Abstract
The Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (né Chelico) was born in Adana in the French Mandate of Cilicia on 28 August 1919. Jabra’s Syriac Orthodox family survived the Sayfo genocide and probably hailed from the Kurdish-speaking Syriac village of Midên in Tur Abdin, in northern Mesopotamia. In the early 1920s, the Chelico family immigrated to Bethlehem, where Jabra grew up. Jabra was a consummate autobiographer who wrote two autobiographies, six autobiographical novels, and dozens of personal essays. Yet he never revealed his family’s history in Tur Abdin, his birth in Adana, and his immigration to Palestine as a child. In this article, the author exposes and contextualizes biographical facts that Jabra concealed. Tamplin analyzes Jabra’s two autobiographies – *The First Well* (1987) and *Princesses’ Street* (1994) – and his novel *In Search of Walid Masoud* (1978) in light of these revelations to argue that Jabra’s project of “self-creation” (Neuwirth, 1998) extends well beyond his first autobiography. Moreover, Jabra’s lifelong project to propel traditional, collectivist Arab society into modernity by valorizing individual experience precluded other possible sources of identity, such as family history, from compromising Jabra’s sense of modern Palestinian national identity. The author proposes new directions in which to take Jabra criticism, such as trauma studies. Until the full range of concealed facts about Jabra’s life is exposed, literary biographers and critics of Jabra should regard his work with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Key words
Autobiography; novel; Palestinian; Syriac; Sayfo; genocide; trauma; suspicion; migration; national identity.
How a great writer’s relations treat his personal papers is a matter no one can do anything about. We can only hope that they do not complicate matters more than is necessary, as they are acting within their legal rights in the ownership of those papers, whether to preserve a family secret or out of fear of a particular scandal.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, “So That One’s Personal Papers Are Not Scattered by the Winds” in Mu’ayashat al-nimrah wa-awraj ukhra [Living with the tigress and other papers]

Most studies on the life and work of the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra state that he was born in Bethlehem on 28 August in either 1919 or 1920. The ambiguity surrounding Jabra’s birth year frustrates the literary biographer, and Jabra himself compounds this frustration by never mentioning in his works where or when, exactly, he was born. What literary historians know for certain is that Jabra died a Muslim in Baghdad on 12 December 1994. In 1952 Jabra converted to Islam from Syriac Orthodox Christianity, the religion into which he was born, in order to marry Lami’a Barqi al-‘Askari, the daughter of an elite Iraqi military family. Jabra and Lami’a had two sons, Sadeer and Yasser, and between their births, Jabra obtained Iraqi citizenship. Despite his registered Iraqi citizenship, Jabra considered himself a Palestinian “to the roots of his hair,” like his character Marwan in In Search of Walid Masoud. After all, Jabra grew up in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, spoke Arabic natively, and studied at iconic Palestinian educational institutions: the National School in Bethlehem, the Rashidiyya School in Jerusalem, and the Arab College atop Jabal al-Mukabbir. Moreover, Jabra studied under the Palestinian nationalist figures Ishaq Musa al-Husayni, Ibrahim Tuqan, and Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi. Jabra’s nostalgic portrayals of the blue hills, green valleys, and red anemones of springtime Bethlehem give one the impression that Jabra could not have been born far from the “first well” of his Bethlehem childhood.

Jabra was in fact born Jabra Ibrahim Gawriye Mas’ud Chelico on 28 August 1919 in Adana, which was then part of the French Mandate of Cilicia. Jabra’s parents Ibrahim and Maryam were Syriac Orthodox Christians (Arab. suryan; Syr. suryoye) belonging to the Chelico family [Shaliko], who probably hailed from the Kurdish-speaking village of Midên (Arab. Middo/Middu), now Ögündük, in Tur Abdin, the geographic Assyrian heartland in northern Mesopotamia. Jabra’s family most likely fled Adana ahead of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s revanchist army to settle in Bethlehem in 1921 or 1922.

Critics of modern Arabic literature overwhelmingly agree that Jabra’s work treads the line between fiction and autobiography; one cannot understand Jabra’s autobiographies without understanding his fiction, and vice versa. Indeed, Jabra’s autobiographies rely on fictional techniques, and many of his novels’ characters were based on himself and his friends. By his own admission, his novels were autobiographical, and his autobiographies were novelistic:

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When I wrote my novels and used an aspect of my life in them, I didn’t imagine that I would write an autobiography, so I gave myself the freedom to weave those autobiographical threads into the rest of the novelistic fabric. When I came to write my autobiography and I finished, I found that some of the events that I could have added to The First Well, I had already spoken about elsewhere . . . In some cases I spoke better about them in my novels than I did in my autobiography . . . That reason is what actually made me refrain from mentioning certain details; and I won’t hide from you that if I had continued writing the autobiography, I would have restored very many things that I mentioned in my novels and that happened after I passed the stage of childhood . . . And if I retold those events, it would be as if I had rewritten entire chapters from my novels . . . I know that this is an extraordinary admission because I usually say that my novels are separate from me . . . And they really are, but here you’ve cast me into my own “well.”

In other words, Jabra’s novels are “separate from him” in the way that Ibrahim al-Mazini’s Ibrahim the Writer, Taha Husayn’s The Days, or Muhammad Shukri’s For Bread Alone are “separate” from their authors. There has been a great deal of overlap between autobiography and the novel in modern Arabic fiction, and in modern fiction in general. Jabra writes that his biggest influences, when he began writing fiction in the 1940s, were James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and Virginia Woolf.

Jabra’s autobiographical writings – his six novels and the two works he marked as autobiographies – were endowed with a strong sense of personal and national purpose. Angelika Neuwirth argues that Jabra’s autobiography The First Well formed part of his lifelong project to propel a traditional, collectivist Arab society toward the acceptance of individual autonomy, starting with that society’s acceptance of Jabra’s own individual autonomy. Faysal Darraj has shown that Jabra believed both that the 1948 Nakba was a defeat of Arab tradition by Euro-Israeli modernity and that the Arabs had to modernize through the transformation of their culture. The process of transformation, to Jabra, had to begin with the written word. In other words, the road to Jerusalem lay in linguistic and cultural reform. Tetz Rooke argues that “Jabra’s life-story is naturally also connected to the Palestinian national struggle for liberation; the collective significance of his personal experience is undeniable.” Issa Boullata calls Jabra the last of the Nahda men, capitalizing on the English connotations of “Renaissance man,” and Darraj claims that Jabra viewed himself as a prophet-intellectual (al-muthaqaf al-nabiyy). Critics agree that Jabra’s autobiographical works merge the personal with the political in his and the Palestinian people’s struggle to achieve modernity and progress, a sense of identity, and purpose within the world.

Scholars’ assumptions about Jabra’s unshakeable Palestinian identity may take on a different cast when we learn about Jabra’s concomitant concealment of his family history in Tur Abdin, his family’s survival of the Sayfo genocide, his birth in Adana, and his immigration to Palestine with his family in the early 1920s. These facts trouble
the tidy, uncomplicated image of the exiled Palestinian intellectual that Jabra presented to the world. Why did Jabra deceive his readers about his family history, birth, and early childhood? What new readings of his work can these revelations generate?

In the eastern Mediterranean of the early twentieth century, national borders, nationalist aspirations, and national identities were in extreme flux. It should not be surprising that as dyed-in-the-wool a Palestinian as Jabra was born outside Palestine. While national borders, aspirations and identities were arguably firmer by the time Jabra began writing political poetry in support of the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, they were firmer still by the time Jabra was exiled to Baghdad in 1948. Yet, to my knowledge, in Jabra’s nearly sixty years of artistic output — poems, paintings, short stories, novels, essays, screenplays, criticism, and autobiographies — no overt references to his northern Mesopotamian roots appear. Jabra referred to his Syriac identity in his autobiographies, but he gave no indication of the geographic affiliation which that identity implied. Those indications appear instead on official papers: his Iraqi passport, in which he lists his birthplace as Turkey; and his transfer application to Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, on 8 October 1940, in which he lists his birthplace as Adana, Turkey. Although we do not know for certain, Jabra may have feared the cries of a Zionist “birther,” as it were, who would attempt to discredit Jabra’s experience and identity — and, through him, those of the Palestinian people — by claiming that Jabra could not be a Palestinian because he was not born in Palestine. Jabra may have hidden facts about his family history and early life in order not to damage his personal and political project of Arab national uplift through the modernization of culture, which he sought to achieve through a focus on individual experience in his autobiographical fiction and autobiographies. However, if to conceal his family background was his object, then why did Jabra undermine that object by scattering clues that gestured toward his Mesopotamian background throughout his autobiographical works?

We must consider the possibility that Jabra knew that his family origins would be discovered. This anxiety may account for the large amount of discussion in his novels of hasab wa-nasab (ancestry and pedigree), family history, and certain characters’
investigations into the roots of Jabra-like protagonists. We must also consider the possibility that Jabra may have been unaffected by his family history, birth, and early childhood. He may have considered them irrelevant to his identity, formed through personal experiences during his childhood in Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Yet it is conspicuous that a writer so dedicated to autobiographical writing and self-reflection shunned the sources of identity that other autobiographers have found compelling and meaningful: their ancestors, parents and grandparents, and their homeland; family traditions; religious or ethnic identity; birth; and early childhood experiences.16 Jabra’s lifelong curation of his autobiography gives credence to Neuwirth’s argument that Jabra’s object in writing _The First Well_ was self-creation.17 To a certain extent, every autobiographer is a self-creator. But few autobiographers fail to mention their family history, birth, and early childhood entirely. My object in this article is fourfold: to reveal biographical facts that Jabra concealed; to examine Jabra’s autobiographies _The First Well_ and _Princesses’ Street_ and his novel _In Search of Walid Masoud_ in light of those facts; to begin to gauge both the nature of Jabra’s relationship with those facts and the extent of what we know and can know before more facts come to light; and to signal new directions for generative readings of Jabra’s works.

“Family history, with all its ramifications”

The term “Assyrian” is often used to refer to ethnic Assyrians who espouse one of the many branches of eastern Christianity traditionally associated with the Assyrians: the Syriac Orthodox (“Jacobites”), the Assyrian Church of the East (“Nestorians”), Syriac Catholics, and Chaldean Catholics. Jabra’s family belonged to the Syriac Orthodox Church.18 At the beginning of the twentieth century, the vast majority of Syriacs inhabited the regions of Tur Abdin, Diyarbakir, and Mardin in what is now southeastern Turkey. Those mountainous regions lie between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in northern Mesopotamia. The modern Syriac language is descended from Aramaic, and modern Syriacs claim cultural affiliation, if not ethnic descent, from the ancient Assyrians.19 For the eight hundred years preceding 1932, the Syriac Orthodox Church was based out of Mor Hananyo Monastery outside Mardin.

Beginning in the 1890s, the Ottoman army, Kurdish irregular forces, and Turkish Muslim civilians undertook intermittent but systematic massacres of Syriac Christian communities in their geographic homeland in northern Mesopotamia and southern Anatolia, in and around the borderlands of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria.20 These massacres reached a fever pitch in 1915–16 during the Sayfo genocide, during which around 250,000 Assyrians – half of the world’s total population of Assyrians at the time – perished. In the 1920s, Ataturk expelled most of the rest from their homes in the new state of Turkey to seek refuge in neighboring countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.21 Today, Assyrian Christians live dispersed all over the world, with large populations in Iraq, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. A few thousand remain in Turkey despite continued persecution.
In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the fertile land of the Adana vilayet, watered by the Seyhan River, became a cotton-producing hub, attracting immigrants from outlying regions to work the land.22 By the early twentieth century, Adana was home to some 1,250 ethnic Assyrian Christians. 23 In early 1909, local Ottoman officials in the Adana vilayet – the military governor, judge, mufti, and notables – spread rumors of Armenian insurrection, inciting Muslim mobs to slaughter local Christians. By the end of April 1909, twenty-five thousand Armenian Christians had been systematically slaughtered throughout the Cilicia province with official Ottoman imprimatur. Syriac Christians were also caught up in the massacres, and 418 of them perished.24

After World War I, the French established the Mandate of Cilicia to seize the region’s fertile lands and to protect local Christians, four million of whom Ottoman Muslims had slaughtered over the preceding thirty years.25 In 1922, Ataturk’s administration signaled its intention to cleanse Adana of its remaining Christians, and many local Christians fled the city before the French retreat from Cilicia and the onslaught of the Turkish army.26

The Syriac Orthodox Church has a strong and ancient connection to the Holy Land. The majority of the rural inhabitants of Byzantine Palestine before the Arabo-Islamic conquests were Syriac Orthodox Christians. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman censuses recorded no Syriac Orthodox Christians inhabiting Palestine. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, internal migration within the Ottoman Empire brought Syriacs to Palestine in two key waves.27 The first wave occurred in 1895, when a delegation of approximately twenty families on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land heard of the Hamidian massacres then occurring in their homeland, in which around twenty-five thousand Assyrians were slain. They decided to settle in Palestine. The second major wave of Syriac immigration to Palestine occurred during the first three decades of the twentieth century, peaking in 1917 during the Sayfo genocide. George Kiraz reports that members of the second wave came mostly from Mardin, Diyarbakir, Azakh, Esfes, Kharpur, Middo, and Ma’sarte, towns and villages depopulated of Christians and Turkified. Most second-wave Syriac immigrants to Palestine settled in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Haifa.28 According to Butrus Ni’neh, the head priest at St. Mary’s Syriac Orthodox Church in Bethlehem, established in 1926, the majority of Bethlehem’s Syriacs arrived in 1922.29

In 1909, Jabra’s mother Maryam, her twin brother Yusuf, and her first husband Dawud were most likely present in the Adana vilayet, where the latter two were murdered in what Yusuf Ibrahim Jabra called the “massacres of the Armenians.” Four years after Dawud’s murder, in 1913 or 1914, Maryam married again, this time to Ibrahim Chelico (b. 1890/1891), who probably hailed from the Kurdish-speaking Syriac village of Midën in Tur Abdin.30 Ibrahim may have been in the Adana vilayet as a seasonal worker or as an internal economic migrant, or perhaps Maryam traveled back home – wherever that was – after Dawud was killed and met Ibrahim in Midën or in Tur Abdin. Maryam gave birth to Jabra in Adana in 1919, and it stands to reason that other family members – Ibrahim, Maryam’s sons Murad (b. 1909, by Dawud) and Yusuf (b. 1915, by Ibrahim), and her mother, Basma – were there then too.31
do not know exactly when, how, or under what circumstances the Chelicos moved from Adana to Bethlehem. However, because so many Christians fled Adana before Atatürk’s army and because most of Bethlehem’s Syriacs migrated there in 1922, it is likely that the Chelicos moved in 1921 or 1922.

A quarter-century later, in January 1948, a twenty-eight-year-old Jabra Ibrahim Jabra would flee once again, from the newly purchased family home in Jerusalem’s Qatamon neighborhood to his childhood stomping ground of Bethlehem, and then over the next few months to Amman, Beirut, Damascus, and, eventually, Baghdad. Jabra found lodging at the Baghdad Hotel in the fall of 1948 and began teaching English literature at the University of Baghdad. Jabra would go on to marry Lami’a Barqi al-‘Askari, the great-niece of the Iraqi Colonel General Bakr Sidqi al-‘Askari (1899–1937). A former Ottoman military officer of Kurdish origin, Sidqi devised and carried out the Simele Massacre of 1933, in which around three thousand Assyrian Christians were slaughtered in sixty villages throughout northern Iraq.

Why did Jabra conceal his Syriac family’s history of trauma, victimization, and genocide in his autobiographical works, especially when that history came to confront him during his exile in Iraq? An autobiography would have been an appropriate place to discuss the facts of his family history, birth, and early childhood, and Jabra wrote two. Could the cementing of Jabra’s sense of Palestinian national identity during his adolescence and youth, in addition to the growing Zionist threat, have demanded that he conceal his family’s provenance from outside Palestine? One cornerstone of modern Palestinian national identity is family origin in the land of Palestine. Yet what if one comes from a family that fled to Palestine in the 1920s not because of economic opportunities but because of the imminent threat of genocide? Jabra could have chosen to repress the trauma his Syriac family suffered because more pressing concerns demanded his attention: the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, the 1948 Nakba, and the challenges ahead. In other words, his time, place and allegiance demanded that he be a Palestinian Arab first and a Syriac refugee of genocide in a faraway second.

“Another Matter Altogether” in The First Well

In the preface to his first autobiography, The First Well (Al-bi’r al-ula, 1987), Jabra states unequivocally that the book is not a family history. The First Well deals with the formative experiences that Jabra had in Bethlehem and Jerusalem during “the first twelve years of my life, or rather with seven or eight years of those, ending with my moving from Bethlehem to Jerusalem with my parents in 1932.” In other words, The First Well covers Jabra’s life from approximately age four through twelve, starting at least two years after Jabra’s family immigrated to Bethlehem. Jabra justifies his decision not to mention any details of his family’s history, writing: “Nor am I here writing a history of my family, for that is another matter altogether, and I don’t claim
I have the ability to do it.”37 Jabra continues: “And lest I should slide into family history with all its ramifications (tempting as that may be), I have preferred to track the development of one single being who daily grew in consciousness, knowledge, and emotion and who lived in innocence and clung to it even as it gradually abandoned him.”38 Jabra distinguishes himself from those autobiographers who choose to focus on their adolescence or youth, when sexual feelings awaken. Unlike them, Jabra focuses on the “first well,” his childhood, “the source of a magic, constant and beyond explanation, the fountainhead of a radiance which cannot be defined.”39

Jabra’s focus on these particular eight years allows him to evade mentioning his family history in Tur Abdin, his birth in Adana, and his family’s immigration to Bethlehem around 1922. The revelation of these facts would probably call for a few words of explanation, although they would not necessarily cause him to “slide into family history with all its ramifications.” Jabra’s focus on “one single being” in The First Well could be construed as part of his lifelong project to help the Arabs achieve modernity and progress through the validation of individual experience against the tyranny of tradition, as Neuwirth and Darraj write. However, Jabra emphasizes that he is writing about “the development of one single being” to the exclusion of “family history with all its ramifications,” as if the two were mutually exclusive entities or potentially contradictory ones. For Jabra, his Palestinian environment was that element most constitutive of his sense of identity. One wonders whether and to what extent that “developing being” was also a product of the mountains of Tur Abdin, the war-ravaged city of Adana, a traumatized family of genocide survivors, and a childhood flight from Ataturk’s genocidal army.

Along with many Syriacs from Bethlehem, Jabra’s older brother Yusuf Ibrahim Jabra saw no contradiction between his Syriac identity and his modern Palestinian national identity, with roots in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ.40 Jabra’s concealment of his family history, birth, and immigration may have served as a kind of insurance against the potential for cynical Zionist propaganda to cast doubt on the authenticity of his Palestinianness and that of other Palestinians born outside historic Palestine. Through the purposeful elision of key details of his family provenance and early life in The First Well, Jabra sought to plant his self, and his sense of self, irrevocably in the environment of Palestine by valorizing individual experience at the expense of his non-Palestinian family past. By eliding select autobiographical details from The First Well, Jabra precluded his family history from compromising his deeply rooted sense of modern Palestinian national identity. Jabra ensured that his first well would be remembered as Bethlehem, and not Adana or Midën.

Behind Jabra’s choices about which details of his life to reveal to his reader, he does allude to his family’s traumatic past. Jabra recounts asking his parents Ibrahim and Maryam about their memories of the days before World War I. One day, Maryam makes herself some coffee and, unprompted, says: “The days of yore … your father remembers the days of yore … I swear by your life, we saw nothing but woe in them.”

I asked her, “Do you remember those days well?” She took one more sip.
from her cup and said, “Remember them? Those before the war? Those after the war? I always try to forget them.”

A wave of memories carried her away. My father helped her, and she helped him to recall some of that past, which appeared to me to be very remote and about which my father often said he was happy because his children did not know it.

Murad was a baby seven or eight months old when his father, Dawood, my mother’s first husband, and her twin and only brother, Yusuf, were both killed on the same day in 1909 in tragic circumstances. My mother was then a young woman seventeen years old. She wore black in mourning for her brother and her husband for four years (as did her mother, my grandmother, Basma). Then one day, my father appeared in her life, and “he captivated her,” as she said, with his height, his handsome looks, and his dashing character. He was only one year older than she was, and he said to her, “Take off your black clothes, lady, and you shall never again wear them after today …”

On the day he married her, he promised her and said, contrary to custom, “If our firstborn is a boy, I’ll name him Yusuf after your brother. As for the second, I’ll name him after my father. Are you satisfied?”

My mother said, “I took off the black clothes, thank God. But the war soon came, and they took away your father as a soldier … oh! The days of yore … we saw nothing but woe in them.”

That woe-filled family past, which appeared to the young Jabra to be “very remote,” had in fact occurred about fifteen years before that conversation. While Ibrahim stated that he was happy that his children “did not know” that past – in other words, had not experienced it firsthand – his stepson Murad and his son Yusuf had indeed experienced it firsthand. Yusuf provides a more detailed version of the same facts, in an interview that Samir Fawzi Hajj conducted in 1998, when Yusuf was 82 or 83:

I was born in 1915. My mother, when she married my father, was a widow, and she had a son, my brother Murad. Her husband had been killed, along with her brother, in the massacres of the Armenians [madhabih al-arman]. When my father married my mother, they agreed to name their firstborn son Yusuf after my maternal uncle who’d been killed, and thus was I named. As for my brother Jabra, he was named after our [paternal] grandfather. The original name for “Jabra” is “Jabriyya.” Our grandfather’s name was Jabriyya and not Jabra – that is, Jibra’il – and in colloquial Syriac, Gawriye. In colloquial Syriac the “b” becomes a “w” so Jabriyyah becomes Gawriye. When Jabra enrolled at the Rashidiyya School, he registered his [family] name as Jabra, even though my grandfather had never heard the name “Jabra” in his life.
Yusuf reveals that Jabra’s politic phrase – the “tragic circumstances” that had led to the deaths of their uncle Yusuf and Maryam’s first husband Dawud in 1909 – were in fact the “massacres of the Armenians.” It was the Armenians of the Adana vilayet who were massacred in 1909, and we can therefore place Maryam in the Adana vilayet, if not the city of Adana, in 1909. We can also confidently place Ibrahim in Adana in 1913 or 1914, when he married Maryam. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra’s use of the evasive euphemism “tragic circumstances” to describe the “massacres of the Armenians” may indicate his desire not to “slide into family history, with all its ramifications.” For if Jabra, the exiled Palestinian intellectual, had written in 1987 that his family had been in Adana in 1909, his reader may have been distracted from the Palestinian identity Jabra had spent his life constructing. Later in the same interview, Yusuf confirms the Chelico family’s continuing presence in Anatolia: “My cousins are in Turkey.”

How did the Chelicos end up in Bethlehem and not Mosul, Urmia, or Cyprus? To my knowledge, few robust sources exist on the manner in which Syriac refugees traveled to Palestine or the British Mandatory administration’s absorption of them. Within Palestine, Bethlehem was the most popular town for the resettlement of Syriacs. According to the 1922 Palestine census, 406 Syriac Orthodox Christians were then living in Bethlehem, compared to 371 in Jerusalem. Butrus Ni’meh states unequivocally:

The Syriacs in Palestine are from the southern part of Turkey. Their ancestors came here about one hundred years ago…. In 1922, most of the Syriacs came to the Holy Land and founded a small Syriac Orthodox church, while they still hope to return to their homeland (watan). Cognizant of the difficulty of returning, they began buying land, and they founded upon it the present Syriac Orthodox church in 1926.

According to Ni’meh, approximately 1,200 Syriacs live in Bethlehem today, while around three hundred others live dispersed between Jericho, Jerusalem, and Nazareth.

In his interview with Hajj, Yusuf states that he remembers his family’s arrival to Bethlehem in the 1920s. Yusuf recalls this while discussing the extent of the technological changes that he witnessed during his long life:

I remember in the 1920s when we came to Bethlehem. The roads weren’t paved. The cars went tuk tuk tuk. The situation was totally different. The things I’ve seen in my life in the 1920s and the 1930s, and after that, electricity … and how we used to go to Bab al-Dayr …. Many changes have come.

Yusuf also mentions in the Hajj interview that “Jabra is an acquired name. People don’t know us as the Jabra family.” Indeed, people know Jabra’s family as the Chelico family, a surname shared by other Syriacs from Adana and Bitlis. One wonders whether the young Jabra’s choice to list his family name as “Jabra” instead of “Chelico” was guileless. Finding out the answer may help shed light on the dynamics of Palestinian nationalism in the context of secondary educational institutions.
in the 1930s. Someone – although it is not clear who – was responsible for Jabra’s nuclear family’s becoming Jabra, and not Chelico. Jabra was twelve years old when he registered at the Rashidiyya School in Jerusalem, and the registration form may have required him to list only his given name, his father’s, and his grandfather’s. He may not have known that his grandfather’s given name was Jabriyya [Syr. Gawriye], and not Jabra. Did the school principal ‘Arif al-Budayri elide Jabra’s strange and foreign-sounding Syriac name to close ranks around a nascent Palestinian national identity that demanded a commitment to linguistic Arab nationalism? A comparable dynamic existed elsewhere in Palestine, where Shimshelevich became Ben-Zvi and Grün became Ben-Gurion, also for nationalist reasons. Behind the new surname “Jabra” and between the lines of The First Well lies the fact that the Chelico family survived a genocide in which 250,000 of their fellow Assyrians died.

In his published work, Jabra never claims to have been born in Palestine. He gives no indication where he was born, and Jabra scholars and even close friends of Jabra have therefore concluded that he must have been born in Palestine. Jabra does, however, conjure a smokescreen of hints and winks that allude to a Bethlehem nativity. For example, he reminisces about the use of gasoline cans for water in Bethlehem during the days of World War I, as if his family had been there then. He insists that the “first well” of one’s life is the well of childhood, foreclosing other potential candidates for “first well,” such as family history, birth, or early childhood. Jabra could have corrected the historical record once scholars and friends began writing that he was born in Bethlehem, but he did not. Desmond Stewart’s book The Palestinians is one example of Jabra’s purposeful non-correction. Jabra read his English friend’s book, cited it in his second autobiography Princesses’ Street, and never mentioned the falsity of Stewart’s claim that Jabra had been born in Bethlehem. Yet because Jabra grew up in Bethlehem, and because his novels’ autobiographical protagonists are born in Bethlehem or a Bethlehem-like town, even the close reader of Jabra’s oeuvre walks away from it believing that Jabra, Darraj’s prophet-intellectual, must also have been born in the birthplace of Christ.

Ancient Assyria and Modern Assyrians in Princesses’ Street

Jabra’s second autobiography, Princesses’ Street (Shari‘ al-amirat, 1994) was published months before his death. Covering his late teens to his mid-thirties, the book consists of six autobiographical essays on Jabra’s experiences as a college student in England during World War II and his experiences in Baghdad as a young professor of English literature. In Princesses’ Street, Jabra maintains the smokescreen that he established in The First Well: he never claims outright that he was born in Palestine, but he casts hints and allusions that would lead the reader to believe that he was. For example, Jabra asks rhetorically, “When were we Palestinians, ever since I was born, not passing through difficulties as individuals or as a nation?” It is true that the Palestinians were passing through difficulties as a nation when Jabra was born in 1919 in Adana. The phrase “ever since I was born,” however, invites the reader to believe that Jabra was born a Palestinian. It is very unlikely that Jabra’s
parents, grandparents, or siblings would have considered themselves Palestinians as they welcomed Ibrahim’s and Maryam’s second son into the world in postwar Adana.

One key difference between *The First Well* and *Princesses’ Street* is location. Whereas in *The First Well* Jabra was ensconced in the Palestinian milieu of his childhood, memories of the Mesopotamia that his parents had fled lay in wait for him in Iraq. In Iraq, Jabra could visit the ruins of Nimrud, which his ethnic Assyrian ancestors had built. Syriac, Assyrian, and Chaldean churches dotted the landscape of Baghdad. Moreover, tens of thousands of ethnic Assyrians inhabited the plains of Nineveh in northern Iraq, where they had settled after fleeing the Sayfo genocide en masse. In addition to the Assyrian ruins and the Assyrian people that Jabra encountered in Iraq, he fell in love with a woman whose great uncle had engineered the 1933 Simele Massacre of Assyrians in northern Iraq. These facts invite an investigation into Jabra’s relationship with the geographical homeland that his parents had fled from and that he fled to.

As a newly arrived professor in Baghdad, Jabra befriended a group of English archeologists, headed by Max Mallowan, who were excavating the Assyrian city of Nimrud in northern Iraq. The ancient Assyrians spoke a Semitic language and occupied the territory around the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia. Their civilization, founded around 2500 BCE, reached its height in the tenth to seventh centuries BCE. Jabra reflects that Mallowan

extracted, with the obstinacy of a lover, history’s evidence and hidden mysteries from the depths of the hills in the north, those barren hills that concealed in their interiors obscure relics of man’s achievements, of which most often nothing remained to us, not even the merest suggestion.

Jabra’s lifelong obsession with “hidden mysteries,” documented by Darraj, is echoed in this memory, evoked in the last months of Jabra’s life, when his Syriac family history had indeed become a “hidden mystery” and an “obscure relic.”

Jabra remembers the exact date of his visit to Nimrud:

On March 22, 1951, to be exact, I finally had the opportunity to visit Nimrud/Calah, the capital of the Assyrians during one of their great periods in the ninth and eighth centuries BC. It had been established four centuries before that, and the Medians were the ones who finally put an end to it by destroying and burning it in 612 BC when Nineveh, the next capital of the Assyrians, fell at the hands of the Babylonian Nabopolassar, father of King Nebuchadnezzar. The Nimrud/Calah civilization lasted for about six hundred years.

As Jabra lists the sterile dates, names, and facts, there resounds a fecund silence that one senses could be filled with Jabra’s own connection of his personal past with that of the Assyrians. However, despite the list of humdrum facts, Jabra remembered the exact date of his visit to Nimrud after more than forty years. Why? Jabra writes:

I still remember the exact date of the visit because it was the second
day after the beginning of spring, and the day became associated in my memory with a deeply felt emotion upon seeing the remains of one of the most wonderful of the *ancient Arab civilizations*, as far as art and culture were concerned.\(^{60}\)

Jabra’s assumption that the Assyrians were an Arab civilization is probably a result of his reading of British historian Arnold Toynbee, whom Jabra met while Toynbee was on a speaking tour in the Arab world. Toynbee considered Assyrian civilization the bedrock upon which Arab civilization was later built.\(^{61}\) Jabra writes:

The Aramaean or “Syriac” civilization (See Arnold Toynbee’s *A Study of History*) was the ancient civilization from which the later Arab civilization proceeded; it was therefore a continuation, in Palestine, of the Canaanite Arab situation as far as atmosphere and thought.\(^{62}\)

Moreover, Toynbee’s judgments about the role of the Palestinian people in the Arab world accorded with Jabra’s. According to Jabra, Toynbee likened [the Palestinians’] expulsion from their country to the expulsion by the Turks of the Greek thinkers and artists from Byzantium in 1453; these thinkers then spread throughout Europe and were a major factor in ending the European dark ages and bringing about the Renaissance. The Palestinians, he told me, were having the same seminal influence on the Arab world. It was their fate to be the germinators of a new age, the heralds of a new civilization.\(^{63}\)

Instead of emphasizing his own unique Syriac heritage, Jabra causes “Syriac civilization” to be the cultural ancestor of Arab civilization, obviating the need to discuss the Syriacs’ geographical homeland in Tur Abdin, where Jabra’s family had come from originally. As long as the Syriac civilizational legacy had been subsumed within the Arab, the entire Arab world could be Jabra’s home. To Jabra, the Canaanites were the Syriacs’ past, the Syriacs were the Arabs’ past, and the Palestinians were the Arabs’ future. Raised in the very town the Canaanites had established to worship their fertility god Lehem, Jabra’s life in 1950s Baghdad lay at the momentous intersection of all such relevant civilizations – Canaanite, Syriac, Arab, and Palestinian. In his mind, the exiled Palestinian prophet-intellectual was ideally placed to wrest the Arabs from their “dark ages” and usher in a new Arab Renaissance, a new *Nahda*.

Whatever Toynbee’s views on the ancient Assyrians or the modern Arabs, he was extremely sympathetic toward the modern Assyrians. Along with Viscount James Bryce, Toynbee compiled the report entitled *The Treatment of the Armenians*, the French translation of which was circulated at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20. The report was the product of a Blue Book commissioned by the British government and originally titled *The Treatment of the Armenians and the Assyrians*. The initial report detailed eyewitness accounts of massacres of Assyrians committed by Ottoman
soldiers during World War I. However, Viscount Bryce, an Armenophile, decided to shorten the title of the report and its text, eliding accounts of massacres of Assyrians. Bryce’s editorial decision buried the plight of the Assyrians for decades such that historians came to refer to Sayfo as the “Forgotten Genocide.”

In addition to Jabra’s enchantment with ancient Assyrian architecture, he remarks on the many Assyrian waiters who staffed the hotels and restaurants of Baghdad. While dining with his colleague Mrs. Kazin at Baghdad’s posh Alawiyya Club, Jabra recalls that:

Most of the servants and waiters in it were polite Athourians, modern-day descendants of the ancient Assyrians, known for their perfect service and discretion. They spoke Arabic with some difficulty and with a characteristic heavy accent, and they also spoke a kind of limited English with which they managed their affairs (there would come a time ten years later when the club would be Iraqized, but would still continue to be the distinguished social meeting place in town par excellence).

Jabra writes that the modern Assyrians’ Volkgeist was characterized by their “perfect service and discretion,” evincing a nineteenth-century romantic emphasis on national particularity. Such romantic racist thinking engendered the kind of racial nationalism that led to the massacres of the twentieth century such as Sayfo, the Holocaust, and the Nakba.

Jabra explains that he had come to the Alawiyya Club unknowingly underdressed. Because of his innate discretion and politeness, the Assyrian waiter Sargon mentions Jabra’s sartorial faux pas to Mrs. Kazin. She and Jabra chuckle at his unpreparedness and joke about his love for scandalizing the bourgeoisie. Jabra deftly turns the memory, in which he could have mentioned something—anything!—about the recent traumatic past that he and his family shared with the wait staff, into a blithe occasion to engage in the French national pastime: épater les bourgeois. Did Jabra deliberately fail to mention his own ethnic, religious, and geographical connections to the “Athourians” who worked at the Alawiyya Club, or did he just forget? Jabra’s failure to mention the fact that the Alawiyya Club’s wait staff were his ethno-religious cousins resembles the manner in which he nonchalantly recounts facts about the Nimrud ruins without once hinting that he, as a Syriac, was a direct heir to that civilization and its architectural glories. One generation prior, Jabra’s and Sargon’s parents had fled the same genocide. If Jabra’s parents Ibrahim and Maryam had fled east instead of south, they may have settled in the plains of Nineveh as well. Jabra and Sargon could have grown up together, and Jabra’s “first well” could have been Mosul, Tel Kepe, or Sinjar.

One interesting fact about Jabra’s life that he discusses briefly in Princesses’ Street is his marriage to the great-niece of Bakr Sidqi. After World War I, the British settled the Assyrian refugees from Anatolia in the very plains their ancestors had fled. Over the centuries, Assyrians fled from those plains to the mountainous Hakkari region in southeastern Anatolia, where they could better defend themselves against their Turkish and Kurdish neighbors who harassed them with or without official sanction.
Yet no less than twenty years after the British resettlement of Anatolian Assyrians in northern Iraq, the Iraqi army, led by Bakr Sidqi, a former Ottoman soldier, carried out a massacre of Assyrians so brutal that it inspired the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin to coin the 1933 neologism “genocide.”

Jabra fails to mention Sidqi’s massacre of the Assyrians in *Princesses’ Street*. Instead, Jabra praises Sidqi for his loyalty and sense of self-sacrifice:

Lami’a was also the niece of General Bakr Sidqi al-Askari, who was the first person in modern Arab history to stage a military coup d’état: in 1936 he rose in support of the man he loved and revered, King Ghazi, son of Faysal I, giving his life as a price less than a year after the coup, when he was assassinated by the opposing factions.

Why did Jabra not mention the ‘Askari family’s skeletons in the closet? Could the reason have had to do with censorship in Saddam’s Iraq in the early 1990s? Did it have to do with Jabra’s fear of stoking internecine tensions in a country as ethnically and religiously diverse as Iraq? Could such a revelation have hurt Jabra’s standing in Iraqi high society or dredged up too many corpses for Iraqi society to stomach? Could Jabra himself have wanted the secret buried in the hills, like the ruins of Nimrud, to remain a hidden mystery? Despite all these possibilities, the fact is that we do not know why Jabra acted as he did. Discovering his motivations and their sources would shed light on the biography of one of the Arab world’s greatest autobiographers.

Jabra hints at a strained relationship with his in-laws in *Princesses’ Street*. Lami’a’s mother, Umm ‘Amir, felt consternation that her daughter would marry a Palestinian Christian. What Jabra fails to mention, and what was surely not lost on the ‘Askari family, was that Jabra was not just a Christian but a Syriac Orthodox Christian and a close relative of the fierce, restive, traumatized, and nationalistic refugee population that Umm ‘Amir’s paternal uncle Bakr had pacified through genocide just fifteen years before Jabra’s arrival to Baghdad in 1948. Despite the uncomfortable relations that could have existed between Jabra and the ‘Askaris, Jabra reports that he got along effortlessly with Lami’a’s brother ‘Amir and the rest of her family members. All but a few family members came to bless their marriage, which proceeded after Jabra converted to Islam. In the name of love, Jabra eschewed the religious affiliation with his immediate family in Palestine by converting to Islam. In the name of love, he may also have chosen or been forced to eschew his ethnic affiliation with his literal cousins in Turkey and his fellow Assyrians in Iraq. Jabra may have felt no religious connection to the Syriacs and no ethnic affiliation with the Assyrians as a man in his early seventies sitting down to write his second autobiography. Yet whether he felt a connection or not, he never mentions that connection – or the lack of it, or the possibility of it. How can literary biographers interpret an absence?

Jabra glosses over these uncomfortable facts of modern Middle Eastern history as smoothly as he does his family history, birth, and immigration to Palestine. Yet
on two occasions in Princesses’ Street, Jabra uses cryptic language to hint that there is more below the surface of his text. First, he mentions that “in my innermost soul, there were deep-seated sorrows about which I did not talk.” Unfortunately for the reader, Jabra does not elaborate on what those deep-seated sorrows were. This admission may be too vague to connect directly to his provenance from outside Palestine, but it is not too vague to connect directly to his lifelong suppression of what may have been family trauma engendered by genocide. In the final two paragraphs of Jabra’s chapter “Lami‘a and the Annus Mirabilis,” Jabra reminds the reader that in that chapter he has written about merely two years of his life and that he “spoke sparingly, and because of all sorts of necessities, I neglected and deleted many things.” This vague apologia seems conventional. Yet it could allude to the fact that Jabra neglected and deleted facts surrounding his family history, birth, and immigration to Palestine.

In the final paragraph, Jabra mentions that the period of Arab history that he lived through was full of possibility but also characterized by dislocation (tashrid), terror, and killing. Is there an end to speaking about all that? I have spoken about some aspects of it in my novels; I have sprinkled other aspects in my studies, essays, and interviews. But most will remain for someone who has the ability, the patience, the love to deduce it from letters, papers, and boundless other sources – if they are not dispersed by storms and drowned by floods, and remain intact for some researcher to refer to them, whether it be in the near or the far future.

What precisely is Jabra talking about, and, again, why does he use such vague language? The antecedent of “all that” which Jabra “sprinkled” throughout his novels, studies, essays and interviews is the “dislocation, terror, and killing” that the Arab world witnessed during Jabra’s lifetime. What exactly about the dislocation, terror, and killing must some researcher “deduce” from Jabra’s letters, papers, and other sources? In other words, what did Jabra not state outright? After all, one deduces that which is not stated explicitly. While writing with the utmost vagueness about what he did not mention, Jabra points to that vagueness as the source of a future scholar’s deductions about his life. One could safely assume that Jabra is referring to the “dislocation, terror, and killing” of the 1948 Nakba. But Jabra’s family’s dislocation from Adana, in addition to the terror that may have beset Maryam ever since her relatives were murdered in 1909, had been with Jabra and his family long before 1948, 1936, or 1929. The word that Jabra uses for dislocation – tashrid – is incidentally the same root and the same verbal form that he uses to describe the “vagrants” (musharradin) from Tur Abdin who settled in Bethlehem in his novel In Search of Walid Masoud. One wonders what “necessities” caused Jabra to neglect and delete “certain things.”

What is devastatingly ironic about this passage in Princesses’ Street is that on
Easter Sunday in 2010, the metaphorical “storms and floods” that Jabra writes about manifested themselves in the form of a suicide bomber. The terrorist detonated a truck bomb at the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad, near Jabra’s family home. The explosion killed and wounded dozens of people and destroyed Jabra’s home along with his letters, papers, and boundless other sources that “some researcher” could have pored over with “patience, ability, and love.”

The Vagrants of Tur Abdin

It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the glimpses of an Assyrian substrate peaking through from between the lines of all of Jabra’s autobiographical works. While his novels contain features that may or may not allude to his family history – mob executions (Sayfo), minor Assyrian characters, and lovers’ relationships complicated because of family history (Jabra and Lami’a) – his novel In Search of Walid Masoud (Al-bahth ‘an Walid Mas’ud, 1978) makes direct reference to the geographic Assyrian homeland of Tur Abdin, Mardin, and Diyarbakir in the context of some extremely poor immigrants to Bethlehem.

In Search of Walid Masoud tells the story of the sudden disappearance of Walid Masoud Farhan, a Roman Catholic Palestinian-Iraqi banker born and raised in Bethlehem during the British Mandate. The book is told by Walid’s friends – Issa Nasser, Tariq Raouf, Maryam al-Saffar, to name a few – who reflect on their relationships with Walid in twelve sections written in the first person. The sixth section is taken from Walid Masoud’s autobiography, which is entitled The Well. The narrator of the first, second, and final sections of the book, and the principal investigator of Walid’s disappearance, is the Iraqi sociologist Jawad Husni, a close friend of Walid’s. Jawad convenes Walid’s friends at a party to listen to a confession Walid recorded on a cassette tape and left in the tape deck of his abandoned car near the “Rutba” border crossing with Syria, which is officially known as the Walid border crossing. After the explosive nature of Walid’s revelations, his friends and acquaintances begin piecing together the truth of his life. Jawad begins interviewing people about Walid’s family history, birth, and early life in order to speculate informedly about Walid’s current whereabouts.

Jawad learns during his investigations that Walid has concealed key details about his life, purposefully misleading Jawad and his group of his friends. Indeed, Jawad recognizes that Walid has constructed a certain image of himself, writing, “The things I [Jawad] know about his [Walid’s] life are what he’s been prepared to tell me, and that isn’t very much. Besides, they’ve been chosen to accord with the image he wants to have of himself and show to others. I need hardly say that sort of image doesn’t convince me at all.” Jawad adds, “I don’t think we know much about his [Walid’s] life, or at least much that isn’t full of errors and illusions, although we’d be justified in inferring a great deal from his books.” In Jawad Husni, Jabra anticipated the literary biographer who would begin asking about him the same questions that Jawad
asks about Walid. Indeed, as Jabra said,\textsuperscript{82} his fiction was autobiographical, and one can infer a great deal about his life from those of his books that are not marked as autobiographies. Jabra was not prepared to tell others very much about himself, and the image he wanted to have of himself and show to others was remarkably similar to Walid Masoud’s. Yet Walid’s Palestinianness, like Jabra’s, goes unquestioned. Jawad writes that “Walid’s background, from the point of view of both birth and political cause, was an important component of the subject” of Walid’s Palestinian identity.\textsuperscript{83}

A passing but striking image from Walid’s confession may have been drawn, like so much else of Walid’s biography, from Jabra’s own life. Because of the spontaneity of Walid’s confession, and because Walid no longer has anything to lose by faithfully representing his life, the facts he relates in the taped confession are more revealing than the facts he saw fit to reveal during his life as a respectable banker. For example, the old rogue reveals that he has slept with many of the women at the tape-listening party. Part of Walid’s stream-of-consciousness confession reads:

\begin{quote}
My father who before he died was lying on the floor like a huge oak felled by the wind and he knew many stories about acorn bread during the days of the Ottoman War banishment and famine I was born after the famine the road sped away with us we were in a truck and the white road wound through the dust fleeing away from us from me and the hills fleeing away and the stones the stone kilometer landmarks which I learned to read after I grew older …. \textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Walid’s early childhood memory of escape in a truck down a dusty road as the road speeds away from him does not accord with the image of Walid’s life, rooted in Bethlehem, which Jawad uncovers. That memory does however accord with Jabra’s life. Like Jabra’s father Ibrahim, Walid’s father Masoud was drafted into the Ottoman army during World War I. Like Masoud, Ibrahim spent many of his final days lying on a mat on the floor like a huge oak because of the debilitating sciatica he contracted doing manual labor.\textsuperscript{85} Like Walid, Jabra was born “after the famine” of the Seferberlik. Walid’s childhood memory of his family fleeing down a dusty road may have been an early memory of Jabra’s: Ibrahim and Maryam, with their three young children and Maryam’s mother Basma in the bed of a truck, fleeing Adana for points south before the advance of the Turkish army. Then again, Jabra was only two and at most three when his family fled, and he may have had no memory at all of his family’s flight. The haunting image of people fleeing in the bed of a truck recurs in Jabra’s penultimate novel, \textit{The Other Rooms}.

\textit{Walid Masoud} includes a passage on the Ottoman expulsion of the residents of southeastern Anatolia, where Jabra’s ancestors hailed from. In his autobiography, \textit{The Well}, Walid writes that in the Bethlehem of his youth, poverty reigned. There were the poor, the extreme poor, and

\begin{quote}
at the bottom of this downward slope of poverty, would be other groups who owned nothing at all. The Ottoman period, with its many injustices
\end{quote}
and a chaotic rule that had played fast and loose with the rights of individuals and communities alike, had deprived them of their lands and forced them to move from their own territory, to wander around the various parts of this sick “empire” in search of shelter and a bite to eat. Bethlehem had witnessed the arrival of many such vagrants [musharradin] since the middle of the nineteenth century; they came from the wastes of Mardin, Diyarbakr, and Tur Abdin; from the villages of northern Iraq and northern Syria ....

It is diplomatic of Jabra to write that the “Ottoman period” had deprived such vagrants of their lands. In fact, actual Ottoman officials, soldiers, and Kurdish irregulars ethnically cleansed the regions of northern Mesopotamia of Christians whose ancestors had lived there for millennia. They ethnically cleansed them by massacring them or expelling them and then expropriating their abandoned property, foreshadowing the second expulsion Jabra would experience in 1948. Jabra’s attribution of blame to the “Ottoman period” and its injustices resembles his euphemistic treatment in The First Well of the 1909 Adana massacre, which he evasively dubbed “tragic circumstances.” Jabra’s estimate that those “vagrants” had arrived in the middle of the nineteenth century was a chronological exaggeration. According to Syriac Bethlehemite historian and linguist George Anton Kiraz, the first Syriacs from Mesopotamia arrived in Bethlehem around 1895, just after the Ottoman census of 1893–94. Syriac Christians were first officially recorded in Bethlehem in the Ottoman census of 1911–12. Jabra employs the same strategy of self-creation in Walid Masoud that he does in his autobiographies and autobiographical novels. While Walid resembles Jabra in terms of childhood, adolescence, and youth, Jabra alters certain details of Walid’s family history and birth in order to establish Jabra’s own Bethlehemite credentials. Nevertheless, Jabra leaves traces for the close reader of Walid Masoud to investigate: the nature and history of those vagrants from the wastes of Tur Abdin, and the image of a family fleeing in a truck down a dusty road. Walid’s lifelong concealment of details of his family history causes Jawad Husni to cast doubt on the veracity of the life story that Walid told his friends. That doubt causes Jawad to begin an investigation into Walid’s past, and the past he uncovers turns out to be Palestinian to the core. Jabra knew that his own past was far more complicated than Walid’s.

The Limits of Biographical Critique

These new revelations about Jabra’s family history and early life could open up his autobiographical writing to new analyses. Critics have regarded Jabra as a Palestinian’s Palestinian and an Arab nationalist’s Arab nationalist with good reason. In his essays on Arab history, politics, culture, and literature, Jabra speaks of himself as a Palestinian and an Arab, and his commitment to Arab nationalism and Palestinian resistance is unquestionable. Yet literary critics could begin recontextualizing that uncomplicated picture of the Palestinian-born Arab nationalist artist and writer that

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critics, following Jabra’s own example, have produced. When a writer whose work is nothing if not autobiographical is revealed to have concealed – or lied by omission about – facts about his biography, critics can rightly begin to regard his work with what Paul Ricoeur referred to as the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Rita Felski picked up on Ricoeur’s phrase to critique the nature of contemporary literary critique, which approaches texts with a kind of cynicism in order to read between the lines and against the grain, even when no insidious truths lurk beneath the text’s surface. Yet how should literary critics approach the work of an author who deliberately hides facets of his identity between the lines and within the finely grained prose of his autobiographies? Jabra’s concealments practically demand that the critic become an “eagle-eyed detective tracking down” his quarry. While critics may want to approach Jabra’s choices about what aspects of his life to reveal in the spirit of sympathetic inquiry, they now have little choice but to read between the lines. What other truths may Jabra have concealed within his texts?

The major theme in Jabra scholarship has been the impact of Jabra – as a wandering, erudite Palestinian exile in Baghdad equipped with excellent English and an elite education – on the modernization of the Arab world through the rejuvenation of culture. Jabra’s civilizational mission was to guarantee the individual Arab his or her freedom. He sought to accomplish this through the valorization of individual experience, starting with his own. Jabra’s principal tool in this effort was the autobiography. Jabra also encouraged the foundation in the Arab world of rules-based institutions that would guarantee individual liberty. Jabra’s vision did not differ markedly from the stated mission of the British Council, which funded his university studies at Exeter (1939–40) and Cambridge (1940–43). Moreover, Jabra’s valorization of individual experience implied the suppression of the given circumstances over which he had no control: family history, birth, and early childhood. Jabra’s focus on his individual experience accounts for why his First Well begins when he was four years old and not, as in Tristram Shandy, at the moment of his conception.

What better candidate did the Arab literary world have in the mid-twentieth century to spearhead modernization through culture? Educated at the Arab College, Cambridge, and Harvard, Jabra was a literal Renaissance man: a painter, translator, art critic, educator, screenwriter, and editor. He was a prolific poet, short story writer, essayist, and novelist. He was also a genial, outgoing man who threw himself into the salons, cafes, and debates of mid-century Jerusalem and Baghdad. Because of Jabra’s frankness about his civilizational mission, there is little scholarship on Jabra that does not hew close to his role in Arab cultural modernization through the individual’s liberation from the ponderous strictures of Arab tradition. Most Jabra criticism emphasizes the role of Jabra’s own life – and his recounting of it in his autobiographies and autobiographical fiction – in the process of Arab cultural uplift. Despite the efforts of the New Critics to bury biographical criticism, Jabra critics cannot but keep it in their repertoire when dealing with a writer whose work is consummately autobiographical. Yet, when dealing with those autobiographies, how do critics write about an absence?
Given Jabra’s family’s survival of Sayfo and the Nakba, these revelations could help generate readings of Jabra’s work that draw on trauma studies. Comparisons could be made with narratives of second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors, who have been shown to evince both a reticence about their families’ trauma and the actual symptoms of prior generations’ traumas. Moreover, the irony that the Nazi leadership settled on the Final Solution because of the international community’s failure to hold the Turks accountable for the Armenian and Assyrian genocides should not be lost on scholars who work on Jabra; the international community’s sympathy for the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust helped galvanize support for the creation of the state of Israel and the displacement – yet again – of the Chelico/Jabra family. An insidious thread runs from Anatolia to Germany to Palestine, from Sayfo to the Holocaust to the Nakba, connecting Jabra’s first exile to his second. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi’s use of the term “black hole” to describe the murky disappearance of Walid Masoud at the Walid border crossing in Jabra’s fourth novel is a counterpoint to the black hole from which Walid’s creator emerged in 1922. Jabra’s approbation toward the “great Arab civilizational flow” may reflect the desire for safety, shelter, and continuity from a writer who was perpetually adrift.

The cessation of time in black holes calls to mind Jabra’s penultimate and least studied novel, The Other Rooms (1986). Like his first novel Cry in a Long Night, The Other Rooms takes place in the course of a single night in an unnamed Arab city in an indeterminate time. The Other Rooms is a study in shifting identity whose plot resembles Kafka’s The Castle: the protagonist, who has forgotten who he is, is led through different rooms in a government building and interrogated. He does not know where he is being led and why. At one point, he looks in a mirror and does not recognize himself. A book about his life called The Known and the Unknown (Al-ma’lum wa-l-majhul) has been published and, although everyone believes that he wrote it, he knows that he did not. Moreover, in addition to forgetting his name, he finds six different identity cards in his wallet, each with a different name. The protagonist’s sense of self is “split into many pieces,” like the cadaver of himself that he watches a team of medical students dissect. Issa Boullata reads this novel as a meditation on autocratic Arab regimes’ crushing of their citizens’ identities within bureaucratic structures. He reads it as a Kafkaesque literalization of the metaphor of “unending labyrinths of politics and its [politics’] upheavals.” In the future, literary critics may need to understand the protagonist’s alienation in terms of Jabra’s experience of Saddam’s Iraq, the unending Palestine disaster, and Sayfo. In the context of Jabra’s life of alienation, exile, and name-changing, Jabra’s Other Rooms, like his life, may expose and unify the temporal connections between all three.

Jabra did not just write about his identity as an exiled Palestinian intellectual. Much scholarship on Jabra will therefore not necessarily be opened up to new readings in light of these revelations. Studies on the role of musical harmony in Jabra’s novels and poetry will not necessarily be deepened by more autobiographical readings, and neither will Jabra’s architectural criticism, his lifelong interest in painting, his translation of Twelfth Night, or his later vindicated suspicion toward the CIA-funded
literary journal *Hiwar*. Yet a posture of hyper-reading, a *hermeneutic of paranoia*, toward his markedly autobiographical works is difficult to resist once we learn that Jabra was burdened with a great secret made all the more momentous because of his lifelong concealment of it. Faysal Darraj writes that Jabra had three great secrets that propelled his work: his abiding Christian faith, the image of his father Ibrahim, and the city of Jerusalem. Knowing what we know now about Jabra’s past, what can we make of the passage in *Walid Masoud* in which an Israeli soldier appears at his family home in Bethlehem to ask him if he has always lived there? What can we make of the passage in *Hunters in a Narrow Street* in which Shabo the Assyrian tells the ambiguously Christian Jameel Farran, born in Bethlehem in 1920, not to reveal his secrets lest he fall foul of the government and find himself the object of its next wave of repression? What can we make of Amin Samma’s encouraging attitude toward Roxane Yasser’s “destruction of the past” as she burns her family’s papers, diaries, letters, and manuscripts in *Cry in a Long Night*? Jabra kept more secrets than Darraj’s three.

As Jabra entered the world in Adana in 1919, there was no indication that he would become one of Palestine’s greatest writers and one of its most persistent autobiographers. Jabra was a Palestinian because of his individual experiences in Bethlehem and Jerusalem that no forced displacement could wrest from him. Jabra was a Palestinian in spite of his family history and not because of it. His project of Arab-national uplift through the modernization of culture and the securing of individual liberty was founded on his suppression of his own “family history with all its ramifications” (*The First Well*) and his characters’ rejection of the “lethal labyrinths of the past” (*Cry in a Long Night*). Furthermore, Jabra’s choice to valorize individual experience in the here and now could be viewed as a rejection of the religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the Middle East, which slouched through an apocalyptic century of genocides, forced displacements, civil wars, military coups, negotiations with competing nationalisms, and continual political repression both local and foreign in origin. Jabra may have sought shelter for himself and his family in the “great Arab civilizational flow” and may have found hope for the region’s future in a less complicated and more culturally homogeneous Arab world characterized by the common denominators of cultural Islam, the Arabic language, and Arab nationalism.

Jabra stated in an interview with Elias Khoury that, “if I were not a Palestinian, I would not be anything.” Jabra’s Palestinian identity lay at the root of his sense of self. Yet Jabra’s statement may have been literally true. Had his family not fled Adana for Palestine, they may all have been killed. Understanding Jabra’s identity as contingent may help Jabra critics add perspective to their studies of him and his work, especially when it comes to the nature of Palestinian identity in his autobiographical works. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi writes that Jabra’s recourse to the novel as a genre of artistic creation was in line with Georg Lukacs’ judgment that the novel emerges from a world that grants no homecoming. To Jabra, the already-exiled exile who was forever out of place, the only kind of homecoming he found was in his self.
### Form of Application for Admission

(Fo be returned to The Censor, Fitzwilliam House, Cambridge, with the Candidate’s Testimonials)

1. **Candidate's name in full (block letters):** Jabra Ibrahim Jabra
2. **Date and place of Birth:** Adana (Turkey), 28th August 1919.
3. **Name, address and occupation of Father, and whether alive or deceased:**
   - Ibrahim Jabra, P.O.B. 453, Jerusalem (Palestine)
   - Retired, alive.
4. **Name, address and signature of person responsible for the payment of fees:**
   - The British Council, 3 Hanover Street, London, W1.
5. **Place or places of Education (complete list with dates):**
   - Government Industrial College, Jerusalem, 1st July 1938.
   - University College of the South West, Exeter, Nov. 1939 – June 1940.
6. **Nationality:** Palestinian.
7. **Race:** Arab.
8. **Religion:** Christian.
9. **Further reference to character:** The British Council.
10. **Course of Reading:** Honours, Pass Degree or otherwise, and subjects:
    - English Tripos
11. **Claims for exemption from the whole or part of the University Previous Examination (Certificates must be sent):**
    - Palestine Matriculation (1937)
    - Diploma in Secondary Education (1939, Jerusalem), Proficiency in English (Exeter 1940).
12. **Date (term and year) when it is desired to begin residence:**
    - Michaelmas Term 1940.
13. **Has application been made elsewhere for admission? If so to what College:**
    - No.
14. **Signature of Candidate:** [Signature]
15. **Date:** 8.10.40

N.B. It is not sufficient to leave any of these spaces blank, or any of these questions unanswered.
Figure 3. Map showing the locations of (counter-clockwise, from upper right): the Chelico family’s likely ancestral hometown of Midén (Turk. Ögündük); Adana, the city where Jabra was born on 28 August 1919; Bethlehem, Jabra’s “first well,” where his family lived until he was 12; Jerusalem, the city where Jabra lived from ages 12 through 19 and 23 through 28; and Baghdad, where Jabra settled in October 1948. Image by Google Maps.

William Tamplin is a visiting fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard University, where he earned his PhD in 2020. The author would like to thank Alex Winder, Salim Tamari, and the small army of people who helped him with this article: Roger Allen, Hanna “Jan” Beth-Sawoce, Alexander Chelico, Linda Chelico, Nabil Chelico, John Cleaver, David Gaunt, Sadeer Jabra, Abigail Jacobson, Caroline Kahlenberg, George Kiraz, Justin McCarthy, Butrus Ni‘meh, and the three anonymous reviewers.

Endnotes


5 Boullata, “Jabra”; author interview with George Kiraz, 24 April 2020 (by email); author interview with David Gaunt, 17 April 2020 and 20 April 2020 (by email). The spelling Chelico for Shaliko may stem from the transliteration system used by the French mandatory authorities in Cilicia. Many thanks to David Gaunt for pointing this out.


8 Jabra, Mu’ayashat al-nimra, 289–90.
9 Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, “Jadaliyyat al-naqd wa-l-ibda’: min al-khass ila al-’amm” [The dialectic of criticism and creativity: from the specific to the general] in Mu’ayashat al-nimra wa-awraq ukhra (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-’Arabiyyah li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 1992): 21–30. For work on the overlap between autobiography and fiction in modern Arabic literature, see Mejcher-Atassi, “Arabic Novel,” 147, and Guth, “Why Novels?” While other Arabic-language authors of autobiographical novels, such as Taha Husayn, diversified their fictional oeuvre with historical novels and novels not drawn directly from their personal experience, Jabra never wavered from the autobiographical novel.

10 Neuwirth implies that because the Western novel was born out of autobiography, and the autobiography out of the medieval confession, Jabra’s confessional mode in his autobiography The First Well, in addition to his novelistic approach to the narration of events, combines the three stages in one. Neuwirth, “Jabra,” 116.


12 Rooke, In My Childhood, 198.


17 Neuwirth, “Jabra,” 116. To be clear, in this article I do not seek to condemn Jabra for his lifelong suppression of key facts about his family history, birth, and immigration to Palestine as a child. I will not compare Jabra to other Palestinian figures whose autobiographies or family histories have proved controversial because of birth or childhood experience, such as Edward Said or Yasser Arafat. Nowhere do I claim – nor do I believe – that Jabra is any less of a Palestinian for his family history in Anatolia, his birth in Adana, or his immigration to Palestine.

18 David Gaunt, “The Complexity of the Assyrian Genocide,” Genocide Studies International 9, no. 1 (2015): 83–103. Because of the nearly five-thousand-year-old history of the Assyrian people and the many distinctions drawn between them along confessional, liturgical, linguistic, and geographic lines, confusion over proper terminology abounds in the scholarship, and this confusion has led to not a little indignant condemnation. Some
consider the terms Jacobites, Nestorians, and Chaldeans controversial and/or outdated. I use them in this article in order to clarify older sources that speak of these ancient Eastern Christian communities, and I do not intend to disrespect anyone.

19 The Syriac Orthodox Church is known as the Jacobite Church for Jacob Baradaeus (543/4 - 578 CE), who broke with the Council of Chalcedon of 451 and declared his belief in the unified nature of Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine.


28 While no Syriacs are reported as living in the Jerusalem sanjak in 1889, 459 are listed by 1913. According to the 1911–12 Ottoman census, 386 Syriacs inhabited the Jerusalem district (kaza) and 41 lived in the Jaffa district; Kiraz, 1aqd al-juman, 12–13, 53. Reporting on his travels in the Holy Land in a 1908 lecture, Frederick Bliss wrote that between 150 and 200 households of Syriacs lived in Bethlehem and ten Syriac households lived in Jerusalem; Frederick Jones Bliss, The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine; Lectures Delivered Before Lake Forest College on the Foundation of the late William Bross (New York: Scribner, 1912), 75. Bliss also mentioned the presence of a Syriac bishop, convent and monks in Jerusalem. The Syriacs inhabiting Bethlehem and Jerusalem were largely stonemasons, and many helped construct the Augusta Victoria hospital; “The Syrian (Jacobite) Patriarch in Jerusalem,” The Living Church 39, no. 22 (26 September 1908): 740.

29 Farhud, “Al-Suryan.”

30 George Kiraz, a relative of Jabra’s and a Syriac Bethlehemite, believes that Jabra’s family was originally from Midën (Arab. Middo), now the village of Ögündük, in Tur Abdin in southern Turkey. Scholars of Assyrian/Syriac studies David Gaunt and Hanna Beth-Sawoce have also both independently speculated to me that the Chelico family was originally from Midén. One of the two dialects of modern Syriac currently spoken in Bethlehem is Azakh, from the Idil region, which comprises the village of Midën, in modern-day Turkey. Two brothers of another family of Chelicos moved to the Adana vilayet for seasonal labor, although they moved from the town of Bitlis. Author interview with George Kiraz,
24 April 2020 (by email); Alexander Aziz Chelico, A Family History (London, Ontario: self-published, 2001), 4; Yafa Muhammad Ayyash, “The Language Situation among the Assyrians of Palestine” (MA thesis, Middle East University, 2014), 3. In The First Well, Jabra mentions that his father Ibrahim, as a child, pastured sheep and ploughed the land with oxen alongside his father Gawriye; Jabra, First Well, 117.

According to Jabra, Ibrahim’s mother Sawsan did not survive World War I; Jabra, Al-bi’r al-ula, 117.

The systematic nature of the killing in the 1933 Simele Massacre was documented by the British officer Ronald Stafford in The Tragedy of the Assyrians (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1935). According to Sargon Donabed, “[The Simele massacres (alongside those of the Ottoman Empire)] were not only invoked but became viable paradigms that influenced a young Raphael Lemkin in the development of a framework concerning the legal concept of mass murder.” Sargon Donabed, Reforging a Forgotten History: Iraq and the Assyrians in the 20th Century (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 123.

The Palestinian need to claim nativity and nativeness to Palestine is largely a reaction to that Zionist propaganda which states that Palestinian Arabs immigrated to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s because of the economic prosperity brought by the Zionists. Many Arabs immigrated to Palestine in the century before 1948. In 1881, about 20,000 Jews lived in Palestine. Jonathan Marc Gribetz, Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 32.


Jabra, First Well, xv.

Jabra, First Well, xv; Al-bi’r al-ula, 10.

Jabra, First Well, xv–xvi; Al-bi’r al-ula, 10.

Jabra, First Well, xviii.


Jabra, First Well, 140; al-Bi’r al-ula, 163.


This is correct if Maryam wore black in mourning for her slain husband Dawud for “four years,” as Jabra writes in The First Well (Jabra, First Well, 140).


Syriac Palestinians in Bethlehem and Jerusalem have told me that their ancestors came by foot or riding on the backs of donkeys. Because the transition in Palestine from British military to Mandatory rule occurred in July 1920, and because Jabra’s family likely immigrated in 1921 or 1922, the Mandate authorities most likely absorbed them.

In 1922 the population of Bethlehem was 6,658; 87 percent of the population was Christian, and 6 percent was Syriac Christian. J. B. Barron, Palestine: Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922: Taken on the 23rd of October, 1922 (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press, 1923), tables III, VII, and XIV.

Farhud, “Al-Suryan.”

Farhud, “Al-Suryan.”


Boullata, “Jabra.” Another family of Chelicos unrelated to Jabra’s family, as far as I can tell, had immigrated in approximately 1878 to Adana from the village of Sughourd near Bitlis These Chelicos established themselves as cotton planters in Adana; Chelico, A Family History, 4, 7. Alexander Chelico writes that “[t]he Chelico home in Adana became the destination for all those members of the Assyrian community arriving from Kurdistan and looking for employment,” Chelico, A Family History, 5. It is unclear if or how Jabra’s Chelicos were related to Alexander Chelico’s ancestors. Jabra’s paternal great-grandfather was named Mas’ud, a name which does not appear in the genealogy that Alexander includes in his book. Dahbur, “Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.”

Jabra, First Well, xx.

Jabra, First Well, xxi.

In Princesses’ Street, Jabra writes that he first alerted Stewart to the plight of the Palestinians. Jabra, Princesses’ Street,
In his book, Stewart writes that his knowledge about “Herzl’s victims” came from his friendships with them, as with the “Bethlehem-born novelist and critic Jabra I. Jabra.” Desmond Stewart, _The Palestinians: Victims of Expediency_ (New York: Quartet Books, 1982), 14. Jabra’s reference to Stewart’s false claim about Jabra’s birth allows Jabra to inscribe the myth of his Palestinian birth while making no such claim himself.

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 19 (italics added).

Syriac Orthodox Christians, as well as Assyrians (Church of the East), Chaldeans (Syriac Catholics), and ethnic Assyrian members of other Christian denominations, are culturally and ethnically descended from the ancient Assyrians.

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 39 (italics added).


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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 42.

Jabra may have conflated the spring season, ancient pagan civilization, and his thirty-year-old self because when he was around thirty, he translated the “Adonis” portion of James Frazer’s _The Golden Bough_, which discusses death-and-rebirth cults in the ancient eastern Mediterranean. Jabra began translating in 1946 and in 1957 published his translations as a book entitled _Adonis or Tammuz: A Study of Ancient Eastern Myths and Religions_ (Adonis, aw Tammuz: dirasah fi al-asatir wa-l-adyan al-sharqiyyah al-qadimah). His translations sparked the Tammuzi movement in Arabic poetry. Jabra’s early creative work relies on imagery drawn from ancient Middle Eastern rites of spring (Phoenician, Canaanite, Assyrian) detailed by Frazer. Boullata, “Jabra.”

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 213.


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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 85.

James Bryce and Arnold J. Toynbee, _The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916_ (London: Causton and Sons, 1916); Hannibal Travis, “‘Native Christians Massacred’: The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I,” _Genocide Studies and Prevention_ 1, no. 3 (2006): 327–72, especially 331. British diplomat Mark Sykes alluded to the Syriacs’ sense of Arab national identity in an account of a journey he took in Turkey: “The Christians of north-eastern Tur Abdin are a fearful ethnological puzzle, as they reckon themselves to be Arabian, and speak a barbarous dialect of Arabic.” About the residents of Midên (Mido), Sykes writes that, “I extorted from the laity that it was their opinion that they were really Kurds of Kurdish race.” Mark Sykes, _The Caliphs’ Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire_ (London: Macmillan, 1915), 355–56. According to Hanna Beth-Sawoce, the Syriacs of Midên spoke Kurdish until the mid-1930s. It is doubtful whether the ancient Assyrians would have considered themselves Arabs. The first Arab mentioned in recorded history, Jundub, allied with Ahab of Israel against the kingdom of Assyria.

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 94. Boullata’s English translation gives “Athourian,” which is not an English word, to translate Jabra’s _athuriyyin_, a word that can refer to both the ancient and the modern Assyrians. “Assyrian” is normally used to translate _athuriyyin_.

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Most of the Assyrians who settled in the plains of Nineveh in northern Iraq came originally from the Hakkari region in Anatolia by way of Urmta. They were mostly Church of the East, not Syriac Orthodox.

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 71. According to Sadeer Jabra, Bakr Sidiqi was the brother of Lami’a’s maternal grandfather; that would mean that Lami’a was Sidiqi’s great-niece. Author interview with Sadeer Jabra, 29 September and 7 October 2018 (by telephone).

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Jabra, _Princesses’ Street_, 77–78.

Two non-fiction references to the opposition of ‘Abd al-Hamid Rif’at, Lami’a’s maternal uncle, to their marriage appear in _Princesses’ Street_ (150, 184). Jabra’s first two autobiographical novels, _Cry in a Long Night_...

71 Jabra did however maintain a correspondence with his brother Yusuf, who translated J. B. Segal’s *Edessa: The Blessed City* (1970), a book on the Syriac spiritual center of Edessa (Ar. *al-Ruha*), now Sanliurfa, Turkey. Jabra also hosted his younger brother ‘Isa when ‘Isa came to Baghdad to look for work.


73 Jabra, *Princesses’ Street*, 185.

74 Jabra, *Princesses’ Street*, 185 (my translation, modified from Boullata’s).

75 Jabra, *Princesses’ Street*, 134.

76 Shadid, “In Baghdad Ruins.”

77 Jabra’s first published novel, *Cry in a Long Night (Surakh fi layl tawil*, 1955), features a mob execution carried out by burning alive, an echo of the 1909 Adana Massacre and the Sayfo genocide. According to the Syriac Jerusalemite Eli Jurj Kuz, burning alive was one method Turks and Kurds used to murder Syriacs during Sayfo. (mirza hon, “Shahadat min filastin min abna’ najin min majazir al-suryan sayfo 1915” [Testimonies from Syriacs during Sayfo. (mirza hon, “Shahadat min filastin min abna’ najin min majazir al-suryan sayfo 1915”].) Also hosted his younger brother ‘Isa when ‘Isa came to Baghdad to look for work.


79 Maryam al-Saffar says about Walid’s autobiography: “But I prefer *The Well*, where he talks about his youth. He does it in such a way that I don’t really know whether it’s autobiographical or an attempt at writing a novel.” “It’s part of his autobiography,” said Jawad. “I urged him to write it for ages, but for him it had become a matter of recording his childhood, something he kept circling around and stopping at, but hardly ever broaching.” (Jabra, *Search*, 266).

80 Jabra, *Search*, 49.


91 Jabra critics may in fact need to caution themselves from reading too suspiciously lest they slip into a hermeneutics of paranoia.

92 For Jabra’s call for the Arab world to embrace individual freedom and found institutions that guarantee it, see Jabra I. Jabra, “Al-tarjamah wa-l-nahdah al-’Arabiyyah al-hadithah” [Translation and the modern Arab renaissance] 1989, in Jabra, *Mu’ayashat*. Founded in 1934, the British Council served as the UK Foreign Office’s arm of cultural diplomacy when rising totalitarian regimes in Italy, Germany, and the USSR sought to replace Britain on the world stage. The British Council awarded scholarships to promising scholars.


94 The same would go for scholars who work on Philip Roth, Rachel Cusk, and Ibrahim al-Mazini.


100 Boullata, *Nafidha*, 69.

101 Boullata, *Nafidha*, 70.

102 Darraj, “Jabra Ibrahim Jabra rahala.”

103 Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*, 182.

104 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, 56.
