struggles to cohere his internal constitution and desires with his shifting understanding of self, vacillating, geographically and psychologically, between Syria and America. The children in “Al-‘amal wal-‘alam” offer a different model of transition, as a group of ethnic Syrians who are fully assimilated Americans, meanwhile their circumstances render them confused and resistant in reckoning with their Syrian origins. Adma and Nakhla from “Timthal al-hurriyya” are characters who negotiate bewildering shifts in America. Their transitions are capped by the emergence of Adma as a financially successful Syrian woman, but in the wake of her precipitous advancement, she finds her husband mired in a

deep crisis of emasculation. In that these short stories are snapshots of Syrian characters' literary lives – likely based on true stories – we cannot help but imagine these characters' futures continuing to unfold in increasing complexity beyond the confines of the text.

Haddad's desire to hold up a mirror to Syrians in the diaspora captures Syrian immigrant subjectivities in transition. Emigration and its accompanying dislocation was simply the first stage of this transition, as portrayed by the initial drive of Syrian characters to stabilize their lives by fastening themselves to the economic engine of America. Yet, even when financial stability proved attainable in the stories of *Hikayat al-mahjar*, a second, more complicated stage in this transition took place, which involved adapting to, and negotiating, their new American surroundings. This involved understanding the relationship of the individual to the larger Syrian community, and the Syrian community's relationship to America, culturally and socially. While Haddad's documentarian writing style did not feature many explicit ruminations on this complicated transition to life in America, we find it echoing everywhere throughout the stories, often hidden between the lines. When characters describe their concerns over their financial futures, ridicule their community's traditions, fall prey to materialist obsessions, lose hope in returning home, are disappointed *after* returning home, or negotiate new gender dynamics, their reactions are constantly imprinting new realities and modalities of success and failure onto their adopted geography. Haddad took pains to accurately convey these reactions, holding them up as a mirror to his community. Haddad's coup, in producing this collection, was to delineate manifold realities and reactions, while leaving the process of judgment to the reader through the formal techniques he employed. So much of what is unspoken and unresolved, and what can be read between the lines or uncovered through deeper analysis, are the possibilities and indeterminate futures of his transitional Syrian characters. They are captured fleetingly by Haddad's documentarian lens, captured but not captive, as their potential bursts from these confines toward new futures and possibilities beyond the page.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Syrian" as used in this 1921 quotation by Haddad and throughout this article refers to individuals from modern-day Syria and Lebanon. The

term was used by the U.S. government to classify immigrants from the Syrian protectorate of the Ottoman Empire for years beyond the end of World War I. Lebanon officially gained independence in 1943, and subsequently “Lebanese” would be distinguished from “Syrian.”

<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd al-Masih Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar* (New York: al-Matba‘ah al-Tijariyah al-Amrikiyah, 1921), 3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>3</sup> Hanri Milki, *Al-sihafa al-arabiya fi al-mahjar wa alaqatuha bi-al-adab al-mahjari* (Beirut: Dar al-Sharq al-Awsat lil-Tab‘ wa al-Nashr, 1998), 13–14.

<sup>4</sup> Fawwaz Amad Tawqan, *Asrar tasis al-rabita al-qalamiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Talia lil-Tibaa wa-al-Nashr, 2005), 104.

<sup>5</sup> Milki, *Al-sihafa*, 109.

<sup>6</sup> Haddad’s story *Al-hakim bi-amrihi* from the collection *Hikayat al-mahjar* was published in the January 1921 edition of *Al-saih al-mumtaz* (New York, N.Y. : Haddad Pub. Corp, 1912-1958), 39–40.

<sup>7</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the sociology of Arabic literature and the development of genres, see Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), 26–36.

<sup>10</sup> Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Sheehi, “Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahdah: Epistemology, Ideology, and Capital,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 273.

<sup>12</sup> In English see Robin Ostle’s chapter “The Romantic Poets” in M. M. Badawi’s *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Aida Imangulieva’s book *Gibran, Rihani and Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth-Century Arab Literature* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2010). Numerous biographies have been written on Gibran, and to a lesser extent Nu‘ayma. In Arabic four commonly cited books on Arabic diasporic literature that focus primarily on these authors are: Jurj Saydah, *Adabuna wa-udabauna fi al-mahajir al-amrikiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm lil-Malayin, 1964); ‘Isa Na’uri, *Adab al-mahjar* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘arif 1967); Ihsan Abbas and Mohammad Nijm, *Al-shir al-Arabi fi al-mahjar*, (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1967); ‘Abd al-Karim Ashtar, *Al-nathr al-mahjari* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Hadith, 1964).

<sup>13</sup> Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> While skimming the table of contents of some of the seminal books on the literature of the Arab diaspora in America one will find the thematic concerns enumerated here as separate chapter headings. For examples, see Ashtar, *Al-nathr al-mahjari*, 83; Na’uri, *Adab al-mahjar*, 3rd ed., vol. 14 (Miṣr: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1977), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Na’uri, *Adab al-mahjar*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Ashtar, *Al-nathr al-mahjari*, 216.

<sup>17</sup> Hadiya Ramadan, *Al-fann al-qasasi fi al-mahjar* (Cairo: Al-Majlis al-Ala lil-Thaqafa, 2008), 166–67.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>20</sup> Haddad would later publish a travelogue in 1963, titled *Intibaat mughtarib suri*, that detailed a visit he made to Syria in 1960.

<sup>21</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1985), 8, 115. Naff discusses the dominance of peddling as an occupation in this community throughout the book as well as low literacy rates among the Syrian community.

<sup>22</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> The most common reason Syrians emigrated was “to make money and return within two or three years to live better in their villages.” Naff, *Becoming American*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Naff, *Becoming American*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Milki, *Al-sihafa*, 107.

<sup>27</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 68.

<sup>28</sup> Naff, *Becoming American*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Akram Khater, *Inventing Home; Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 223.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 14.

<sup>32</sup> In many of the stories of *Hikayat al-mahjar* the desire to return home is prominent. See, for example, “Ta’asat al-bayk” (The bey’s misery), 145–51, and “Timthal al-hurriyya” (The Statue of Liberty), 167–72.

<sup>33</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 225.

<sup>34</sup> Mikha’il Nu’ayma’s story “Sa’at al-kuku” is perhaps the best example of the vilification of American materialism. Ameen Rihani’s novel in English *The Book of Khaled* also belabors this issue.

<sup>35</sup> Haddad, *Hikayat al-mahjar*, 233.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>40</sup> Khater, *Inventing Home*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Naff, *Becoming American*, 267. Chap. 7, “From Syrian to Syrian-American: Between the Wars” marks 1924 as a turning point in the history of this community due to that year’s restrictive immigration law.