

Space, Identity, and Exile in Seventeenth-Century Morocco: The Case of Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī

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Abstract

This article begins with the question of Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī’s (1631-1691) relationship to a Moroccan national literature, opening onto an interpretation of two of his most famous texts written in exile. Al-Yūsī’s *al-Risālah al-kubrā ilā Mawlāy Ismā‘īl* and *al-Muḥāḍarāt fī al-adab wa-l-lughah* are interpreted as paradigmatic examples of seventeenth-century Moroccan literature and ideal vehicles to understand al-Yūsī’s relationship to place. *Al-Risālah*, a dialogue at a remove from its addressee, mixes invective and appeal for aid with subtle shifts in focalization between the misdeeds of the second-person addressee (Ismā‘īl) and al-Yūsī’s own suffering. In this text, the spaces for which the author longs encompass both his actual place of birth and the larger category of place it represents. Al-Yūsī identifies exclusively with an idealized vision of the countryside set in the distant past, complicating the possibility of his return. In *al-Muḥāḍarāt*, al-Yūsī adopts the medium of poetry, creating a poetic persona distinct from the authorial voice of his epistle. Here his spatial identity is more inclusive, extending to cover most of the territories of early modern Morocco. Through these two exilic texts, I examine the complex relationship al-Yūsī had with the country’s urban centers and rural landscapes and how this could, under certain circumstances, begin to reflect something that resembles a Moroccan national consciousness.

Keywords

al-Yūsī – Ismā‘īl – *zāwīyah* – Morocco – Maghreb – Sufism – exile – seventeenth-century literature

In 1938 ‘Abdallāh Kannūn—one of the leading figures of Morocco’s literary scene from the 1920s until his death in 1989—published the first anthology

of Moroccan literature in Arabic under the title *al-Nubūgh al-maghribī fī al-adab al-‘arabī* (Moroccan Genius in Arabic Literature).¹ In the introduction to this 974-page volume still widely used in the country’s educational institutions today, Kannūn writes that the anthology was inspired by the neglect with which the Arab East has historically treated literature produced in the far West of the Arab world. Kannūn states that his initial aim in creating the anthology was to argue for the inclusion of Moroccan literature within the larger Arabic literary tradition; it was not, he clarifies, to assert the existence of a national literary canon detached from its broader heritage.² Nevertheless, the compilation of approximately thirteen hundred years of literature produced by authors born inside what are now the modern nation-state’s borders into a single anthology stakes a claim for a distinctly Moroccan literary corpus, something tacitly acknowledged by Kannūn later in the text despite his earlier disclaimer: “In this book we have collected examples of science (*‘ilm*), literature (*adab*), history and political writings in order to depict the intellectual life of our country Morocco (*waṭaninā al-maghrib*) and its development throughout different eras, from the first arrival of Islam until the period close to our own.”³

Al-Nubūgh, originally published as three separate volumes, is structured chronologically, first leading the reader through Morocco’s intellectual life by dynasty—with sections on the Idrisids (under *‘aṣr al-futūḥ*), Almoravids, Almohads, Marinids, Saadis, and finally the ‘Alawites who have ruled the country since the seventeenth century—and then by genre, with the second volume devoted to prose and the third to poetry. The period in *al-Nubūgh* that is “close to our own” in Kannūn’s words begins with the inauguration of Sultan Rashīd in 1666, an event that marked the founding of the ‘Alawite dynasty. Here Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī (1631-1691) is cited as “the most distinguished of the period’s scholars . . . a brilliant littérateur,” a transmitter of poetry with the diwans of al-Mutanabbī, Abū Tammām, and al-Ma‘arrī “at the tip of his tongue,” and an adept and prolific poet himself.⁴ He is described as belonging to the Ait Yūsī, an Amāzīgh (Berber) tribe from Moulouya (North of Fez),

1 This is discussed briefly in Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, “Breaking the Canon: Zafaf, Laroui and the Moroccan Novel,” in *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature: 2. Postmodernism and Thereafter*, ed. Stephen Guth (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 4.

2 ‘Abdallāh Kannūn, *al-Nubūgh al-maghribī fī al-adab al-‘arabī*, 1st ed. (Tetouan: al-Matba‘ah al-Mahdiyyah, 1938), 7-8.

3 *Ibid.*, 31.

4 *Ibid.*, 286. وكان أبو علي أدبياً عبقرياً راوية للشعر، يستحضر ديوان المتنبي وأبي تمام والمعري وقصائد كثيرة لغزيرهم، كل ذلك على طرف لسانه. وهو نفسه شاعر مجيد مكثر، الشعر عنده أسهل من النفس، بل كان يقول: لو شئت أن لا أتكلم إلا بالشعر لفعلت.

but it is his wide-ranging travels across Morocco that are most emphasized: his search for knowledge took him throughout the country, most notably to Sijilmasa, the Dar‘ah, Sous, Marrakech, and Doukkala, before he finally settled at the Dilā‘iyyah Sufi order, or *zāwīyah*, in the Middle Atlas.⁵ The term *zāwīyah* in North Africa generally refers to the physical home of a Sufi order, whether it be a small shrine and mosque or a much larger complex with teaching facilities and rooms for students. When the Dilā‘iyyah *zāwīyah* where al-Yūsī had been living was later destroyed by Sultan Rashīd, he recommenced the kind of peripatetic life that he had known before, with the difference being that now he would no longer choose his destinations; instead, they would be determined by the reigning sultan: first Rashīd, and then his brother and successor Ismā‘īl (r. 1672-1727).

When thinking about al-Yūsī’s work, it is worth pausing at Kannūn’s choice of words—“our country Morocco (*waṭāninā al-maghrib*)”—above. The 1930s in Morocco were characterized by the increased textual production of intellectuals associated with the nationalist movement, and *al-Nubūgh* was part of that larger trend. The burgeoning nationalist idea behind the project’s conception, however, does not in itself dismiss the question the anthology implicitly raises as to how the authors included in its pages relate to the country that Kannūn claims for them. Al-Yūsī is featured in all three of *al-Nubūgh*’s volumes, highlighting his significance to the anthology’s definition of Moroccan literature. I show in what follows that a close examination of al-Yūsī’s work can help us to answer this question of what it meant to be a Moroccan author in the early days of the country’s modern history. The most productive years of al-Yūsī’s life coincided not only with the start of ‘Alawite rule but also its consolidation under Ismā‘īl, the sultan responsible for laying much of the groundwork for the modern Moroccan state. Al-Yūsī is also distinguished by the long periods of time he spent in all regions of the country; his personal geographies largely mirror the borders established by Ismā‘īl. In order to address what al-Yūsī’s texts themselves say about place, community, and identity, two famous works with notable spatial dimensions that he composed while in exile will be considered. Although the question of when precisely we can begin to speak of a specifically Moroccan literature lends itself to multiple answers, al-Yūsī’s work allows us to pose a slightly different, though related, inquiry into the complex relationship that an author in seventeenth-century Morocco could have with the country’s various urban centers and rural landscapes and how this could,

5 Ibid. جال في المغرب؛ فدخل سجلماسة ودرعة وسوس ومراكش ودكالة وأخذ بها عن مشايخ عدة ذكرهم في فهرسته؛ ثم القى عصا التسيار بالزاوية الدلائية، فعكف فيها على نشر العلم حتى أوقع مولاي رشيد بأهلها، فنقله إلى فاس.

at times, begin to both reflect and be constitutive of something resembling a national consciousness.

Exile and the Post-Classical Moroccan Literary Context

The fact that exiled authors so often focus on places—usually those in which they no longer reside—makes exilic literature ideal for an interrogation of the relationship between place, identity, and sentiments of belonging, and indeed such exilic literature can be found throughout the Arabic literary tradition. As early as the ninth century CE, a special type of anthology known as *al-ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān* (longing for homelands) emerged. Thematically concerned with the alienation symptomatic of spatial displacement, these compilations are filled with fragments of poetry, epistolary segments, terse reports, and dictums that focus on homelands either too physically distant to access or lost to the inevitable changes wrought by time.⁶ Beginning in the eleventh century after Muslim cities in al-Andalus and Sicily had begun to fall to invading Christian armies, more complete expressions of mourning were recorded in the corpus of *rithāʾ al-mudun* (city elegies) poetry.⁷ Here the Western lands of the Arab world gained a special prominence. Despite the spatial alienation that defined much of the early history of Islam—from the first Muslims' emigration to Medina, to the *maghāzī* campaigns of the Prophet's lifetime, to the later conquests that brought thousands of Muslims to landscapes radically different from their homelands—it is ultimately within the literature composed in the Western part of the Islamic world that a fully developed genre devoted to longing for the specificities of a place was firmly established. These poems' frequent evocations of a city's former prosperity, contrasted with the ruins of its devastated present, are articulated through a nostalgia for a lost past that is also found in the exile's lament. With the *rithāʾ al-mudun* elegies that accompanied the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba in the eleventh century,

6 For a detailed discussion of these anthologies in English, see Wadad al-Qadi, "Expressions of Alienation in Early Arabic Literature," in *Myths, Historical Archetypes, and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Briget Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar (Beirut: In Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1999), 3-31.

7 In 1085 Alfonso VI captured Toledo. After Córdoba was conquered in 1236, most of the south fell under Christian rule. By 1249 Granada was the last Muslim state on the Iberian Peninsula. It finally surrendered to Queen Isabella of Castile in 1492. The Emirate of Sicily (831-1072) was conquered by the Normans in 1072, shortly before the fall of Toledo.

al-Andalus in particular became a symbolically charged site of dispossession in Arabic writing, as poets composed verses in which they figured themselves mourning the city's loss while standing over the ruins of Madīnat al-Zahrā'.⁸ Not long after, Morocco would come to serve as the primary site of displacement for Andalusian refugees, leading it to play an important role in the various discourses of exile connected to al-Andalus.⁹ The fourteenth century gave rise to well-known texts like Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *Nufāḍat al-jirāb ft 'ulālat al-ighṭirāb* (Morsels from the Travel Bag for Consolation during Exile) and *Mufākharāt Mālaqah wa-Salā* (Boasting Match between Málaga and Salé), both of which describe the Maghreb from the vantage point of an exiled vizier and poet. These writings demonstrate that for those accustomed to the sophisticated trappings of Andalusian urbanity, Morocco paled in comparison.

Yet if Morocco failed to meet the cultural expectations of the exiles from the Iberian Peninsula whom it sheltered, it had nevertheless become a locus of literary activity in its own right by the time the Marinid dynasty consolidated its rule (1244-1465). With Fez as its intellectual center, its scholars were no longer dependent on the Eastern capitals or al-Andalus; this is an age to which Moroccan critics often refer as a period of literary renaissance, or *nahḍah*. Not only did traditional narrative genres like the epistle, testament (*waṣīyah*), and oration (*khuṭbah*) flourish, but there was a proliferation of innovative travel literature (*adab al-riḥlah*), *maqāmāt*, thematic works expressing congratulations (*tahnī'ah*) and condolences (*ta'ziyah*), descriptive prose (*waṣf*), and texts written as dialogues and arguments (*munāẓarah*).¹⁰ The travel literature of the period in particular contains a number of sub-genres that say much about contemporary expressions of Moroccan authors' relationship to place and their sense of estrangement, alienation, and exile when they were far from the spaces they considered their own. Though it is the early modern period's *riḥlāt rasmiyyah*—travel narratives written during diplomatic missions—and the lesser number of captivity narratives composed around the same time that are most often discussed, there are a number of other narrative

8 Al-Sumaysir's eleventh-century elegy, for example, begins, "I stopped at al-Zahrā' weeping; considering it / I lament its broken fragments." Alexander Elinson, *Looking Back at al-Andalus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 6-7.

9 For example, Camilio Gómez-Rivas argues not only that Ibn al-Khaṭīb's writings have shaped Andalusia's position in the Arabic textual tradition more than those of any other author, but that his articulation of al-Andalus is inextricably tied to his encounter with, and eventual exile to, Morocco. See Camilio Gómez-Rivas, "Exile, Encounter, and the Articulation of Andalusī Identity in the Maghrib," *Medieval Encounters* 20 (2014), 340-351.

10 Al-Ḥasan Shāhidī, *Adab al-riḥlah bi-l-maghrib fi al-'aṣr al-marīnī*, vol. 1 (Rabat: Maṭba'at Dār al-Qalam, 1990), 30-46.

forms that bear little relation to the increased contact between the Maghreb and the countries of Europe.¹¹ The authors of *riḥlāt ḥijāziyyah* (*ḥajj* narratives) inevitably compare the strange locations they encounter with their longed-for homes as they fulfill their obligation to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. The genre of *riḥlāt ṣūfiyyah* (Sufi narratives) that remained prominent well into the twentieth century shows the authors' spaces of belonging contracting into those associated with their individual sheikhs or brotherhoods. In *riḥlāt dākhiliyyah* (internal travel narratives), the authors never journey beyond the borders of current-day Morocco but experience the acute loss associated with exile no less, their authors' identifications with the smaller geographical units of specific villages, towns, cities, or regions rather than the larger entity of Morocco revealing the highly localized forms of identity that often prevailed in the post-classical period.¹² The condition of exile, then, as an important component in the literature of the period, was not necessarily dependent on an encounter with Europe or a dislocation that crossed national boundaries but could be born of a wide range of circumstances.

In al-Yūsī's case, exile was a condition driven by politics. Just as al-Yūsī is widely thought to exemplify "the archetype of the scholar and man of letters" of post-classical Morocco's intellectual milieu, he is also arguably a paradigmatic example of a seventeenth-century Moroccan exilic writer.¹³ The greater part of his adult life was shaped by the repeated experience of enforced exile, an experience he described in several texts with notable autobiographical components. Two of these—*al-Risālah al-kubrā ilā Mawlāy Ismā'īl* (The Long Epistle to Mawlāy Ismā'īl) and *al-Muḥāḍarāt fi al-adab wa-l-lughah* (Lectures in Literature¹⁴ and Language)—will be considered here from several vantage

11 Among the more frequently discussed narratives are the vizier al-Ghassānī's account of his travels to Spain for Mawlāy Ismā'īl (see Muḥammad al-Ghassānī, *Riḥlat al-wazīr fi iftikāk al-asīr* [Tangiers: Publications de l'Institut général Franco, 1940]), as well as Muḥammad al-Saffār's *Ṣudfat al-liqā' ma'a al-jadīd: riḥlat al-Saffār ilā faransā* (Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Rabat, 1995), published in English as *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845-1846*, trans. and ed. Susan Gilson Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). The captivity narratives treated by Nabil Matar in *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) are also relatively well studied.

12 For an in-depth discussion of the period's travel literature, see Shāhidī, *Adab al-riḥlah*.

13 Kenneth Honerkamp, "al-Ḥasan ibn Mas'ūd al-Yūsī," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: Teil 2*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 412.

14 While this term is generally translated as literature, it should be understood to encompass the full range of meaning that the word *adab* implied at the time, including anecdotes relating to etiquette, morals, proper conduct, and religious propriety.

points that relate to the author's relationship to place. These two texts show that the distinct narrative forms al-Yūsī chose to write the experience of exile produce different imaginings of community, spatial belonging, and different sites of nostalgia. Given the circumstances of al-Yūsī's exile, the question of how these narrative forms intersect with political power is equally important. *Al-Risālah* and *al-Muḥāḍarāt* are striking for their distinct stylistic modes and focalizations. A unique expression of narrative time and space is called upon in each to record the emotional experiences of the author's various dislocations, which are often dissimilar from one another in a number of ways. As a result, place is understood and localized differently in the two texts. In *al-Risālah*, al-Yūsī's exile is figured as a banishment in the classical sense. In a manner reminiscent of how the Emperor Augustus unilaterally exiled Ovid to Tomis on the Black Sea—at the time, a remote town on the periphery of Hellenic civilization—al-Yūsī was banished to the desolate ruins of the Dilā'iyyah *zāwīyah* by an order issued directly by Sultan Ismā'īl. The spaces for which he longs and with which he identifies in the text encompass both his place of birth and the larger rural category of place it represents. This understanding of the relationship between space and the self is linked to Sultan Ismā'īl's consolidation of political power. The extreme nature of al-Yūsī's three-year (1684-1687) isolation at the remains of the *zāwīyah* is reflected in the textual identity he creates in the *Risālah*, an identity that coalesces around the antithesis of the urban centers that embody the sultan's rule. The section of *al-Muḥāḍarāt* that will be discussed here was likely composed earlier, in Marrakech; and by contrast, although al-Yūsī was compelled to live wherever the sultan commanded at the time, his life in Marrakech teaching at the sultan's behest was significantly less grim than it would be soon thereafter. Unlike in *al-Risālah*, in *al-Muḥāḍarāt*, al-Yūsī writes in an autobiographical voice whose nostalgia extends to a number of different spaces and communities, both rural and urban. The result is an emergent national identity that supports a reconceptualization of a specifically Moroccan literature beginning far earlier than the current paradigm that places its roots in the early twentieth century.

Narrative Form and Power in *al-Risālah al-kubrā ilā Mawlāy Ismā'īl*

Al-Yūsī's epistle is wrought by the contradictions of involuntary exile, which is both intensely private and inescapably public. The hardships voiced by al-Yūsī are consistent with those of many exiles forced to live outside the places they consider home—they are of the most personal sort, yet the reasons behind his estrangement and loss are political. The "transcendental homelessness" of his

predicament may be expressed in an intimate voice, but it necessarily contains within it the larger historical and political contexts at the root of his isolation.¹⁵ In form, *al-Risālah al-kubrā ilā Mawlāy Ismāʿīl* is a long letter written to Sultan Ismāʿīl between the years 1684 and 1687, the time in which al-Yūsī was exiled by the sultan to the ruins of the *zāwīyah* founded by the Dilāʿiyyah Sufi order. ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Madgharī refers to the complex that housed the Dilāʿiyyah Sufis as “the greatest of the Moroccan *zawāyā* at the time and the most significant center of religious learning in Morocco during that period of its history.”¹⁶ Concerned exclusively with religious practice and apolitical at its founding in the middle of the sixteenth century, by the middle of the seventeenth it had risen to a position of prominence; with the unconditional support of the local Tamazīght-speaking (Berber) tribes who populated the Middle Atlas, the Dilāʿ developed political ambitions. By 1650 they had not only conquered Fez but also controlled Meknes, Salé, the Gharb Plain, and the region extending south of the Middle Atlas Mountains to the outskirts of Tafilalt. The attempts by the Dilāʿ to expand the territory they governed were symptomatic of the power vacuum that plagued Morocco after the disintegration of the Marinid dynasty in 1471. Western academics have traditionally referred to the approximately two hundred years between the end of the Marinid dynasty and the establishment of ʿAlawite rule as the “Maraboutic crisis” due to the lack of a strong central government and the number of parties competing for power during this period.¹⁷ Along the coast, Spanish and Portuguese fleets were often successful in their invasions of Moroccan territory while the interior of the country fragmented into individual fiefdoms. The Saʿdī dynasty (1554-1659), based in the south, provided a modicum of stability for a time, but with the death of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr (r. 1578-1603), the strongest of the Saʿdī rulers, the political unrest escalated into a civil war between competing rural centers.¹⁸ This was

15 Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 181.

16 ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-ʿAlawī al-Madgharī, *al-Faqīh Abū ʿAlī al-Yūsī: namūdhaj min al-fikr al-maghribī fi fajr al-dawlah al-ʿalawīyyah* (Rabat: al-Mamlakah al-Maghribiyyah, Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʿūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1989), 132. To further emphasize the *zāwīyah*'s prominence, al-Madgharī records a few pages later that it had 1,400 rooms for students, but was so overwhelmed with pupils that at least two students were obliged to occupy every room, and sometimes more (135).

17 The word “Marabout” is the French rendering of the Arabic *murābiṭ*, which in Morocco generally refers to a holy man attached to a Sufi brotherhood. Many of the men vying for power during this period were charismatic *murābiṭūn* who claimed to work miracles and tried to use their popular spiritual authority to gain political power.

18 For more on this, see Honerkamp, 410-419.

the context in which the 'Alawites ascended to power. As the Dilā' were vying for control over the country, al-Yūsī, who had embarked upon a largely itinerant life in search of knowledge while still a child, spent what would be his most stable years at the *zāwiyah*, from 1653 to 1669.¹⁹ Once Mawlāy Rashīd, the first of the 'Alawite sovereign line, succeeded in eliminating most of his rivals and gaining control over much of the country, he began to see the Dilā' as a threat. He defeated them in 1669, laying the *zāwiyah* to waste along with the walled city that had risen up in its proximity, an act of destruction that al-Yūsī witnessed firsthand. There is, then, a poignant sadism in Mawlāy Ismā'īl's eventual sentence in 1684, which sent al-Yūsī to the *zāwiyah*'s wreckage, the site of *al-Risālah*'s composition.

Structured as a point-by-point response to a letter that Mawlāy Ismā'īl had sent to al-Yūsī, *al-Risālah* is both a defense and a form of censure. It is also the reassertion of power through literary means. The letter is written as an admonition meant to elicit an emotional response from the sultan, a dramatic realization of his error, and a return to humility—much like the parable it cites, in which the scholar Sufyān al-Thawrī boldly rebukes the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, ultimately moving him to tears and repentance.²⁰ Al-Yūsī's epistle, sometimes called *Jawāb al-kuttāb* (Response to the Scribes), is first and foremost a rebuttal of the accusations leveled at al-Yūsī by the sultan. In *al-Risālah*'s final pages, it becomes clear that al-Yūsī's carefully delineated responses are precisely what was demanded of him by the sultan; the sultan's letter, as quoted by al-Yūsī, stated: "If you have something to say, say it. Answer us point by point."²¹ Al-Yūsī has been punished by Ismā'īl for evading his teaching responsibilities in the city, neglecting his intellectual work (*al-ilm*), practicing Sufism, disobedience, and showing solidarity with the Amāzīgh tribes, among other complaints. Formerly in a secure position through his alignment with a Sufi order that wielded considerable political might, al-Yūsī in *al-Risālah* attempts to preserve an element of his former self-determination even in his current state of powerlessness. As it has been in any number of historical contexts, exile in seventeenth-century Morocco could be a potent political tool, one of the fundamental ways that the powerful could effectively reduce the strength and influence of their opponents. Al-Yūsī's intimate relationship with the rural *zawāyā* and Amāzīgh tribes (among them the Ait Yūsī) that posed the greatest

19 Ibid., 414.

20 al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il Abī 'Alī al-Ḥasan ibn al-Mas'ūd al-Yūsī*, vol. 1 ed. Fāṭimah H. al-Qiblī (Çasablanca: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1981), 192-193.

21 Ibid., 232. إن كان عندك ما تقول فقله وأجبنا عن هذا حرفاً حرفاً. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

threat to Ismā'īl played no small part in his removal to the remnants of the demolished *zāwiyah*; the banished could do far less damage.

Al-Yūsī's compensatory mode for his enforced position of vulnerability is first based on a substitution, an exchange of hierarchical positions staged rhetorically. Abdelfattah Kilito has observed that *al-Risālah* is, in its essence, a treatise on the relationship between princes and scholars on the one hand, and between political and discursive power on the other.²² In *al-Risālah*, these two modes of power are explicitly weighed against each other and the latter is shown to have more value. Ismā'īl's first allegation is delivered more in the syntax of a request or entreaty than in that of a demand or accusation: "What we need from you is that you accept the truth from us."²³ Al-Yūsī shows the sultan customary deference in the first lines of his retort ("No doubt God has helped the sultan know the truth").²⁴ To simultaneously explain and support his position, he cites a proverb:

وفي الخبر المشهور: «علماء أمي كأنبياء بني إسرائيل» وذلك أنه في بني إسرائيل يكون النبي في قومه يوحى إليه، ويكون الملك على يديه ينفذ ما أمر به النبي، فإذا كان علماء هذه الأمة كأنبياء بني إسرائيل، لزم أن يكون ملوكها كملوكهم ينفذون ما يأمر به العلماء. ولهذا قال الإمام أبو الأسود الدؤلي: ليس شيء أعز من العلم، الملوك حكام على الناس، والعلماء حكام على الملوك.

There is a famous saying, "the scholars of my community (*ummatī*) are like the prophets of the children of Israel." This means that for the children of Israel, a prophet would reveal [the truth] to his people and the king would implement what the prophet had commanded. If the scholars of this community (*al-ummah*) were like the prophets of the children of Israel, then its kings should be like their kings, implementing what the scholars had commanded. In this regard the Imām Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī said, "There is nothing more dear than knowledge. Kings are the rulers of the people and scholars are the rulers of kings."²⁵

22 Abdelfattah Kilito, "Speaking to Princes: al-Yūsī and Mawlay Isma'īl," in *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power, and Politics in Morocco*, ed. Rahma Bourquīa and Susan Gilson Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 39.

23 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 133.

24 Ibid., 133-134.

25 Ibid., 136.

The analogy makes it clear that while the sultan may have recourse to the trappings of material power, the higher metaphysical category of truth, which includes everything related to the Islamic sciences (*‘ilm*, *fiqh*, and *dīn* fall under its purview), belongs to al-Yūsī, whose authority is underscored by this religious legitimacy.²⁶

Though the letter is direct, al-Yūsī is careful to employ a number of tropological and rhetorical devices to soften his criticism: praise of Mawlāy Ismā‘īl, prayers on his behalf, declarations of submission and fidelity, and so on.²⁷ As al-Yūsī constructs a model of discursive power that grants him a de facto superiority over the sultan, he concurrently undermines the validity of his forced exile. In doing so, he likewise positions his conflict with Ismā‘īl as something negotiated through the act of writing, with all the distance—both physical and temporal—that this implies. This point is emphasized in *al-Risālah*'s preamble, where as though as a protective measure al-Yūsī stresses that “discourse addresses itself to discourse and not to the author of that discourse.”²⁸ His self-presentation is that of someone writing commentary rather than criticism: “In this regard, I address myself to the discourse attributed to the scribes and which they have authored . . . the sultan can observe my discourse and theirs and determine what is just.”²⁹ As Kilito has observed, this allows al-Yūsī to appear as though he is not offering a direct challenge to Mawlāy Ismā‘īl; he does not, in fact, even directly respond to the sultan's discourse, but ostensibly to that of the scribes. The sultan is figured as a judge whose task is to consider the validity of both sides' arguments.³⁰ Tempering his approach further, al-Yūsī's reliance on citation allows him to invoke the central texts and figures of the established canon to legitimize his position. By means of a sustained web of intertextual references, he substantiates everything he writes: with *ḥadīth*, lines of verse, and any number of stories and anecdotes from the *turāth*.³¹

Al-Risālah is epistolary while much of its content bears a resemblance to “Mirror for Princes” literature; it is within the conventions of these two genres that al-Yūsī finds a space to voice the sufferings of his exile. The epistle is an appropriate form, having been used to express the condition of exile since antiquity. Several of the formal features of the genre noted by Jo-Marie Claassen in relation to the exilic literature of classical antiquity are equally

26 Ibid., 135.

27 Kilito, 42.

28 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 133. *فالكلام إنما هو مع الكلام لا مع المتكلم.*

29 Ibid., 133.

30 Kilito, 40.

31 For more on this aspect of the text, see Kilito, 30-49.

useful to consider in relation to al-Yūsī's text.³² An epistle is always addressed to another person rendered grammatically in the second person, creating a dialogue at a remove between the exile and another; it is necessarily a "you-and-I" situation.³³ The spatial and temporal distance between himself and the sultan that al-Yūsī accentuates in *al-Risālah*'s opening by drawing attention to the material circumstances of his discourse is an intrinsic aspect of the genre; time is needed for the contribution of each participant to reach the other. Despite the absence of the writer's partner in dialogue, the awareness on the part of both author and addressee that they are participating in an act of reciprocal communication is paramount. The letter-writer creates half a conversation, with the recipient at the forefront of his mind.³⁴ Claassen delineates the multitude of forms and the range of narrative devices upon which exilic letters can draw, and al-Yūsī's *Risālah* qualifies as a "primary epistle," where both the model and empiric writers coincide with the model and empiric recipients.³⁵ While al-Yūsī writes as himself, however, it is regardless a particular authorial persona that he develops: the letter-writer-as-exile. *Al-Risālah* may have been composed for the pragmatic function of addressing the sultan's charges, but its more straightforward informational responses are frequently positioned next to passages that are clear examples of first-person exilic literature set in an epistolary mode, whether framed as appeals or as statements that border on invective. These latter moments—in which al-Yūsī describes his personal suffering and his shock at the sultan's charge that his allegiance remains with the *zāwiyah*—carry a tone verging toward self-exculpation, and despite his care to soften his criticism, his letter contains hints of accusation, as will be seen below.

Space and Identity in *al-Risālah*: The Dilā'iyyah Zāwiyah

Al-Yūsī's conception of home is tied to the fundamental changes that had gradually taken place in Morocco over the previous two hundred years. *Al-Risālah* shows a distaste for urban life, reflective of the acute unrest that afflicted

32 Jo-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999). I have borrowed the basic framework of the genre's definition from the discussions that recur throughout this book, particularly in the section entitled "The Second Stage: Exilic Outreach," 73-147.

33 *Ibid.*, 3.

34 *Ibid.*, 74.

35 *Ibid.*, 77.

urban centers like Fez and Marrakech during the period between the fall of the Marinid dynasty and the establishment of 'Alawite rule. It was only during Mawlay Ismā'il's fifty-five-year tenure as sultan that the country became unequivocally stable. As a result of these societal shifts, the remembered spaces of al-Yūsī's youth are not the state-sponsored religious schools of Fez and Marrakech, once the predetermined destination of any student in search of a rigorous Islamic education. Instead, they are the rural *zawāyā* (and their surroundings) that first began to multiply in the fifteenth century and had become legitimate centers of learning by the seventeenth.³⁶ Al-Yūsī studied in Sijilmasa in the far south, at the Nāṣiriyyah *zāwīyah* in the Dar'ah Valley in the southeast, and at the Dilā'iyyah *zāwīyah*, the place of his future banishment, southeast of Boujad near what is now Ait Ishaq in the Middle Atlas.

In *al-Risālah*, home as a site of nostalgia extends beyond the immediate region of al-Yūsī's birth and is ultimately figured as an imaginative construct that encompasses the landscapes of the different *zawāyā* that regularly served as his primary source of physical and spiritual nurture, as well as the broader category of the countryside (*al-bādiyah*). The tension in which these rural *zawāyā* existed with competing dynastic power structures—the latter would prove victorious in the end with the establishment of the 'Alawite dynasty—underscores the dichotomy of city vs. country (*al-ḥaḍīrah* or *al-ḥawāḍir* vs. *al-bādiyah*) in much of al-Yūsī's work. Through a clear personal identification with one side of this binary, al-Yūsī is able to align himself with a spatial concept invested with added sentimental and moral value. Throughout his texts, exile is often less associated with the loss of a specific place than it is with forced residencies in the urban centers of Fez, Marrakech, and Meknes, which appear to have been largely interchangeable for al-Yūsī. In *al-Risālah* these cities serve as the antithesis of *al-bādiyah*. This dichotomy is complicated, however, by the particularly cruel banishment that al-Yūsī endured at the ruins of the Dilā'iyyah *zāwīyah*, a place which stands outside the categories of *al-ḥaḍīrah* and *al-bādiyah* in his writings. It is this site that will be considered first.

36 Honerkamp notes that “[t]hese centers or *zāwīyahs* offered a refuge from the strife of the towns and their dynastic conflicts as well as a political authority with theological foundations” (413). Along the same lines, Muḥammad al-Manṣūr observes that by the seventeenth century, the Nāṣiriyyah *zāwīyah* in Tamagrout in the south, which was not a traditional center of intellectual activity in the region, had become a veritable hub of Arabic-Islamic cultural and intellectual production. See Muḥammad al-Manṣūr, *al-Maghrib qabla al-isti'mār: al-muḥtama' wa-l-dawlah, 1792-1822* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 2006), 267.

In conveying the particular hardships of life among the ruins of the Dilā'iyah *zāwiyah*, al-Yūsī privileges an affective discourse. The material and physical merge with the emotional and ideational, and his isolation and alienation are written through a vocabulary of sensorial perception. In the text, he first reproduces Ismā'il's charge, which he alternately attributes to the scribes or simply to the letter, and then responds:³⁷

أما قوال لكتاب: أين تجد السبيل في التباعد والتجافي عن حواضر المسلمين إلى قوله: وأي عذر لك في التباعد عن حاضرنا. وقوله تسكن الزاوية التي هي دار الفسق فأقول: أما الزاوية فإني لم أرد سكانها، ولم يكن لي فيها ولي ولا قريب ولا حميم ولا قبيلة، ولا كان في عمارتها نفع لي، ولا في خلايتها مضرة. ولا طلبتها من السلطان قط. ولا تشوّفت إليها. ولا خطرت لي ببال. . . فلم يفاجئني إلا كتابه لي يأمرني بالرحيل إلى الزاوية عزماً عزماً ولا بدّ. فلم يمكنني إلا الرحيل، ولقد ارتحلت في ذروة البرد. ولم أقدر على التراخي ولا الاعتذار، لئلا يظن بي التعاصي، ثم جئت الزاوية ولم أجد فيها داراً ولا جداراً، فكنت فيها بين الشيخ والريح إلى الآن، حتى أنه لو تأملني من هو جاهل بحال السلطان، لظن أنه إنما كلفني بها امتحاناً لي وتعذيباً. . . فكيف ينسب لي بعد هذا أنني أريد الزاوية معاذ الله!

The letter says: How would you justify your isolation from the cities of the Muslims? What excuse do you have for staying away from our city? You live in the *zāwiyah*, that house of impiety [*dār al-fisq*]. I say: As for the *zāwiyah*, I did not want to live here. I had not a protector, kinsman, close friend, or tribesman here. Whether I stayed or left was of no benefit to me. I never asked the sultan for this, nor did I desire it. It never occurred to me. . . I was shocked by his message ordering me to travel to the *zāwiyah*. I had no choice but to go. I carried out my journey when cold was at its peak. I could not be indolent or excuse myself lest I be accused of disobedience. Then I got to the *zāwiyah* and found no house, not even a wall. I have been here in complete desolation ever since. If someone ignorant of the sultan's character were to consider me [in my present state], he would think that he had charged me with this as a test

37 The editor of *al-Risālah* has chosen to put the quotes that al-Yūsī included from Ismā'il's original letter—the individual accusations that al-Yūsī answers here—in bold to distinguish them from al-Yūsī's responses. I have replicated this in the translation.

and form of torture³⁸. . . . How has it been attributed to me after this that I want the *zāwiyah*, heaven forbid!³⁹

Telling of a journey undertaken in the dead of winter to a bleak and utterly inhospitable destination, al-Yūsī's description interlaces "sensual physical experience with . . . the intensities of bitterness."⁴⁰ The insult that has been leveled against him by the sultan is embodied in the image of the hardships that his fifty-three-year-old body is forced to endure. Even once he arrives, he is absolutely isolated and vulnerable to the elements of the Middle Atlas mountains in winter. His description may be factually accurate, but more importantly it resonates with the central tropes of the literary tradition. As a motif, travel through archetypically liminal spaces has a long history in Arabic literature. Its origins can be traced to the second structural component of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah*, the *raḥīl*, where the poet sets out in the middle of the night or under the blazing sun on a journey through dangerous and foreboding territory before he reaches the third and final integrative section of the poem.⁴¹ In the *qaṣīdah*, the poet's departure from the ruined encampment contains some autonomy; there is a deliberate decision taken to enter a state "characterized by ambiguity, wilderness, and . . . danger" wherein he can test his own limits and confront his fears.⁴² Al-Yūsī, by contrast, is forced to sever his communal bonds and undertake the passage through liminality at the sultan's decree. In opposition to the literary convention in which the traveler is accompanied by his she-camel to ensure his successful transit through perilous and insecure terrain, al-Yūsī is completely alone.⁴³ Moreover, while the *raḥīl* is generally resolved with a reentry into society, al-Yūsī has been banished and his exile is left open, indeterminate, and outside his own control.

The allegation to which al-Yūsī is responding in this part of *al-Risālah* is the charge that he deliberately avoids the court and its environs. By way of this

38 The phrase *bayn al-shūh wa-l-rīh* is an idiomatic Moroccan expression that can convey either the desolation of rural areas or, positively, their connection to nature. Al-Yūsī uses it in both ways, in the former sense here, and in the latter sense in his description of his birthplace (quoted below).

39 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 160-161.

40 Ben Highmore, "Bitter after Taste," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 120.

41 Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 44-45.

42 Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 26.

43 *Ibid.*, 27.

accusation, the sultan more broadly questions al-Yūsī's commitment to the Muslim community; his distaste for Marrakech, Meknes, and Fez and his reluctance to live in any of these cities are interpreted by the sultan as tantamount to voluntarily depriving the cities' residents of his services as a scholar. In the course of al-Yūsī's response, the person upon whom he focuses subtly shifts. Although he commences with the sufferings of the first-person narrator, the "isolated I" or subject of exile, he quickly turns to the deeds, or rather misdeeds, of the implied second person who is his partner in conversation, namely the sultan ("I never asked the sultan for this"). This section of text serves to chronicle the vicissitudes of his seclusion, dramatizing his subjective experience while at the same time externalizing the blame for his unhappy situation onto his addressee. The gesture of outreach to the sultan in the depiction of al-Yūsī's miserable circumstances sits in tension with his reminder to Ismā'īl that he is responsible for his condition. Claassen suggests that when an exiled writer addresses the political leader who is the cause of their exile, subservient discourse clothed in eulogy is the soundest approach when seeking relief or a reduction in sentence.⁴⁴ For al-Yūsī, direct confrontation or accusation risks angering the sultan who controls his fate; nonetheless al-Yūsī does not spare Ismā'īl his reproach. Here he treads the potentially dangerous ground of simultaneously appealing to the sultan's sympathies while implicitly accusing the sultan of unjustly sentencing him to an especially deplorable exile. His response provides a moment of self-exoneration by placing the blame for his circumstances squarely on the sultan, who had commanded him "peremptorily and irrevocably" to the *zāwīyah* with little warning.⁴⁵

Claassen offers relevant observations for this section of the text as well. Temporally, the exile's writings may look to a more favorable past, describe an uncomfortable present, or turn to the future in hope (or despair, if the term of exile seems interminable).⁴⁶ The perspective on time that is articulated depends on the exile's position; s/he may have already returned home and is now reflecting upon a former ordeal, or s/he may still be in exile while fixing a gaze backward to remembrances of better times. In this part of *al-Risālah*, al-Yūsī begins with his impressions of a disconsolate present. The *zāwīyah* as al-Yūsī portrays it is part topographical metaphor for the scene of his exile and part representation grounded in verisimilitude. As there is no assurance of an eventual return, the liminality that characterized his journey extends as well to the destination he eventually reaches. He describes a space mythically separate,

44 Claassen, 103.

45 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 161. يَا مُرْنِي بِالرَّحِيلِ إِلَى الزَّوَايَةِ عَزْمًا وَعَزْمًا وَلَا بَدَّ .

46 Claassen, 155.

a geography of “outsiderhood” set apart from all mainstream social and institutional structures.⁴⁷ He subscribes here to an ancient literary convention of depicting the place of exile as epically bleak, a site of complete isolation.⁴⁸ The drama of his portrait likely carries some exaggeration; the *zāwiyah* was not, for example, in fact wholly bereft of other inhabitants. Its abjection, however, is corroborated by al-Yūsī’s son, Muḥammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī, in *al-Riḥlah al-ḥijāziyyah* (also known as *Riḥlat al-Yūsī*, the name being a reference to the son and not to the main author under consideration here), as can be seen in this passage quoted by al-Madgharī and taken from the manuscript held by the Khizānah Malakiyyah in Rabat:

أرض خالية لا توجد فيها دار ولا جدار ولا أثر فيها لما يؤنس النفس أو يخفف من وطأة الغربة،
فليس إلا التلج والريح وأففاض الزاوية الدلائية الحربة، وأفراد من الناس كانوا أحبث قلبا وقالبا
وديننا وأدبا .

[It was] vacant ground without an abode, wall, or trace of anything convivial to the soul or that could lighten the burden of exile [*waṭʿat al-ghurbah*]. There was nothing but the snow, wind, the rubble of the razed Dilāʾiyyah *zāwiyah*, and the most malicious of people in both heart and soul with no religion or sense of propriety.⁴⁹

Even in this description by al-Yūsī’s son, the space’s liminality is clear. It is “betwixt and between,” in the sense outlined by Victor Turner in his consideration of those symbolically liminal places located outside of society proper.⁵⁰ These sites signify an individual’s total detachment from his community; unable to serve as a religious leader or a scholar in his isolation, here al-Yūsī is divested of all the attributes of his social position. The *zāwiyah* itself is neither urban nor rural; yet its desolation as a place of exile in which al-Yūsī is kept from performing the work that has formed the driving axis of his life prompts him to craft an authorial voice that identifies wholly with the rural spaces of his youth.

47 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 233.

48 Claassen, 31.

49 al-Madgharī, 149.

50 Turner, 232.

Al-Ḥādirah vs. al-Bādiyah

Defending his aversion to urban centers, al-Yūsī first projects his nostalgic longing onto a highly particularized location: the place of his birth. This site of belonging will ultimately extend in *al-Risālah* to include the spatial category of the countryside in a general sense.

وأما عذري في استئقال الحاضرة فوجه كثيرة أقتصر على بعضها: منها الطبع: فإني لم أولد فيها، بل في الفجاج الواسعة بين الشيح والريح، والجنوب والشمال، فأني عجب إذا حننت إلى مسقط رأسي ومحلّ أبناء جنسي، وفي الحديث الكريم: «حب الوطن من الإيمان.»

As for my reasons for finding the city [*al-ḥādirah*] burdensome, there are many, so I'll limit myself to some of them: **Natural disposition:** I was not born there but in a wide valley between the mountains, amongst nature between the north and the south. So why should it be surprising if I long for the place of my birth and of my people; as the *ḥadīth* says: love of one's homeland is a part of faith.⁵¹

Al-Yūsī attributes his preference for *al-bādiyah* to two central factors: his natural disposition (*ṭab'*) as in the quote above, and “the corruption of the nature of women, children, and friends” that occurs in the city, as will be considered below.⁵² When discussing his own temperament, he presents Fāzāz, in the upper Moulouya region north of Fez in the Middle Atlas where he was born, as his primary point of identification. He vindicates his sentiments to the sultan by universalizing them through citation, drawing heavily on proverbs, aphorisms, and poetic stanzas that fall under the generic rubric of *al-ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*:

فيل لبعض الحكماء بأي شيء تعرف وفاء الرجل، وذمام عهده دون تجربة واختبار، (قال):
بحينه إلى أوطانه، وتشوقه إلى إخوانه، وتلهفه على ما مضى من زمانه.

A wise man was asked: How can one know the fidelity of a man and the strength of his oath without firsthand experience of him? (He replied) By

51 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 162.

52 Ibid., 162, 166. فساد طبع العيال والأولاد والأصحاب.

his attachment to his homeland [*ḥanīnihi ilā awṭānihi*], his inclination toward his brothers, and his nostalgia for his past.⁵³

Zayde Antrim notes the transferability of the idea of *waṭan*, or homeland, in the classical tradition. New homelands could be gained, loyalties could expand to include other geographies, and previously unknown landscapes could become sites of political and spiritual belonging.⁵⁴ It is an idea against which al-Yūsī takes a strong position in *al-Risālah*. After citing a number of poetic verses that affirm the importance of emotional constancy to the original territory of one's home, he includes the following lines conventionally attributed to Abū Tammām, heard by Abū Dulaf al-ʿAjālī in al-Yūsī's anecdote: "The inclination of the soul toward family [*ahl*] and homeland [*awṭān*] / should not prevent the life of ease you seek / In every country [*bilād*] if you settle there you will meet / family to replace family and neighbors to replace neighbors."⁵⁵ Upon hearing these verses, Abū Dulaf al-ʿAjālī proclaims that they constitute the most painful stanza ever uttered by the Arabs, for they could only pertain to someone whose "heart is ruthless and disposition is harsh, who lacks fidelity and is inconsistent in his word."⁵⁶ Emotional allegiance to the place of one's roots is not simply a private matter of internal sentiment, but an indicator of moral character. Yet despite al-Yūsī's insistence on the singular importance of loyalty to an original authentic home and the impossibility of substituting one place for another, his nostalgia encompasses a wider spatial range than this might imply. His attachment to the rural terrain of his childhood is only the first of many reasons underpinning his antipathy toward the city. As he moves on to his discussion of the corrupting influence the city has on women, children, and friends, he shifts focus to the binary framework of *al-ḥāḍīrah/al-ḥawāḍīr* and *al-bādiyah*.⁵⁷ Urbanity for al-Yūsī represents avarice, excess, and corruption,

53 Ibid., 162.

54 Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22.

55 al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 164. The translation of Abū Tammām's verses is Zayde Antrim's. See Antrim, 23.

56 Ibid.

57 It should be noted that in contrast to the way this opposition tends to be imagined in the twentieth century, for al-Yūsī *al-bādiyah* is a distinct spatial category that does not include the village, which he considers to be more closely related to the city: "The villages [*al-qurā*] are under the jurisdiction of the city [*fi ḥukm al-ḥāḍīrah*]. The countryside [*al-bādiyah*], however, derives its name from the Bedouin and has nothing visible to the eye: no walls, doors, or roofs. In contrast, the village [*al-qaryah*] has most of the comforts of the city" (al-Yūsī, *Rasā'il*, 182).

while the countryside exemplifies humility, constraint, and piety. He continues his denunciation of the city through an idealization of its opposite:

ومنها فساد طبع العيال والأولاد والأصحاب، ونخشى ذلك نحن أيضا في أنفسنا من جهات :
إحداها : تعلم الشهوات والاتساع فيها ، وإن كنا بالبادية لانعرفها . ووجدنا آباءنا يعيشون بما
وجدوا قانعين به ، يلبسون الصوف الخشن ، ويأكلون البرّ تارة ، والشعير أخرى ، والدخن
أخرى ، والتمرأخرى ، والبلوط وحبّ العرعار أخرى ، حامدين شاكرين . . . فلما دخلنا
الحاضرة ظهرت الشهوات ، ونظر النساء إلى النساء ، والصبيان إلى الصبيان ، والرجال إلى
الرجال ، فطلبوا الاتساع كما اتسعوا ، وابتلينا كما ابتلوا .

Another reason [for avoiding the city] is the corruption of the character of women, children, and friends. We fear the same for ourselves in a number of ways. First, one learns how to engage and indulge in desires [*shahawāt*] even if one wasn't familiar with them in the countryside [*al-bādiyah*]. [There] we saw our fathers living contentedly with whatever they found, wearing coarse wool, sometimes eating wheat, at other times barley, millet, dates, acorns, and juniper seeds. They praised God and were thankful. . . . But when we entered the city (*al-ḥādirah*), desires appeared. Women looked to women, boys to boys, men to men, and they wanted more as they saw what others had. We became afflicted as they were afflicted. . . .⁵⁸

Al-Yūsī's subsequent remarks further encourage a reading of the city as the symbolic inverse of this pastoral image: he goes on to say that the urban space breeds "insolence" (*waqāḥah*), "shamelessness" (*qillat al-ḥayā*), and "miserliness" (*al-bukhl*).⁵⁹ Steeped in nostalgia, al-Yūsī's description in this passage of the countryside of his father's generation contains a distinct configuration of time and space that becomes a chronotope of the rural in Bakhtin's sense of the term, whereby temporal and spatial structures work together to create particular types of narrative. The idyllic country scene al-Yūsī depicts is connected to an idealized past, where the temporal and spatial are fused into a unity described as hierarchically superior to the rural life that existed at the time of *al-Risālah*'s composition. His memories of the countryside are of a people and lifestyle that had not yet been exposed to the negative influence

58 Ibid., 166-167.

59 Ibid., 167.

of *al-ḥādirah*. Contact with the city creates a kind of fall from Eden, a loss of innocence that cannot be reversed. He may attempt to initiate his reentry into society by arguing his case to the sultan while banished to the *zāwiyah*, but the rural paradigm he envisions is firmly set in a past to which he cannot really return. The “desires” that those who have migrated to the city—including al-Yūsī and his family—have all now experienced can be repressed but not wholly forgotten, closing off the imaginative possibility of reintegration.

The focal point of al-Yūsī’s longing is an imagined geography that carries with it a particular mode of social, physical, material, and spiritual being. In these sections of *al-Risālah*, he does not identify with any individual place, but with a distinct kind of space that encompasses the many rural communities in which he had spent time before the destruction of the Dilā’iyah *zāwiyah*, from the far north on the Mediterranean, to the southeast near the Algerian border, to the Middle Atlas, to the southwest off the Atlantic coast. As part of his explanation to Ismā’īl for the extreme difficulties he faced while living among the urban elite in Fez, al-Yūsī proclaims, “innamā anā rajul badawī” (I am but a rural man); the semantic weight of the phrase—connected as it is to *al-bādiyah*—implies the full spectrum of meaning that this connotes as a territorial category in al-Yūsī’s lexicon throughout the text.⁶⁰ His frequent assertions that invoke variants of *al-bādiyah* as a strategy of self-definition are a defining feature of *al-Risālah*. He draws on the same rhetorical trope to respond to Ismā’īl’s contention that he bears a responsibility to the cities’ inhabitants, that he is under an ethical obligation to teach there:

فإنه لا يجب علينا أن نرتحل إلى المداين ليتعلم أهلها علمنا . . . ولم يوجب الشرع قط على بدوي
أن يتحضر، كما لم يوجب على حضري أن يتبدى . . . فإن من احتاج إلى العلم رحل إليه
وطلبه

It is not necessary for us to go to the cities for their people to learn from us. . . . It has never been prescribed that someone from the countryside must urbanize just as the urbanite does not have to acclimate to the countryside . . . whoever needs knowledge must travel and seek it out.⁶¹

His resistance is not to teaching students from the urban centers, but to the sultan’s demand that he must himself live in the city to do so. He cites the traditional idea that those who want to learn must travel to study with scholars

60 Ibid., 170.

61 Ibid., 172-173.

wherever they are, quoting the well-known *ḥadīth*, “seek knowledge as far as China,” to support his position.⁶² This relates back to the concept of *ṭabʿ*, or natural inclination. One is either urban or rural by disposition, and is therefore unlikely to adapt to the opposite environment. Likewise, his response to another of the sultan’s allegations—that al-Yūsī cannot possibly maintain the necessary level of intellectual engagement outside an urban center—also invokes the urban–rural divide: “If I were an urbanite [*ḥaḍarī*] through my father and grandfather, and I then moved to the countryside, this would not be an impediment to me. So how can it be [a disadvantage] when the countryside is my origin and the place where I grew up?”⁶³ With these lines al-Yūsī moves beyond a generalized self-identification with the rural to a characterization of belonging that is affixed to his genealogy. The quality of being urban or rural is positioned as generational and inheritable, passed down from grandfather to father to son, at the same time as he equates an interchangeable rural topography—*al-bādiyah* as a category of place rather than a specific location like the Fāzāz—with his origins. This close association of his identity with a highly idealized version of *al-bādiyah*, an association that is a constant preoccupation in *al-Risālah*, is intimately tied to the text’s epistolary genre—the result of its dialogue with the sultan as a symbol of urbanity—and the particular exilic condition of its writing. This exclusive identification with the countryside is not an association that is replicated in *al-Muḥāḍarāt*.

al-Muḥāḍarāt fī al-adab wa-l-lughah

Around the same time that al-Yūsī drafted his letter to Ismāʿīl, he began the composition of *al-Muḥāḍarāt fī al-adab wa-l-lughah*. He commenced writing it while traveling in the territory of the Maṣmūdah tribes in 1684 and would ultimately finish it during his three-year tenure at the remains of the Dilāʿiyyah *zāwiyah*. The *Muḥāḍarāt* is a classic *adab* work reliant on a parenthetical mode of narration that moves freely from subject to subject without a clear linear

62 Ibid., 173.

63 Ibid., 180–181. The passage continues to say, “Why must I move to the city where myself and my family will face hardships and tribulations simply to teach the seekers of position and rank? This should not be required and is perhaps fundamentally impermissible.” فلو كنت حضرياً عن أبي وجدي، ثم خرجت إلى البادية لم يكن عليّ حرج، فكيف والبادية أصلي ومنشأى، فمتى يجب عليّ دخول الحاضرة، والقاء نفسي وعبالي في المرح والضيق والفتن التي تقدم شرحها، لأن يجلس إليّ طلاب المناصب والمراتب. هذا ما لا يجب ولا يندب وربما لا يباح أصلاً.

progression. It is a long and rich text that covers a broad variety of topics. While it merits detailed interpretation in its entirety, the focus here will be on the persona developed in the chapter “The Writer’s Nostalgia for the Dilā’iyyah *zāwīyah* [*Hanīn al-mu’allif ilā al-zāwīyah al-dilā’iyyah*],” a section whose stylization of exile can be read in productive counterpoint to *al-Risālah*. Here, drawing on the mode traditionally considered most effective for the subjective expression of emotion, al-Yūsī turns to poetry.

The poetic persona that emerges in *al-Muḥāḍarāt* is of a different nature than the persona developed in the epistle, the authorial voice in each drawing on different generic conventions and offering opposing conceptions of home and the meaning of exile itself. Unlike *al-Risālah*, which features two voices in dialogue, the point of view expressed in this excerpt from *al-Muḥāḍarāt* is that of the first-person “I” pleading to God, an autobiographical poetic voice that expresses nostalgia for a territory that includes nearly the entirety of the country. This nostalgia, directed toward specific and varied plots of land, creates a very different geography of belonging than that found in the letter to Ismā’īl. The different spatial constructs of the two texts emphasize the divide in al-Yūsī’s work between the subjective “I” of the narrator—the literary persona in the text—and the objective “I”—the actual author—which are not always precisely the same thing.⁶⁴ Autobiographical texts are no less rhetorical constructions than works of fiction, and al-Yūsī’s writings about his own life should be read as stylizations that offer a number of different self-portraits with distinct aims rather than documents to be mined for biographical facts. The poem may be a moment of autobiographical expression, but it is nevertheless a fictionalization or mythologization of a nostalgia sown by repeated dislocations.

Although most of *al-Muḥāḍarāt* was written during al-Yūsī’s three-year exile at the remains of the *zāwīyah*, the following poem is crafted as having been composed earlier, its first-person narrator positioned in Marrakech, al-Yūsī’s last place of residence before his extended banishment. In these verses, the dichotomy between the urban and the rural no longer holds; instead, his nostalgia extends to almost all of the places he has lived, whether his residence at each was by his own design or by the sultan’s command. It is worth citing the poem in full here:

سلام على الإحباب غير مضيع لذي شرف ذكراً ولا لوضيع
سلام محب لا يزال أخاهوى إلى جلة قد شرفوا ونزوع

64 Claassen, 31.

ومن يسأل الركبان عني فإني
فألفيته يحكي زفير زفيره
ويسعديني في عبرتي غير أنه
فتجرتني إلى مهفي الجنوب دموعه
حللت بيتي حول أم ربيع
بقلب كقلبي بالفراق صديع
يخالفني في مهبط وطلوع
وتجرتني إلى مهفي الشمال دموعي

ولما كنت بمدينة مراكش - حرسها الله تعالى - وقد بقيت الأملاك في خلفون والكتب وما معها في مكاسة وبقيت العلائق في جبال فازاز والقبيلة في ملوية قلت :

تشتت قلبي في البلاد فقسمة
وأخرى مجلفون وأخرى مقيمة
وأخرى بغازاز وأخرى تجزأت
وأخرى بذاك الغرب بين أحبتي
فيا رب فاجمعها فإنك قادر
ويا رب فاجعلها بأوطانها فما
لك الفضل والإحسان بدءاً وآخرأً
فمن يأنعام وجد لي مجاتي
فما لي إلا بابك الرحب ملجأً
وما لي إلا جودك الحم شافع
وصفوتك المبعوث للناس رحمة
صلاة وتسليم عليه مدى المدى
بمراكش منه على رجل طائر
بمكاسة الزيتون حول الدفاتر
بملوية الأنهار بين العشائر
بأهل البوادي منهم والحواضر
عليها وما غير الإله بقادر
عبيدك للبين المشت بصابر
وإني لما أوليتي جد شاكراً
ورفق بقلب للهموم مسامر
وما طلب الحاجات منك بضائر
وحسبي بفيض منه أغزر وافر
بشيرا شفيحاً مظهرأً بالبشائر
وعترته والصحب أهل البصائر

Greetings to the loved ones / [a greeting] not lost to either the noble or the humble

A greeting from someone still an ardent lover / of the dear ones who have departed

And whoever asks the riders [*al-rukban*] about me / let them know that I have arrived at my house [*baytī*] at the Umm Rabī'

I found it telling the story of both our laments / with a heart like my heart,
 broken from parting⁶⁵
 It cheers me in my sorrow yet / it opposes me in the directions I endeavor
 to take
 Its tears pull me to the place for which I suddenly yearn in the south / my
 tears compel me to the place for which I long in the north
 When I was in Marrakech, may God protect it, and my possessions had
 remained in
 Khalfūn, my books and the like in Meknes, my family still in Jabāl Fāzāz,
 and the tribe in Moulouya, I said:
 My heart has been scattered throughout the country (*al-bilād*) / a piece in
 Marrakech, not yet settled
 Another in Khalfūn, and another residing / in Meknes with my notebooks
 Another in Fāzāz, and another / scattered in the Moulouya river among
 the clans
 Another in al-Gharb among my loved ones / with those from the country-
 side and from the cities
 Oh God, bring them together, for indeed You are capable / of it, and noth-
 ing, no one other than God is capable
 Oh God, return them to their homelands (*awṭānihā*), for indeed / Your
 servants cannot bear this exile (*al-mushitt*)
 All perfection belongs to You beginning to end / I am most thankful for all
 Your protection and aid
 So bestow generously [O God] and provide me with all that I need / and
 bless me with a joyful companion to ease my worries
 I have nothing but Your generous opening as a refuge / and truly, a request
 to You for basic needs carries no harm
 I have nothing but Your great beneficence as intercession / there is noth-
 ing more boundless than Your generosity
 Your Chosen One [The Prophet] was sent to mankind as a mercy / and as
 a bearer of glad tidings, an intercessor, and a revealer of miracles
 Prayers and peace be upon him for an infinite duration / his family, his
 companions, and the people of spiritual insight⁶⁶

65 I read the "it" here as referring to the Umm Rabī' river.

66 al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī, *al-Muḥāḍarāt fī al-adab wa-l-lughah*, vol. 1, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī and Aḥmad S. Iqbāl (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1982), 337-338. Several lines from the middle section of this poem were translated into French by Jacques Berque in 1958, and

Muhsin al-Musawi has noted the practice in modern Arabic exilic poetry of invoking the classical canon as an assertion of belonging or a source of comfort.⁶⁷ The continuing sense of kinship to the larger Arabic literary tradition created through this poetic practice is conspicuous in al-Yūsī's verses. Just as the twentieth-century Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh calls upon Abū Tammām in his capacity as a fellow exile, al-Yūsī's lines summon the same canonical figure toward a similar end.⁶⁸ Though Abū Tammām is utilized by al-Yūsī in *al-Risālah* as well (as noted above), there the famous poet's verses affirm the importance of sentimental devotion to one's "birthplace," this being the precise meaning of the word *waṭan* throughout that text. Al-Yūsī's lines above, however, contain an allusion to Abū Tammām that is indirect and subtle. Muḥammad ibn al-Marzubān's tenth-century anthology *Kitāb al-ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān* includes a pair of Abū Tammām's verses under a heading that could easily refer to al-Yūsī himself, "Those for whom displacement [*ghurbah*] is a perpetual cycle:"

I am the successor to al-Khiḍr. Others fix their homeland [*waṭan*] / in a place [*baldah*], but my homelands [*awṭān*] are the backs of camels

then translated into English from the French by Clifford Geertz in his infamously problematic treatment of al-Yūsī in *Islam Observed*. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 31; Jacques Berque, *Al-Yousi: Problèmes de la culture marocaine au XVII^{ème} siècle* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1958), 20.

The same lines were cited yet again by Henry Munson, Jr., who interprets them as exclusively concerned with expressing the Sufi desire for unity with God. Henry Jr. Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 15. The lines were rendered by Geertz (and used by Munson) as: "My heart is scattered through my country / One part is in Marrakech, in doubt / Another in Khalfoun; another in Meknes with my books / Another in Fazaz; another in Mulwiya among my tribesmen / Another in Gharb, among my friends of the town and of the countryside / O God, reunite them. No one can do it but You / O God, put them back in place." No one since Berque has looked at the original Arabic, nor has anyone addressed the poem in its entirety or tried to situate it within the context of al-Yūsī's other writings in which place, exile, and nostalgia emerge as central themes.

67 Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 168.

68 In this regard, al-Musawi cites the following lines from Darwīsh's "If You Return by Yourself": "If you return by yourself, say to yourself: / Exile changed its profile . . . / Wasn't Abū Tammām so disturbed before you / upon facing the self: / 'you are not the same / nor are the abodes.'" Cited and translated by al-Musawi, 168.

My people are in Syria [*al-Shām*], my desire is in Baghdad, and I / am in al-Raqqatayn, while my brothers are in al-Fuṣṭāṭ⁶⁹

An ambulatory poet, Abū Tammām must gather together these multiple fractured homelands to create an authentic sense of *waṭan*; in doing so, he lays claim to much of the ‘Abbasid empire: present-day Syria, Egypt, and Iraq are all named and appropriated in the poem. Al-Yūsī does not directly quote these verses in his poem the way he cites Abū Tammām explicitly in *al-Risālah*. Instead, here he borrows Abū Tammām’s structure while fundamentally altering its meaning through geographical substitutions. While Abū Tammām claims the spaces of empire, al-Yūsī charts the territories of early modern Morocco. The short section of text that separates the two stanzas of al-Yūsī’s poem—“When I was in Marrakech, may God protect it, and my possessions had remained in Khalfūn, my books and the like in Meknes, my family still in Jabāl Fāzāz, and the tribe in Moulouya”—bears an unmistakable resemblance to Abū Tammām’s lines. Here and in the verses that follow, al-Yūsī joins together Marrakech, Khalfūn, Meknes, Fāzāz, al-Gharb, and the Umm Rabīʿ and Moulouya rivers through his recollections of personal loss, creating an imaginary landscape that corresponds to much of Morocco’s current territory, largely unified by Ismāʿīl in the seventeenth century. In this earlier exile, he crafts an authorial identity that is explicitly Moroccan through its appropriation of these different sites. He positions himself as belonging to all of them, and as a result al-Yūsī’s poetic voice constitutes a figure equally attached to the multiplicity of landscapes brought together by the sultan as a single national entity.

If there is a primary site of belonging in al-Yūsī’s verses, it is not signified by the term *waṭan*; home as a localized place is represented metaphorically by the Umm Rabīʿ river, one of the largest in Morocco whose source is in the Middle Atlas near al-Yūsī’s childhood home. The significations generally attributed to the *waṭan* are transferred to this body of water, itself anthropomorphized. This is reminiscent of classical anthologies on the theme of *al-ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān* that often accentuate the close connection between the land and the poet’s body; for al-Yūsī this connection leads to an image of a natural landscape endowed with human attributes.⁷⁰ Al-Yūsī begins his elegy with a scene of homecoming in which the river is depicted as an intimate friend, its empathic connection to him so pronounced that it nearly transforms into his double. It is not only the poem’s narrator who suffers as a result of his separation from

69 The translation is Antrim’s: see Antrim, 27.

70 Ibid., 16.

his natal land; the river's sorrows mirror the poet's, its heart equally broken. The Umm Rabīʿ, notably, tries to pull him toward the south, the direction in which it flows ("Its tears pull me to the place for which I suddenly yearn in the south"). Yet regardless of his attachment to home, the narrator longs for other domains ("my tears compel me to the place for which I long in the north"). The poem's final stanza initiates the affective discourse used to describe al-Yūsī's exile at the *zāwiyah* in *al-Risālah*. In *al-Risālah*, Ismāʿīl is given a portrait of al-Yūsī's physical suffering that is a metaphoric representation of his emotional distress in exile. In the poem from *al-Muḥāḍarāt*, al-Yūsī also utilizes a vocabulary of bodily metaphors to create a graphic image of his sorrow and pain, in which his heart is described as literally sectioned into pieces and dispersed throughout the different places he has called home ("My heart has been scattered throughout the country"). We see him restless in his exile in Marrakech ("a piece in Marrakech, not yet settled"), with parts of his self having been left in both the rural areas of his youth like Khalfūn and Fāzāz and the cities of his forced residencies like Meknes. The picture he creates is one in which the boundaries of his body have become permeable, fractured, and broken in this imagined encounter with the landscapes for which he longs. A material unity is achieved between his physical self and these sites of nostalgia, although he mourns his heart's fragmentation throughout so many different territories. The most remarkable part of the poem is its concluding moment of integration. The polarized categories of *al-bawādī* and *al-ḥawāḍir* are reconciled in the narrator's lament—the final piece of his heart is in al-Gharb among his loved ones, "with those from the countryside and from the cities"—whereby al-Yūsī unifies the country into a cohesive whole.

Notably, the poem lacks the bitterness that colors many of al-Yūsī's descriptions in *al-Risālah*, something that can be attributed to its genre and its narrator's comparatively less burdensome exile in Marrakech in contrast to his isolation at Dilāʿiyah *zāwiyah*. For these poetic lines voiced in the first person, al-Yūsī's only interlocutor is God. He does not, then, need to adopt the tone of reproach or provide the frequent self-justifications interlaced throughout his letter to Ismāʿīl, nor does he need to place himself in stark opposition to the sultan's urbanity. Return and reintegration into society appear unlikely in *al-Risālah*, where his fate rests squarely with Ismāʿīl. This poem from *al-Muḥāḍarāt*, however, extends the possibility of homecoming and an end to the author's exile through divine intercession ("Oh God, bring them together, for indeed You are capable"). Likewise, this possibility is encoded in the time-frame to which he looks in the course of the poem; it is not that of his forefathers as it is in *al-Risālah*, but his own. The places of his remembrance are

those in which he himself has lived in the recent past and which have likely changed little in his absence.

Conclusion

This discussion began with an anecdote about al-Yūsī's anthologization in *al-Nubūgh al-maghribī fī al-adab al-'arabī* in the 1930s, which may say more about the drive to create a national literary canon as Morocco struggled for its independence than it does about al-Yūsī's position within the Arabic literary tradition. Yet the geographies of authors from the Maghreb are worth exploring, particularly those contemporary with al-Yūsī whose lives overlapped with the founding of the modern state. In *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727*, Nabil Matar observes that in the seventeenth century specific terms corresponding to discrete national identities began to be used by writers in the greater Maghreb: "Tunisian/*tunisi*, Algerian/*jaza'iri*, and Moroccan/*maghribi* from *al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*."⁷¹ During this time, Matar writes, "a consciousness of national identity was slowly emerging in North Africa."⁷² By looking at the period's literature we can see how authors chose to relate to the spaces they inhabited. The two texts of al-Yūsī's examined here begin to tell a complicated story. The identities he constructs are highly contingent upon the genres in which he writes, which are, in turn, connected to the particular condition of exile he expresses. The epistle's oppositional stance to the sultan requires a rejection of an inclusive spatial identity, negating the potential for anything resembling a broader national consciousness in the text. In the verse from *al-Muḥāḍarāt*, however, al-Yūsī moves closer to the national identity Matar describes and which Kannūn's anthology implicitly claims. The poem enables its author to envision himself as belonging to multiple geographies, both rural and urban, that begin to create a more unified picture of seventeenth-century Morocco. It is perhaps not just the term *maghribī* that we should look for in the literary production of early modern Morocco, but the spaces and identities to which these texts lay claim.

71 Matar, 31.

72 Ibid.