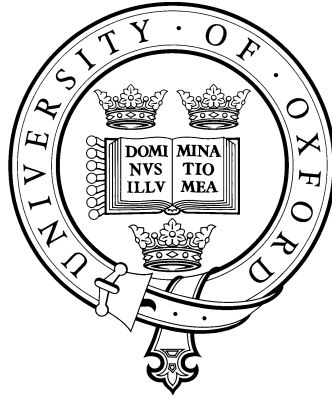


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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford

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**Reading between the Lines:  
Arabic Fiction in Israel after 1967**

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Hilary Term, 2014

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES: ARABIC FICTION IN ISRAEL AFTER 1967

**ABSTRACT**

Arabic literature in Israel has evaded critical attention, or has been treated as an uncomplicated part of Palestinian national culture, on a quest for unification and an identity that was devastated in 1948. This dissertation complicates that narrative through close readings of short stories by five Arab citizens of Israel—Imil Habibi, Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, Muhammad Naffa’, Hanna Ibrahim, and Zaki Darwish—between 1967 and 1983. Focusing on the relationship between geography and fiction, I suggest that literary constructions of “place” and “space” by these authors reveal a range of cultural negotiations that break down entrenched dyads: Palestinian *yet* Israeli; Palestinian on the *one* hand, Israeli on the *other*; spared exile, but suffering occupation. Instead, these writers evoke the hybrid and ambivalent experiences produced in the paradoxical spaces of Israeli-Palestinian life.

I develop an analytical framework that incorporates geographic and literary theory. I use the work of humanists such as Gaston Bachelard, Yi-Fu Tuan, and Edward Casey to suggest that literature mediates geography in a way that communicates belonging, alienation, or personal and collective meaning. The framework is bolstered with the work of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, along with historical and political sources, to capture the contextual resonance of the texts.

After laying out these theoretical guidelines, I offer a historical account of Arabic literature in Israel and embark on four analytical chapters. Chapter Two explores Imil Habibi’s portrayals of anxiety around post-1967 Palestinian reunions. Chapter Three focuses on the themes of Muhammad ‘Ali Taha’s Palestinian collective identity in Israel. Chapter Four takes up the theme of “the land” in the works of Muhammad Naffa’ and Hanna Ibrahim, in the context of 1970s land expropriations. Chapter Five explores a long story by Zaki Darwish and its depiction of the body’s phenomenological relation to the homeland.

Rather than portraying counter-narratives that suggest a binary of “Israeli” and “Palestinian” always at odds, these authors portray the spaces and characters in between. They disclose the anxieties of finding a sense of place in the context of a dispersed Palestinian nation, geopolitical uncertainty, social marginalization within the state, and the subtle geographies of a historic homeland that both is—and is not—one’s own.

## **NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION**

This dissertation works extensively with Arabic literary texts. Most have not been translated into English, and for these I offer my own translations. Where there is a published translation, I follow the convention of citing the translation and reading it alongside the original Arabic. Where I find the translations lacking in the style or resonance of the original, I offer an alternative. In these cases, I explain the deviation in the notes.

I also rely on secondary sources in Arabic, Hebrew, and French. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of these critical materials are my own.

I have followed the transliteration guidelines of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, with one exception. For the sake of clarity, I include diacritical markers in the titles of books, short stories, and academic articles. The names of people and organizations follow the IJMES convention of transliteration without diacritics (e.g. Imil Habibi). There are deviations in cases where scholars use alternative transliterations (e.g. Emile Habiby) and when scholars' names themselves take a different spelling (e.g. Mahmoud Ghanayim). For places, I transliterate without diacritics or employ the accepted English equivalent (e.g. Haifa, Nazareth).

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## INTRODUCTION

In his 1970 short story “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*” (Tale of the Jug of Oil), Muhammad ‘Ali Taha places his young protagonist, Yusuf, in the middle of Paris Square in Haifa. Yusuf still calls the plaza by its old name, Carriages Square, though he laughs to himself that he has never actually seen a carriage roll through there. Where, he wonders, does the name come from? Then, out of the corner of his eye, Yusuf glimpses a Hebrew newspaper, taped up in the window of a storefront. He cannot read the Hebrew text, but he recognizes the photograph of his friend, Sami. How could Sami have made the headlines? “Has he become a Member of the Knesset like Shaykh Jabr? Has he become head of the government like Golda? Maybe a general like Dayan? Impossible!” Yusuf soon tempers his flippancy with skepticism: “One of our people is only photographed once in his life—when his I.D. card gets cut. There’s no way his picture can be in the newspaper!”<sup>1</sup>

Even in this brief snapshot, Taha engages provocatively with the geography of the State of Israel, where he lives and writes as a Palestinian Arab citizen. His text conjures contestations over the possession and naming of public spaces that pervade many Israeli-Palestinian sites. His protagonist finds himself in a bilingual cultural realm in which he speaks Arabic and sees Hebrew script that he struggles to interpret. Yusuf has an inquisitive, freewheeling tone as he takes in his surroundings, but he also senses that his social place is marginal, and that his only turn before the camera can take place in an office of Israeli bureaucracy. Paris, or Carriages Square, becomes a dynamic location not exclusively colored by either feelings of belonging or alienation. Instead, through Taha’s wry narrative voice, it conveys an eclectic range of issues—language, civic identity, historical belonging, and public space—that must be negotiated in contested

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Jisr ‘Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn* (Nazareth: Manshurat al-Sadaqa, 1978), 38.

environments with rich histories of their own.

In constructing such canny meditations on Israel's physical and social geographies, Taha is joined by a number of other writers, including the renowned Imil Habibi, also living and writing within Israel as Arab citizens. They incorporate Hebrew names and phrases into their writing, and portray Israeli Jewish characters. They depict local Israeli landmarks and describe local political events, such as the seminal Land Day riots of 1976. For these writers, unlike the majority of the Palestinian people, places like Haifa, Nazareth, Jerusalem, and the villages and fields of the Galilee are not relegated to traumatic memories, but remain the everyday sites of lived experience. Taha and Habibi are party both to the scattered Palestinian nation and to the State of Israel. Their allegiances are not clean and nor are the meanings of the ambivalent settings in their work.

In this dissertation, I focus on these links among literature, geography, and the complexity of personal and collective identities for Arab writers within Israel. I explore the work of five authors—Imil Habibi, Muhammad 'Ali Taha, Muhammad Naffa', Hanna Ibrahim, and Zaki Darwish—and am particularly concerned with fiction produced between the Six-Day War in 1967 and the early 1980s. How can the relationship between geography and literature deepen our understanding of Palestinian identities in Israel? How do Palestinian Arab writers communicate a complicated sense of place in Israel in the years after 1967? How do they depict geographies of belonging, anxiety, hybridity, and estrangement, from a village house in the Galilee to the urban streets of Haifa, both in real-time and in the painful spaces of memory? And how do these geographies relate the intricacies of Israeli-Palestinian society, enriching major themes such as collective

identity, the land, and the importance of tradition?<sup>2</sup>

Grappling with these questions, I couple the close reading of texts with theoretical and historical sources to argue that the construction of “place” and “space” by these five writers reveals a range of cultural negotiations that break down dyads entrenched in politics and academia: Palestinian *yet* Israeli; Palestinian on the *one* hand, Israeli on the *other*; spared exile, but suffering occupation. Instead, their work evokes the anxious and hybrid experiences produced in the paradoxical spaces of Israeli-Palestinian life in the unpredictable years after 1967. In this way, these authors highlight the inadequacy of understanding the Palestinian Arab community in Israel through a binary lens that puts Israel and Palestine inexorably at odds. Instead, they capture an important sense of cultural entanglement that characterizes the lived experience of Arab citizens of Israel. The most renowned writer from this community, Imil Habibi, evokes this feeling of entanglement in a 1968 short story, written in response to Palestinian reunions across the Green Line after the Six-Day War. Using a powerful spatial metaphor, he declares, “Life is not made up of discrete lines. The lines are entwined.”<sup>3</sup>

This introduction breaks down into four sections that lay the theoretical groundwork for the study of geography in literary works and that highlight the centrality of fiction to the task of negotiating identities within the contested arena of Israel/Palestine. First, I examine the relationship between literature and geography and how Arab writers in Israel mobilize this connection. Second, I define the terms “place”

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<sup>2</sup> Owing to the diverse nature of these questions, I neither advance nor adhere to a rigid set of terms. I use Israel, Palestine, the State of Israel, and Israel/Palestine throughout, in part to showcase particular emphases from one text or scenario to another, and also to communicate in general the ways in which these terms are always contested, negotiated, or fused. Similarly, to highlight the different angles of civic and national identifications, I alter my usage of the accepted terms Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinian Israelis, and the Arab minority. The only term that I avoid is “Israeli Arabs,” a problematic coinage of the 1950s Israeli government. I discuss this term in detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>3</sup> Imil Habibi, “*Wa Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz*,” in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 37.

and “space” and suggest ways to reconcile the geographic and the literary in theoretical and methodological terms. Third, I lay out the methods this dissertation employs and the contributions it makes to existing scholarship. Fourth, I explore the precedents for studying geography in Palestinian literature and expose several ways in which they fall short. I end with a summary of the remaining chapters, which consist of a historical account of Arabic literature in Israel followed by four analytical chapters that explore the authors in depth.

Writing Arabic fiction in Israel was no straightforward task for Habibi, Taha, Naffa‘, Ibrahim, and Darwish. Throughout, I suggest that only a multi-faceted lens that encompasses close readings, theoretical insights, and a careful attention to historical context can illuminate the complex act of crafting stories somewhere between a disorienting Israeli state and a fragmented Palestinian nation. Ultimately, my aim is to show how such provocative texts, preoccupied with the themes of land, space, and place, construct contentious issues in Israeli society, and to do so in a way that highlights rather than flattens the intricate, cross-cultural dynamics of writing Arabic fiction in a modern Israeli state that is, and is not, one’s own.

### **THE INTERSECTION OF GEOGRAPHIES, LITERATURES, AND IDENTITIES**

It is axiomatic that “the land” is a vital theme in Arabic and Palestinian literature, yet the term suggests a deceptively simple notion of geography and how it becomes important to literary work. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reminds us that land and territory are seldom self-contained subjects. Rather, they are often a facet of much broader issues, “functional spin-offs of arguments that are substantially about power,

justice, and self-determination.”<sup>4</sup> Just as geographies may be diverse—natural, urban, rural, even imagined—so they encompass and interact with an array of social and political processes. Literature offers opportunities to engage these multi-faceted connotations.

As Leonard Lutwack observes, authors deliberately construct settings and their characters respond to them in illuminating ways. Attentiveness or even obliviousness to one’s surroundings—as in Joyce and Kafka, respectively—are revealing, part of “a matrix in which character is formed.”<sup>5</sup> Place is a crucial feature of the “literary complexion.”<sup>6</sup> Yet this relationship between literature and its settings is also reciprocal, as texts reinscribe and enliven a given geography. “Places are neither good nor bad in themselves,” Lutwack writes, “but in the values attached to them, and literature is one of the agencies involved in attaching value to places.”<sup>7</sup> The English canon has examples like Henry David Thoreau and Walden Pond, or Charles Dickens and Victorian London. Analogues in modern Arabic literature include Najib Mahfuz and the streets of Cairo, Ibrahim al-Kawni and the Libyan desert, or Ilias Khuri and the war-torn suburb of East Beirut.<sup>8</sup> Such environments may be imbued with deep political and social resonance and can embody “the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population.”<sup>9</sup>

If places are central, they are nevertheless unfixd, the location of shifting and multiple meanings. Mohamed-Salah Omri examines this polyvalence in his analysis of literature and settler colonialism in Tunisia. French writers like Bertrand and Chatelain

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<sup>4</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Lutwack, *The Role of Place*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Lutwack, *The Role of Place*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> For a set of articles concerning al-Kawni, as well as explorations of space in the work of Mahmud Darwish, Jamal al-Ghitani, and Hanan al-Shaykh, see Boutros Hallaq, Robin Ostle, and Stefan Wild, eds., *La Poétique de l’Espace dans la Littérature Arabe Moderne* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, introduction to *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1993).

tried to “revive” Latin origins in North Africa, “appropriating icons from the Latin presence” and effacing local perceptions. Indigenous people were “considered to have a past but no historical memory.”<sup>10</sup> More liberal writers, most notably Camus, offered an alternative reading, framing the Mediterranean instead as a humanist and multicultural “ideal space in which to reconcile culture and life while keeping an inclusive international spirit.” To revive only Roman roots, for Camus, was a chilling denial of this region’s integrity as “a center in its own right.”<sup>11</sup> And there was yet a third set of interpretations. Local Tunisian intellectuals like Mahmud al-Mas‘adi crafted a national narrative that restored “the country’s Islamic history, the Arabic language, and a conception of the world drawn from Islam and other Mediterranean civilizations.”<sup>12</sup> One geopolitical arena thus evokes a diverse and contentious set of narratives that revolve around identity and belonging, and in which writing and literature play a seminal role.

The role of literature is perhaps especially important in such contested colonial territories as Tunisia and Algeria or, to use Joe Cleary’s more precise term for Israel/Palestine, areas of “partition.” Geopolitical partition occurs when two new states emerge out of a single administrative unit such as Mandate Palestine, the Irish Republic, Korea, or postwar Germany.<sup>13</sup> Cleary critiques the ideology of partition as being grounded in an overemphasis on ethnic ties. According to the proponents of partition, the Palestinians, ethnically bound and thus guided by kinship, could never coexist and identify with the Jewish people, who are similarly bound together by ethnic identifications—hence the need for two separate states. However, partition encounters a problem when these putatively distinct ethnic communities may not, in fact, be cleanly

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<sup>10</sup> Mohamed-Salah Omri, “History, Literature, and Settler Colonialism in North Africa,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 66:3 (September 2005), 278-280.

<sup>11</sup> Omri, “Settler Colonialism in North Africa,” 286.

<sup>12</sup> Omri, “Settler Colonialism in North Africa,” 289.

<sup>13</sup> Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

divided. After partition, some communities end up “on the wrong side” and become “hostage communities” in a somewhat foreign state.<sup>14</sup>

The Palestinian people clearly embody this problem, since over 150,000 Palestinian Arabs remained in the nascent Israeli state after 1948. Indeed, Cleary’s term “hostage community” resonates with one coined in the Israeli context by Dan Rabinowitz, who has framed the Arab population as a “trapped minority.”<sup>15</sup> Arab communities were governed by military rule until 1966, largely severed from the wider Arab world. Speaking Arabic in the home and in various ways holding onto a sense of Palestinian history and identity, many Arabs in Israel nevertheless worked for Israeli construction companies, wrote for Israeli newspapers, or, once they were granted citizenship in 1952, voted in local Israeli elections. Children born into this paradoxical Palestinian-Israeli situation might speak Arabic at home but learn Hebrew at school and follow an Israeli state educational curriculum.

In this ambivalent context, the literature of a “hostage community” may become one of the key “meaning-generating institutions” that helps to enrich its collective identity.<sup>16</sup> Cleary suggests other means, including broadcasting companies and education systems, but these are notably stunted or absent in the case of Israel’s Arab citizenry. Until the 1980s, there were no independent newspapers, as the communist party dominated the public sphere. In the early years of the state, Arabic radio stations were all government-sanctioned and thus government-sanitized. There is still no Arabic television channel in Israel, and there are no universities run by the Arab community. In response to

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<sup>14</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 23-25.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Rabinowitz, “The Palestinian Citizens of Israel, the Concept of Trapped Minority and the Discourse of Transnationalism in Anthropology,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 24 no. 1 (2001), 64-85. The term has also been picked up by Amal Jamal in a recent study of local Arabic media. See Amal Jamal, *The Arab Public Sphere in Israel: Media Space and Cultural Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 57.

these discrepancies, a number of Palestinian Israeli intellectuals recently compiled the “Future Vision” documents, a political manifesto and draft constitution for a more equal—and ethnically neutral—Israel that would not be a “Jewish and democratic” state, as the legal and political status quo dictates, but rather a “state for all its citizens.”<sup>17</sup> These documents note the exclusion of the Arabic language from Israeli curricula, the public sphere, and urban space, and perceive it as an attempt to efface Arab culture wholesale.

Some of the powers of literature within this context are to cherish language, to enhance “shared culture,” to “recover” an older heritage, and to valorize a folk tradition that risks erasure.<sup>18</sup> Specifically in the Palestinian case, Cleary suggests three “tasks” that literature may perform. The first is to offer a “Palestinian counter-narrative to the more established Israeli version,” dismantling the history written by Israeli victors and reinserting Palestinians into the national narrative. The second task, borrowing a term from anthropologist James Clifford, is an act of “textual rescue” in which names, poetry, photography, or encyclopedic research attempt to reclaim a landscape settled, altered, and “alienated” by the Zionist enterprise. Third, writing represents a way to confront historical trauma, “to perform the work of mourning” necessary to process the meaning of such a catastrophic event as the *Nakba*, the exile and depopulation of 1948.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas Cleary examines only the work of exiled author and political activist Ghassan Kanafani, each of the authors I examine in this dissertation likewise take up one or multiple of Cleary’s “tasks” in order to articulate and to negotiate their Palestinian-Israeli predicaments. Habibi offers alternative narratives to the aftermath of the 1967 War in a small Galilean village and in the alleys of the Old City of Jerusalem; Taha engages with the problem of place names in Haifa and two Palestinian refugee camps; Naffa‘

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<sup>17</sup> “The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel,” published by The National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, December 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 54-56.

<sup>19</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 192-3.

recalls deep knowledge of his home village, Beit Jann, in the Galilee; and Darwish reckons with historical trauma dating to the British Mandate in al-Birwa, Deir al-Asad, and the plains of the Jezreel Valley. As these examples imply, Cleary's tasks are entwined with geography, and with particular experiences of space and place within Israeli territory. If Kanafani conjures a range of settings to portray the dislocating quality of exile, these writers within Israel retain a local focus. They are also more intimately embroiled in the domestic dynamics of the state and the norms and narratives it generates. Reinserting Palestine into an Israeli narrative from *within* thus necessitates grounding one's literature in the settings of the state. Naming, describing, and valorizing local environments represent an engagement with places affected by Zionist productions of space or infused with geopolitical tensions. And Palestine's historical trauma stems from a battle focused on settlement, belonging, and territorial rights over the land in which these writers and their communities still reside.

Later in the introduction and in Chapter One, I will press further the need to view the Palestinian Arab communities in Israel, and their works of literature, on their own unique and compelling terms. I have also been suggesting in a general sense, however, that it is imperative to think kaleidoscopically, and to view the nexus of geography and literature as a dynamic and productive site of cultivating identities. This intersection provides the ground from which to excavate an alternative set of Israeli narratives, to unpack the rich relationship between territory and personal or collective identities, and to consider how fiction has processed the hybridity of the Israeli state.

Finally, a varied perspective on geography and literature can give depth to small or specific places that are critical yet forgotten sites of discourse. Yi-Fu Tuan refers to these as the "inconspicuous fields of human care." They may be situated on a street

corner or in a modest village home.<sup>20</sup> Yet they are no less crucial for understanding how authors and their characters have shaped, and been shaped by the environments through which they move. While Zaki Darwish's story "*al-Khurūj min Marj Ibn 'Āmir*" (Crossing Marj ibn 'Amir) centers on the historic plain of the Jezreel Valley, Imil Habibi's characters dwell in an unnamed village near Tiberias, the streets of Haifa, and even a single prison cell. Muhammad Naffa' constructs the small village of Beit Jann with painstaking detail, whereas Muhammad 'Ali Taha's interest in geography is transient, marked by travel, movement, and the ephemeral effects of sound. These untold, nuanced approaches to space in Arabic literature in Israel complicate the broad-brush maxim that "the land" is the crux of Palestinian identity, and they warrant careful analysis through both geographic and literary means.

#### **PLACE, SPACE, AND LITERATURE: A THEORETICAL OUTLINE**

The key terms for a discussion of geographies and identities in literature—"place" and "space"—demand some clarification. These are thorny concepts that are best understood as dialectical and overlapping. In scholarship "place" has tended to signify a site that holds a certain valence for an individual or group. As Barbara Parmenter puts it in her study of Palestinian literature, places represent sites of "meaning, value, and intention."<sup>21</sup> Place is thus inclined towards lived experience and the processes of describing, practicing, and developing meaning in a particular locale. Yet the scale of a place is difficult to pin down. Colloquially, we speak of neighborhoods or whole cities as interesting "places" to visit. The sites that are most evocative, however, are often smaller—a room, a park, a market—and can even comprise single objects.<sup>22</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan

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<sup>20</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 162.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 2-4.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 2-3.

finds a world of meaning instilled in “a favorite armchair.”<sup>23</sup> Edward Casey writes of Proust that “an entire world awaits us in a single tea-soaked madeleine.”<sup>24</sup> As Tim Cresswell notes, the influence of phenomenological and existentialist work on humanistic geography has also prompted a more “ideographic” outlook that sees place more as an attitude, and a “way of being-in-the-world.”<sup>25</sup> At its core, then, to think about place is to take an interest in both where and how we establish “centers of value”—by sensory perception, lived experience, symbolism, memory, or cultural representations—across a range of sites.

“Space,” by contrast, is understood as more abstract. For Edward Relph, space is “amorphous and intangible,” an ether into which we carve our own practices and lived places.<sup>26</sup> Tuan represents space as a zone of movement and action, in contrast to place as static, a kind of “pause” for stopping, experiencing, and instilling value.<sup>27</sup> If place is to this extent something private, then, space represents the world of public, economic, and political relationships. Indeed, other popular meanings of the term are impersonal: the axes of a Cartesian grid, or the angles of architectural and urban design, for example.

These contrasting connotations of space and place remain rhetorically productive. I generally will use place to refer to affective, personal, and collective dimensions, and space to suggest the wider fabric of Israeli-Palestinian geographies, often related to conflict, the urban realm, and the symbolic fabric of the Israeli state. Yet a clean theoretical bifurcation would be problematic. In a state where territorial ownership is so profoundly contested, there is effectively little division between public and private. As Naffa<sup>4</sup> describes a local farmer’s close, knowledgeable bond with the earth, the character

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<sup>23</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 149.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 175.

<sup>25</sup> Cresswell, *Place*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Press, 1976), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 149.

knows that his carefully nurtured lands are at risk of state expropriation. When Taha describes a village being raided by police, he deliberately notes that every home—a quintessential kind of place—was turned inside out. Habibi’s *Umm al-Rubabika* collects individual, private trinkets, yet they all remind her of the broader, collective trauma of the *Nakba*. The stories of this contested land clearly demand that place and space be seen in dialogue with each other, even at times collapsing together.

An iconic treatise against the place-space binary comes from Henri Lefebvre, whose 1974 work *The Production of Space* represents an attempt to develop a “unitary theory of physical, mental and social space.”<sup>28</sup> What Lefebvre finds irksome about certain definitions of place is that they treat geography as “nothing more than the passive locus of social relations.”<sup>29</sup> For Lefebvre, space cannot be a blank canvas, “a void packed like a parcel with various contents.”<sup>30</sup> Rather, space is a complex, continually shifting, dynamic agglomeration of physical features, social practices, architectural representations, and even abstractions—such as political and state ideologies—that necessarily function in space and that “produce” it in a variety of ways. Societies construct built areas, in which architects realize designs and “representations.” Markets divide spaces up and trade real estate as a particular kind of commodity. People influence and are influenced by their environments in daily practices and routines. In Foucault’s words, “space itself has a history.”<sup>31</sup> And of course, echoing Leonard Lutwack, works of literature represent space, influence geographic perceptions, and develop settings as a powerful component of narrative.

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<sup>28</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, October 1984, 1.

Lefebvre's understanding of space revolves around a triad of concepts. First is "spatial practice," conceived as both the routines of daily life and the "routes and networks" that connect different social arenas like work and home. Second are "representations of space," the dominant aspect of production that is governed by architects, planners, and political forces. Third, Lefebvre posits "representational spaces" as the work of the literary and artistic realm, in which authors are able to "change and appropriate" space, construct their own symbols, and tackle the representations of space through which they move.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, there is something holistic about literature, which acts as its own kind of imaginary space that nevertheless addresses the actual conditions of "spatial practice" and "representations of space."

In a recent study of contemporary Hebrew literature, Karen Grumberg elaborates on how these diverse theoretical perspectives on space and place can be brought together to inform literary close readings. Grumberg divides the geographic scholarship into two broad, not entirely discrete groups that to some degree track the tendentious distinctions between space and place: "one [group] that considers the spatial to be primarily experiential, intimate, and phenomenological; and the other that considers it to be primarily social, political, and ideological."<sup>33</sup> Among the first, phenomenological group, are Gaston Bachelard, Michel de Certeau, and Yi-Fu Tuan. Bachelard investigates "dwelling places" and those sites that are imaginatively rich, vivid, and often positive in their affective force. De Certeau is concerned with "practice" in space, arguing that the ways in which we invest value in places and develop attachments to them are intimately connected with the spatial practices that we enact. To be "inside" a place is to develop through "ongoing activities" an "authentic" relationship with it. This notion dovetails

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<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38-39.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 19.

with the work of Edward Relph, who also looks for some notion of “authenticity” and specificity that nurtures “insiderness” against global currents of increased mobility, displacement, and “spatial homogeneity.”<sup>34</sup>

The critique that Grumberg levels at the phenomenological approach, and rightly so, is that it frequently ignores the “political factors” that bring about placelessness.<sup>35</sup> A related critique is implicit in her discussion, which is that phenomenology also overlooks the intrusion of similar political factors into the fabric of a place itself; how an experience such as displacement may be geographically inscribed, or more simply how places can be negative and alienating. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard considers the phenomenological force or “reverberation” of large-scale places (houses, attics, valleys, open natural landscapes) and specific objects (shells, drawers, closets), and the interior dialectics that they bring out.<sup>36</sup> Bachelard’s notion of “immensity,” for example, explores the paradoxical inwardness of experiencing open vistas. Yet Bachelard is unapologetically concerned with what he terms “felicitous space”—those objects and environments that may be “grasped” and “defended” owing to their affective force. Contested arenas do not figure in *The Poetics of Space*. As Bachelard writes, “Hostile space is hardly mentioned in these pages. The space of hatred and combat can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images. For the present, we shall consider images that *attract*.”<sup>37</sup>

I would suggest, however, that the aversion to “hostile space” is precisely what makes Bachelard and other phenomenological scholars relevant here. Palestinian Arab works in Israel after 1967 offer a broad range of Bachelardian images *disrupted* or challenged and concepts like “immensity” or “inside/outside” more ambivalently

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<sup>34</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Gaston Bachelard, trans. Maria Jolas, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xxxv.

deployed. Darwish, for example, portrays a soldier whose angst only deepens as he takes in a panoramic view from his watchtower. Naffa‘ has one young protagonist reflect on the traditions and customs of village life before a gaping ravine. Habibi’s young character Mas‘ud sees his house not as a comforting, private place, but instead as a banal environment out of which his dreams transport him to a wider Arab world. It is through the likes of Bachelard that we can delve into these “spaces we love” even in fraught worlds where, indeed, they need to be “defended” or seem already lost.

In finding a balance that reconciles the phenomenological with the sociopolitical, Grumberg looks to Henri Lefebvre and his formulation on ideology: “The production of space, which in itself can consist of intimate phenomenological components as well as abstract conceptual ones, not only invites but actually *forms* ideology. Without space and the process of its production...there can be no ideology.”<sup>38</sup> Lefebvre’s ideas are critical for a second group of scholars, then, which may also include postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Bill Ashcroft, who insist that systems of power, production, and politics cannot be sidelined. For literary close readings, phenomenological and sociopolitical literature thus enter a symbiotic relationship, each fulfilling an important task and fleshing out an interpretive possibility that the other is less equipped to achieve. As Grumberg concludes: “It is not that textual space need not be abstract—it *must* not be abstract.”<sup>39</sup>

### **METHODS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

The intricacies of partition and the complex relationships between literature and territory, and territory and identity in Israel/Palestine, demand an equally dynamic set of analytical tools. In adopting a combinatory approach, I strive for what Ella Shohat calls

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<sup>38</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 24.

“flexible relations” among theoretical insights, and I embrace her call for a versatile approach to the study of intertwined identities, which is a central concern for Palestinian Arabs in Israel.<sup>40</sup> My methods of close reading rely on three interlocking strategies, which each make important contributions to existing scholarship.

Primarily, I engage closely with the language and narrative fabric of the original Arabic texts. I investigate the ways in which writers mediate the complex environments of the Israeli state, and how features such as narrative time and voice, the etymological resonance of key concepts, shifts between formal and colloquial registers, the importing of terms from Hebrew, the development of character, or the careful construction of settings all contribute to layered, frequently anxious, and challenging attempts to establish a sense of place in this familiar yet estranging homeland. This attention to literary craft works alongside the wide-ranging theories on place and space. Developing conceptions of home from Bachelard, for example, I discuss Habibi’s use of a shifting temporal frame and a restrained depiction of a village house to communicate the anxieties of family reunion after 1967. I explore the use of colloquial Arabic terms by Naffa‘ to convey the richness of his home village, and how this richness relates to Lefebvre’s arguments about working the land. With Meron Benvenisti’s work on “white patches” and geographic effacement in mind, I consider how Darwish depicts the devolution of an agricultural heartland into a gray, homogenized space marked only by the scars of conflict.

This theoretically symbiotic approach enriches our understanding of where and how these works locate belonging and community within Israel. It is a theoretical combination that has not been used in any other study of Palestinian literature, much less

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<sup>40</sup> Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial.’” *Social Text*, No. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992), 112.

an in-depth exploration of Arabic literature within Israel at this particularly important juncture after 1967.

Secondly, I engage closely with the historical context of the short stories at hand. As I will discuss shortly, the one work that tackles Palestinian literature from a spatial perspective (Barbara Parmenter's *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature*) is notably lacking in historical detail. And as I discuss in Chapter One, even though scholars like Ibrahim Taha and Mahmoud Ghanayim discuss the relevance of Arabic literature in Israel to that state's "extra-textual reality," to use Taha's formulation, they do not expound on this reality critically or in depth. Addressing this oversight, I incorporate a range of important critical materials both to develop context and to bring these sources into dialogue with close readings of fiction. I draw on historians including Rashid Khalidi, Tom Segev, Shira Robinson, and Benny Morris; political geographer Oren Yiftachel; and sociologist Tamir Sorek. The inclusion of these sources enhances the "situatedness" of the texts and, since so many authors cite a fine line between their own lived experiences and the creative worlds that they conjure in writing, it is an apt way of enriching textual analysis with its proper context.<sup>41</sup>

Thirdly, related to this contextual engagement, I take an interest in the mainstream Israeli narratives and Hebrew terms with which Arab citizens grapple on a daily basis. In addition to close reading Arabic literary texts, then, I gloss key Hebrew terms such as "present absentee" and "infiltrator," examining their emergence and etymological resonance. I also locate instances where Habibi, Taha, or Naffa' brush against an official Israeli state line, such as the narratives of pluralism and tolerance in Jerusalem that revolve around the Muslim administration of the al-Aqsa Mosque and Haram al-Sharif

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<sup>41</sup> The term suggests a closer exploration of a text's audience, its sources, and the context of its production. See Mohamed-Salah Omri, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Comparative Critical Studies*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2007, 359-378.

(the Temple Mount complex that sits atop the Western Wall). I use a number of academic sources in Hebrew, and I have explored Imil Habibi's personal files in the Israeli State Archives in order to deepen our understanding of his days as a parliamentarian in the Knesset.

My bilingual approach is a particularly necessary contribution, as much of the scholarship on Palestinian prose fiction is flattened by inadequate attention to the nuances of either the Arabic or Hebrew language, or sometimes both. By his own admission, Cleary reads neither Arabic nor Hebrew. Indeed, a majority of scholars working on Arabic literature do not command fluency in Hebrew. More often than not, those who do incorporate both languages—such as Ghanayim, Taha, and Ballas—are themselves Israeli. Although they work with multiple texts, they seldom interrogate the Israeli context and the terms of the state or its cultural discourse. In this respect, I am perhaps aided by my status as a relative outsider to the region. In the effort to work critically and bilingually on Israel/Palestine—though I do not incorporate literary texts in Hebrew—I join a recent body of work that includes Gil Hochberg and Anna Bernard, who both approach the figures of the Arab and the Jew as compellingly linked subjects and bridge linguistic barriers in search of “relational” analyses that embrace the “inseparability” of Israeli-Palestinian literary narratives.<sup>42</sup>

To a significant degree, advancing the notion of a complex cultural realm in Israel with contrasting narratives and hybrid spaces draws on concepts from postcolonial studies. The extent to which Israel/Palestine suits a postcolonial frame is up for debate, and Anna Ball has recently offered a neat encapsulation of the dilemma. Ball discusses

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<sup>42</sup> See Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013). Rachel Brenner has also written on the interconnectivity of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab writers, though she works exclusively with writing in Hebrew by Anton Shammas and 'Atallah Mansur and translations into Hebrew of the work of Imil Habibi. See Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

the “classification complex” that surrounds the question of whether Israel/Palestine should be treated as postcolonial.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, Zionism embraces a settling mentality that evokes comparisons to colonial ventures in such regions as Australia, South Africa, and the United States.<sup>44</sup> The foundation of the state displaced 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 and since 1967 the state has occupied territories beyond its initial borders and administered them largely under military rule. Indeed, as Bernard notes, the “abject” Palestinian within this realm has become a highly visible figure and point of reference for certain media and academic narratives.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, in response to what Shohat calls “millennial persecution,” Zionism also represents a liberation ideology. And, emerging from various countries in Europe in the late nineteenth century, it had no clear metropolitan center, a role that Paris and London, for example, served in their respective nation’s imperial projects.

Taking up Joseph Massad’s paradoxical term “the postcolonial colony,” Ball concludes that Israel/Palestine is best seen as occupying an “ambivalent synchronicity” whereby Israel can be seen simultaneously as both victim and perpetrator, downtrodden oppressed and shadowy oppressor.<sup>46</sup> Albeit an idiosyncratic, uncertain variant of quasi-colonial power dynamics, Israel/Palestine undeniably represents an instance in which postcolonial theory can be usefully employed to understand the society’s complexities even if, as Ball notes, this is relatively new analytical ground.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Anna Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6.

<sup>44</sup> On the discursive similarities between Zionism and colonialism, see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). On the ways in which a new Israeli administration drew on existing British infrastructure, see Shira Robinson, “Occupied Citizens in a Liberal State: Palestinians under Military Rule and the Colonial Formation of Israeli Society, 1948-1966,” PhD diss., Stanford University, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film*, 4-7.

<sup>47</sup> Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film*, 2.

The central terms that I deploy here from postcolonial studies are “hybridity” and “anxiety.” I use hybridity to refer to the liminal, in-between nature of mixed spaces and ambivalent identities. Developed by a number of theorists in the 1990s, hybridity is one of the most important concepts through which postcolonial studies has attempted to dissolve binaries of colonizer/colonized and self/other. Importantly, though, as Homi Bhabha has suggested, hybridity evokes an intermingling that is not so much a productive blend of two groups but instead suggests a shift into the uncertain middle ground in-between. As an administrator absorbs a foreign language and raises children among local people, for example, there is slippage away from the stereotypical national character of the imperial homeland and metropole. This is clearly encapsulated in Rudyard Kipling’s semi-autobiographical character Kim, who spends his upbringing dashing jovially through the streets of India before he comes of age—with some apprehension—into the colonial administration. Similarly, a talented local student or promising professional may move away from his indigenous roots by adopting certain styles and habits that tend towards the fashions of the governing power. From each end of the supposed binary, there is a drift into an uncertain—and hybrid—social zone where one is not a consummate dual citizen, but “neither one nor the other.”<sup>48</sup> Hybridity, in this sense, is also “partiality.”<sup>49</sup>

Though Bhabha and others have used hybridity in arguments centering on semiotics and speech, the term has much wider application. Hybrid spaces and conflicted characters are equally fertile ground for cultural negotiations. With inherent connotations of contact, hybridity serves as a lens to capture the complexities of daily geographic

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<sup>48</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 159. To this extent, moving inward and away from supposed polarities, “hybridity” can also act as a means for critiquing those binary assumptions. Indeed, it is critical that it does, as Hochberg warns that concepts like hybridity risk embracing “the junction of two predetermined national, ethnic, or cultural identities.” Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition*, 16.

engagements for Palestinian Arabs in Israel. In moving to Palestine, setting up villages, towns, and kibbutzim, and over time developing state-like infrastructure, the Zionist movement had since the late nineteenth century put itself in close contact with the Palestinian Arab population. Though it is easy to frame the encounters in polar, dual terms (us/them, invader/owner, self/other), this attitude overlooks the intricacies of mutually formative interactions. Hybridity defies straightforwardness and dualism and instead allows a richer consideration of the mediations of geographies and identities in Israel.

Anxiety, which so often permeates the narratives that I will discuss, is a more self-evident term, though its place in literary work demands brief explanation. Often linked to existentialist writers like Camus and Sartre, anxiety manifests as a symptom of reckoning with various forms of dislocation and displacement. To Bhabha, anxiety is intrinsically related to hybridity, since it “links us to the memory of the past while we struggle to choose a path through the ambiguous history of the present.”<sup>50</sup> If Bhabha’s frame is temporal, Cleary’s is built on cultural contact and narrative. According to Cleary, anxiety is most acute when “substantive cultural differences” are not particularly obvious. This lack of differentiation is ironically common in partition societies, where conflicting sides both fashion themselves in terms of a deep connection to the landscape. Ashcroft, borrowing from Sara Suleri, calls this the “peculiar intimacy” of territorial contestation, in which different sites may prompt complicity, resistance, or “a dialogic process of recovery and reinscription.”<sup>51</sup> Mary Louise Pratt coins the term “contact zone” to describe these places where there is a cultural confluence that is both fraught and productive.<sup>52</sup> Cleary uses the evocative phrase “incestuous intimacy” and Hochberg writes of “libidinal

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<sup>50</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, xix.

<sup>51</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989), 183-184.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991), 33-40.

ties” to describe the uncanny proximity and the “linked life” of these parties vying for the same national ground.<sup>53</sup>

The textual manifestations of anxiety may be varied. They may be temporal, concerned with local histories and how they have been effaced or rewritten; spatial, concerned with the forcible displacement of people or the altering of local environments; personal, regarding the absence of family or traditional community; or collective, related to threatened shared values and a society under strain. In literary work, anxieties can be located in the predicaments faced and the states lived in by a particular character; or, uncertainty may seep into the narrative structure of time and place, the fracturing of voice, the use of multiple languages, or the attempt to invoke and so “recover” local cultural forms, from casual idioms to folkloric tales or religious epithets. In the mixed and often embattled circumstances of Arabic literature in Israel, both anxiety and hybridity are vital concepts.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: GEOGRAPHY AND THE NATIONAL PARADIGM**

The importance of exploring hybridity and anxiety, paying attention to Hebrew terms and Israeli narratives, and adopting a theoretical outlook that balances humanistic work with politically and socially engaged scholarship, becomes clearer in light of the only previous study on literature, geography, and identity in Arabic fiction in Israel/Palestine: Barbara Parmenter’s *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (1994). Parmenter traces the evolution of a Palestinian “land rhetoric” from the early twentieth century to the outbreak of the First Intifada. Parmenter departs from the literature of “struggle and loss”—a period spanning from 1920 to

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<sup>53</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 57. Hochberg also points out that this closeness has been articulated by critics including Judith Butler and Edward Said. See Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition*, 2-7.

1960—and then moves through a number of tropes: the desert, refugee camp, and foreign city as “objective” settings of exile; and the vexing concepts of “home” and of “encountering” the transformed Israeli landscape. Parmenter’s approach springs from humanistic geography and a concern for “the meaning and experience of place”—that is, as I have similarly discussed the term, sites and areas that people embed with “special meaning, value, and intention.”<sup>54</sup> Parmenter offers thoughtful readings across a range of texts that include the poetry of Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, and Tawfiq Zayyad, the fiction of Ghassan Kanafani and Anton Shammas, and the journey writing of Raja Shehadeh. Her readings lead to the conclusion that, in the face of Israeli attempts to transform the landscape of Palestine both literally and rhetorically, Palestinians deploy poetic and literary constructions of “place” that aim at “confronting and resisting Israeli versions of place, history, and identity” and at forging their own “enduring identity” around a homeland usurped and altered.<sup>55</sup>

The theoretical inclination and scope of Parmenter’s study lead also to its shortfalls. Primarily, the exclusive use of humanistic geographic theory facilitates a relative lack of geographical specificity, as well as a lack of attention to relevant literary theory—such as the postcolonial—on identity in contested landscapes. Looking as Parmenter does for articulations of place, which is to say sites of meaning, paradoxically renders specific geographies unimportant when that (implied positive and affective) meaning is found wanting. Arguing that writers imbue recurring settings in the diaspora—the foreign city, refugee camp and desert—with a meaninglessness that negates surroundings, Parmenter implies that the “condition of exile” is all-consuming, flattening the diasporic experience. “*Ghurba*,” that powerful sense of dislocation and

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<sup>54</sup> Parmenter, *Stones*, 2-4.

<sup>55</sup> Parmenter, *Stones*, 98.

alienation from home, persists across adopted locales. The geographic openness of exile, encompassing vast and diverse landscapes outside of the homeland, paradoxically reinforces the very inwardness of “*ghurba*,” of the suffocation of experiencing personal alienation no matter the surroundings. Thus Parmenter is able to gloss over distinctive geographies and to reduce their specificities with the broad brush of “*ghurba*.”

Although the condition of “*ghurba*” is doubtless conveyed with extreme intensity across many works, Parmenter’s approach prevents us from understanding what it means literarily to communicate a landscape *without* particularly affective meaning; how numbness, negativity, or profound alienation and dissonance may also be inscribed in different settings. This theoretical bias to “place” as affective also short-circuits an understanding of the resonance that a given locale may carry and the dynamics of its history and production as a contested site. A short story set in the Sabra refugee camp, for example, would have immensely powerful, traumatic connotations after 1982. Parmenter analyzes a poem by Tawfiq Zayyad that mentions both Kafr Qasim and Deir Yasin, the sites of decisive tragedies for the Palestinian people that have since entered the memorial canon, but these charged locations are only footnoted.<sup>56</sup>

In a similar vein, the almost century-long sweep of this study renders historical nuance difficult to achieve. We are left with little sense of the traumatic shock of 1948, for example, while the dramatic shifts after the 1967 Six-Day War appear only in passing. Also ignored, as a result, is the crucial distinction between Palestinian Arab citizens and the broader Palestinian community: the fact that Darwish was a “present-absentee” who grew up in Haifa before leaving Israel for Lebanon when he was twenty-three; that Kanafani was exiled at age twelve and spent years of political exile in Syria, Kuwait, and Lebanon; and that Shammas was born after 1948 as an Israeli citizen. Indeed, in an

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<sup>56</sup> Parmenter, *Stones*, 74-75.

interview with fellow novelist David Grossman, Shammas speaks of the “invisible but most palpable semantic Green Line” between Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel and those in the Occupied Territories and beyond.<sup>57</sup> Glossing over these nuances, *Stones* assumes a unified Palestinian people with a commonly held national cause of resistance.

To this degree, Parmenter implicitly adopts the “national paradigm” that is pervasive in broader scholarship on Palestinian literature. As Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg argue, the national paradigm is a dominant framework that positions the nation-state as the “inherent guiding logic,” with the result that cultural material is either consigned to the margins or instrumentalized as a political tool. Parmenter, of course, falls closer to the latter. Stein and Swedenburg characterize this problematic outlook in the introduction to a revisionist volume on popular culture as follows: “The relative importance of culture is directly proportional to its perceived ability to reflect, serve, and exemplify the political, either in the instrumental service of hegemony or when deployed as a weapon in political struggles.”<sup>58</sup> Stein and Swedenburg critique one article by Palestinian critic Hanan Ashrawi, but the examples of this way of thinking are many.

Take the following excerpt from the introduction to a seminal anthology of Palestinian literature:

While one can say that all Arabic literature nowadays is involved in the social and political struggle of the Arab people, politics nevertheless imposes a greater strain on the Palestinian writer...There are problems of identity, even problems over the simple acquisition of a passport; Palestinian writers have to spend their lives either as exiles in other people’s countries, or, if they have in fact remained in their own ancestral homeland, either as second-class citizens in Israel proper or lacking any citizenship at all under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza...Modern Palestinian experience is harsh, unrelenting, and all-penetrating;

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<sup>57</sup> David Grossman, trans. Haim Watzman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993), 263.

<sup>58</sup> Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, introduction to *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 5-6.

no Palestinian is free from its grip and no writer can evade it...There is no escape.”<sup>59</sup>

Here, and repeatedly throughout this seventy-page introduction, Jayyusi subjects Palestinian literati to a unitary conception as national(ist) writers bound to a struggle and to an implicitly moral imperative to communicate their representative plight. She uses the very language of Stein and Swedenburg’s critique, presenting poetry as a “potent verbal weapon against the tragic circumstances of their people.”<sup>60</sup> This framework is reductive not only of the “Palestinian writer” and his or her “problems of identity” but also of the struggle whose expression “the Palestinian writer” cannot escape. The tone here recalls Fredric Jameson’s well-known dictum that “in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual.”<sup>61</sup>

The homogenizing effect of this paradigm is problematic in that it has limited our exploration of Palestinian Arab literature within Israel on its own compelling terms. Other works—not unlike Parmenter’s and Jayyusi’s—include the writing of Palestinian Arab citizens yet veer toward straightforward national categorization. Israeli academic Ami Elad-Bouskila embraces literary identities unquestioningly along national and linguistic lines. Palestinian literature becomes one of “twenty-two different literatures” in the Middle East.<sup>62</sup> Of Anton Shammas and other Palestinian citizens writing in Hebrew, Bouskila asserts that, “Clearly, their literature, written in Israel, is Israeli literature.”<sup>63</sup> Shimon Ballas distinguishes between Palestinian refugees and “those who remained,” yet persists with the dualism of a “*national* minority” (emphasis mine) attempting to protect

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<sup>59</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> Jayyusi, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text*, no. 15 (Autumn 1986), 74.

<sup>62</sup> Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 5-10.

<sup>63</sup> Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 52-55.

its particular character, often with militaristic poetry.<sup>64</sup> Nur and Abdelwahab el-Messiri, in an anthology of quite varied short stories, impose a meta-narrative over the collection for organizational purposes. Admittedly fabricated, this orders the anthology yet simultaneously forges the arc of a purely national allegory.<sup>65</sup> A number of scholars—including Maher Jarrar, Ibrahim Taha, and Mahmoud Kayyal—use the paradigm of “minor literature” advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.<sup>66</sup> This framework has three broad characteristics: minor literature is written in a language affected by “deterritorialization,” it is always political, and it is always collective.<sup>67</sup> “Minor literature” offers a more nuanced platform than the national paradigm, but it places similar emphasis on categorization and on literature’s inevitable role on the national political stage.

Perhaps the most prevalent frame within the national paradigm is that of “resistance literature,” a term coined by Ghassan Kanafani and developed by Barbara Harlow in a seminal text for postcolonial theory. For Harlow, “resistance literature” revolves around revolution. Resistance writers operate in an “arena of struggle” where there are circumstances of domination in general, but also specific repressions of their literary craft.<sup>68</sup> In this embattled context, writers use their work not only to critique their circumstances of repression, but also to suggest alternatives, and to engage in the political process of liberation. The classic example in the Palestinian case is Kanafani himself, a writer who was also deeply involved in a liberation movement as a political and intellectual leader of the People’s Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

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<sup>64</sup> Shimon Ballas, *La Littérature Arabe et le Conflict au Proche-Orient* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1980), 55.

<sup>65</sup> Nur and Abdelwahab el-Messiri, eds., *A Land of Stone and Thyme: An Anthology of Palestinian Short Stories* (London: Quartet Books, 1996).

<sup>66</sup> Mahmoud Kayyal, “‘Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques’: Minor Hebrew Works of Palestinian Authors in the Eyes of Critics,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, vol. 11:1 (2008), 31-51. The use of Deleuze and Guattari’s framework also extends into the visual arts. See Jean Fisher, “Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present,” *Third Text*, 24:4 (2010), 481-489.

<sup>67</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 2.

Certainly, some of the writers among Israel's Arab minority, notably Taha and Naffa', identify to an extent with resistance literature. Yet their work implicates Israel in more nuanced and ambivalent ways than others writing from abroad. Not to mention authors like Ibrahim and Habibi, who are critical but in some ways conciliatory, incorporating Jewish characters and focusing less on iconic portrayals of resistance than on the intricate challenges of everyday life. Crucially, for all of these writers, there is a level of acceptance towards the state, even a conflicted sense of belonging, in spite of the criticisms that they level against it. Liberation does not mean an erasure or dismantling of Israel as it did for many contemporaries abroad, and as it did for Kanafani. Doubtless, local writers itch for greater freedoms, but more often through increased civic opportunities and equalities, recognition from the state, and coexistence. Harlow's "resistance literature" has little room for such integrative, hybrid identities that challenge a state system while understanding and critiquing its role as an inevitable, functional part of a civic self.

Of course, the idea of the nation remains a compelling force in Palestinian writing, not least in the absence of a sovereign and independent state. Nevertheless, the concept—and the geographies in which the nation and the state might be grounded—often escape without being critically interrogated. As such, although the tendency to extrapolate onto an always politically engaged national scale is common, it can be limiting as a means of literary analysis, especially for a complex internal minority of Palestinian Israeli citizens.<sup>69</sup> If Arabic literature produced within Israel is treated only in blanket Palestinian terms, or even as "minor literature" within the state context, then we risk slipping into

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<sup>69</sup> For a critique of the allegorical tendencies in Arabic literary scholarship, see Mohamed-Salah Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and World Literature: Sites of Confluence in the Writings of Mahmud al-Mas'adi* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 18-20. For a recent exception on theorizing the "national allegory," showing how certain writers may "expect and exploit" the demands of writing about the nation in literature that circulates widely and in translation, see Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 4-16 and 22-34.

what Zachary Lockman terms the “dual society” paradigm, in which Israeli and Palestinian societies are implicitly separate and reciprocal interactions are sidelined.<sup>70</sup> Jayyusi’s anthology uses the revealing language of dualism, characterizing Palestinian writing as “the suffering and struggle of a particular section of humanity caught in the toils of a well-engineered political situation imposed on them without their consent and through no fault of their own.”<sup>71</sup> Lockman’s discipline is history, yet the “dual society” logic also colors textual analysis, precluding recognition of complex interactions between Israeli Jews and Arabs, and of expressive portrayals of one group by the other outside the dynamics of conflict. At its most stark, this paradigm devolves into a Manichean arena in which Israel and Palestine inexorably do battle.

Just as Grumberg quips that trying to locate clear-cut definitions of space and place can be “an exercise in frustration,” so the issue of categorizing Palestinian Arab writers in Israel is complicated and elusive.<sup>72</sup> It is not my intention to advance a certain category, or even to advocate a new one for this literary community. Instead, I focus on close readings as a way to suggest that the works themselves defy ready categorization. The sheer plurality of available categories is testament enough to the complicated nature of this community and its cultural production. What I am interested in, then, is acknowledging yet cutting through these existing frames, and adopting a flexible and fluid approach that does greater justice to the contingencies and reverberations of both text and context. I will ultimately return to a discussion of categorization in the conclusion.

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<sup>70</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5-6.

<sup>71</sup> Jayyusi, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 71.

<sup>72</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 18.

When characterizing the effects of 1948, Parmenter writes, “Some Palestinians found themselves quite literally on the outside looking in.”<sup>73</sup> What I grapple with here is how certain writers after 1967 undertook the complex process of writing and constructing spaces not from the opposite position—“on the inside looking out”—but living and moving anxiously in-between. These were Palestinian Arab writers who experienced Israel/Palestine as entangled and interlinked rather than separate and parallel; in Livia Alexander’s words, as societies “within” and “between” each other.<sup>74</sup> These writers were on the inside looking *around*.

### **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

Building on the methodological and theoretical foundations discussed, Chapter One provides a historical background for Arabic literature in Israel. I chart its trajectory through the momentous conflicts of 1948 and 1967, briefly introduce the authors, and justify my choice of timeframe and the focus on prose. I review and critique existing scholarship that prioritizes cultural binaries, discrete aesthetic and political categories, and the diachronic periodization of literary trends over a close focus on text and historical context.

The remaining four chapters are devoted to close readings. I have organized chapters by author so that each section may develop a focused analysis and explore the idiosyncrasies of different authors tackling the dynamics of place, space, identity, and anxiety in unique and sometimes highly personal ways. I draw connections and contrasts between authors where they are most striking, suggesting that these writers frequently respond to similar concerns such as language, names, tradition, and historical trauma. For

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<sup>73</sup> Parmenter, *Stones*, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Livia Alexander, “Conflicting Images: Palestinian and Israeli cinemas, 1988-1998” (PhD diss., New York University, 2001), 14.

the sake of clarity, rather than to imply a teleological progression, the chapters proceed in a rough chronological order.

Chapter Two explores Imil Habibi's *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (The Sextet of the Six Days), arguing that Habibi's work is rife with anxiety over the impossibility of true unification between Palestinians in Israel and those in exile, following the post-1967 reunions across the Green Line. Employing Bachelard's perspectives on the house, Tuan's on names, and David Seamon's on everyday routines, I suggest that Habibi uses shifts in narrative time and voice, issues of naming and the Hebrew language, and his banal everyday settings—a village home in the Galilee, the alleyways of Jerusalem, and a Haifa prison cell—to communicate his uncertainty of belonging within Israeli borders and his distrust of a monolithic ideal of Palestinian identity. Using historical scholarship and my own archival research, I link these sentiments to Habibi's political career with the Israeli Communist Party and as a Member of the Knesset.

Chapter Three focuses on Muhammad 'Ali Taha, spotlighting the first of several writers about whom relatively little is written in the Arab world, with even less in languages other than Arabic. The chapter moves from the challenges of individual identities to the problems of the torn, disenfranchised collective. Taha openly embraces the idea that he is crafting some kind of representative Palestinian fiction, but his short stories are more ambivalent than his claim would suggest and often question how the writing of Palestine within Israel may unfold. I argue that a number of recurrent themes—the naming of places, movement and travel, the circulation of information, and political ideology—reflexively meditate on the challenge of fashioning collective identities in a contested geopolitical arena. I explore these themes with reference to the role of sound in geographic thought, Nirvana Tanoukhi's discussion of roads and freedom, and Benedict Anderson's theory of print-capitalism and imagined community.

Chapter Four is the first of two chapters that deal less with urban and vernacular spaces and instead take up the axiomatic theme of “the land.” Here, I juxtapose the work of Muhammad Naffa‘ and Hanna Ibrahim. I discuss the land confiscations of the 1970s and the riots of Land Day in 1976 as a backdrop to their work. I use historical material and the insights of Oren Yiftachel and Tamir Sorek to suggest the ambivalence of the occasion and its commemorations as a quasi-national symbol. In this context, I suggest that Naffa‘’s rural stories deliberately portray both the vibrancy of his home village in the Galilee and the complexity of the Israeli political and legal establishment that puts his home under threat. I also explore his portrayals of land protest and how they reveal a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between local belonging and national unity. Here, I employ several local critics as well as Joe Cleary to place Naffa‘’s constructions of the local and his use of colloquial Arabic within an anxious dialectic of tradition and modernity. I also discuss the important place in his writing of his own particular community—the Israeli Druze—and its unique standing within Israel. Shifting the discussion to Hanna Ibrahim, I suggest that he provides a foil to Naffa‘ in attempting to write from the perspective of Jewish characters. Ibrahim’s is a moderate outlook that emphasizes the closeness—that “peculiar intimacy”—of Arab and Jewish characters. I unpack the figure of the infiltrator (*mutasallil*) to complicate the sense of difference between purported adversaries in the battle for territory, and to problematize an Israeli narrative of Palestinian returnees as dangerous resistance fighters.

While Chapter Four incorporates a range of sociopolitical angles, Chapter Five is devoted to a more phenomenological reading of Zaki Darwish’s “*al-Khurūj min Marj Ibn ‘Āmir*,” a striking account of a journey across the Green Line. I use Tuan’s insights on the senses to discuss the characters’ holistic attachment to the homeland, and Meron Benvenisti’s scholarship on geographic effacement to convey the changes wrought by

territorial conflict. Building on the notions of “desolation” and “displacement” offered by Edward Casey, I suggest that this trauma is also inscribed on the human body, taking a phenomenological toll as the homeland turns into something that is at once familiar and foreign, deeply known yet barely recognizable.

Darwish’s story concludes with a powerful scene in which the protagonist stands just over the Green Line at dawn, caked in clay, and cleansed by rain. A memorable and powerful image, it resonates both with the anxieties that mark post-1967 writing and with the idea of a more strident Palestinian-Israeli subject amid the shifting sands of the mid-to late 1980s. As 1967 reshaped Israeli-Palestinian geographies, Darwish’s work and his iconic final tableau stand on the brink of yet more momentous cultural and political turns. “*Al-Khurūj*” provides a reflective conclusion to this era of provocative short story writing in Israel.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **RUPTURE AND RECOVERY: ARABIC FICTION IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

How did Arabic literature in Israel develop? How does its context set it apart from other literatures of the Arab world? Why is the period after 1967 a particularly fruitful era to explore? This chapter addresses these questions, tracing the arc of the Arabic literary and cultural scene that existed in Palestine and its development in the context of the geopolitical shifts of 1948 and 1967. I also briefly introduce the key authors that feature in this study. Who are these writers, why have I chosen to examine their work, and how do they fit into Israel's Arabic-language public sphere? Lastly, I critique prior scholarship on Arabic literature in Israel, considering shortcomings such as its lack of close textual analysis, emphasis on categorization, and detachment from social and historical context.

### **ARABIC LITERATURE IN ISRAEL PRE- AND POST-1967**

Before 1948, Palestine was a vibrant cultural scene. The Ottoman and British powers had overseen the establishment of numerous educational institutions. More than fifty newspapers from around the Ottoman Empire were in circulation, as well as material from beyond the empire's borders, as writers like Pushkin and Chekhov were being translated into Arabic. Numerous poets, both male and female, published and performed work that covered a range of politically engaged and more romantic genres. In 1920, Khalil Baydas published *al-Wārith* (The Heir), a book that some consider the first Palestinian novel.<sup>1</sup> Following the Six-Day War, Imil Tuma, in an editorial for the cultural journal *al-Jadid*, emphasized the number of Palestinians who had published works across the Arab world before 1948, citing a letter from a visiting critic who found the union of

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<sup>1</sup> Mahmoud Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ša'b: Riḥlat al-Qiṣṣa al-Filasṭīniyya fī Isrā'īl* (Haifa: Silsilat Manshurāt al-Karmil, 1995), 14-16.

writers in Jerusalem to be unparalleled in cities like Damascus.<sup>2</sup> Tuma's article attempted to counter the idea that pre-1948 Palestine was a barren cultural desert (*ṣaḥrā' qāḥila*) with only a flimsy "lightness of culture" (*istikhfāf al-thaqāfa*). Indeed, there was a rich and open literary culture, aided in part by fluid borders that linked Arab intellectuals across the region. An ambitious writer or traveler could "take breakfast at home in Haifa, have lunch in Beirut, spend the night in Damascus, and the next day head to Baghdad."<sup>3</sup>

As Jewish immigration into Palestine continued apace, however, the clash over territory intensified and gripped the cultural realm. Also a talented public speaker, Baydas was partly responsible for riling up crowds with his rhetoric and sparking the Jerusalem riots in 1920 that were the first of many large-scale confrontations.<sup>4</sup> Several other poets and journalists responded to the expanding Zionist enterprise, sharpening Palestinian national consciousness.<sup>5</sup> As journalists arduously decried the threat of Zionism for the Palestinian people, poets evoked references to historic Arab warriors and depicted holy and famous sites. These verses were intended to "inspire the public" and to cultivate nationalist fervor.<sup>6</sup> The poem "*Mawḍīnī*" (My Homeland), still a kind of Palestinian anthem, was composed by Ibrahim Tuqan in the 1930s in the midst of this downward spiral. Other poets like Sulaiman Zahir, 'Abd al-Karim al-Karmi (who wrote by the pen name Abu Salma), and Muhammad 'Ala al-Din joined the fray, vehemently criticizing both the British and the Zionists and warning of the clashes that seemed to lie ahead.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Imil Tuma, "*al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya al-Filastīniyya*," *al-Jadid* 8-9, 1973, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, *Coffins on our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>4</sup> M. Peled, "Annals of Doom: Palestinian Literature 1917-1948," *Arabica*, T. 29, Fasc. 2 (June 1982), 150-151. For a detailed account of these riots, see Tom Segev, trans. Haim Watzman, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 127-145.

<sup>5</sup> See Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 119-145.

<sup>6</sup> Parmenter, *Stones*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Peled, "Annals of Doom," 169-171.

Unlike poetry, prose fiction in Palestine, as elsewhere in the Arab world, was something of a latecomer, often favoring entertainment value and leaving “serious issues” as a poetic prerogative.<sup>8</sup> Yet the short story and early attempts at the novel were also becoming more sophisticated and engaged by the 1940s, represented by writers like Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Najati Sidqi, as well as the pioneering female writer Najwa Qa‘war. A sphere of literary criticism (*naqd*) was also emerging, and its champions Khalil Baydas and the famed educator Khalil al-Sakakini envisioned an important social function for fiction in the fostering of national sentiment.<sup>9</sup> Prose, it seemed, was on the rise within an already established Palestinian cultural arena.

The events of the *Nakba* in 1948 eviscerated Palestinian culture in Israel. Around 750,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes, including the bulk of the intellectual and political elite. Demographically, the remaining 156,000 Arabs—often referred to as “the Arabs of ‘48” (*‘Arab thamāniya wa-arba‘īn*) or “the Arabs within” (*‘Arab al-dākhil*)—represented mostly lower socioeconomic levels and lived predominantly in rural villages. Only one Arab secondary school still functioned (no tertiary institutions survived), and illiteracy rates skyrocketed.<sup>10</sup> The Arab population, perceived as a security threat by the nascent State of Israel, was then subjected to a system of military rule. Employment, travel, communications, and freedom of expression and association were all tightly controlled.<sup>11</sup> Under such restrictive circumstances, Arab writers in Israel had to revive the cultural scene. Yet they had lost their political and

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<sup>8</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 25. Peled notes a few anomalies that were overtly political well before 1948, but also acknowledges that poetry was the form to express “concern with social and political issues” whereas “prose barely touches on these subjects.” Peled, “Annals of Doom,” 152.

<sup>9</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Nadim Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> See Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel’s Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Books, 1979); and Shira Robinson, “Occupied Citizens in a Liberal State.”

intellectual core, their territorial sovereignty, their right to publish without military censorship, and their ability to communicate with the Arab literary world beyond these new Israeli borders. Imil Habibi described a feeling of “total separation” from Palestinian and Arab kin.<sup>12</sup> Communist critic Imil Tuma framed the challenge as one of beginning (*bidāya*) rather than continuing (*istimrār*) a literary movement.<sup>13</sup> Mahmoud Ghanayim sums up the situation starkly: “Narrative prose basically made a new start after 1948, due to changing political, economic, and social circumstances.”<sup>14</sup>

The initial efforts to remake a literary culture were intertwined with politics. Some writers, most notably Habibi and Hanna Ibrahim, still remained and set to work through the world of journals. *Al-Jadid*, the first Arabic literary magazine in Israel, was founded in 1951 as a supplement to the Communist Party newspaper, *al-Ittihad*. With its mixed Jewish-Arab membership, the party was the only sustained and sanctioned forum for Arab political activity in this period. Moreover, large numbers of Arabic-speaking Jews had immigrated to Israel from Iraq, allowing for collaborative work through the 1950s. The journal *Haqiqat al-Amr* emerged, edited by Jewish writers. More followed: *al-Mujtama‘* in 1954, *al-Ra'id* in 1957, and *al-Fajr* in 1958. In the early 1960s, though, Iraqi Jewish writers like Sami Michael and Shmuel Moreh found it difficult to straddle the line between the Jewish and Arab communities. The “natural Iraqi hybrid of a Jewish-Arab identity” did not have a ready place in a state that seemed to view Arab and Jew as “diametrically opposed” categories.<sup>15</sup> Reliant on the state for their prospects, these writers

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<sup>12</sup> Habibi, “*Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz*,” 26.

<sup>13</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Mahmoud Ghanayim, *The Quest for a Lost Identity: Palestinian Fiction in Israel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Reuven Snir, “Till Spring Comes: Arabic and Hebrew Literary Debates Among Iraqi Jews in Israel,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Winter 2006, 96-7.

“receded” from the Arabic cultural scene and began writing exclusively in Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> Not one continued to work in the Arabic-language sphere.<sup>17</sup>

By the mid-1960s, Nazareth had become the Arab population’s nucleus of printing and publishing (some of the largest Arabic-language newspapers are still based there) and a unique form of Palestinian writing in Israel had gained a foothold. It was characterized by an interest in its own language and collective values, but also in its Israeli sociopolitical surroundings, mediating its circumstances with a tentativeness regarding the power dynamics of military rule and the recent plight of the Palestinian national community. As Tuma argued, this was becoming an “original” literature with its own particularities and its own sense of time and place, but still without any clear articulation of Israeli or Palestinian belonging.<sup>18</sup> As with the terms used to describe the Palestinian Israelis themselves, there is no consensus on what to call their literary production. Habib Bulus writes both of “Arab culture in Israel” (*al-thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya fī Isrā’īl*) and “Palestinian life on the inside” (*al-ḥayāt al-Filasṭīniyya fī al-dākhil*).<sup>19</sup> Nabih al-Qasim also uses combinatory terms, entitling a volume of essays as studies of “local Palestinian literature” (*al-adab al-Filasṭīnī al-maḥallī*).<sup>20</sup> Lutfi Mash‘ur and Mufid Mihna similarly emphasize local scope and character, and Imil Tuma, who consistently uses the term “Palestinian Arab culture” (*al-thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya al-Filasṭīniyya*), acknowledges that writers like Darwish and Naffa‘ matured in “the Israeli period” (*al-fatra al-Isrā’īliyya*).<sup>21</sup> These varied names and qualifiers alone point to the complexities

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<sup>16</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Khaldun (Imil Tuma), “*Qiṣaṣ Bidūn Huwiyya*,” *al-Jadid* 7, 1969, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Tuma, “*Qiṣaṣ Bidūn Huwiyya*,” 40.

<sup>19</sup> Habib Bulus, *al-Riḥla al-Ūlā: Maqālāt fī al-Adab al-‘Arabī al-Filasṭīnī al-Ḥadīth* (Nazareth: Bayt al-Sadaqa, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, *Dirāsāt fī al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī al-Maḥallī* (Acre: Dar al-Aswar).

<sup>21</sup> Lutfi Mash‘ur, “*Arā’ li-l-Munāqasha*,” *al-Jadid* 11, 1968, 28. Mufid Mihna, “*Arā’ li-l-Munāqasha: al-Aqṣūṣa al-Maḥalliyya wa-l-Qaṣṣāṣūn*,” *al-Jadid* 4-5, 1972, 48. Tuma, “*Qiṣaṣ Bidūn Huwiyya*,” 40.

of literary revival under military rule and in relative isolation from the wider Palestinian Arab world.

Most of the serious literary material between 1948 and 1967 came in the form of poetry or short stories, often published first in cultural journals and supplements. Palestinian authors in Israel wrote only fifteen novels and novellas in these two decades.<sup>22</sup> Most likely due to the ongoing military government, it was very uncommon to find explicit or particularly controversial political content in this early literary work. “Social” topics were far more common, steering clear of the wrath of the authorities, at times even evincing a positive attitude towards the state.<sup>23</sup> Writers walked a tightrope: it was easier to publish this sort of non-threatening prose, but local Palestinian critics would be unforgiving. Tuma wrote scathingly of work that he perceived to be dodging its challenging surroundings.<sup>24</sup> ‘Assam al-‘Abbasi went further, suggesting that literature not dealing with political substance or taking a firm political stand was essentially in the service of the Israeli system, maintaining the status quo.<sup>25</sup> Prose had thus reemerged in Israel not as a linear revival of pre-1948 norms, but rather as a tentative, often ambivalent set of expressions in restrictive circumstances within the new state.

Circumstances changed profoundly, again, in 1967. The military government had been dismantled towards the end of 1966, and six months later the Six-Day War and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza irrevocably transformed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. After twenty years of constriction, Palestinian Arabs within Israel were suddenly freer to move, write, organize, and act without the limitations of

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<sup>22</sup> See the complete list in the appendix to Ibrahim Taha, *The Palestinian Novel: A Communication Study* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Taha, *The Palestinian Novel*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Imil Tuma, “*Masīrat al-Jadīd fī ‘Ashar Sanawāt*,” *al-Jadīd* 1, 1964, 8-11. Cited in Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Assam al-‘Abbasi, “*Arā’ li-l-Munāqasha*,” *al-Jadīd* 9-10, 1968, 24-25. Cited in Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 44.

military rule. They were also able to renew ties with Palestinians residing in the Occupied Territories. As families reunited, writers published their work beyond Israel's borders and organized conferences and symposia to enhance their new connections.<sup>26</sup>

The dynamics of this contact, however, proved to be complex and challenging. Growing solidarity for independent Palestinian national rights chafed with the separate, internal battle within Israel for equal rights and civic status for Arab citizens. Ghanayim also suggests that the increased contact with the Arab world offered a dangerous pretext for those in the Israeli authorities keen on disenfranchising Arab citizens further. Sympathy and solidarity with Palestine and its national cause could be branded a “form of terrorism.” Even the less extreme outcome was worrying: if the authorities perceived a greater sense among its Arab population of belonging to the Palestinian community, this could strengthen an argument for expulsions (euphemistically, “transfers”) of Arab citizens to other territories.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, if Palestinian Arab writers within Israel perceived a social function to their work, it was in large part anchored specifically to the community around them and to its hardships in negotiating this new and often alienating Israeli state. The local orientation was intensified by the fact that a smaller, second exile occurred with the 1967 conflict and some cultural icons—mostly notably Mahmud Darwish and Rashid Husayn—opted to leave Israel in that year or soon after. In the wake of the Six-Day War, reunion thus prompted only varied and discordant political, social, and emotional responses. Anton Shammas, an Arab citizen who famously writes in Hebrew, found the socio-national divide as jarring as the territorial one. As I noted in the introduction, to Shammas belongs the evocative phrase of an “invisible but most palpable semantic Green

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<sup>26</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ša‘b*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ša‘b*, 54.

Line” between Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel and those in the Occupied Territories and beyond.<sup>28</sup>

Predictably, these momentous communal and geopolitical shifts—coupled with greater personal freedoms—were productive for the literary sphere. The predominantly “social” work of the past two decades was being superseded by short stories that were more impressive in style and language, more stark and realist, and sometimes more directly geared towards “gain(ing) admission” to the Arab literary world.<sup>29</sup> In terms of setting and surroundings, however, most ambivalently stayed close to their homes, at times taking a didactic tone, at others grappling more cautiously with the difficult questions of identity and belonging in the State of Israel.

After 1967, then, more writers were prepared to bridge politics and literature, although it was an almost impossible creative balancing act that Habibi cannily described as attempting to hold two watermelons in the same hand.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, it was Habibi’s own work that decidedly paved the way for these tough new engagements. His collection of six vignettes, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* conjured the uncertain, anxious nature of reunions across the Green Line, using a diverse set of protagonists and depicting environments as wide-ranging as a Galilean village, the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem, a prison cell in Ramla, and the scenic, undulating road to Nazareth. Stylistically, Habibi used strategies involving flashes of Hebrew, musical epithets from Fairuz, and shifts in narrative time and voice in order to portray these environments and to convey the challenging, hybrid nature of experiencing them as a Palestinian Arab making a life in Israel.

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<sup>28</sup> Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire*, 263.

<sup>29</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Mishael M. Caspi and Jerome David Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening: Culture and Identity of Arab Israeli Literati* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 106.

Habibi is by far the most renowned of the Arab literati in Israel in the 1970s, but there are several others whose work merits closer consideration. Among these are Hanna Ibrahim, a member of the old guard like Habibi; Zaki Darwish, a teacher and playwright and the younger brother of poet Mahmud; Muhammad Naffa‘, a fiery writer-politician; and Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, a prolific writer and critic. A dearth of scholarship in English notwithstanding, these figures are all well known locally. Combined, they have published more than twenty anthologies of short stories, in addition to theatrical and poetic works. With the exception of Darwish, they have contributed stories as well as reviews or critical studies to journals like *al-Jadid* and *al-Adab*. In turn, they have been recognized for their cultural contributions. As early as 1972, at an important writers’ conference convened by *al-Jadid* at a cultural club in Haifa, Ibrahim and Taha were asked to represent the fiction-writing community.<sup>31</sup> Taha has received official awards from the Palestinian Authority. And each has had at least some work translated and republished in anthologies of Arabic and Palestinian literature. In extremely challenging conditions after 1948 and in the post-1967 era, these writers—if less stylistically ambitious and celebrated than their counterpart Habibi—nevertheless played a critical role in the development of Arabic literary culture within the Israeli state.

#### **JUSTIFICATIONS: PROSE, AUTHORS, AND TIMEFRAME**

It is worth pausing here to clarify the focus and scope of this project. First is my focus on short-form prose. As I have established, prose was becoming a more prominent form in Israel/Palestine from the 1960s, incubated by journals and newspapers that simultaneously discouraged—by harsh criticism—earlier, apolitical attempts at longer form fiction. Though Western literature tends to prioritize the novel, the short story in the

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<sup>31</sup> “*Al-Aqṣūṣa al-Maḥalliyya: Wāqi‘uhā wa-Āfāquhā*,” *al-Jadid* 19, no. 9, 1972, 11-16.

Arab world had reached great heights, and many modern icons—Ghassan Kanafani, Zakariya Tamir, and Yusuf Idris—specialized in the genre. Importantly, short fiction may also be a more apt form than poetry for exploring place and anxiety. Writers must carefully convey their settings, and the demands of plot and character development create opportunities for depictions of moving through and around the contested spaces of the Israeli state. Moreover, this form is ideal for the close readings that I engage here. With short pieces—some stories are only a few pages long—it is reasonable to assume that the writer has carefully chosen each word, phrase, name, and place.

Of course, the scope of this project excludes several worthy authors. Among these are Mustafa Murrar, Naji Zahir, and Salim Khuri. These writers are mentioned somewhat less often in criticism: Murrar in particular is at times dismissed for overly “social” themes, and Khuri made greater strides in novels rather than short fiction. Though they certainly merit consideration, there is little particularly striking about their style—insofar as it tackles questions of geographies and identities—that warrants deeper consideration here. In a sense, I am interested in introducing the most prominent authors from the Palestinian Arab community at this time, grappling with the most compelling representations of Israeli-Palestinian spaces and complex identities, and striking a balance in terms of style and substance. I have been wary of including more writers for the benefit of comprehensiveness but at the expense of close textual analysis and satisfactory historical engagement.

Fundamentally, the five authors that I have selected are all acknowledged and acclaimed writers and represent the range of styles and backgrounds of this literary community. No writer holds the same stature as Habibi, and no writer uses quite the same densely figurative, dramatic, and evocative language as Darwish. The latter steered clear of politics professionally, while the former served in the Knesset for close to twenty

years. Taha, Ibrahim, and Naffa‘ comprise a diverse group who represent a range of perspectives generationally, stylistically, and even ethnically. Taha and Naffa‘ were young and strident in the 1970s, whereas Ibrahim was an older, moderate writer. Naffa‘ comes from a Druze community in Israel, which is often treated differently than other Arab groups and gives an important reminder of heterogeneity within the minority. Darwish and Taha are Muslim, Ibrahim and Habibi Christian.

Absent from this dissertation is a focus on female writers. Najwa Qa‘war had left Israel/Palestine at the time of the Six-Day War, moving first to Ramallah and then to Beirut. A few young female writers from the 1970s onward met success, such as Asya Shibli and Fatima Dhayyab, but their work in this period sits in the more romanticized “social” stream of Arabic literature in Israel.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth noting that women were—and still are—much less prominent in an institutional fabric in which newspapers, journals, and political groups help to nurture poetry and fiction. Indeed, Palestinian Arab women also remain one of Israel’s most disenfranchised populations in areas such as healthcare, unemployment, and basic education. It is unfortunately not entirely surprising that there has not yet been a female literary icon who has commanded as central a place as Qa‘war before 1948, or as female writers in other parts of the Arab world, like the poet Fadwa Tuqan in the West Bank, Hanan al-Shaykh in Lebanon, or Radwa ‘Ashur in Egypt.

Finally, I limit my scope to work published between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. As is clear from the historical discussion, the period after 1967 is uniquely compelling since it represents the opening up of borders as well as an increasingly open environment in Israel in terms of civic rights and the ability to write, protest, and tackle challenging subjects with candor. I restrict the analysis to the fifteen-year period

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<sup>32</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 223.

following 1967 for two reasons. The first is to ensure that the analysis does not stretch unmanageably and risk prioritizing historical trajectories and diachronic narratives over close attention to individual texts and their synchronic cultural and political conditions. Second, there were yet more watershed changes in political and literary spheres in Israel/Palestine towards the late 1980s. The First Intifada broke out in 1987 after some years of brewing tensions, and in 1986 Anton Shammas published his groundbreaking novel *Arabeskot* (Arabesques), a haunting and critically acclaimed work penned eloquently in Hebrew. I will turn to these developments in the conclusion, but my primary interest lies in the tensions, anxieties, and resonances of a remarkable decade and a half after the Six-Day War before the tragic slide towards yet another round of Israeli-Palestinian clashes in 1987.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW: CATEGORIES AND TRAJECTORIES IN ARABIC LITERATURE**

The scholarship on post-1967 Arabic literature in Israel is quite limited. There is little—and almost nothing in English—devoted individually to Ibrahim, Naffa', and Darwish, apart from some reviews of their work in periodicals like *al-Jadid* and the occasional inclusion of their stories alongside biographical notes in anthologies of Palestinian and Arab writing.<sup>33</sup> Taha, perhaps because he was quite prolific in a short space of time—he published five short story anthologies between 1964 and 1983—has attracted more attention in critical circles, prompting Ibrahim Taha to compile an edited volume that focuses on the author's oeuvre.<sup>34</sup> Some of these writers have recently been translated, as Jamal Assadi has embarked on a systematic effort to make key texts available to an English audience. Assadi introduces the texts, though, with brief accounts

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Jayyusi, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, and el-Messiri, eds., *A Land of Stone and Thyme*.

<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim Taha, ed., *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha* (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001).

of author interviews rather than critical assessments. Similarly, Jerome Weltsch and Mishael Caspi have compiled an extensive set of discussions with these and other Israeli authors, providing valuable documentary material, if few insights into the literary texts themselves. Given this paucity of critical attention, I review and incorporate the secondary literature in the chapters that follow.

The exception is Imil Habibi, who has all but monopolized academic interest in Israeli-Palestinian literature of this period. Writing on Habibi in turn centers on his acclaimed *al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība fī Ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī al-Nahs al-Mutashā'il* (The Secret Tale of Saeed the Pessoptimist, in Trevor LeGassick's and Salma Khadra Jayyusi's well-known translation), published serially between 1972 and 1974. Though composed in three parts, this work has always been treated as the first modern Palestinian novel to come out of Israel, and it has captured attention for this status as well as for its sharp irony, its pioneering use of the “anti-hero” as protagonist, and its use of European intertexts like Voltaire's *Candide* as well as the styles of the Arabic literary heritage such as the picaresque genre of the *maqāma*.

Here, however, I focus instead on Habibi's earlier work, *Sudāsiyya* (1968). This collection is massively underemphasized in critical scholarship despite its seminal, indeed groundbreaking role as the first serious piece of post-1967 fiction to confront the cultural and sociopolitical intricacies that followed the Six-Day War.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, part of the appeal of *Pessoptimist* is its beguiling style, which lends itself to a discussion of the ways in which the surreal and the fantastic may capture the complicated feelings of Palestinian residents who seem both present and absent within the Israeli state. Strategies of documenting—in opposition to the state's imperatives to document and control this

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<sup>35</sup> I will discuss this negligence further and incorporate the literature specific to *Sudāsiyya* in Chapter Two.

population—come to the fore.<sup>36</sup> While I will refer to *Pessoptimist* in Chapter Two, I also contend that it is important to move beyond this work if we are to expand our understanding of the other players in Israel’s Arabic literature and to grasp the narrative trends alongside which Habibi’s work stands.

There have also been a handful of general and comparative studies relevant to post-1967 Arabic literature in Israel. ‘Adil al-Usta has charted the portrayal of Jews in Arabic works between 1913 and 1987, exploring a shift from early negative and stereotypical portrayals into more individualized, at times even sympathetic characters.<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim Taha has advanced a “coalition model” of reading that theorizes the link between reader and writer, exploring the relationship between “literary” and “extra-literary” realities, though he focuses on different writers (Salim Khuri and Samih al-Qasim) or work that is beyond the timeframe in question here (the work of Riyad Baydas, for example, only emerges in the late 1980s).<sup>38</sup> Habib Bulus and Nabih al-Qasim have incorporated a number of journal articles into collections that touch individually on a variety of writers including Ibrahim and Naffa’.<sup>39</sup>

The most crucial scholar in the field is Mahmoud Ghanayim, whose work makes a very valuable contribution to understanding the historical background of Arabic writing in Israel, the relationship between writers and the critical establishment, and the dynamics of looking outward to other Palestinian and Arab literatures in the region—a phenomenon that was briefly suspended after the *Nakba* but possible again after 1967. Ghanayim has produced two book-length studies of the trajectory of Arabic literature in Israel, one in

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<sup>36</sup> For a formalist study of Habibi’s “impulse to document,” see Refqa Abu-Remaileh, “Documenting Palestinian presence: a study of the novels of Emile Habibi and the films of Elia Suleiman,” (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> ‘Adil al-Usta, *al-Yahūd fī al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī bayna 1913-1987* (Nablus: Ittihad al-Kuttab al-Filastiniyyin, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> Taha, *The Palestinian Novel*, 40-50.

<sup>39</sup> Bulus, *al-Rihla al-Ūlā*. Al-Qasim, *al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī al-Maḥallī*.

Arabic and the other, altered and much abridged, in English. Without Ghanayim's contributions, most of the authors that I focus on would otherwise remain confined to *al-Jadid* back issues, and there might be little interest in attempting to differentiate Arabic-language writing in Israel from the Palestinian intellectual streams in the West Bank, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

Yet there are important drawbacks in the literature that this dissertation looks to avoid. For many scholars—including Ghanayim, Ballas, and Ibrahim Taha—there is an underlying assumption of an external “reality” that writers attempt to critique, record, or reflect. Ghanayim even titles one book chapter “Politics in the Mirror of Fiction,” positing a clear, familiarly visual relationship between the two. Yet there is seldom detailed exploration of what this “objective” reality involves, and little historical or documentary material is deployed to establish context.<sup>40</sup> Though this shortfall relates to the “national paradigm” that I discussed in the introduction, it also seems to stem from a preconceived idea that literature will, and must, tackle certain themes—the land, the nation, tradition, and identity. These themes then escape without critique or interrogation and without the acknowledgement that they are polyvalent concepts that carry different meanings for different writers, or indeed readers.<sup>41</sup> In terms of the nation, as Yasir Suleiman suggests, this “reflection” theory is particularly problematic, since it hinges on “naïve realism” and a “reductive reliance on stereotypes” that stunt a richer understanding of national belonging and identities. Paradoxically, then, the claim that Arabic writing in

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<sup>40</sup> For a reading that uses “objective” reality” as an assumption, see the discussion of ‘Atallah Mansur’s novel *Wa-Baqiyat Samira* in Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 31-47.

<sup>41</sup> I will return to the thematic problem of identity in Chapter Two, the general overemphasis on theme in Chapter Three, and land and nation in Chapter Four.

Israel captures or preserves historical reality thus develops in somewhat a-historic fashion, resulting in a lack of textual “situatedness” and a certain thematic looseness.<sup>42</sup>

A related issue in Ghanayim’s work revolves around genre and periodization. At its core, Ghanayim’s project traces a journey in which writers navigate what he perceives to be a fundamental tension between social, romantic work—devoid of time, place, and political relevance—and realist ideological work, tied to a hegemonic critical establishment with writers like Imil Tuma and the journal *al-Jadid* at its center, and with an expressed interest in “national issues” (*al-qaḍāyā al-waṭaniyya*).<sup>43</sup> Ghanayim characterizes literary culture between 1948 and the 1960s as a “wallowing” (*takhabbuṭ*) between these poles, and suggests that afterwards writing entered a “crystallization” stage that shifted towards the political, before a final “crystallization and opening up” phase (*al-tabalwar wa-l-infītāh*) marked by three impulses: an attempt to craft a modernist story; to open up to the broader Arab world; and to use strategies of irony, humor, and footnoting to make local references clearer to regional readers.

Ghanayim’s trajectory is complex, in contrast to that of scholars like Taha (and a range of writers in the social sciences), who portray a more simplistic path: the pre-1967 years as “confused,” with the post-1967 years driving towards Palestinian “unification.”<sup>44</sup> To be sure, the picture is more complicated, but Ghanayim’s layout becomes somewhat baffling. There is an overemphasis on firm categories and periods, with the result that binaries are drawn that cannot hold.<sup>45</sup> Ghanayim draws a division, for instance, between

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<sup>42</sup> Yasir Suleiman, introduction to *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, eds. Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 3. Suleiman further notes that this set of theoretical assumptions is prevalent in Arabic-language scholarship.

<sup>43</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 330.

<sup>44</sup> Taha, *The Palestinian Novel*, 14-21.

<sup>45</sup> The emphasis on periodization is apparent elsewhere. In his comprehensive review of Palestinian literature from 1917-1948, Peled draws attention to alternative periodizations offered by scholars ‘Abd al-Rahman Yaghi and Nasir al-Din al-Asad. This tendency seems to stem in part from the importance of defining *when* a particular Palestinian culture emerged pre-1948, thus responding to the claim by the Zionist movement and others that a Palestinian nation and culture were non-existent; tackling the

the “social” and the “political,” yet also differentiates between the “realist” and the “modernist,” the “Marxist,” the “socialist realist,” and the “political-ideological.” He also suggests hybrid categories such as the “realistic-artistic” and acknowledges that some writers oscillate between contrasting poles. Similarly, while there was a general trajectory as previously discussed, from parochial themes to a freer and more politically engaged post-1967 culture, some writers remained in romantic or realist modes rather than embracing modernist individualism and interiority. In this sense, the different stages that Ghanayim posits inevitably hedge among diverse styles that continue to circulate in an often-shifting literary scene, as hybrid and complex as the authors themselves.

The main pitfall here is teleological in that, for Ghanayim, modernism appears to be the narrative pinnacle. Other genres, whether or not they last, seem to mark the path towards this more finely tuned aesthetic end. Even the titles of his books reveal this bias, conceptualizing Arabic literature in Israel as a quest, an orbit or path (*madār*), and a journey (*riḥla*). The clear implication is that fiction must arrive somewhere or achieve something. This is not inherently problematic since there is undeniably much cross-pollination in Israel/Palestine and the Arab world at large between literary and political activities. The major consequence, though, is that this forward-looking approach tends to gloss over the value of close readings and the analysis of language, metaphor, space, or voice even in realist or didactic works that line the path. In Ghanayim’s journey to modernism—one that will restore Palestinian work to a worthy place in the contemporary canon of Arabic literature—texts themselves too often fall by the wayside.

In the chapters that follow, I will frequently refer to existing scholarship on individual authors and some of the historical and biographical trajectories traced by

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entrenched adage that Israel was a “land without a people for a people without a land.” Peled, “Annals of Doom,” 147-8.

Ghanayim and others. My main departures, however, lie in the attention to close reading and textual analysis, and an emphasis on considering historical resonance with greater care. This is achieved with the use of interdisciplinary material and with a relatively narrow, focused timeframe of approximately fifteen years. It is also achieved with my particular theoretical interest in place, space, and the relationships among geography, anxiety, and hybridity. It is to these flexibly informed close readings that we now turn.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ANXIETY OF REUNION IN IMIL HABIBI'S *SUDĀSIYYAT AL-AYYĀM AL-SITTA* (1968)

In June 1967, after the swift conflict in which Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians who had been separated by the 1948 battle lines were able to reunite. A number of those exiled in 1948 made return visits, emotional pilgrimages in which they surveyed razed villages, gathered debris and local plant life, and met relatives and friends who had since become citizens of the State of Israel.<sup>1</sup> For those entering, the moment is defined by a nostalgic, often disorienting experience of a lost homeland, the Palestine that for two decades had been romantically remembered and painfully captured in exilic poetry. It is striking that both Imil Habibi in the 1960s, and Sayyed Kashua some four decades later, characterize these Palestinians as “ghosts.”<sup>2</sup>

For those who had remained, however—“the Arabs of 1948” or “the Arabs within,” and later Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel—the experience of reunion differed. The novel exposure to a wider Palestinian Arab world brushed paradoxically against their evolving place as inhabitants of the Jewish State. In his work on Palestinian literature in Israel, Mahmoud Ghanayim gives a passing sense of this ambiguity:

This feeling [of joy] was mingled with the misgiving that this state of affairs might end with a return to the former state of separation. These encounters forged a new identity for the Arab minority in Israel, a Palestinian identity based on belonging both to the Palestinian people and the Arab nation, without ignoring their status as citizens of the State of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the visits to former village sites, see Efrat Ben-Ze'ev and Issam Aburaiya, “‘Middle-Ground’ Politics and the Re-Palestinization of Places in Israel,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (4): 639-655.

<sup>2</sup> Imil Habibi, “*Umm al-Rubābīkā*,” in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 49. See also Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 151-152.

<sup>3</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 14.

Misgiving is to put it lightly. Families were brought together across the Green Line so spontaneously after the Israeli incursions that collapsed the 1948 borders that a profound anxiety shoots through the historic encounter. This had been a separation in which many connections were, in Habibi's words, "totally severed" for two decades, and future resolutions to the new territorial occupation were uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

Habibi's *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (The Sextet of the Six Days) is the first serious work to engage with the personal and geopolitical dynamics of post-1967 Palestinian reunions. With six linked vignettes, the collection offers tableaux that, in spite of their distinct plots and characters, play on shared themes of reunion, anxiety, collective memory, and geographic belonging. Yet in Ghanayim's and other critical works, there is little exploration of how these rich themes enter the textual world and how Habibi's tenuous reunions unravel. Ghanayim gives only brief remarks on the first two stories, while arguing that all six "clearly bear witness to the 'split personality' of the Palestinians in Israel."<sup>5</sup> Anna Sessona summarizes the first story, a tale of family reunion, in the straightforward terms of "how the boy benefited from the visit of his extended relatives."<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim Taha merely notes that *Sudāsiyya* was "one of the most important literary works" of the post-1967 canon.<sup>7</sup> Other analyses hover on a broad, thematic surface looking less for nuances in individual texts and more for "the general picture," themes that would relate the text to its circumstances and help to categorize this "new identity for the Arab minority" or the so-called "new literature" that the dramatic 1967 war created.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Habibi, "Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz," 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Sessona, "Intertextual Strategies and the Poetics of Identity in Imil Habibi's Literary Works," (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2001), 171.

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim Taha, "The Palestinians in Israel: towards a minority literature," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literature*, 3:2, 2000, 232, note 15.

<sup>8</sup> Hashim Yaghi, *al-Riwāya wa-Imil Habibi* (Cairo: Al-Fajr, 1989), 27. See also Ballas, *La Littérature Arabe*.

Another tendency, also noticeable in Ghanayim's scholarship, has been to work in tactile and concrete language around questions of identity. Ghanayim conceives of minority identity here as being "forged" in the 1967 moment, as if shaped by metallurgy. He elsewhere writes of identity in the wake of 1967 as a "crystallization" of the Arab minority, adding a particular Palestinian component that, when combined with Israeli identity and civic status, thrusts the Arab minority into a tangibly "split personality." The tension is apparent between a single, immutably hardening identity and the fluid mingling of relief and insecurity that permeates the reunions between Arabs living in Israel and those entering from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The use of such metaphoric language to describe sociopolitical phenomena is not uncommon. As Stein and Swedenburg have noted, "power" is often treated as an object to be "wielded" or a reward to be earned.<sup>9</sup> Anthropologists have long grappled with an understanding of "culture" as some sort of object that is "homogenous" and "stable" and that we are able to guard and pass on.<sup>10</sup> In this case of Palestinian identity, the metaphors are instructive insofar as they recall the background conflict of Palestinian national history: crystallizing into harder, tougher form in the face of a competing vision of national belonging; forging identity as a blacksmith smelts and shapes a weapon. Shimon Ballas channels this confrontational language explicitly: "The true reunification of the Palestinian people, according to Habibi, is one that has a role in the common battle against Israeli domination."<sup>11</sup>

Like the language of the national paradigm that I discussed in the introduction, this framing of identity is evocative but limiting. It does not do justice either to literary

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<sup>9</sup> Stein and Swedenburg, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Culture*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991), 137-62. See also Christoph Brumann, "Writing for Culture: Why a Successful Concept Should Not Be Discarded," *Current Anthropology* 40, (supplement), 1999, 1-27.

<sup>11</sup> Ballas, *La Littérature Arabe*, 72.

negotiations of shifting and contingent identities or to the nuanced political perspectives that a writer like Habibi espoused. Instead, this trend represents an understanding of Palestinian Arab literature within Israel as akin to the “resistance literature” that developed mostly in communities of exile, embodied in prose by Ghassan Kanafani, who coined the term in the mid-1960s.<sup>12</sup> Its forceful, physical language recalls Fanon’s “literature of combat,” a confrontational form of writing that “moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons.”<sup>13</sup> With literature framed in this way, as instrumental to resistance and as an almost tangible entity ready for the battlefield, it is no surprise that the treatment of identity follows similar lines. Though powerful, this approach assumes that Palestinian reunions—on account of that shared, palpable identity—will be a mostly straightforward step on the road to liberation. It undermines narrative, individual, temporal, or spatial complexities that may transcend a homogenous notion of identity and instead present rich, shifting alternatives that emerge through challenging circumstances.

Against the grain of these two analytical trends—a lack of close textual attention to the literature by Palestinian Arabs in Israel, and the dominance of flattening approaches to identity—this chapter explores the uncertainties and moments of in-betweenness that pervade Imil Habibi’s *Sudāsiyya*. I account for the relative scholarly neglect of *Sudāsiyya* and summarize the stories that comprise the collection. I then consider three aspects. First, I discuss voice and time, suggesting that Habibi infuses his narrative structure with uneasy hybridities and a sense of incompleteness linked with the negotiation of different Israeli/Palestinian cultural polarities. Second, I explore Habibi’s construction of anxiety in the characters’ lifeworlds through the lenses of daily routine,

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<sup>12</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *Adab al-Muqāwama fī Filasṭīn al-Muḥtalla, 1948-1966* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Abhath al-‘Arabiyya, 1982). The first edition was published in 1966.

<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 173-174.

language, and naming. Third, I suggest that, while certain characters look to break out of their geographic environments in dream and memory, they seem to find only problematic solace that reiterates anxiety or isolation. The chapter closes with reflections on how these shifting, uneasy evocations refract elements of Habibi's political outlook and relate to his literary style more generally. *Sudāsiyya* is read, in sum, as a crucial, earnest expression of personal and collective anxiety amid post-1967 geopolitical uncertainty.

### **GENRE, THE NOVEL, AND CRITICAL ATTENTION TO SUDĀSIYYA**

*Sudāsiyya* has been held up as an influential work and the cause of “a great stir” in the late 1960s, but its stories are not widely read or studied.<sup>14</sup> This paradox stems from the fact that scholarly attention to *Sudāsiyya* is overwhelmed by discussions of genre. To be sure, the work presents a conundrum. The stories were published serially in *al-Jadid* over a period of six months, republished in Lebanese and Egyptian magazines, and then compiled into a single volume in 1970.<sup>15</sup> The stories are connected thematically and intertextually but they have discrete characters, settings, and plots, as well as different narrative styles. The first and fifth vignettes invoke a Palestinian folk tradition, while the second blends narrative and dialogue, and the sixth is partly epistolary. Adnan Sa'di thus concludes that, on the one hand, “the stories do not seem to lose any of their power or integrity when viewed apart,” although they also evince a singular thematic concern over the post-1967 predicaments of the Palestinian Arab reunions.<sup>16</sup> This thematic unity is enough for Ilias Khuri to see the work unequivocally as a novel, whereas Ghali Shukri more tentatively considers it “a new form of novel.”<sup>17</sup> Ihsan 'Abbas sees *Sudāsiyya* as a connected set of six stories, whereas Hashim Yaghi suggests that *Sudāsiyya* merely

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<sup>14</sup> Taha, “The Palestinians in Israel,” 232, note 15.

<sup>15</sup> Yasin Ahmad Fa'ur, *al-Sukhriyya ft Adab Imil Habibi* (Tunis: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1993), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Adnan Ibrahim Sa'di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel: A Critical Study of the Works of Emile Habibi (1921-1996)* (Haifa: The Arabic Language Academy, 2013), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Sa'di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel*, 49.

“looks like six short stories” but is actually a novel.<sup>18</sup>

Even in the introduction to the 1970 compilation, published in Beirut, genre is disputed as three critics give different, indecisive views. For Raja' al-Naqash, “the story is a short novel that the author wrote in the form of six tableaux, or six short stories.” Ahmad Sa'id Muhammadiya considers the work to be “a novel and short stories at the same time, which is its noteworthy and challenging artistic balance.” Muhammad Dakrub most clearly captures the ambiguity of the piece by conceding defeat: “a chain of short stories, or tales, or a long story, or a novel, or... You simply cannot force it into one of these types of literary form.”<sup>19</sup> Amid this preoccupation over *Sudāsiyya*'s beguiling and unfamiliar form, the texts themselves have been somewhat neglected, or analyzed only for general thematic tones and indexical qualities that establish the links that course through the collection.<sup>20</sup> It is clear, however, that the stories may be productively read both individually and as a kind of symphonic whole.

If *Sudāsiyya*'s shifty genre has dominated its reception, the work has also been overshadowed by Habibi's *al-Waqā'i' al-Gharība fī Ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī al-Naḥs al-Mutashā'il* (The Secret Tale of Saeed the Pessoptimist), published between 1972 and 1974. *Pessoptimist* is a groundbreaking work of Arabic literature. With its dark humor that satirizes Israeli and Palestinian societies alike, as well as its intricate writing that at once recalls the Arabic *maqāma* and Voltaire's *Candide*, it quickly assumed a place among the great works of modern Arabic writing. As such, it has dominated the scholarship surrounding Habibi at the expense of greater critical inquiry into his other work, in particular the limited output that preceded *Pessoptimist*. A comprehensive

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<sup>18</sup> For a breakdown of further perspectives on genre, see Nadir Qasim, *Imil Habibi: al-Tajriba al-Qiṣāṣiyya wa-l-Riwā'iyya* (Hebron: Office of the Ministry of Culture, 2000), 106-118.

<sup>19</sup> Introduction to Habibi, *Sudāsiyya*, 5-10.

<sup>20</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of genre, which tabulates some of these similarities and settles on the notion of linked short stories, see Emma Westney, “Arabic literary modernism: the short story cycles and episodic novels of Imil Habibi and Idwar al-Kharrat,” (D.Phil., University of Oxford, 2000), 22-72.

overview of Habibi's oeuvre by Hashim Yaghi, for example, devotes as many pages to *Pessoptimist* as to all of Habibi's other pieces combined.

There is perhaps a broader bias at work here, related to the problematic question of genre. *Pessoptimist*, unlike *Sudāsiyya*, has always been considered a novel— indeed, the first notable Arabic novel to emerge from the Palestinian Arab community in Israel after 1948. As Mohamed-Salah Omri suggests, the novel has always been seen in Europe as the summit of modern writing. Yet this notion has extended well beyond Europe, such that an “over-valorization of the novel” characterizes literary scholarship in other regions as well.<sup>21</sup> Through this “almost apocalyptic vision of literary history,” the novel becomes not an individual aesthetic achievement, but a crucial cultural yardstick that reflects more widely on its national surroundings. Much energy is invested in locating the first novel from a particular country, which represents “nothing short of a symbolic pinning down of the point of entry into Western modernity and—by extension—into nationhood.”<sup>22</sup> This Eurocentric “allure of the novel” maps onto the reception of *Pessoptimist*, but its consequence has been to undermine Habibi's other writings. Especially in a study that explores the dynamics between hybrid geographies and identities, *Sudāsiyya* warrants excavation and significantly more focused textual attention on its individual tableaux.

#### **A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SUDĀSIYYA**

The first story in *Sudāsiyya* focuses on a family reunion in a Galilean village near Tiberias in the direct aftermath of the Six-Day War. It portrays a young protagonist Mas'ud and the emotional whirl that characterizes his first meeting with family from the West Bank. The young boy starts to acquaint himself with these newfound relatives but, in the uncertainty of that immediate postwar moment, they return to the West Bank

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<sup>21</sup> Omri, “Guest Editor's Introduction,” 319.

<sup>22</sup> Omri, “Guest Editor's Introduction,” 320.

shortly after the visit, leaving Mas‘ud to grapple with the complexity of rediscovering family yet enduring separation from them.

The second tale relates a reunion between older friends, the narrator who had stayed in Nazareth and Mr. M, a teacher now living in Haifa and who is using the open post-1967 borders to search for old friends and memories. Mr. M speaks of his trips and recollections moving across the Green Line, and his quest ends with the narrator in the hopes that he will help Mr. M to place a particular friend from a love story of the past. It transpires that this character is none other than Mr. M himself, revealing a symbolic personal amnesia that puts memory and nostalgia in question.

The third story is a portrait of a Palestinian woman who goes by “Umm al-Rubabika.” Her family left after 1948, and she has since wandered Haifa and northern Israel collecting bric-a-brac, the trinkets and mnemonics of a lost homeland. The narrator, a journalist, speaks directly to the reader, defending Umm al-Rubabika against a critical audience, and contrasting her with the ghostlike Palestinians making return visits after 1967 and struggling to achieve the same piecing together of Palestinian life that she represents. The character moves on at the end of the story, but leaves some of her odds-and-ends, including a collection of letters, to the narrator for safekeeping.

The fourth piece takes place in the Old City of Jerusalem and is a kind of narrative tour that also evokes the unrest that took place in that city after the war. A crowd including the narrator gathers at the plaza of the Dome of the Rock and proceeds through the Old City with a guide, documenting streets, gates, and names in a secular and political “Way of the Cross.” The march ends at a graveyard that keeps some of those who fell in 1948, and where many in the crowd lay down memorial cards and flowers.

The fifth and penultimate story is a shrewd retelling of the popular folk tale of Jubayna, the story of a young woman whisked away to far-off lands and who eventually

returns home wearing a charm that her mother tied to her wrist the day she left. Habibi introduces the folk tale itself and then mimics its plot with the tale of a modern Jubayna returning from Lebanon. Habibi's story is different—more ambivalent and unresolved—and provokes a moving contrast with the unproblematic happy return home that characterizes the original.

In the sixth and final story, Habibi closes the collection with a piece that starts in St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) with the author touring two sites of national importance: the Mother Motherland statue and a museum at the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery. The narrator is struck by these expressions of collective memory and muses on the statue's inscription and a diary that he finds in the museum. The second part of the story shifts into a jail cell in Ramla, shared by a Palestinian woman and a young Arab woman from Israel who writes letters to her family. The story replays three of these letters, whose content is harmless, but the correspondence is cut short by military censorship. The collection thus ends with an image of stifled, ambivalent unity, bringing together two Palestinian Arab women only within the confines of their Israeli prison cell.

### **VOICE, TIME, AND FORMAL NARRATIVE ANXIETIES**

Throughout *Sudāsiyya*, Habibi employs contrasting voices and temporal settings. The first and fifth tales are redolent of Palestinian Arab oral traditions, while the second relies heavily on dialogue. The third story unfolds in a linear fashion, while the first evades a unified progression of time and the second shifts between present and past. Though these contrasts have been explored in terms of their effect on genre and the textual contiguity of *Sudāsiyya*, their personal and collective repercussions have been underplayed. Yet their impact is profound, as Habibi uses shifts of time and voice to

communicate the anxiety and incompleteness of post-1967 reunions, and to suggest the unease of locating narrative, social, and political stability within Israel.

In the opening story, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd bi-Ibn ‘Ammih*” (When Mas‘ud was Happy with his Cousin) Habibi clearly invokes the Palestinian folktale. The story is packed with playful puns and rhyming prose, which give the narrative a colorful, idiomatic quality. The title itself is exemplary, as verb and subject draw on the same trilateral root and suggest immediately a degree of mischievousness towards the protagonist’s name and actions. As we enter the story, the narrator speaks in the first person voice, sometimes in the plural, and twice addresses readers with a traditional moniker, “*yā shuṭṭār*” (*shuṭṭār* literally means “sharp ones”).<sup>23</sup> He continues to punctuate the text with references to his own narrative role, using reiterative phrases such as “like I said” or “a little bird told me” and showing a canny, privileged familiarity with the inner world of the protagonist. The reader becomes actively involved in the telling of the tale, as though brought into the circle that gathers around the raconteur.<sup>24</sup> This narrative strategy, as I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, is also used by Muhammad ‘Ali Taha and Muhammad Naffa‘, though for these two writers it serves to include the reader in a more politically motivated collective.

Scholars have seen Habibi’s invocation of the colloquial and the folk in straightforward terms. For Fa‘ur, the use of colloquial language renders the literary characters more human and more relatable, since they use common vernacular

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<sup>23</sup> Westney, “Arabic literary modernism,” 30.

<sup>24</sup> It is also worth noting that the plot in general revolves around family life in a small village, a theme and setting that are common to the Palestinian folktale. Though Habibi does not give a name to the village, various details suggest the quality of the locale as a small enclave in Israel’s Galilee region. Mas‘ud is described as “*min awlād ḥaratina*,” one of the kids of the neighborhood, or quarter, and Habibi notes that all in the village are from the same extended family clan (or *hamula*). We also glean the proximity of an urban center by the mention of regional leaders who visit if they need their vehicles fixed, as well as the odd Jewish Israeli who passes through on his way to Tiberias, a Jewish city in the Lower Galilee. For a discussion of the size and organization of Arab villages in Israel, see Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes: The Buried History of the Holy Land*, trans. Maxine Kufman-Lausta (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 90-100.

expressions.<sup>25</sup> Sa'di and Qasim both suggest that colloquial Arabic helps to convey the local "flavor" (*nakha*) of the story or to "enhance the authenticity of the scene."<sup>26</sup> In establishing this tone that connotes the folk tale, however, Habibi toys with traditional narrative and creates distortions, marks of narrative anxiety. In an expansive study, Muhawi and Kanaana argue that the Palestinian folktale has generally been considered "a woman's art form," with an evening of stories often kicked off by the most senior woman present. Habibi's narrator appears to be male, however, with no obvious link to Mas'ud and his family and no apparent stature within the community.<sup>27</sup> The story's conflict does not focus on the immediate family—as Muhawi and Kanaana note, a majority of folktales deal with dynamics such as marriage, sibling discord, or parent-child relationships—but leapfrogs it to consider the extended relatives from the West Bank. Habibi seems on the one hand to provide the clear stylistic notes of a popular narrative and, on the other, to use them in a manner that is slightly out of place.

Habibi's contemporary setting of the post-1967 Galilean village is also instructive. It is not uncommon for the oral tradition to touch on topics of contemporary politics. As Susan Slyomovics has noted, oral narratives are often improvised in live performance, giving an adaptability that allows the storyteller to make a bold political point or an allegorical nod that plays to the audience and riles them up. Indeed, the same flexibility holds for public poetry readings or theatrical shows. Unsurprisingly, this performative flexibility is common outside of Israel. Palestinians in Jordanian refugee camps in the 1970s would alter the story of Abu Zayd, for example, replacing his arched scimitar with the Russian-made *Kalashnikov*, the gun most identified with Palestinian freedom

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<sup>25</sup> Fa'ur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 197-198.

<sup>26</sup> Sa'di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel*, 89. Qasim, *al-Tajriba al-Qiṣaṣiyya*, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana, *Speak, Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab Folktales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 4.

fighters.<sup>28</sup> Even within Israel, Palestinians have exploited this advantage of a more fluid narrative mode, both in the retelling of folk tales and in public performances of poetry, which may become subtle vehicles of resistance.<sup>29</sup>

Habibi's stories, however, published in a literary journal, are less flexibly "audiocentric" than poetry, plays, or folktales, and seem better candidates for individual, silent reading than for staged public performance.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, there is an important audio component to *Sudāsiyya*, since each vignette opens with an epithet from the famous singer Fairuz. If a lyric is recognized, the reader may enter the story with a melody in mind. Nevertheless, this acoustic quality remains fixed: other lyrics or songs may come to mind, but the text itself only evokes brief, selective soundbites. In this sense, although the lines between the supposed polarities of "written" and "oral" are blurry, the realm of modern fiction represents a point on the spectrum that is less freewheeling than other forms, keeping this short story somewhat more bounded by its spatial and temporal frame.<sup>31</sup> There is no shifting of material from one audience to the next, no tradition of publicly performing fiction, and no obvious room in the text for improvisation in the hands of a reader quietly thumbing the pages.

For Habibi, there is a double unease in navigating this tension—though, as I have suggested, it is not a clean binary—of *inscribing* the style of *oral* tradition. Tackling a postwar and politically charged theme and setting explicitly, the author is less able to make notably strong, fixed statements. The ways in which tales can be adapted "to

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Slyomovics, "Arabic Folk Literature and Political Expression," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1986), 179.

<sup>29</sup> See J. Kristen Urban, "Darwish's 'Indian Speech' as Dramatic Performance: Sacred Space and Transformation," in *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, eds. Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 79-99.

<sup>30</sup> On the audiocentric nature of literacy and reading in the Arab-Islamic world, see Walter Armbrust, "History in Arab Media Studies: A Speculative Cultural History," in *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field*, ed. Tarik Sabry (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 32-54.

<sup>31</sup> Slyomovics, "Arabic Folk Literature," 179.

express or to explain popular political sentiments are relatively straightforward and clear cut,” Slyomovics writes, when the poet or storyteller is presenting commonly held views. This directness does not apply, however, when the view is subversive or subtle.<sup>32</sup> Slyomovics delves into one of the strategies that an experienced storyteller may be able to deploy—an intentional break, characterized by banter and chat with the audience—but the fiction writer does not enjoy the same improvisational, reciprocal possibilities. Moreover, Habibi was writing less than two years after the lifting of military rule over the Arab population in Israel, an era of stringent control over cultural and political expression. Writing in 1968, Habibi stands not in the commanding position of adaptable narrator playing to his audience, but instead in a discomfited space that works with traditional narrative in the somewhat fixed medium of fiction and amid the indeterminacy of the Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical matrix after the Six-Day War.

Over the course of his career, Habibi was lionized for his experimentation in voice and genre, achieving the same kinds of “hybridized” approaches that also exemplify the work of Idwar al-Kharrat and Ilias Khuri.<sup>33</sup> At this stage, however, and at this uncertain historical juncture after 1967, Habibi’s attempt at a hybrid voice is better viewed through a lens of anxiety, rather than one of confident, successful experimentation. His narrator in “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*” frequently insists on his own role, never quite allowing the tale to settle. He is constrained by the parameters of his narrative voice to offer any particularly controversial political stance, and yet the plot is devoted to a pressing political question. Habibi’s narrative is at once obvious in its folk tone, and an obvious mismatch in its setting and message. In contrast with his comfortably ironic approach in *Pessoptimist*,

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<sup>32</sup> Slyomovics, “Arabic Folk Literature,” 180.

<sup>33</sup> Sessona, “Intertextual Strategies,” 159-160.

Habibi moves nervously in *Sudāsiyya*, shifting earnestly in the spaces between narrative styles rather than bridging the divide with brazen satire.

In its evocation of the folktale, the first story is complemented by the fifth, “*al-Kharaza al-Zarqā’ wa-‘Awdat Jubayna*” (The Blue Charm and the Return of Jubayna). “*Ḥīna Sa’ida Mas’ūd*” adopts a plot whose point of departure is political, driven by the impact of the 1967 conflict. In so doing, the piece projects the difficulty of applying the oral tradition directly to this moment. It is unable to leverage its flexible style and to embrace its political connotations, and as a result feels nervously forced. The story of Jubayna achieves something different, but is at its core no less anxious. In this vignette, Habibi departs from the side of traditional narrative, using the intertextual reference of a renowned folk tale to set the scene for his own retelling of it. With this well-known reference serving as a guideline, Habibi creates a “set of expectations about the woman’s return.”<sup>34</sup> The folk tale implies that the Jubayna of this modern-day story, like the girl of lore, will complete a happy return to the home village from which she was uprooted; that a nearby spring, which dried up after her departure, will begin to gush again; and that she will bring with her the eponymous “blue charm” that was tied to her hand when she first left and whose bright, apotropaic color staves off the evil eye.

Habibi’s version has none of these resolutions.<sup>35</sup> Jubayna, returning home from Lebanon, is not recognized by the people in her village. She has not held on to the blue charm. It is unclear whether or not the spring flows again, as the narrator anticlimactically decides to visit it at some later time. With its intertextual layers, this story is a fuller nod to folklore than “*Ḥīna Sa’ida Mas’ūd*.” It retains some of its stylistic touches and calls up the oral tradition clearly and confidently by entering into a dialogue with a

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<sup>34</sup> Sessona, “Intertextual Strategies,” 118.

<sup>35</sup> Sessona tabulates the differences between Habibi’s story and the folk tale. See Sessona, “Intertextual Strategies,” 117.

popular fable. The end result, though, remains uneasy. It points relentlessly to discrepancies with the well-known story and abandons its satisfying conclusions. The story ends with an implicit question—when will the author visit the spring? Similarly, Mas‘ud’s little adventure closes with a dream, an unconscious escape from a new, volatile reality. While both stories therefore show a clear movement away from a traditional mode, neither is able to suggest quite where that path leads.

This absence of a resolution perhaps helps to explain a final tension with traditional storytelling. Muhawi and Kanaana emphasize the centrality of fatalism, the “belief in predestination [that] implies that the plot of human, and therefore individual, destiny has been planned from the very beginning.”<sup>36</sup> When Mas‘ud looks at the political landscape around him, he clearly wants to believe that an Israeli withdrawal from the territories is ordained, but he cannot believe in this outcome unequivocally:

Like the rest of the kids in the village, he believed they would withdraw and as the sun came up each day he believed it was one day closer. He’d open his mouth and lean in as close as he could when his sister ‘the philosopher’ was talking about the inevitability of withdrawal.<sup>37</sup>

Mas‘ud wakes up every morning and wants to believe a resolution is closer. And while he certainly thinks that it may be, he does not carry the confidence of his sister, whose language of inevitability (*ḥatmiyya*) uses strong vocabulary that carries connotations of destiny and unabashedly binds inexorability to an Israeli withdrawal.<sup>38</sup> Rather than speak in stark terms himself, Mas‘ud can only eavesdrop, tentatively hoping for a development that, ten months after the war when the story was published, remained elusive.

Habibi sets a precedent here that will be picked up, as I discuss in Chapter Four, by Muhammad Naffa‘, in which the folk or the traditional are mediated literarily in a

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<sup>36</sup> Muhawi and Kanaana, *Speak, Bird, Speak Again*, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Imil Habibi, “*Ḥīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd bi-ibn ‘Ammih*,” in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 20.

<sup>38</sup> In his short discussion of *Sudāsiyya*, Ghanayim also observes that Mas‘ud begins to doubt “his elder sister’s conviction.” Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 84.

manner that both valorizes the older world customs that they represent and simultaneously critiques their relevance to modern challenges. Habibi, incumbent in the Knesset at the time he authored *Sudāsiyya*, was bitterly aware of the gridlock over postwar settlements and the resistance of the political establishment to withdraw forces from newly occupied territories. He would write later that some in the Israeli establishment were “Machiavellians serving a master known as ‘the security of the state.’”<sup>39</sup> While he valued the place of oral and popular traditions to his narrative craft, then, Habibi also questioned the utility of its deterministic thinking in tackling such a complex geopolitical challenge and battling with the local political scene.

Just as Habibi’s conflicted narrative voice—hovering between oral and written, folk and contemporary—conveys the anxiety of the historical moment after 1967, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*” uses shifts in the story’s timeframe to mimic the disruptive novelty of the family reunion. The protagonist Mas‘ud is introduced with little intrigue as the story opens: he is running joyously and almost crazed through the streets, basking in the first-time encounter with relatives that he never knew he had. The frame then shifts back to the arrival of his relatives’ car in the village on that “blistering” summer day shortly after the war. The car winds its way through the village with excitable children in pursuit, and Habibi describes with anticipation—although the destination has been established proleptically—the route of this intriguing vehicle, massive, grey, “winged like a bird” along the village’s main artery and up to Mas‘ud’s house.<sup>40</sup> The reunion itself, which takes place inside, is then glossed over:

After Mas‘ud dragged his heavy legs into the house and entered with a sense of dread, he met—for the first time in his life—his uncle and cousins who had come from Silat al-Dahr in the West Bank to visit their uncle, Abu Mas‘ud. It was now

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<sup>39</sup> Emile Habibi and Yoram Kaniuk, trans. Jean-Patrick Guillaume and Laurence Sendrowicz, *La Terre Des Deux Promesses* (Paris: Solin, 1996), 14.

<sup>40</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 14.

clear to Mas‘ud that he wasn’t lowly and cut off, that he was not a stranger in this world. And the most important part of this discovery was that he became attached to his relatives. For the first time, there was a chain of events that linked together.<sup>41</sup>

There is a narrative ellipsis here, a resistance to move into the unfolding of the first meeting behind closed doors. Instead, Mas‘ud undergoes a sharp shift from the heaviness of his legs to the lightness of his conscience. It is clear from the opening of the tale that, chronologically, the plot unfolds as follows: a car arrives, Mas‘ud meets his newfound relatives indoors, and tears out of the house in exhilaration. Habibi confounds the plot with the above fissure, creating a brief jumble in the very “chain of events” that is supposed to give fresh order and clarity. He conjures a space of uncertainty in which the first words—that moment of reunion—remain on the margins.

With typically sly wordplay, Habibi dances around the strangeness of the encounter. On the one hand, Mas‘ud realizes that he is not “isolated” or “strange” (*gharīb*) any longer. On the other, “*gharīb*” is precisely how Habibi describes the car that brings his family into the village, as well as, later on in the tale, Mas‘ud’s cousin with whom he becomes fast friends. The young boy undergoes a “hybrid moment” in which he articulates a new characterization for himself that does not quite fit the frame: he cannot be “one or the other” and instead begins to emerge as “something else besides.”<sup>42</sup> Mas‘ud hangs in the balance of a single word, at once unmoored from strangeness and yet moving towards it. The connotations of the adjective “*gharīb*” are deeply charged by the etymological link to “*ghurba*,” a complex word that suggests the exile and estrangement so often used to describe the condition of the Palestinian diaspora. Edward Relph’s notion of “existential outsidersness” captures both the physical and psychological ruptures that the

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<sup>41</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 16.

<sup>42</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 41.

Arabic term connotes and that Mas‘ud grapples with.<sup>43</sup> Bhabha echoes Relph with an inherently spatial paradox that would aptly translate “*ghurba*” as “the insider’s outsideness.”<sup>44</sup>

In both of these strategies—shifting the temporal frame, and toying with the strangeness of the moment—there are further similarities with the character of Jubayna. Instead of calling out her name and welcoming her home, the villagers refer to Jubayna as “the strange one” (*ghurabā*).<sup>45</sup> Habibi then uses the adjective “*gharīb*” at least three times more to describe the unsettling nature of the reunion.<sup>46</sup> And while Habibi does dwell more closely on the moment of contact, as Jubayna’s mother looks up at her daughter from the bottom of the stairs and smiles, he still pushes a sense of dislocation:

Through the commotion, a shrill cry of joy could be heard, which froze every movement and silenced every voice. The old mother was uttering exclamations of joy. We did not understand any of the verses she recited.<sup>47</sup>

The reunion thus becomes an explicitly unknowable, incomprehensible event, so much so that Mohammad Shaheen, in commentary after his translation, suggests that the narrator wonders whether the event is even occurring. “Its realism,” he writes, “is expressed as a state of limbo.”<sup>48</sup>

As the family reunion sinks in for Mas‘ud, Habibi enacts yet another kind of temporal dislocation. “For the first time” (*li-awwal marra*) becomes a refrain, appearing six times in the space of a few short pages. Yet the dizzying newness is interrupted, short-circuited by the sense that “finally” (*akhīran*) Mas‘ud takes his cousin’s hand and comes back down to earth, or literally “returned to life” (*nazala ilā al-ḥayā*), after which a new

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<sup>43</sup> Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 50-52.

<sup>44</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Imil Habibi, “*al-Kharaza al-Zarqā’ wa-‘Awdat Jubayna*,” in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 72.

<sup>46</sup> Habibi, “*al-Kharaza al-Zarqā’*,” 73.

<sup>47</sup> Mohammad Shaheen, “The Blue Charm and the Return of Jubayna,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 15 (1984), 116.

<sup>48</sup> Shaheen, “The Blue Charm,” 119.

set of “for the first time” actions kicks in. This adverbial shift occurs in the middle of indexing these cheerful novelties, creating a state of disorientation and a sense of compression in which the characters are torn between novelty and finality. No “chain of events” develops fully; it oscillates from beginning to end and back again.

The image of the chain is evocative, and the other stories in *Sudāsiyya* are poignant reminders that there is real value to this kind of “linked” and linear coherence that is so difficult to attain, and which is not inherently remedied by an act of reunion. In the second vignette, “*Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz*” (At Last the Almond Blossomed), the protagonist Mr. M insists on *not* being interrupted as he recounts his travels across Israel/Palestine in search of the connections and narratives of his past. When the narrator splices in with questions and comments, Mr. M reiterates this desire: “You will listen to me until the end.”<sup>49</sup> Haunted by what he calls the “hold of dualism”—he lives between two cities, speaks two languages, studied two subjects in university, and was for some time enchanted by Sidney Carton from Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*—Mr. M persists without success in his search not only for a unifying strand that will bridge two decades of disconnection, but even for the simple pleasure of being able to tell his tale from start to finish as a complete unit.<sup>50</sup> Instead, he is interrupted and thwarted; the narrator cuts in on close to a dozen occasions. Mr. M remains at the mercy of his state of limbo.

Similarly, the third and sixth stories are inherently incomplete. In the former, the title character Umm al-Rubabika bequeaths her collection of letters—“the pages of a brighter youth”—to the narrator, who closes the story with a call to his audience to compose the end of the woman’s story together.<sup>51</sup> In the sixth vignette, Habibi portrays an

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<sup>49</sup> Habibi, “*Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz*,” 34.

<sup>50</sup> Imil Habibi, “At Last the Almond Blossomed,” trans. Anthony Calderbank, in *A Land of Stone and Thyme: An Anthology of Palestinian Short Stories*, eds. Nur and Abdel-Wahhab Messiri (London: Quartet Books, 1996), 177.

<sup>51</sup> Habibi, “*Umm al-Rubābīkā*,” 50.

imprisoned Palestinian girl who sends letters and requests to her family, but her communications are cut short by censorship and she ends the story unable to send anything beyond her cell. While the sixth story is thus more sinister and heavy-handed, both use a motif of unfinished collections of letters and interrupted correspondence to convey the difficulty of achieving the temporal continuity and completeness of narrative that the protagonists all crave. Across *Sudāsiyya* as a whole, the temporal “chain” of events never has its links all in place. The order and fusion that the image connotes and the characters’ abilities to narrate fully and to express a unique place are roundly denied.

### **ROUTINE, NAMES, AND LANGUAGE: AMBIVALENCE IN THE LIFEWORLD**

Echoes of uncertainty in *Sudāsiyya* are far from unique to Habibi’s narrative time and voice. Anxieties also intrude into the fabric of the environments and spaces that Habibi’s characters navigate, their geographic “lifeworlds.” Habibi casts a broad net of experiences in which characters are often on the move, wrestling phenomenologically with spaces and objects from the sublime to the mundane, from natural vistas to the house or the street. This section will continue the analysis of “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*” and will delve further into the third and fourth stories, “*Umm al-Rubābīka*” (The Bric-a-Brac Woman) and “*al-‘Awda*” (The Return). I suggest that, in their practices of daily life and through negotiations of language and naming, the protagonists in these stories evoke ambivalent relationships with the spaces around them, trying to stake out their own ground but often unsure of where or how to move.

David Seamon, whose work is grounded in the phenomenological insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, develops the notion of a “time-space routine” to describe the way in which we interact with our everyday environments. Seamon defines this routine as “a set of habitual bodily behaviors which extend through a considerable portion of

time.”<sup>52</sup> For Seamon, a morning routine is exemplary of the actions and rhythms that come together to form such a set of practices in which physical activity is harmonized to the point that it requires little cognitive attention. In time, we no longer need to give much thought to getting dressed, making breakfast, and heading off to work. The body (or body-subject, in Merleau-Ponty’s terminology) knows without conscious prompting what to do, where, and in what order. Seamon further suggests that, in a “supportive physical environment” and in concert with the time-space routines of others, a “place ballet” may emerge—a mingling of individual routines “rooted in space” that contributes to a sense of continuity and place.<sup>53</sup> The “place ballet” is not unlike what Bachelard calls the “group of organic habits” that develops in the home.<sup>54</sup> Seamon’s emphasis on repetitive activity also resonates with Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau and their respective concepts of “habitus” and “practice” that shape individual and communal preferences. The common thread across these theoretical inquiries is an interest in the ways that individual practices can merge with, mimic, and shape a wider environment of existential stability.

In “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” the family reunion after the Six-Day War plays out in Mas‘ud’s house. After he meets his long-lost relatives, the boy conducts himself with greater poise. His daily routine changes, and Habibi seems to dangle in front of him the potential for a “time-space routine.” No longer would the boy thrash around as his mother helped him to get dressed; wash his face only after being dragged to the basin; spill cereal absent-mindedly all over his lap. For the first time, instead, he dressed without objection and would not clash with his parents: “For the first time, he ate breakfast without spilling

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<sup>52</sup> David Seamon, *Geography and the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest, and Encounter* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>53</sup> Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 14.

on his shirt. For the first time, he found his older brother Mas‘ad dropping coins in his pockets, and in his cousin Samih’s.”<sup>55</sup>

Shortly after Habibi establishes these foundations for a more collected routine, however, he destabilizes them. Mas‘ud accompanies his cousin to the local grocery store, where an argument breaks out between his cousin and a villager named Ibn Ratiba. They trade heated comments about “the renewal of the Six-Day War” and pull the story sharply back to its geopolitical context: uncertainty over any further hostilities and the questionable future of the occupation. Mas‘ud, listening in, is unable to maintain any of the composure he has tentatively begun to enjoy: “Despite what he’d heard at home from his sister ‘the philosopher,’ who was now in the tenth grade, Mas‘ud got ready for battle when he heard the insults. The ice cream streamed down onto his shirt, and he hadn’t even had a bite.”<sup>56</sup> With a simple, banal gesture, Habibi effectively undoes the serenity of that morning’s routine. The blunder directly parallels his former habit of spilling cereal, suggesting a fitful return to that previous state of disorder. The “time-space routine” is short-circuited in a way that quite literally leaves its mark.

This undoing has more to it than broad geopolitical insecurity. Habibi’s choice of object suggests a localized kind of disruption to the hope for reunion. In a shrewd play of linguistic hybridity, Habibi looks to Hebrew, “*artik*,” to describe the snack. This is not a Hebrew word per se but—like “Kleenex” or “Xerox” in American English—a brand name that has entered the lexicon as a generic word for a particular item: in this case, an iced lollipop. This is the only instance in the story where a Hebrew word is imported and its use here suggests a kind of double dislocation. Having appeared twice before in the text when the boy entered the shop and, secondly, when he purchased the snack, the

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<sup>55</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 16.

<sup>56</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 18.

“*artik*” seems to intrude continually, to insist on a certain Israeli presence in the context of Palestinian family reunion. The word, marked out in the text by quotation marks, seems jarringly foreign despite being readily understandable. In one sweep—and with a carefully chosen, unexciting word—Habibi is able to portray the disjunctive nature of his Arab characters in Israel alongside their uphill battle to achieve dependable family contact across the Green Line. Prompted, of all things, by a melting popsicle, Mas‘ud’s anxiety is all the worse for being so embarrassingly trivial.

The only other instance in *Sudāsiyya* where Habibi brings in a Hebrew reference is in the fourth vignette, “*al-‘Awda*.” This piece takes place in Jerusalem one year after the war and depicts a march to commemorate the loss of the city and to lay cards and wreaths on the graves of 1948 victims buried in a cemetery nearby. As the story opens, the narrator’s friend uses the Hebrew word “*asur*” (forbidden). As a crowd then gathers around the Dome of the Rock near the al-Aqsa Mosque, preparing for a kind of political “Way of the Cross” through the Old City, this character explicitly attempts to control access to the space around him: “*Asur—mamnū‘—ya khawāja, aw takhla‘ ḥidhā’ak*” (It’s forbidden, you outsider, or take off your shoes).<sup>57</sup> It is as if he is directly addressing an absent Jewish Israeli, the “*khawāja*,” affronting him at first with his own Hebrew language and using it as a subversive tool.<sup>58</sup> The character then clarifies with the Arabic analog as if to show off his linguistic skills and ends with a condition (“or take off your shoes”) that reiterates his commanding place.

If anything, though, the character’s disjointed comment ironically highlights the jarring shift that took place on this piece of land, which fell dramatically to the Israeli Defence Forces in 1967 after two decades of Jordanian aegis. For a start, rabbinical

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<sup>57</sup> Imil Habibi, “*al-‘Awda*,” in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 55.

<sup>58</sup> This term “*khawāja*” has diverse connotations in some parts of the Arab world, but in Palestinian Arabic it is generally used to refer to a Jewish person and to connote a kind of otherness or outsidership. See Abdullatif M. Barghouti, ed., *Dictionary of Colloquial Palestinian Arabic Dialect* (Ramallah: 2001), 417.

authorities very quickly ruled in 1967 that Jews could not step on the Temple Mount, since they could not pinpoint where exactly on the surface once stood the “Holy of Holies,” the central core of the temple where the High Priest alone was allowed to tread.<sup>59</sup> The forbidding command is, from this religious angle, redundant. In fact, it is also redundant in secular legal terms. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, shortly after the Six-Day War, pushed legislation that would enshrine freedom of access to the “Holy Places” for all religious groups and give the basis for prosecution in the event of vandalism or the violation of this freedom.<sup>60</sup> Unlike other areas such as Gaza and the bulk of the West Bank, East Jerusalem was annexed to the State of Israel after the war. The city’s municipal area was redrawn and in 1980, under the right-wing Likud government of Menachem Begin, the Basic Law was approved that designates “Jerusalem, complete and united” as the state’s capital.<sup>61</sup> In this light, the command to “take off your shoes” becomes a weak afterthought. It stresses only a social and spatial power dynamic that is not in Palestinian hands, and in which the demarcation of space and access in the Old City of Jerusalem has sharply come under unilateral Jewish Israeli command.

For Adnan Sa’di, Habibi’s aberrations from the formal registers of Arabic are generally about comprehension: “Habibi uses colloquial language when the classical language cannot provide the exact meaning expressed by colloquial expressions.”<sup>62</sup> Touching briefly on Habibi’s use of Hebrew, Sa’di similarly implies that these moments point to a need for comprehension, in this case not of a colloquial concept but of a certain local authenticity: “Habibi is also cognizant of regional dialectical differences...When

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<sup>59</sup> This ruling also had the political upshot of not further angering the wider Muslim world with large numbers of Israeli soldiers walking on hallowed ground.

<sup>60</sup> “Protection of Holy Places Law, 1967,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. <http://www.mfa.gov.il/>

<sup>61</sup> “Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel,” Knesset website: [www.knesset.gov.il/](http://www.knesset.gov.il/). For an account of the Jerusalem’s municipal borders and expansions, see Meron Benvenisti, *City of Stone: The Hidden History of Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1996.

<sup>62</sup> Sa’di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel*, 90.

depicting characters from the Galilee, for example, he lets them speak in the local dialect, interspersed with words in Hebrew and English that have entered the locals' speech."<sup>63</sup> Yet the analysis of this linguistic particularity must go further. The "artik" is carefully chosen as a central object; it might just as easily have been a bottle of water or a product with an Arabic name. As for "asur," Habibi uses this strong word alongside its Arabic equivalent, not as a colloquial idiosyncrasy that places the character in a particular region or city within Israel. Interestingly, Habibi notes in an autobiographical essay that the first time he spoke Hebrew was at a similarly confrontational moment. In Habibi's first Knesset meeting in 1952, then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion made shockingly blunt remarks about Palestinian Arabs returning secretly from exile to their home villages. Habibi was stunned into a spontaneous interruption in Hebrew: "And would *you* ignore the love of your homeland?"<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to Sa'di, I would suggest that the entrances of Hebrew into Habibi's literary work are more subtle and problematic than comprehension or even local "flavor" and that they resonate with his personal background. Habibi was profoundly concerned with the status of the Arabic language in Israel and saw its preservation and development as a continual affirmation of existence. In a 1982 interview, he commented on the character of his literary work as a Palestinian in Israel, relative to the Arab world at large:

Often we ask ourselves what the difference is between our Palestinian literature and other Palestinian literature, or 'refugee' literature. The answer is that, from Israel's appearance in 1948, we have been confronted with a challenge: to be or not to be... We remember Ghassan Kanafani's novel, *Men in the Sun*, written after ten years of the tragedy: you have to knock on the walls of the tank if you want to live.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sa'di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> Habibi and Kaniuk, *La Terre Des Deux Promesses*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Samih al-Qasim and Imil Habibi, "Palestinian writers in Israel," *Index on Censorship*, 11:4, 1982, 21.

Habibi's provocative analogy to Kanafani's famous story deserves attention. In *Men in the Sun*, three Palestinians die in the dry, suffocating heat of the empty water tanker in which they are being smuggled from Lebanon to Kuwait. Their driver, Abu Khaizuran, wonders whether or not they banged on the inside wall near the end, or whether they stayed silent in fear of being discovered. Notably, the communication that might have saved them is one without language. The pain inside the tanker is unknowable and "unsharable." Even if they had tried to make themselves heard, the sounds from the outside would have resounded as a raw, primal banging or perhaps as "the sounds and cries a human being makes before a language is learned." Both Palestinian life and language are, in this moment, "unmade."<sup>66</sup>

Habibi's stance is that, confronted with a challenge to identity and place, one has to make a sound—to write, to speak, to announce one's being and presence. This task, he firmly believed, could only be undertaken in Arabic. All of his literary output was in that language. He established the Arabesk publishing house in Nazareth in 1974 in order to promote Arabic works in Israel.<sup>67</sup> He even threw down the gauntlet once to fellow writer Anton Shammas and challenged him to translate a particularly alliterative, rhythmic Arabic sentence with similar cadences in Hebrew.<sup>68</sup>

Habibi's fleeting use of Hebrew may seem paradoxical in light of his later statements, but it should not. The deliberate use of Hebrew markers is part of that very effort "to be," to announce himself on the stage of the Arab world. This is a stylistic choice distinctive to the Palestinian Arab community in Israel and—especially in "*Hīna Sa'ida Mas'ūd*"—it explores the ambivalence of confronting an Israeli Jewish public

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<sup>66</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Maher Jarrar, "A Narration of 'De-Territorialization: Imil Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*,'" *Middle Eastern Literatures* 5:1, 2002, 25, note 6.

<sup>68</sup> Sessona, "Intertextual Strategies," 189-190.

sphere while reckoning a decisive moment in Palestinian national history. To be sure, Habibi acted out performances of this challenge most days of his professional life. Though all of his fiction was in Arabic, Habibi was determined that it be translated into Hebrew.<sup>69</sup> He gave speeches in Hebrew at the Knesset. In a parliamentary career that spanned three decades, he wrote countless letters to Jewish MKs that posed questions and registered complaints in Hebrew. He even wrote a short autobiography in Hebrew, in which he captured the linguistic closeness by referring to Arabic and Hebrew as “twin sisters, born of the same mother”—each language distinct in its own way, yet in another sense inseparable from each other.<sup>70</sup>

This process of shifting between languages was more broadly built into the scaffolding of Habibi’s political career. Ilana Kaufman describes the protocols of the Israeli Communist Party, which Habibi represented, as follows:

Both the united Maki and Rakah congresses were held either in Jaffa or Haifa, which are mixed Jewish-Arab cities. The entire proceedings and most of the speeches in Rakah’s congresses were conducted in Hebrew, and while those in Arab (sic) were translated, those in Hebrew were not. The Israeli flag was displayed beside the red flag, and the Israeli national anthem, ‘Hatikva,’ was played along with the ‘Internationale.’<sup>71</sup>

Flying both flags, singing both anthems: it is clear from this account that the Communist Party attempted to toe both pro-Soviet and their own national lines. Similarly, the party also functioned explicitly as a Jewish-Arab political bridge, with both Arabic and Hebrew represented, and with the latter as the default. We see Habibi moving here through what Bill Ashcroft calls a “constantly negotiated network of relationships,” and what Homi Bhabha calls “a negotiation (rather than a negation) of antagonistic and oppositional

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<sup>69</sup> Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 114.

<sup>70</sup> Habibi and Kaniuk, *La Terre des Deux Promesses*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Ilana Kaufman, *Arab National Communism in a Jewish State* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), 47.

elements.”<sup>72</sup> This often-anxious space of negotiation is evident in both politics and writing, intimately connected with an uneasy sense of place in Israel after the 1967 War. That “*artik*” that seems to intrude, the paradoxical attempt to proclaim access forbidden in Hebrew, and the countless letters and speeches all share this common thread.<sup>73</sup>

Language politics touch the fourth story again through place names. Walking the heart of the Old City, narrator and friend comment on different places—rendered in Arabic—from which Palestinians poured out in 1967, foisting on some a haunting second moment of exile two decades after 1948. The use of street names like “*Khan al-Zeit*” and the name of one of the Old City gates “*Bab al-Silsila*” resist the reconfiguration of place names in Israel, and the ways in which new signage and Hebrew markers tactically place Hebrew over Arabic, obfuscate the latter orthographically, and use the visual projection of language into public space to “signify the new political realities of the city.”<sup>74</sup> These names also resist the “destruction of houses and expulsion of residents” that took place after the war in the plaza at the base of the Western Wall, more concretely altering its physical geography.<sup>75</sup> Habibi’s references thus forcefully suggest a “retention of legitimate rights to reside” and, in residing in a place, to give it the “meaning and resonance” of one’s own collective group.<sup>76</sup> I will return to Hebrew/Arabic place names in each of the remaining chapters, since Taha, Naffa‘, Ibrahim, and Darwish all deploy this level of the geopolitical conflict in different ways and with contrasting tones of anxiety or resistance.

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<sup>72</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> I will return to the problem of language for Palestinian Arab writers repeatedly. In Chapters Three and Four I will discuss the valence of particular terms in Hebrew that resonate with the Arab citizens and their complex niche within the Israeli state.

<sup>74</sup> Yasir Suleiman, *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 189-191.

<sup>75</sup> Fa‘ur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 82.

<sup>76</sup> Julie Peteet, “Words as Interventions: Naming in the Palestine-Israel conflict,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2005, 157-8.

In *Sudāsiyya*, however, Habibi makes richer use of *people's* names as the main discursive vehicles around place and belonging. As with places, the names we call ourselves are part of a broader cultural system. They can allude to geographic locations, family status, desirable attributes, or historical figures, to name a few. For items as for people, Yi-Fu Tuan suggests, names designate a level of worth: “The particular things we value may be given names: a tea set is Wedgwood and a chair is Chippendale. People have proper names. They are particular things and they may well be the first permanent objects in the infant’s world of unstable impressions.”<sup>77</sup> Fundamentally, then, names are the first step that we take in understanding the assignment of meaning to ourselves and to the animate and inanimate bodies that cascade around us. “Things are not quite real,” Tuan argues, “until they acquire names.”<sup>78</sup>

For people, names are never static. In his autobiography, which is pertinently entitled *Out of Place*, Edward Said writes that his name was always a social marker of where he stood. Its pronunciation and connotations morphed among the worlds he negotiated in his early life, from Egyptian schools to the Lebanese countryside, and eventually to high school and university in the United States. Simply hearing “Edward” or “Said” in different accents and tones could signal different worlds of meaning, intense feelings of dislocation, and a complex sense of belonging that shifts across various exilic spheres.<sup>79</sup> In *Sudāsiyya*, Habibi imposes a similar tension on certain characters, engaging a discourse around names that conveys not a clean split between Israeli and Palestinian,

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<sup>77</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 18. It is worth noting that Tuan’s quite microcosmic emphasis represents only one aspect of the ways in which theorists have recovered and imbued single objects with much greater nuance and depth. For a reassessment of the term “commodity” and an attempt to invest similarly focused, singular value to objects in the language of economic exchange, see the introduction to Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3-64.

<sup>78</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1999). For a discussion of Said’s memoir, and a critique of other treatments of his naming and self-identification as evenly “split” or a balanced “double self,” see Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 52-60.

but rather a compelling instability of identity and an articulation of complexly hybrid belonging.

In the first story, when Habibi introduces Mas‘ud, he remarks that the boy is also known by the nickname “Radish” (*Fajla*). This name, since it connotes a small and perhaps rather insignificant object, has been read as a purely exclusionary tag placing Mas‘ud outside of his own community. Ballas views the nicknaming as the character’s meek acceptance of an “inferior place” as he becomes the local punching bag, the “objet de moquerie” who does not protest his lowly status.<sup>80</sup> This argument contradicts the text, in which Habibi clarifies the familiarity and equality that nicknames can connote:

It was important to Mas‘ud that his friends call him by the nickname ‘Radish’— and not how he got the name in the first place. His mother also used the name for him. And he would call his friends by their own nicknames. This one was ‘Soldier,’ that one ‘Beetle’... He normally loved the use of nicknames because it created equality between people, without the clans and groups.<sup>81</sup>

Contrary to Ballas’ reading, which seems to assume that a literally diminutive nickname must be a source of shame, the name bestows a social place on Mas‘ud. As Michael Herzfeld argues, “cultural intimacy” is often mediated by names, traditions, and public expressions that may seem embarrassing from the outside. They are better seen, however, as an “inward acknowledgment” that helps to define a social group and to create belonging from within.<sup>82</sup> As Qasim similarly suggests, Mas‘ud’s nickname is indicative

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<sup>80</sup> Ballas, *La Littérature Arabe*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 15. There is an interesting parallel here with a popular cultural study of economic, military, and political leadership in Israel. Senor and Singer stress the importance of nicknames in creating counter-hierarchical social norms in important Israeli institutions. As Mas‘ud benefits from the use of nicknames to imply ease and equality, Jewish Israelis actively use nicknames for their leadership in a way that breaks down rigid boundaries between different ranks and statuses. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, is always referred to as “Bibi.” Ariel Sharon, a controversial icon of Israeli politics, went by “Arik.” See Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2009), 23-32.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6. See also Herzfeld’s essay “Intimating Culture” in *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture*, ed. Andrew Shyrock (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

of the village forming its particular “social structure” (*tarkīb ijtīmā’*).<sup>83</sup>

With the intimacy of Mas‘ud’s nickname also comes a literal kind of rootedness—a radish is a root vegetable, nourished by the earth and springing from it. Mas‘ud’s proper name confirms a certain kind of place—in Tuan’s original, familial sense—but precisely for this reason, it also suggests the lack of family stability that has characterized his life so far. The casual nickname, therefore, fills a gap by conveying character and belonging in a young, relaxed social world, even if the name’s origins were pejorative. It is not Mas‘ud himself, then, but the broader narrative and other characters that impose the simplistic, rigid conditions echoed in Ballas’ reading. When the relatives arrive, the issue of naming seems instantaneously resolved: “‘Radish’ became a cousin...And ‘Radish’ went back to being Mas‘ud.” When he steps into the store, he is greeted by the owner Abu Ibrahim, “Good morning, Mas‘ud—not ‘Radish’!”<sup>84</sup> And when his relatives leave, conversely, “Mas‘ud became ‘Radish’ again.”<sup>85</sup> It is difficult for Mas‘ud to establish a subtle bridge between both.

Whether or not Mas‘ud likes the nickname, which he does, seems immaterial. The nuance that he bestows on it gets lost against the backdrop of this straightforward, dual understanding. Naming for others can only be grounded, familial, and somehow more proper, or condescending and somewhat out of place. With the contrast between these clear oscillations and the middle ground that Mas‘ud actually tries to occupy, owning both names and their different evocations of community, Habibi suggests how difficult it is to move between entrenched poles of any sort. The inability to be *both* “Radish” and Mas‘ud, stifling the boy’s agency to fully own his two names, lays down a challenge to hybrid identities and shows the tensions inherent in being “something else besides” and

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<sup>83</sup> Qasim, *al-Tajriba al-Qiṣaṣiyya*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 17

<sup>85</sup> Habibi, “*Hīna Sa‘ida Mas‘ūd*,” 20.

striking a balance between perceptibly contradictory worlds.

The other character in *Sudāsiyya* who goes by an alternative name has an equally ambivalent relationship with it. Where Mas‘ud/“Radish” evokes an ambivalent position between two poles, we never in fact learn the real name of the title character of the third story: Umm al-Rubabika, the “bric-a-brac” or “odds-and-ends woman.”<sup>86</sup> The entire tale can be read through the lens of this alias, which is both the result of derogatory chatter and a general tag for her lowly, makeshift profession, collecting unwanted wares and where possible reselling them. The young men that represent the audience (the story is in the second-person voice) mock the woman’s aimlessness as she wanders the streets of Haifa, and the narrative tone unfolds in her defence:

And you, why do you keep muttering about the odds-and-ends woman in al-Wadi Street in Haifa? Why won’t you believe her when she tells you she buys all the pilfered bedding from the Heights, and every cupboard and chest, in the hope of finding the treasure she’s looking for? Totally illogical, you say!

Well, is that the only illogical thing that’s going on in this country of ours?

You disapprove of her buying all the sofas from Qunaitra, do you...Qunaitra with all its furniture and coffee cups and kubbeh mortars and toothbrushes and insect sprays and books by al-Farabi and toilet rolls.<sup>87</sup>

The narrator indexes a wide range of trinkets and bric-a-brac here, anything from broken furniture to coffee cups, from abandoned books to rolls of toilet paper. These objects are all decidedly domestic, but a poor substitute for a more concrete sense of place. They are by definition incomplete, always detached from some original spot, often only parts of a larger set, or simply broken. These items convey a desperate search for the woman’s “treasures.” Her persistent cry, “My treasures! My treasures!” is a kind of Conradian refrain of suffering and lament, which, over the course of the story, evolves to express the

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<sup>86</sup> Emile Habiby, “The Odds-and-Ends Woman,” trans. Roger Allen and Christopher Tingley, in Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>87</sup> Habiby, “The Odds-and-Ends Woman,” 455.

loss not just of her home, but also of her husband and children, who fled Palestine amid the turmoil of 1948. Indeed, through literally picking up the pieces of other (former) Palestinian homes—Qunaitra lies in the contentious Golan Heights region on the Israeli-Syrian border and was occupied by Israel in 1967—the character is also gathering the “treasures” of a wider, fragmented people. Habibi uses the word “*haḍaba*” to describe one area where she gathers objects.<sup>88</sup> The word may simply mean hill, suggesting that the character moves up and down the contours of the whole city of Haifa, from predominantly Arab streets at the base of the mountain to largely Jewish neighborhoods on the higher parts of its slope. In this wandering, she traverses the diversity of Israel’s new socioeconomic worlds even as she tries to locate a simpler past. Allen’s translation of the “Heights,” however, takes the meaning further by referring metonymically to the Golan Heights, an interpretation that was confirmed by Habibi in a footnote added to a later edition of *Sudāsiyya*.<sup>89</sup> The bric-a-brac that inheres in the character’s name therefore covers a broad geographic scope, widening literally as well as figuratively the lack of direction in her quest.

Yet this breadth also suggests an enormous responsibility. Whereas Mas‘ud’s nickname is a diminutive alternative, the name “Umm al-Rubabika” mimics an Arab-Islamic tradition of naming, in which a parent takes on the name of a child. This name, then, suggests the notion of family but replaces people with an assortment of mnemonics. As Yasin Fa‘ur has noted, “she is an actual mother as well as a symbolic mother,” preserving concrete objects and a sense of the past not only for her family but also for a greater collective.<sup>90</sup> It is apposite that the maternal figure, for Habibi, resonates personally with a quiet and admirable commitment. He writes in his autobiography of his own

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<sup>88</sup> Habibi, “*Umm al-Rubābīka*,” 43.

<sup>89</sup> Sessona, “Intertextual Strategies,” 194.

<sup>90</sup> Fa‘ur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 82.

mother staying by his father's side until his passing: "it is the mothers who have stayed at home," his language implying not only the family home but also the nation at large.<sup>91</sup> He closes this very personal text with a similar refrain, but with an important alteration and a shift in tense: "mothers *always* stay at home."<sup>92</sup> In this light, Umm al-Rubabika's name plays complexly on a common trope of local nomenclature. While the name inherently echoes personal dislocation and a peripatetic lifestyle, it also recognizes the important work of parenting and dedication, albeit through a very traditional and domestic lens.

In spite of this poignancy, the woman is mocked and sidelined. The narrator, engaging his audience quite abruptly, responds with rebuke. Habibi reprimands those who would aim cruel humor at such a woman, giving her a name that pokes fun at, and disapproves of her attempts to regain the traces of an older world. Importantly, he makes an implicit contrast between Umm al-Rubabika and the other people—Palestinians returning from the West Bank, Amman, Gaza, or Kuwait for the first time—who are also going in search of their homes. These figures are described as wandering ghosts, or "roving spirits," barely able to utter a word, much less to gather up belongings and try again to cobble together a sense of place. As Hannan Hever has suggested, this contrast, coupled with the barbed voice of the narrator, can be read allegorically as a critique of those who viewed the Palestinian Arabs within Israel as "traitors" and "collaborators" more loyal now to the Israeli state.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to the ghostlike returnees, though, Habibi imbues the lead character with diligence and dignity in her quest for the objects of home. Interestingly, Umm al-Rubabika is aware that she may hold some of the returnees' treasures among this trove,

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<sup>91</sup> Habibi and Kaniuk, *La Terre des Deux Promesses*, 32.

<sup>92</sup> Habibi and Kaniuk, *La Terre des Deux Promesses*, 44. Emphasis mine.

<sup>93</sup> Hannan Hever, "'The Refugee Women to the Refugees': Emile Habibi and the Canon of Hebrew Literature in Israel," *HaMizrach HeHadash*, Special Issue on the Literature of the Arabs in Israel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 105. [Hebrew]

yet none come to visit her. Although she has little prospect for regaining her own familial and material “treasures,” then, Umm al-Rubabika nevertheless stands in stark contrast to those entering Israel for the first time in two decades. She itches to recapture the glimmer of the treasures that she and others have lost and, though the youth may think it aimless, she is attentive, constantly moving and conscientiously gathering. Lastly, however sarcastic or functional its origins, she does have a name. Umm al-Rubabika is not a lost, faceless ghost.

Even as this story connotes a quintessentially transient, broken relationship with the spaces around its protagonist, Habibi’s narrator thus finds something salvageable in the name. At the end of the story, when Umm al-Rubabika has left Haifa—presumably for another Qunaitra to keep searching and gathering—the narrator asks the audience to read the letters she left him and to join him in writing an ending to her story, and he too calls her by the nickname. He does not intend to change it, or to revert back to her real name that he keeps to himself. Rather, he looks to endow the epithet with a new shade of meaning. Umm al-Rubabika, for the narrator, is integral to the Palestinian community left behind in Israel. Her dislocation within that country—not necessarily less traumatic than the pain of those who landed up in the West Bank or the Gulf—is worthy of acknowledgment. The name that encapsulates it is, in this sense, worth retaining.<sup>94</sup> The end of her story remains uncertain, as fragmentary as the trinkets she gathers, but it is not without a base. As the conclusion is written in her absence, Umm al-Rubabika will keep the nickname, and with it a strange sense of place that is at once anchored in Israel yet unmoored from it, always wandering and looking for something different.

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<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Habibi clearly kept this tale in mind himself. He revisited the piece almost twenty-five years later and transformed it into a play—by the same name, and with the same eponymous female character—that was performed in Haifa in the early 1990s.

## DECEPTIVE ESCAPE: IMAGINATION, DREAM, AND MEMORY

With a geopolitical reality that sees Habibi's characters and many Palestinian citizens of Israel relate to their surroundings with ambivalence, it is hardly surprising that some in *Sudāsiyya* look to escape or live vicariously. Mas'ud is left dreaming at the end of his story; the imprisoned girl curls up in her cell at the end of hers; Mr. M for two decades has closed himself off and taken refuge in memories of love and friendship. With these characters in particular, Habibi explores the possibility of breaking out of mundane everyday spaces and into the imaginative. Adnan Sa'di interprets the "escapist endings" straightforwardly as characters "fleeing their reality to live in a symbolic realm of dreams, in order to avoid coping with the pressures and brutality of their actual circumstances."<sup>95</sup> Setting aside that "brutal" seems a stretch in the context of *Sudāsiyya*, this conclusion is unsatisfactory about what the escapism involves, or what it achieves. I would suggest that it is intricately tied to geography and the specific problem of establishing one's place, rather than emerging as a symptom of generic "pressures." Perhaps more importantly, the escapist process is in fact more of a loop than a clean pathway out. What the characters find are deceptive or illusory experiences that only reinforce their anxieties of confinement and isolation.

The final stretch of "*Hīna Sa'ida Mas'ūd*" deserves to be quoted at length:

In the evening the strange grey car with the blue license plate and the humming horn left our neighborhood. Mas'ud became 'Radish' again, and went back to playing in the quarter barefoot...

Now, I don't want you to leave thinking that Mas'ud went back to being how he was in the village before. He began to resemble the rest of the children, those with aunts and uncles and relatives, and he wasn't totally cut off. He would go with his mother and father to the West Bank. And his aunts and uncles would visit him from the West Bank.

Like the rest of the kids in the village, he believed they would withdraw and as the

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<sup>95</sup> Sa'di, *The Arabic Novel in Israel*, 57.

sun came up each day he believed it was one day closer. He'd open his mouth and lean in as close as he could when his sister 'the philosopher' was talking about the inevitability of withdrawal.

And he began to love his cousin Samih deeply, listening to him with admiration when he talked about his brother working at a pharmacy in Kuwait, who visited Cairo, and saw 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz performing live.

His sister 'the philosopher' tried out all of her political ideas on him when helping with his homework or putting him to bed on the rug. He would ask her whatever was on his mind and she'd answer, and like her he was passionate for the withdrawal and confident that it was an inevitable reality.

But there was one question that he didn't dare put to his sister 'the philosopher,' afraid that she'd slap him (a fight with a sister who he didn't want to quarrel with), or afraid within of something else – Well, if they withdraw, Do I go back to how I was... without a cousin?

Then he would sleep, dreaming of Samih and his brother in Kuwait, who visited Cairo, and saw 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz performing live.<sup>96</sup>

The closing passage brings together many strands of my discussion thus far: oral tradition and the use of colloquial idiom; fatalism and an uncertain future; and shifts in the use of names. Spatially, this ending is important since it brings the reader again into Mas'ud's home, an entrance that was resisted around the moment of family reunion.

Geographic scholars have treated house and home with varying degrees of intensity. For Tuan, the built environments in which we house ourselves are profound expressions of a local social cosmos, serving different purposes, crafted from different materials, and nurturing an understanding of being "inside," physically sheltered and socially included.<sup>97</sup> Casey is more cautious, arguing that the house is not always the "foundational" space of home.<sup>98</sup> In his focus on buildings, however, Casey does suggest that houses are often critical sites of a similar process of "interior cultivation." This concept refers to the way in which we make built environments our own and is

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<sup>96</sup> Habibi, "*Hīna Sa'ida Mas'ūd*," 20-21.

<sup>97</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 101-108.

<sup>98</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 181.

understood literally as shaping, decorating, and individualizing space, and figuratively as a process of developing an inner sense of self. Cultivating home becomes an enriching process of “letting one interior speak to another.”<sup>99</sup> For Bachelard, the value and intensity of the house are indispensable. *The Poetics of Space* opens with the assertion that the house is “a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the value of inside and space.”<sup>100</sup> Its corners, stairs, and floors are the planes for our first steps and bodily experiences, and as such any first living space becomes “physically inscribed” in a young body.<sup>101</sup> Ultimately, this phenomenological bond is intimate and stabilizing, establishing areas in experience, memory, and imagination where “the human being’s *certainty of being* is concentrated.”<sup>102</sup>

It is significant, then, that Habibi overturns this trope and undermines the place of the house and home. As soon as we enter Mas‘ud’s home at the story’s close, we are taken out of it, departing immediately for an ethereal dreamscape. Habibi’s description of the dream perfectly mimics Samih’s talk a few lines prior. The repetitive cadence gives the conclusion a kind of refrain that casts enthralled, childlike wonder over the wider expanse to which Mas‘ud has been exposed. What we see instead of the house’s interior is imagined, almost utopian access to a broader Arab world. Uncertain of his own place, Mas‘ud dreams of faraway Kuwait, a country where tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees had become migrant workers. He thinks of Samih’s brother, another of his cousins, skipping over to Cairo in a heartbeat to watch a famous Egyptian singer and to revel in contact with cultural icons of the Arab world.

However utopian, Mas‘ud’s dream is not a projection of his own potential. He is not taking his cousin’s place or joining him, but looking on at a detached, unconscious

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<sup>99</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 174.

<sup>100</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 33. Emphasis mine.

distance. In this interiority, Habibi focuses as much on his protagonist's own unconscious hopes as he glances nostalgically back at the similarly fluid access that characterized the cultural world of Palestine before 1948 and came to an abrupt halt. In an interview with Siham Daoud in 1995, Habibi speaks of the vibrant scene in Palestine in terms that make clear the breadth of connections to the Arab world. In the absence of an "established" scene for theatre, for example, Egyptian productions were brought over to Palestine. Habibi further comments that, "We brought singers over from Lebanon too, and writers and poets from Iraq. The Radio Broadcasting Service played an important role. During Ramadan evenings there were suitable broadcasts on the radio, and the Palestinian community here used to bring artists from different Arab countries to celebrate Ramadan evenings, in cinemas and cafes."<sup>103</sup> Habibi recalls a community that enjoyed a frequent and ready ability to connect with the Arab world beyond its borders. He would know: Habibi worked as a radio broadcaster with the Jerusalem Radio Station before he moved into politics and writing. As a child of the post-1948 era, however, it is clear that Mas'ud would find this interlinked world difficult to visualize. He accesses it only through others and in flights of fancy.

By contrast, the spatial universe better known to Mas'ud and to many Arab communities in Israel in this era was built on limitation and constriction. The military government, which persisted until late 1966, had divided Israel into three broad zones—Northern, Central, and Southern—and the Defence Minister directly appointed a governor to each area. The operational logic within these zones was based predominantly on a British document, the Emergency Regulations, which emphasized the value of physically containing the local population. As Ian Lustick writes, "Of particular interest was the

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<sup>103</sup> Siham Daoud, "Interview with Imil Habibi", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 3:2, 1995, 107.

restriction of travel.”<sup>104</sup> These regulations also allowed for curfews, inspections, arrests, and recriminations in the name of security. The administrative structure confined Palestinian Arabs to their homes, curtailing their “elementary power to move” and enshrining lines of fracture even across the internal landscape of the new state.<sup>105</sup> There were “easements” passed in the early 1960s, but Habibi himself criticized their limitations. Speaking to the Knesset in 1963, he argued that villagers living close to the border could still not leave without a permit either by day or night. He complained that the list of places inaccessible without a permit remained the same: workplaces in the Negev, Tiberias, Jerusalem, as well as collective settlements and kibbutzim in the north. Furthermore, he emphasized that residents in the Triangle were still unable to visit the nearby Galilee without a permit, nor could residents of Jaffa, Haifa, or Ramla enter the military government areas.<sup>106</sup> Habibi devoted considerable time to formal questions and letter-writing on this issue. More often than not, the government responses were terse and dismissive. Some were as short as: “No. For security reasons.”<sup>107</sup>

Compared to the status quo during the British Mandate, these constraints were a shock to the system. Egyptian actors were no longer traveling across the border. Lebanese and Iraqi poets were not giving readings or even being broadcast over the airwaves. Even for those who did not take interest in highbrow entertainment, the freedom of movement was in stark contrast to a pre-1948 environment in which one could move freely through Palestine and beyond. As I noted in Chapter One, it was even possible to “take breakfast at home in Haifa, have lunch in Beirut, spend the night in Damascus, and the next day

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<sup>104</sup> Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State*, 123-125.

<sup>105</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Stenogram of the 5<sup>th</sup> Knesset, Session C, no. 18. November 27, 1963. 141/K/6. [Hebrew]

<sup>107</sup> Question 2580, March 23, 1965. The range of constituents Habibi wrote to support was large. To name a few, he asked about permits for tractor drivers (Questions 0406, 0571), citizens operating small tours (0411), those seeking medical attention (1192), and young workers (134, 126, 258). Imil Habibi (personal file), ISA 6277/G/27. [Hebrew]

head to Baghdad.”<sup>108</sup> For almost two decades after 1948, though, even a personal trip required a permit, which was often difficult to obtain, involving long queues, interrogation, and constantly changing application forms. Even when granted, a permit was strictly prescriptive, specifying “not only the destination and the date, but also the time of departure and return.”<sup>109</sup> In 1958, a decade into military rule and around the time Mas‘ud would have been born, only one third of Arabs in Israel were able to secure travel permits, and only half of these were for “long periods.”<sup>110</sup>

It has been suggested that the final stretch of Mas‘ud’s story emphasizes the inevitability and the importance of Israeli withdrawal.<sup>111</sup> Yet the snapshot of Mas‘ud’s dream is shot through not just with marvel, but also with anxiety. With his newfound family, Mas‘ud may resemble his friends in the village a little more, but he struggles with the idea of an Israeli withdrawal, profoundly apprehensive at the consequences that it may hold. If occupation persists, what lies in store for these new relatives? If the army withdraws, though, will he ever see them again? Given the geopolitical shock of the Six-Day War, it is not an exaggeration that the young protagonist, having known only the dynamics of dispersion and separation, could imagine himself waking up to yet another dramatically altered environment. Moreover, while his dream valorizes wide access to the Arab world, it hints at a spatial openness that has been lost, and its unconscious nature paradoxically reiterates the banality of Mas‘ud’s own physical space. The house—a widespread symbol and receptacle of value, place, and belonging—becomes a plain, restrictive zone out of which Mas‘ud’s imagination is forced to break. The young boy’s projections are better suited to this oneiric outside, since here they are unbounded.

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<sup>108</sup> Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, *Coffins on our Shoulders*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, trans. Jessica Cohen (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 68.

<sup>110</sup> Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State*, 125.

<sup>111</sup> Fa‘ur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 80-81.

In the final vignette, which is split between the narrator's visit to Leningrad and a prison scene featuring two young Palestinian Arab women, Habibi brings full circle this contrast between physical containment and imaginary openness. Indeed, the story's title evokes a direct link with Mas'ud's dream: the phrase "*al-Ḥubb fī Qalbī*" (The Love in My Heart) is drawn from a song by 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, the same artist Mas'ud's cousin sees perform in Cairo.<sup>112</sup> In place of a young boy about to go to bed, however, we find in the second half a young woman serving an indefinite prison sentence. Her retreat from the grey, cold cell takes the form of memory rather than dream:

This friend from Haifa says that she never feels her homeland except when she sits on the bed, before going to sleep at night, at her mother's side, and her mother tells her about what happened in the days when her six brothers were at home. They would sleep on the ground. They would laugh and wrestle. And in the morning their mother would give them lunch boxes, and some would go to school, others to work. Her six brothers are now scattered across the world, in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Beirut, and one in Canada.<sup>113</sup>

Just as Mas'ud drifts into his dreamy expanse, this young woman lays down on a bed or rug (*firāsh*) and tries to break out by remembering her family. Even from prison, she speaks of these moments "feeling the homeland" in the present tense. From the musical, staccato sentences that describe her uncles' playfulness to the drawn-out list of places in which they were dispersed, there is a poignant contrast in rhythm. Habibi shifts from closeness to dispersion, undercutting the girl's attempt to recover harmonious unity. The list of exilic places lingers, indexing locations first regionally and then across the ocean. The increase in distance from Beirut to Canada—ending with the place furthest afield—tracks the growing helplessness of this somber family register.

As Habibi locates the memory of dispersion in a confined space, the only personal reunification that is evoked in this final story becomes problematic and restrained. "*Al-*

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<sup>112</sup> Sessona, "Intertextual Strategies," 165.

<sup>113</sup> Imil Habibi, "*al-Ḥubb fī Qalbī*," in Imil Habibi, *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (Haifa: Dar al-Ittihad, 1970), 90.

*Ḥubb fī Qalbī*” and with it the collection as a whole, end with the assertion that the accusations and reports against the imprisoned youth—that they are forming a terrorist cell within Israel—are baseless: “This is a pure distortion of an innocent friendship between two young women from one people, who came together after a long separation, under one roof, the roof of the prison cell.”<sup>114</sup> This echo of oneness is particularly resonant in the Arabic: “*sha‘b wāḥid...saqf wāḥid.*” Habibi frames the collection with these depictions of memory and dream that constitute imaginative attempts to break out of banal, confined spaces, but that serve instead to replay and reiterate circumstances of isolation, loss, and haphazard dispersion. Ending in a cold cell replete with connotations of fear, uncertainty, and a lack of agency, Habibi allegorizes the prospects of close and sustainable reunion cynically, giving them a semblance of unity and richness, but ultimately locking them up in a single jail cell.

In the second story, Mr. M also reckons with memory, though he does so in an open rather than an enclosed space. Habibi takes aim at this character’s geographic memory when, as part of his travels to rediscover his own past, Mr. M drives with friends from Nazareth into the West Bank and stops with marvel at the al-Libban slope, “a famous crooked elevation between Nablus and Ramallah.”<sup>115</sup> Mr. M dramatically recognizes the spot: “For twenty years I’ve been dreaming of this winding road,” he says. He claims to remember every bend, to know the fragrances and the cleanness of the air. “This place is my place!” he exclaims, giving us the anthology’s most clear and animated sense of geographic rootedness.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the Arabic sentence, “*hādhā al-makān makānī*” resonates etymologically since, as Boutros Hallaq has noted, the term “*makān,*”

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<sup>114</sup> Habibi, “*al-Ḥubb fī Qalbī,*” 94.

<sup>115</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 83, note 17.

<sup>116</sup> Habibi, “At Last the Almond Blossomed,” 178.

meaning place or location, derives from the verb “*kāna*”—to be, or to exist.<sup>117</sup> Being rooted in place and being alive are one and the same. When Mr. M steps out the car, he takes in the surroundings with sensory richness:

‘Something inside me told me to prostrate myself; something in my eyes was melting into tears. I felt like someone beholding a wonderful spectacle unfolding right in front of his eyes, as if I was reliving the years of my youth, not just seeing them but living them, breathing their air, feeling the blood of youthfulness, with the smell of fresh bread and dried figs, coursing through my veins.’<sup>118</sup>

Mr. M’s memory of the slope is intensely physical and visceral, centered around the body: he feels the blood of youth, smells fresh, resurgent smells, and even senses an inexplicable need to bring himself to his knees and onto this evocative ground. As Qasim suggests, the land itself seems alive and burgeoning, and Mr. M’s energy suggests a clean “symbol of love and nationhood.”<sup>119</sup> Importantly, though, the moment is not so straightforward. Mr. M cannot pinpoint why he makes this gesture. He later “pleads” with his memory (*astarḥim dhākiratī*) to recover what happened at the al-Libban slope that is so intrinsically resonant.

This gap in the protagonist’s memory opens itself to mockery and uncertainty:

‘But my colleagues did not give me enough time and they soon brought me down from the heights of those winding roads to the lowliness of my reality. One of them wanted us to continue on our way immediately because our permits did not allow us to stop at al-Laban (sic) Heights, while another mocked my memories of the place by reminding me how, twenty years before, I had stopped to relieve myself on one of the bends.’<sup>120</sup>

Mr. M’s grandiose phenomenological wonder is first cut down by an intrusive technical point: the Israeli authorities still issued only stringent and limited travel permits to Arab citizens. More importantly, though, Mr. M is brought down by his former actions in this supposedly idyllic spot. As a friend reminds him that he had stopped to urinate on this

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<sup>117</sup> Boutros Hallaq, introduction to Hallaq, Ostle, and Wild, eds., *La Poétique de l’Espace*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Habibi, “At Last the Almond Blossomed,” 179.

<sup>119</sup> Qasim, *al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya*, 123.

<sup>120</sup> Habibi, “At Last the Almond Blossomed,” 179.

enchanted landscape twenty years before, the bond that Mr. M attempts to reclaim through familiarity with its rolling hills is reduced to a crude, anti-romantic kind of naturalness. Loving familiarity is superseded by an unsentimental and untoward biological necessity. An alternative explanation that his colleagues offer is that Mr. M quite simply confuses this vista with another, namely the al-‘Abhariya slope that he would pass twice a week when driving between Nazareth and Haifa. The conclusion seems to be that either Mr. M’s idealized memory is a fabrication—a substitution of like landscapes—or that he is dredging up with some embellishment an embarrassing memory of a roadside pit stop. Mr. M accepts the former, glad that his visceral reactions can be logically explained. Calderbank’s translation adds aptly ironic wordplay that does not exist in the Arabic: Mr. M relieves himself on the slope and, when he later accepts the al-‘Abhariya explanation, he feels relieved (a more literal translation would be, “I lifted a heavy burden off my chest”).<sup>121</sup>

After the uncertainty of these memories and experiences, the narrator makes clear that Mr. M *had* in fact set foot on the al-Libban slope. Indeed, it is the crucial site of the love story for which he is searching—a hill where two people picked almond pods in a symbolic gesture for the future prospect of their blossoming, maturing affection. The narrator’s dilemma at the end is whether or not to enlighten Mr. M that his search for a lost character of the past is a quest, literal and symbolic, for a part of himself. Whatever the explanation he accepts, then, Mr. M’s relationship with geographic and spatial memory is shown to be fundamentally untrustworthy. Traversing Israeli-Palestinian roads, swerving around hills, and gazing over slopes, he has no reliable recall or record of his former place there. On the one hand, he has flashes of sentiment whose geographic

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<sup>121</sup> Habibi, “*Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz*,” 32.

richness seems to him misplaced. On the other, he has a moving story that he cannot ground in its locale.

These reiterations of confinement or expressions of geographic ambiguity underscore for Habibi the need for a clear, more reliable form of memory. If we return to the sixth tale, “*al-Hubb fī Qalbī*,” the setting of its first section in the Soviet Union makes this need clear by forming a stark juxtaposition to the cold prison cell. Before the story shifts to the jail housing the young women, the narrator embarks on a trip to Leningrad and tours two sites of collective memory: the Mother Motherland statue at the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery, and a nearby museum where his attention is captured by a small diary. Strikingly, this famously imposing statue is of less interest to the narrator. The vast bronze figure, backed by a stone wall, casts itself as the great mnemonic. “The granite immortalizes them,” a poetic epithet proclaims, urging the reader to take comfort in knowing that not one of the thousands who were lost there (the statue commemorates the 1941 Siege of Leningrad) will ever be forgotten.<sup>122</sup> For the narrator, though, the granite does not do justice to those it claims to mark. “The granite is dead. There is no life in it. So this description also seems dead, with no life in it either.”<sup>123</sup> Pathetic fallacy reinforces this stark reading, as the narrator reflects that he cannot capture photographically the lightning that flashes around him. The statue seems cold and static, while the lightning embodies the kind of memory and memorial that he prefers: something vibrant, dynamic, and luminous.

The diary of a young girl named Tanya is what truly captures the narrator. In this he finds a written record that tried to memorialize and document the siege even as it was occurring. Tanya listed the names of those family members, friends, and neighbors lost

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<sup>122</sup> Habibi, “*al-Hubb fī Qalbī*,” 80.

<sup>123</sup> Habibi, “*al-Hubb fī Qalbī*,” 80.

day-by-day until eventually, “Today, I was left by myself.”<sup>124</sup> Habibi finds in this book a portable, specific, and dynamic alternative to the patriotic inscription to which he struggles to relate. Its etymological resonance is apposite. The word “*mufakkira*” (diary) connotes memory and reflection actively, suggestive of an object that triggers thought and makes one remember. The statue (*timthāl*) meanwhile stresses a more passive kind of mimicry and representation, laying out a likeness in stone. Indeed, the narrator obsesses over the word “*mufakkira*.” Habibi uses it no less than six times in two pages. This diary’s concision and persistence—Tanya appears to be the last person standing in her neighborhood—project exactly the kind of specific, documented memory that Mr. M fails to capture. Its unitary, portable form also stand in contrast to the incomplete, censored, intercepted letters of the imprisoned young woman from Haifa.

It may not be surprising that, in order to locate a site of collective memory like Mother Motherland—solid and concrete—Habibi must take us *out* of the geography of Israel/Palestine. Nowhere in *Sudāsiyya* will we find inscriptions, statues, or grounded sites that convey a Palestinian message. The closest analog is the cards placed on tombstones in the fourth vignette, “*al-‘Awda*,” which the narrator notes will stand firm longer than bouquets of flowers that wilt fast.<sup>125</sup> It is noteworthy, though, that the diary, a vivid expression of reliable and documented memory in space, is also housed outside of Habibi’s home environment. Mas‘ud’s home, the prison cell, and the al-Libban slope present a range of spaces where dream and memory are deeply problematic, uncertain of themselves or trumped by the confinement out of which they look to break. The careful, portable diary, however tragic its contents, suggests the fuller, dependable chronicling that Habibi’s characters lack. That it is housed in a museum gives both gravitas and

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<sup>124</sup> Habibi, “*al-Ḥubb fī Qalbī*,” 83.

<sup>125</sup> Habibi, “*al-‘Awda*,” 59-60.

longevity to its mnemonic function. In Habibi's anxious and geographically unstable world, Tanya's diary suggests that putting pen to paper is a more powerful and reliable gesture than dreaming, mining memories, or taking chisel to granite.

### **CONCLUSION: GEOGRAPHY, SATIRE, AND CONFIDENCE**

After Habibi passed away in 1996, Mahmud Darwish spoke at a memorial service and offered a characteristically lyrical eulogy:

You suffered in this journey, as you suffered to find literature there, in that region straining with questions. Here, on this ancient little land, dialogue takes place between the real and the mythical, the temporal and the spiritual, the relative and the absolute, the ephemeral and the eternal, between right and wrong, war and peace. And here, indeed, is the beginning, as well as the end.<sup>126</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that it would be shortsighted to fix Habibi's work into the framework of "resistance" or "combat" literature. The myriad ways in which *Sudāsiyya* evokes an anxious set of voices attests to the challenges shortly after the Six-Day War to negotiate social and physical spaces that are in between Israeli and Palestinian, Hebrew and Arabic, folkloric and novelistic, or even real and ethereal. Darwish evokes similar negotiations in his moving tribute and stresses not that the Israeli-Palestinian geography is rife with conflict, but rather that it is "strained with questions," laden with a burden of uncertainty. Darwish portrays Habibi's career as a struggle with questions and dualities and as a quest to "find literature" through a process of dialogue. This course—navigating and collapsing binaries—suggests a creative impulse that is by definition somewhat moderate. Indeed, in the value of writing and documenting that is suggested by young Tanya's diary, Habibi valorizes a similarly restrained, insular path. In this sense, the broad tone of *Sudāsiyya* reads well against Habibi's political career, as well as the evolution of his prose style.

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<sup>126</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, "Emile Habibi: You All-Sarcastic Enchanter," *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol.3 No.2 1996.

When Mas‘ud wonders at the possible futures in store for him, he considers straightforward options—withdrawal or occupation—that are more revealing than they first seem. This story was written four years after the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the first major Palestinian national political group whose foundational charter called for an armed struggle to liberate all of historic Palestine. The umbrella group quickly gained supporters in the Arab world and among communities of Palestinian exiles. Mas‘ud, though, never conceives of a future that goes any further than the status quo ante. He seems to accept the inevitability of the Israeli state’s persistence even as he wants to believe in the inevitability of its military withdrawal from the West Bank. A solution in line with the early PLO platform never crosses his mind. Mr. M and Umm al-Rubabika meanwhile traverse the terrain with a sense of anxiety and loss, but no revolutionary agenda.

Nevertheless, some have read revolutionary drive into the vignettes as a whole. In Qasim’s analysis, all moments of incompleteness serve to reiterate the value of resistance and struggle, guided by the simple assumption that reunion and return will restore unity and attain that elusive sense of completion. Yaghi sees the prison setting of the sixth vignette allegorically, arguing that “the whole country is a big prison” and only through resistance can its walls be broken. To be sure, “*al-‘Awda*” and “*al-Ḥubb fī Qalbī*” suggest acts of resistance, but the former is limited to a memorial march in the Old City of Jerusalem, and the latter explicitly denounces that the young women have nefarious, ulterior interests. In its approach to reunion, return, and the broader geopolitical quandary, *Sudāsiyya* is fundamentally a careful and restrained work.

None of this restraint is coincidental. In his political life, Habibi never contested the existence of the Israeli state. In his twenties, he was a founding member of the National Liberation League in Palestine, the only Arab group to accept the 1947 United

Nations Partition Plan.<sup>127</sup> As a member of a small cultural elite that remained after 1948, Habibi stressed the need for Arabic literature in Israel to “carry the banner of Jewish-Arab brotherhood” and he developed working relationship with Jewish immigrants from the Arab world like Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas.<sup>128</sup> As a lifelong member of the Communist Party, which he joined at the age of nineteen, Habibi was often piercingly critical of the state but was always careful to clarify that “our party strongly encouraged trust in Jewish democratic forces, which struggle against oppression and for equality.”<sup>129</sup> With these sundry, open-minded relationships, it is not surprising that Habibi was a defender of the diversity that came with the territory of Israeli citizenship. As he said in 1994: “It is time that the whole Arab nation takes stock of its diversity. Yes, we are all Arabs. The fact that we have developed local particularities does not hold us back. This diversity is a sign of progress and evolution. It does not at all signal the decline of the Arab people as a group.”<sup>130</sup> Habibi clearly took a measure of pride in the diversity that he himself represented from within Israel, and hoped to preserve this status whatever the resolution of the wider conflict.

Basic acceptance of the state notwithstanding, Habibi was exasperated by the outcome of the Six-Day War and, in particular, what he perceived to be a lack of commitment to finding a resolution. In October 1968, the end of the period during which *Sudāsiyya* was published, Habibi spoke on behalf of Rakah (the Arab breakaway branch of the Israeli Communist Party) at the opening of a Knesset plenary session. His records

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<sup>127</sup> Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 51-52.

<sup>128</sup> Reuven Snir, “‘We Were Like Those Who Dream’: Iraqi-Jewish Writers in Israel in the 1950s,” *Prooftexts*, 11, 1991, 168.

<sup>129</sup> Kaufman, *Arab National Communism*, 101.

<sup>130</sup> Emile Habibi, “Comment avez-vous commencé à écrire?” Interview with K. Brown, translated from Arabic into French by M. El Ghoullabzouri. *Mediterraneans* 6, 59-67.

show that he tended to skip meetings and, even when present, he seldom spoke up.<sup>131</sup> Here, however, Habibi gave a full-throated critique of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories and of what he called playing the “card” of territory, damning parliamentary politics with a frivolous gambling metaphor. At the end of his diatribe, he concluded coolly: “There is a historic opportunity to establish peace in the Middle East, a peace that will guarantee the existence, rights, and security of the State of Israel and the Arab states. The nations that want peace and an end to war and bloodshed will not forgive the leaders who miss this opportunity.”<sup>132</sup> Habibi continued to be earnest and judgmental on the issue of the Six-Day War until his final stretch as a member of parliament. In early 1971, he sparred with Knesset speakers Reuven Barkat and Yisrael Yishayahu about acknowledging the urgency of a discussion on renewing the ceasefire agreed to in November 1967:

The urgency of the proposal is clear. According to the General Assembly the ceasefire comes to an end on 5<sup>th</sup> February. We are making efforts to renew the ceasefire, that is our general concern...There is the danger that the ceasefire will not be renewed and hostilities will reignite. From this point flows danger to peace and to men’s lives...I think democracy is not measured just by affirming the urgency of measures on a television show, but precisely on questions like this.<sup>133</sup>

Habibi saw hypocrisy in those who emphasized this urgency in public, yet stalled the discussion behind closed doors. The language of his critique is plain and heartfelt.

In the literary realm, Habibi is remembered not for these earnest frustrations and expressions, but above all for his cutting satire and relentless irony. In *Sudāsiyya*, however, there are few flashes of that sardonic tone for which Habibi would become renowned. To be sure, he lampoons his own political roots through Mr. M, noting that he

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<sup>131</sup> From 1967-69, for example, Habibi served on the public services committee, but attended no more than five meetings in eighteen months. ISA/171/K/12-13, ISA 179/K/4-5. Habibi attended more meetings of the House Committee in this period, though the numbers are still low at around fifteen of ninety meetings. ISA 178/K/10, ISA 171/K/2, ISA 171/K/1. [Hebrew]

<sup>132</sup> Protocols of the Sixth Knesset, Session D, October 22, 1968. ISA 172/K/12. [Hebrew]

<sup>133</sup> Meeting 85 of the House Committee of the Seventh Knesset, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1971. ISA 191/K/5/85. [Hebrew]

and the narrator had founded a youth group in school (Habibi had founded a group called *Nadi al-Sha‘b*), but realized that their activism was limited to smoking cigarettes and wearing dark glasses. Minor jabs are aimed at political leaders who go through Mas‘ud’s village only before elections or to get their cars fixed. And there are overarching ironies, most notably in that Mr. M’s quest for a character from his past is, in fact, a search for himself. Overall, though—even in its ironic moments—*Sudāsiyya* is relatively free of caustic humor. It stands in stark contrast to Habibi’s best-known work, *Pessoptimist*, in which barely a page turns without relentless scorn, and no character goes unscathed.

Geography is perhaps instructive in this contrast in tone and humor. The settings of *Sudāsiyya* are grounded and realist. Yet Habibi’s later satiric style, as Akram Khater has noted with regard both to *Pessoptimist* (1974) and *Ikhtayya* (1985), marshals fantastic locations and even extra-terrestrial characters. In these works, Habibi “challenges normalcy by indulging in the fantastic, supernatural and even science-fictional.”<sup>134</sup> In setting, then, as in tone, *Sudāsiyya* can be seen as a bridging work for Habibi. This is a transitional role that others have previously noted only for the work’s interesting genre, somewhere between the short story and the novel.<sup>135</sup>

Unsurprisingly, political shifts also play a role in this transition. Habibi and Fa‘ur both link satire intrinsically to political criticism as the most apt means both to entertain and encapsulate the frustration (*ghaḍab*) that writers find in challenging sociopolitical conditions.<sup>136</sup> In 1994, shortly after his controversial acceptance of the Israel Prize for Literature, Habibi explicitly connected his derisive tone to his circumstances as part of a minority community in the State of Israel. It was not easy, Habibi said, “to mock the person imposing injustice, or the person who resigns and gives in to it. I did not always

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<sup>134</sup> Akram Khater, “Emile Habibi: The Mirror of Irony in Palestinian Literature,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar., 1993), 77.

<sup>135</sup> Qasim, *al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāsiyya*, 117.

<sup>136</sup> Fa ‘ur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 30-32.

know whether it was the Israeli oppressor or the Palestinian oppressed who was more estranged. It is through mockery that we have lifted the veil of fear that covered the Israeli soldier.”<sup>137</sup> At least part of Habibi’s interest in the satire that characterizes *Pessoptimist*, then, is stripping away the all-too-simple surface and the binaries of oppressor-oppressed that color other writing in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere. An insider to Israeli society, Habibi looks more sensitively for the common humanity that bridges the disparate communities. He locates the commonality, specifically, in a certain vulnerability that we all mask. Appropriately, Habibi had written previously that his “taking refuge” in satire was also a “weapon” to protect himself from this very weakness (*ḍaʿf*), his choice of tone thus carrying a double purpose.<sup>138</sup>

In addition to seeing vulnerability as the surest way to measure our humanity, Habibi also deemed laughter “the surest way to evaluate our self-confidence.”<sup>139</sup> The explicit connection between a derisive mode and self-confidence is critical. By the early 1970s, Habibi seems to have settled into this mode of writing, his attitudes exacerbated by the political gridlock and perceived hypocrisy that dogged his postwar tenure in the Knesset. It was only in 1970 that Habibi began writing editorials and commentaries for the Communist newspaper *al-Ittihad*, an engagement that no doubt sharpened his political axe. And it was in *Pessoptimist* that Habibi first ventured more daringly critical portrayals of Israel, even scenes that might be read as an “utterly undisguised condemnation” of how the state has treated the Arab minority.<sup>140</sup>

Before the unremittingly sardonic *Pessoptimist*, though, whose biting sharpness indicates that Habibi was comfortable and successful in that genre, *Sudāsiyya* offers something very different. Across this work, Habibi’s characters are subject to little

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<sup>137</sup> Habibi, “Comment avez-vous commencé à écrire?” Interview with K. Brown.

<sup>138</sup> Faʿur, *al-Sukhriyya*, 30-32.

<sup>139</sup> Habibi, “Comment avez-vous commence a ecrire?” Interview with K. Brown.

<sup>140</sup> Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 130-131.

derision, and almost none of the fantastical and absurdist settings that characterize Habibi's later work. Instead, they stand unsteadily on Israeli-Palestinian ground and evoke great earnestness in their post-1967 uncertainties.

In its anxiously hybrid uses of voice and time, and in the complex ways in which diverse characters move through everyday spaces—or struggle in dreams and memory to break away from them—*Sudāsiyya* is best understood as a raw account of uncertainty in Israel's Arab communities, unvarnished by satire. It holds more anxiety than conviction, as its characters navigate uneasily their early post-1967 worlds. As Qasim has astutely noted, every character in *Sudāsiyya* is always looking for something, be it family or lost objects or a particular spot on the Haifa-Nazareth road.<sup>141</sup> The anxiety is both spatial and temporal; in Homi Bhabha's words, "linking us to the memory of the past while we struggle to choose a path through the ambiguous history of the present."<sup>142</sup> In *Sudāsiyya*, Habibi's six vignettes earnestly encapsulate precisely this kind of anxious struggle through a kaleidoscope of characters whose in-between places in the State of Israel are, both literally and figuratively, unsettled.

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<sup>141</sup> Qasim, *al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya*, 148.

<sup>142</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, xix.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MUHAMMAD ‘ALI TAHA AND PALESTINIAN COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN ISRAEL

Imil Habibi, already involved in Israeli-Palestinian politics by 1948 and an acclaimed writer soon after, represents the old guard and pioneering generation of Palestinian Arab literati in Israel. Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, though writing alongside Habibi from the late 1960s and 1970s, represents a new generation. Along with writers like Zaki Darwish and Naji Zahir, Taha joins a group with only childlike memories of that cataclysmic year.<sup>1</sup> They grew up within the constraints of military rule. The Six-Day War struck in the formative heyday of their twenties. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the questions at the heart of their work are more strident than the subtle anxieties that color Habibi’s *Sudāsiyya*. For Taha, the task of writing fiction seems to spring from an exasperated question that affects not just individuals and local communities, but the people and the nation as a problematic, alienated, and often-unclear whole. Simply put: What is happening to us?

A brief introduction to the writer is in order.<sup>2</sup> Taha was born in Mi‘ar, a village in the Western Galilee that was depopulated in 1948.<sup>3</sup> At the age of seven, Taha moved with his family to nearby Kabul, a village of several hundred inhabitants that lies between the urban centers of Acre and Shefa ‘Amer. Kabul is by-and-large a Muslim town that has grown to a current population of close to 10,000. Taha’s departure in 1948 clearly left an

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<sup>1</sup> For an elaboration of the generational breakdown of Arab writers in Israel, see Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Against this biographical context, it should be noted that Mohamed-Salah Omri has voiced an important concern that, in the cross-pollination of Area Studies and contemporary literature, the details of biography and context have at times overshadowed literary merits and analyses in a given text. In this case, since Taha’s work is mostly untranslated and has attracted very limited scholarship in English, I offer the introduction not to assert the primacy of biography but simply as a brief familiarization. See Omri, *Islam, Nationalism, and World Literature*, 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 26.

imprint on his life and work. His home was destroyed along with possessions, clothing, and documents. According to Taha, the family “lived under a tree” for three months and eventually found a room to rent in Kabul. Taha also lost a younger sister at this time.<sup>4</sup> The notion of Palestinian dislocation in time as well as space is evident in this writer’s own experience, since he not only left his home but with it the documents dating his birth. His father remembered only that Taha was born in the plowing season of 1941, leaving his precise origins in a traumatic, temporal haze.<sup>5</sup>

Abandoning an early desire to be an engineer, Taha began writing fiction in his early twenties. He published his first anthology, *Likay Tushriq al-Shams* (So the Sun May Shine) in 1964, followed by numerous others in the 1970s and 1980s: *Salāman wa-Taḥiyya* (Greetings) (1969), *Jisr ‘Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn* (A Bridge Over the Sad River) (1974), *‘Ā'id al-Mi‘ārī Yabī' al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za'tar* (‘A'id al-Mi‘ari Sells Bread Loaves in Tall al-Za'tar) (1978), *Warda li-'Aynay Ḥafīza* (A Rose for Hafīza's Eyes) (1983), and *Wa-Yakūn fī al-Zaman al-Ātī* (May it Be, Next Time) (1989). Taha has recently diversified with one novel, two satirical pieces, and three plays since the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> He has also branched out into children’s literature.

Ibrahim Taha divides Muhammad ‘Ali Taha’s career into three phases. The first, which includes only his 1964 collection, is concerned with the village: the names, plants, and customs that animated the rural scenes of Palestinian Arab life in Israel.<sup>7</sup> The restricted scope of this early phase is a product both of inexperience—critics including Ibrahim Taha consider the stories to be overly romantic and simplified—and the

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<sup>4</sup> Jamal Assadi, trans., *Mohammad Ali Taha's 'A Rose to Hafeeza's Eyes' and Other Stories* (Peter Lang: New York, 2008), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Assadi, *Mohammad Ali Taha*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> On Taha’s recent theatrical work in collaboration with Jewish writers, see Dorit Yerushalmi, “From a Transient to a Resident: The Acco Festival of Alternative Israeli Theatre, 2001-2004,” *The Drama Review* 51, no. 4 (2007): 47-67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim Taha, introduction to *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 10.

containment of the era of military rule in which they were published. After easements and the eventual disbanding of military rule, and after the 1967 War had opened up even parochial areas to contact with broader Palestinian national concerns, Taha embarked on a second phase that explored Palestinian collective memory (*al-dhākira al-kulliyya*, or *al-dhākira al-jamā'iyya*) and identity. Beginning in the mid-1980s, his third phase, which includes two of his best-known stories, “*Warda li-‘Aynay Ḥafīza*” (A Rose for Hafiza’s Eyes) (1983) and “*Layla fī Qitār Rīga*” (A Night on the Train to Riga) (1995), represents a more modernist sensibility, turning inwards to construct richer, conflicted characters, and driving narratives through individuals rather than the force of a collective dilemma. Interestingly, his children’s stories come full circle: titles like “What the Birds Said,” “The Old Sparrow,” and “King of the Fruits” attest to Taha’s ongoing interest in the land and what it supports.

The discrete division of categories is somewhat deceptive, since Taha’s concern for collective identity and memory can also be read into his early, naturally descriptive stories as well as the individually focused modernist tales like “*Layla fī Qitār Rīga*.” Nevertheless, he explicitly embraced collective identity as central to his anthologies between 1969 and 1983, and in this chapter, I focus primarily on the tensions of this period and the way in which they construct and problematize collectivity. Though it is sometimes assumed that this reckoning of collective identity and relations to the broader Arab world is an accretion of sympathies, a march towards ethnonational consolidation, this was no straightforward task for Taha through the 1970s. His comments about consolidation belie its complexities:

My literary works are part of Palestinian literature and Palestinian literature forms part of Arab literature. But there is a difference between Palestinian literature and pieces from Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere...We Palestinians have always had to fight for a small piece of land here and have fought to hold on to an image of our

people...When you read our literature you know that this is literature from within the State of Israel.”<sup>8</sup>

Taha’s desire to preserve a picture of his people (*sūrat sha‘binā*) and his background sits uneasily alongside his cursory characterization of unified Arab literary culture. Somewhat prosaically, Taha tries to emphasize a general commonality. Yet he cannot help but ground his own craft in the controversial particularities of Israel: its geography, its people, and even its language. He freely admits later in the same interview the influence of Hebrew in the vernacular of Palestinian Arab citizens. He also acknowledges that, should an independent Palestinian state emerge, he will remain in Israel, where “I have something that belongs to the Galilee, to Haifa more than to Gaza.”<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Taha’s post-1967 works did not emerge in a geopolitical vacuum. The unexpected 1973 October War with Egypt dealt a severe blow to the euphoric strength that many Israelis saw in the expansive victory of 1967. To some extent, this restored hope in the vigor of Arab nationalism (its champion, Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir, had died suddenly in 1970). The Land Day riots of 1976, whose local importance I discuss in detail in Chapter Four, took place in response to land expropriations in the Galilee, representing a landmark protest around an issue particular to Palestinian Arabs within Israel. Anwar Sadat’s visit in 1977 then prompted outrage, as some including Taha himself saw the Egyptian president’s touching down on Israeli ground as a treasonous concession. Indeed, Taha wrote a much criticized tableau of this visit and titled it sarcastically in Hebrew: “*Baruch Haba, Mar Sadat*” (Welcome, Mr. Sadat).

While some of Taha’s work has missed the mark with local critics, there is almost unanimous agreement that his strongest work revolves around collective identity. Several

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<sup>8</sup> Jerome David Weltsch, “Muhammad ‘Ali Taha: *al-Qiṣṣa al-Qaṣīra wa-l-Huwiyya al-‘Arabiyya al-Filasṭīniyya fī Isrā’īl*,” in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta’ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya ‘inda Muhammad ‘Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu’assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 155.

praise Taha's use of popular idiom and Arabic-Islamic symbols, his invocation of the land and its place names, and his social criticism of power structures, in particular corrupt local leaders who have collaborated with Israel and created a rift between generations. Yet this praise is limited in that it frequently explicates rather than analyzes. Ibrahim Khalil compartmentalizes Taha's contributions into four straightforward tropes that become de facto components of collective identity: describing the rural environment; highlighting the character of the local farmer, peasant, or "*fallāh*"; using idiom and colloquial language; and referencing folklore.<sup>10</sup> More adventurously, Nabih al-Qasim indexes nine characteristics. These include structural choices (breaking stories into sections; using letters or anagrams as section headings), cultural references (Arabic-Islamic symbols; popular idioms; personal names with clear connotations), and narrative style (satirical tone; alternations in narrative voice). Both al-Qasim and Khalil notably refer to one explicitly geographic quality as "drawing a map of Palestine." For both critics, however, this seems simply to mean offering superficial descriptions of rural places, noting characters' original homes, or listing objects and foods like coffee, olives, and *kibbeh*.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, this taxonomical approach belies the nuances that mark the complexity of Palestinian Arab life in Israel.

In contrast, this chapter seeks to suggest certain themes and motifs that reach beyond an indexical outlook and rhetorical, axiomatic notions such as "the land," "the village," and "the new generation." I do not dispute the importance of the trends that scholars like al-Qasim lay out, nor their thematic approach in general. Since few of Taha's works until the 1980s conjured particularly unique characters or uniquely striking

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<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim Khalil, "*Jisr 'Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn*," in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 55-56.

<sup>11</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, "*Majmū'at 'Ā'id al-Mi'ārī Yabī' al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za'tar wa-Dalā'il al-Taḥawwul al-Jadīd fī Intāj Muhammad 'Ali Taha*," in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 149-153.

places, a thematic analysis most effectively conveys the collective heart of his emerging oeuvre and his interest in the salient dilemmas of identity in the literal and figurative spaces between Israeli state and Palestinian nation. What I do suggest, however, is that there is much to be gained from scratching the surface of the established themes and attempting to locate subtler ones.

I offer four interlocking avenues that course through Taha's post-1967 oeuvre. First is Taha's interest in naming and political geography, which he deploys in different ways across the territory of Israel/Palestine and in a Lebanese refugee camp. Taha relies frequently here on the role of sound in mediating and constructing geographies. Second is his relentless use of movement and travel, which paradoxically reinforce a sense of internal isolation for Arabs in Israel. Third, I consider motifs that connote the circulation of information and the consolidation of personal and communal ties, showing how these too reiterate the local vulnerabilities that Arab citizens face. Fourth, I explore the ideology that lies behind some of Taha's more strident work and emphasizes political and economic difference. My intention is not to offer an alternative, exhaustive list of building blocks out of which to mould a uniform collective identity. Rather, it is to extract nuanced, often fraught sets of images and themes that evoke an intricate relationship between geography, collective identity, and political ideology.

### **NAMING: IMAGINING AND CONTESTING PALESTINIAN SPACE**

In an interview with Jerome Weltsch, Taha is unabashedly proud of his ability to spell out local geography:

I'll tell you that in my stories I emphasized very much the names of the places, towns, valleys, animals, flowers, plants. I did it so much that one of the critics wrote in a Lebanese monthly the following: 'In spite of the fact that I have not lived in Palestine or the Galilee, from the stories of Muhammad 'Ali Taha, I know

the Arab villages in the triangle; I smell the fragrances of the soil and plants from there.<sup>12</sup>

Taha presents his romanticized use of geographic names in straightforward fashion. To name places, flora, and fauna is to exhibit deep-rooted familiarity with the physical environment of Palestine and to give an important assertion of belonging. His account holds for his first published work in 1964—the clearest manifestation is found in the story, “*al-Shajara al-Mafqūda*” (The Lost Tree), which features long paragraphs that exalt natural sights and smells—but it hides the intricacies that enter his negotiations of space in the 1970s. Rather than the abstract act of recovery that characterizes *Likay Tushriq al-Shams*, we find in the 1970s and early 1980s a series of stories that move out of the village. Taha’s use of names in these problematic and ambivalent spaces works differently, defying simple attachment and conveying the new complexities of Israeli-Palestinian political geography.

Three stories in particular demonstrate the polyvalence of names in the context of collective memory, contrasting the three different zones that are often said to make up the three “branches” of the Palestinian people: a large and well-known refugee camp in Lebanon (the branch of exile); a much smaller camp near Bethlehem in the West Bank (the branch exiled to lands that have since become the Palestinian territories), and a city square in Haifa (the branch of historic Palestine, now Israel).<sup>13</sup>

In “*‘Ā'id al-Mi'ārī Yabī' al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za'tar*,” Taha moves beyond the boundaries of Israel/Palestine into a notorious refugee camp in northeast Beirut. Here, Taha gives a picaresque-like portrait of a young boy who sells “*manāqīsh*,” a street vendors’ snack of bread topped with a salty mix of thyme and sumac. An enterprising

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<sup>12</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> The tree metaphor is common in scholarship on Palestinian culture. See Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 10-11.

youngster, ‘A’id al-Mi‘ari runs through the camp peddling his loaves, and makes himself known by referring to people by their places of origin, or surprising them with his knowledge of places in which he has not set foot: “‘Ai’d al-Mi‘ari knew the names of his customers and he knew the names of their cities and villages, so he’d make use of them. And he knew the names of the plants and fruits of the land so he could use these for banter as well. Every day, he drew the map of Palestine in his roving.”<sup>14</sup> In addition to flaunting his knowledge, the boy even suggests that he will bring customers ingredients from their own homes, and thus crafts an unexpectedly light-hearted verbal map as he runs through the camp making a living.

The makeup of this imaginary map is poignant, since it is composed in sound waves rather than sketched in visible lines or scraped out in a clear and regular route through the camp. Collective identity in this distant, disenfranchised place is not manifested in relics, cartographic maps, or the concrete use of space. Rather, it persists as an auditory snapshot, the jocular calls of a budding salesman who, as the story informs us from the start, has never known or experienced any physical environment other than the camp. Yet ‘A’id’s levity is not mere entrepreneurial wit. In an internal narrative moment, the boy wonders about his lost childhood: “If he were to go back to his village, and to go back to that world that he had lost, and that his father had drawn for him in his stories time and time again...he wondered, would he taste the happiness that had vanished from his childhood?”<sup>15</sup> What the boy does publicly, then, mimics what his father had done privately by tracing Palestinian contours through talk. The use of place names, called out as reference points and marking characters as a diverse assortment of national coordinates, creates an ephemeral sense of collective geographic identity.

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<sup>14</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “‘Ā’id al-Mi‘ārī Yabī‘ al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za‘tar,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *‘Ā’id al-Mi‘ārī Yabī‘ al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za‘tar* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1989), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Taha, “‘Ā’id al-Mi‘ārī,” 10.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, audiocentrism plays an important role in narrative form and literacy in Middle Eastern societies. This is in contrast, as Daniel Sui and others have noted, to “Western culture [that] generally favors sight more than sound,” using the visual rather than the aural as an organizing principle.<sup>16</sup> In “‘*Ā'id al-Mi'ārī*,” Taha uses sound as a trope rather than a formal characteristic of the experience of reading, and it acts as a foil to the visual space that is, perhaps especially in a refugee camp, constrictive and imposed. ‘Ai’d’s calling out of names defies this constriction since sound pervades physical space in a way that the visual cannot. One does not need to turn towards something and view it directly in order to hear it, nor can one choose *not* to hear a spontaneous sound from anywhere nearby. “Objects in acoustic space,” such as the boy vendor and the refugees in the camp, become “interconnected simultaneously—having centers everywhere with boundaries nowhere.” And thus “the world of sound” evokes what Sui terms “a unified field of instant relationships.”<sup>17</sup> The boy’s shouts work towards a holistic, alternative space that washes over the camp and overlays its visual design. Out of forced migration and dispersion, Tall al-Za’tar becomes “an arena of mutual involvement instead of a division of experience.”<sup>18</sup>

It is tempting to see this pervasive characteristic of sound as a kind of Palestinian counter-geography, a means of resistance that creates wholeness amid the dislocation that Tall al-Za’tar represents. Yet Taha makes two important authorial choices that undermine this drive to a “unified field,” showing the limitations of an aural geographic alternative. First, the boy’s name implies constant movement towards that lost home: he is always returning (*‘ā'id*) to a place of family origins that inheres in his second name. There is a nod to autobiography in that Mi’ar is also Taha’s place of birth, which he fled during the

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Sui, “Visuality, Aurality, and Shifting Metaphors of Geographical Thought in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 90 (2), 2000, 323.

<sup>17</sup> Sui, “Visuality, Aurality,” 335.

<sup>18</sup> Sui, “Visuality, Aurality,” 335.

*Nakba*. Secondly, the story is deliberately composed in sections, each of which is titled by a letter of the alphabet. Ordered in sequence, they fall one short of spelling “Tall al-Za‘tar.” Denying completeness, Taha creates an intrinsically limited frame. Tying the plot through with an incomplete title uses the core structure of the story (*bunyat al-qışsa*) to suggest that naming and vocal mapping in this foreign place must fall short in representing Palestinian space.

Taha uses this structural trope elsewhere to contrasting effect. “*Al-‘Ādiyāt*” (The Downturns) revolves around a fictional country, “*Dawlat al-Zayt*” (The Olive State) that is transformed into a superficial haven for tourists. Here, the letters that compose “*Filasṭīn*” (Palestine) are scattered across the story, jumbled into an anagram and interspersed with other subtitles. In addition to being out of order, most letters are incorrectly vocalized: “*Lām kasra*” (as opposed to “*Lām fatha*”) is followed by the grammatically impossible “*Ṭā mada*” (“*Ṭā kasra*” would be the only acceptable option in “*Filasṭīn*”). There is even an extra letter “*nūn*,” baffling and superfluous, as though the story and the place have lost track of themselves in the chaos of transformation.<sup>19</sup> Yet in “*Yal‘an Abū...*” (May He Curse...) a fiery story dedicated to the nationalist poet and recently elected mayor of Nazareth Tawfiq Zayyad, subsection letters simply spell “*Filasṭīn*” in the correct sequence.<sup>20</sup> For this more rousing, didactic piece, the name of Palestine is full and obvious, in harmony with narrative structure. Taha is using titular place names in a manner that creates variation, perhaps even a kind of hierarchy, in terms of how names may represent and recover territories lost.

If “*Ā‘id al-Mi‘ārī*” employs names to sound out partial, alternative geographies, the story “*Sabbī wa-Bint min Mukhayyam Duhaysha*” (A Boy and Girl in the Duhaysha

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Al-‘Ādiyāt*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Ā‘id al-Mi‘ārī Yabī‘ al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za‘tar* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1989), 15-24.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Yal‘an Abū...*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Warda li-‘Aynay Ḥafīza* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1989), 129-137.

Camp) uses a refugee camp much closer to Israel to comment on territorial loss directly. In this portrait, a number of children play a game called “Soldiers and Patriots” in which they run through the streets in mock battle with each other. The chants adopted by the soldiers reflect the division of land in Israel in dialogue: “*Yerushalayim? Shelanu! Hevron? Shelanu! Yericho? Shelanu!*” The boys flaunt their Hebrew (“*Shelanu!*” meaning, “It’s ours!”) and claim the landscape city by city. Strikingly, the text renders each name in Hebrew phonetics, deliberately glossing over the Arabic names that would normally be used (“*al-Quds*” for Jerusalem, “*al-Khalīl*” for Hebron, and “*Arīḥa*” for Jericho), and developing that “unified field” of sound in the language that connotes Palestinian exile or occupation. The final chant in the game explicitly and caustically dismisses an Arab claim to the landscape: “*L’Aravim? Hamidbar*” (For the Arabs? The desert). Not only does this punch line condemn the Arab population to a less habitable, arid space, but it also scatters them across a landscape that does not have a distinct name.

Moreover, the tag “*Aravim*”—as opposed to more nuanced epithets that acknowledge Palestinian identities and/or Israeli citizenship—has long been a pejorative colloquial way of referring to Israel’s Palestinian Arab population. It shortens the term, “Israeli Arabs,” which as I noted in the introduction, was coined by the Israeli government in the 1950s and then applied to the Arab population. Palestinian Arab citizens themselves have never embraced this term since it lacks Palestinian particularity and represents an effort to absorb the indigenous Arab population into the new state.<sup>21</sup> Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker have argued that the term “Israeli Arabs” connotes “spatial diffusion” and “obliterates any suggestion that the group in question is related to a

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<sup>21</sup> The term “Arab citizens of Israel,” though it seems similar, is more accepted for its foregrounding of Arab identifications, as well as its implications of equal civic identity.

territory.”<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it attempts to transfer the locus of identity primarily to Israel, to attach the state inexorably to the minority’s collective character. In Hebrew, the word order is reversed: *Aravim Yisraeli’im* (Israeli Arabs), or *Araviyei Yisrael* (the Arabs of Israel). Albeit a grammatical necessity, the reversal pointedly connotes difference and otherness before it adds the geographical qualifier.

It could be argued that Taha is using Hebrew here in the same way that Habibi does with the melting “*artik*” and a character looking angrily at a Hebrew sign: subtle, sparing choices that hold significance for the emerging hybridity of Israeli-Palestinian identities post-1967. Or perhaps he is simply giving the game a flash of realism: the soldiers are Jewish Israelis and therefore they should be heard in Hebrew. Yet Taha’s stance on language is more strident than Habibi’s. He takes great pride in the correct and formal usage of Arabic as a means of preserving cultural heritage, and he posits himself as a linguistic stickler. Conjuring a fine image, he suggests that, “We must hold onto the language with our fingernail. We want it to be beautiful, clean, to remain in our homeland.”<sup>23</sup> In other interviews, Taha suggests that Palestinian writers are obligated by circumstance to pay closer attention to Arabic. In a series that he penned for *al-Jadid* in the early 1970s, he even criticized the great Arab writer Taha Husayn for making errors in language and syntax.<sup>24</sup> And Taha talks scathingly of the linguistic blend (*al-mazāj*) that is increasingly common among Palestinian Arab citizens. Several basic phrases—“*kullu b’seder*” (everything’s fine), “*mahsom*” (checkpoint), “*ramzor*” (traffic light)—borrow from Hebrew. And indeed Hebrew speakers regularly adapt from Arabic: “*Dir balak*” (watch out), “*sababa*” (great), and “*ahlan*” (hello).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, *Coffins on our Shoulders*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Al-Uslūb al-Riwā’ī ‘inda Taha Husayn*,” *al-Jadid*, no. 1, 1974, 6.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of language in the fraught Israeli-Palestinian context, see Suleiman, *A War of Words*, 137-217. See also M. Sen, “Voices in Conflict: The Language of Israeli-Arab Identity,” *Yale Israel Journal*,

That Taha steps away in this story from his unequivocal stance signals the bitterness intrinsic to his use of place names in “*Duhaysha*.” The acerbic tone of the game recalls his other piece that uses Hebrew so explicitly, “*Baruch Haba Mar Sadat*,” and this is widely considered a brazen story in which Taha’s vitriol at the Egyptian president’s 1977 visit overrides his artistic sensibility.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the sonic, Arabic-language geography of “*Ā'id al-Mi'ārī*,” Taha presents in “*Duhaysha*” a sharp, conflict-ridden negotiation of aural space in which the use of Hebrew is categorically painful. It also connotes a certain helplessness in the face of widespread changes of local names after 1948. Meron Benvenisti has worked extensively on the evolution of toponymy in Israel/Palestine and illuminates the ways in which over 9,000 sites—from villages and towns to plains, hills, and rivers—were officially named in Hebrew, often with variations on Biblical Hebrew names that would serve to solidify the Jewish claim to self-determination in this particular land.<sup>27</sup> Place names are not to be taken lightly. Suleiman asserts that “the symbolic meaning of a name assumes greater importance in situations of conflict than in conditions of neutral interaction.”<sup>28</sup> A central component of cartographic order, names structure space superficially and thus craft or inscribe a wider power dynamic, in this case the symbolically charged prioritization, hence empowerment of Hebrew over Arabic in what becomes a “cartographic palimpsest” of state geography.<sup>29</sup> Place names are also critical to historical narratives. As Rashid Khalidi argues, in a discussion of the naming of Jerusalem (rendered on Israeli signs as “*Urshalim-al-Quds*” even though the first part has never featured in Arabic nomenclature) and of the Haram

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4, 2004, 15-23.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Qasim, “*Dalā'il al-Taḥawwul al-Jadīd fī Intāj Muḥammad 'Alī Taha*,” 154. See also Imil Tuma, “*Al-Ruṣd min Mawāqī' al-Waṭan*,” and 'Adil al-Usta, “*Muḥammad 'Alī Taha wa-Nuz'at al-Tajrīb fī 'Ā'id al-Mi'ārī Yabī' al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za'tar*,” in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya 'inda Muḥammad 'Alī Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 121-3, 125-6.

<sup>27</sup> Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes*, 17-27.

<sup>28</sup> Suleiman, *A War of Words*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> Suleiman, *A War of Words*, 161-162.

al-Sharif complex at the city's center, the prevalence of Hebrew names represents an official attempt and ability to put a "stamp of authority on narratives."<sup>30</sup> The state is able to leverage names to influence historical understanding and to monopolize institutional geographic knowledge.

Interestingly, in a review of Ghassan Kanafani's *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum* (All That's Left To You), Taha writes with admiration of the author's nod to place names as a possible locus of understanding. The protagonist Hamid sees the name "Jaffa" on the identity card of the Israeli soldier he has encountered in the desert. Merely seeing the name prompts positive reflection on what the two could discuss.<sup>31</sup> Yet Taha's own use of names in the West Bank camp setting refutes such shades of optimism. In "*Duhaysha*," names add semantic insult to geographic injury.

Taha uses very young characters in these two stories, exploiting for dramatic effect the implication that the discourse on naming and loss goes hand-in-hand with a lost childhood away from an original home. In the first story, names represent a poignant attempt at sonic recovery. In the second, they are stripped of nostalgia and taken hostage, again partly in the medium of sound. In a striking piece from 1970, "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*" (Tale of the Jug of Oil), we find a slightly older protagonist. This character evokes the more thoughtfully ambivalent, hybridized mediation of Palestinian environments whose changes a young man, resident in the State of Israel, witnesses from *within*.

This 1970 short story opens as follows:

The tale began when Yusuf al-'Abdullah passed by a newsstand in "Paris Square," which Yusuf still called by its old name, Carriages Square, even though he absolutely hadn't seen a single carriage in it since he set foot on the streets of Haifa for the first time and started out in public works. Yusuf al-'Abdullah wasn't sure how his gaze fell on the paper hanging from the newsstand. He had never

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<sup>30</sup> Rashid Khalidi, "Contrasting Narratives of Palestinian Identity," in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 192-195, 200.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad 'Ali Taha, "*Hawla Qiṣṣat Mā Tabaqqā Lakum li-l-Adīb al-Filasṭīnī Ghassan Kanafani*," *al-Jadid*, no. 4, 1968, 40.

read a newspaper in his life because he could barely discern Arabic writing, much less many characters and languages in which he didn't know right from left. But the square picture on the front page of the newspaper lured Yusuf al-'Abdullah towards it, and he approached the stand.<sup>32</sup>

With a wry and offhand tone, Taha disguises an extremely provocative discourse on place names. The narrative refers first to "Paris Square," using the Hebrew name for this modest plaza near the Arab neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas in lower Haifa. Giving a deliberate counterpoint to this instinct to use the new Israeli name first, the young Yusuf then insists on the older Arabic name, "*Sāḥat al-Ḥanāṭīr*." Yet he questions the relevance only of this name (as if thinking, "Carriages? Well, I've never seen one!"), rather than musing on why a square in Haifa might invoke the capital of France. Unlike the previous stories discussed, the setting here includes both Jewish and Arab residents—Haifa is one of Israel's so-called mixed cities—and represents an ideal type for Hana Wirth-Nesher's contention that "place names may reflect conflicts between different nations as part of their respective claim for the city."<sup>33</sup> It is revealing in this light that Yusuf glosses over the legitimacy of a recent state establishment and instead interrogates his own place name, his own claim to one of the most important urban centers for Palestinians in Israel.

Perhaps unintentionally, Taha's use of place names here has a further layer. Carriages Square is not in fact the name that Paris Square superseded. It is a popular name that came from the thirty or so two-wheeled carriages that operated out of the square from the nineteenth century on. The official name that was replaced was actually Hamra Square ("*Sāḥat al-Ḥamrā*" in Arabic, "*Kikar Hamra*" in Hebrew). The name Paris Square was adopted in 1954 and not 1948, in commemoration of strong French-Israeli ties and France's contribution to reconstructing Haifa's train station. If the author

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<sup>32</sup> Muhammad 'Ali Taha, "*Ḥikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*," 37.

<sup>33</sup> Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes, Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Cited by Hannah Amit-Kochavi, "Haifa—Sea and Mountain, Arab Past and Jewish Present, As Reflected By Four Writers," *Israel Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 145.

intended Yusuf's gesture to undermine Israel's recoding of space after 1948, the gesture is ironic, using an old name that was never part of the official record. This detail adds historical perspective to the exclusion of the Palestinian Arab population from processes of naming, building, and organizing public space, especially in urban areas. As I noted in the introduction, Henri Lefebvre conceives of such "production of space" as being intimately related to political ideology. The opening of "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*" therefore highlights the gap between the local Arab population and both the contemporary production of Israeli Zionist spaces and the earlier shaping of built environments by the eighteenth-century Ottoman administration.

The most salient aspect to Carriages Square, though, is its inherent emphasis on the functionality that gives it this popular name. In time, the carriages that characterized Hamra Square under Ottoman rule turned into the buses, taxis, and trains first of the British and then the Israeli administrations. The square holds a palpable functional history as a hub of transportation, and as such it evokes the freedoms and restrictions of different historical stages. As Raef Zreik puts it, "It was a transportation center for carriages, taxis and buses. At that time you could take a cab to Beirut or Jenin. After 1948 you could take the cab only to Nazareth. After 1967 you could take a cab again to Jenin."<sup>34</sup> With this simple stroke of listing available routes, Zreik implies the significance that Carriages Square holds for the young Yusuf al-'Abdullah. It is a place infused with the significance of what being able to travel—or not—means for his civic status more broadly.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Raef Zreik, "Exit from the Scene: Reflections on the Public Space of the Palestinians in Israel," in *Mixed Towns, Trapped Communities: Historical Narratives, Spatial Dynamics, Gender Relations and Cultural Encounters in Palestinian-Israeli towns*, eds. Daniel Monterescu and Dan Rabinowitz (Ashgate Publishing: Hampshire, 2007), 204.

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that Paris square is now also the first stop on Haifa's funicular that cuts a path up the steep mountain on which the city is built. This, too, is a route charged with social implications, since the wealthier Jewish suburbs are located higher up. Taking the funicular thus involves moving up literally as well as symbolically. Amit-Kochavi refers to this phenomenon as a "down-up dichotomy" that forms an important socio-economic axis for the city. Amit-Kochavi, "Haifa—Sea and Mountain," 143.

Yusuf does not enjoy quite the freedom that Zreik suggests is restored after 1967. He travels between village and the square on a bus specifically for laborers. The newspaper stand in the square holds only Hebrew papers that Yusuf struggles to understand and, when it turns out that the front-page picture is a friend who is suspected of involvement with the Palestinian nationalist organization *Fatah*, he and his friends are verbally abused by the Israeli shopkeeper and told to leave. Yusuf's friend Mustafa is particularly nervous that the square will become dangerous if people recognize the young men as being from the same village as the suspect. The square is not the neutral public hub that it seems. Lefebvre has used the term "abstract space" in part to describe these kinds of public locations where a tacit, even economy of usage should evolve: "Communal or shared spaces, the possession or consumption of which cannot be entirely privatized, continue to exist. Cafes, *squares*, and monuments are cases in point."<sup>36</sup> In Taha's story, however, the square stands for the opposite: an economy of access and belonging that are far from communal and shared.

Several scholars reviewing Taha's work have pointed to his use of names, but each tends to see a monolithic function. For Fakhri Salih, names showcase geographic knowledge as a piece of collective memory.<sup>37</sup> For Ibrahim Khalil, names are central to a more accurate rendering of Palestinian environments, fleshing out what differentiates them from their surroundings.<sup>38</sup> Ibrahim Taha argues that names are one part of what he terms a kind of "traditional language" (*lughā turāthiyya*) that serves to bridge the distance

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<sup>36</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 57. Emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> Fakhri Salih, "Wa'ī al-Tajruba fī Qiṣaṣ 'Ā'id al-Mi'ārī Yabī' al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za'tar," in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 141-2.

<sup>38</sup> Khalil, "Jisr 'Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn," 54.

between reader and writer, forging a kind of communicative solidarity through the text.<sup>39</sup> These three stories, though, show that Taha's place names can serve very different functions across the range of environments that he portrays after moving beyond the rural. Here, between 1970 and the early 1980s, names serve to map audibly in a foreign country; to convey the sharpness of territorial takeover from the West Bank; and to express the ambivalence of names within Israel, conjuring layered disorientation and engaging with the production of Israeli space in lower Haifa. Taha in fact defies a collective identity of simple nomenclature and homogeneous cartography.

### **MOVEMENT: BLOCKED PATHS AND STIFLED FREEDOM**

While a number of Taha's stories reveal a varied interest in the superficial geography and toponymy of Israel/Palestine, several more suggest a concern, even an obsession with physical movement. A range of stories set transport and motion at their center. In "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*," Yusuf and his friends must rush from Paris Square to their home village. The climactic scene in "*al-Şundūq*" (The Box) takes place on the platform of a train station. "*Al-Mun'aṭif*" (The Turn) revolves around a car crash. "*Qirsh Şāgh*" (A Piaster) is set on a train, where two Arab passengers meet, trade newspapers, and are interrogated by an Israeli official. One of Taha's most acclaimed stories, his 1995 "*Layla fī Qitār Rīga*," also takes place on a train, this time an overnight journey in the former Soviet Union.

No doubt these motifs serve partly to illuminate the transitory nature of identity, especially in a state where geopolitical uncertainty still reigns. As a line from "*al-Şundūq*" proclaims, "The state is the station." Taha binds collective national identity to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibrahim Taha, "*Tawāfuq al-Shakl wa-l-Maḍmūn fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad 'Ali Taha*," in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta'ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣaṣiyya 'inda Muhammad 'Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 21.

the evanescence of movement: no one stands still or stays long at a train station. More importantly, though, Taha deploys these themes paradoxically. His characterizations of movement imply that Palestinian Arabs in Israel remain, even after the era of military rule, restricted and vulnerable. The difficulties faced in trying to move through the landscape only reiterate a sense of collective isolation and emphasize an ongoing challenge to freedom both physical and psychological.

Taha first broaches travel in “*al-Khaṭṭ al-Wahmī*” (The Illusory Line), a story about a man going to Jerusalem for the first time in eighteen years in order to meet the brother he has not seen since 1948. The story opens with the journey:

When I traveled that day to the holy city, a slight hope was fluttering in my heart. All my thoughts were surrounded by this glimmer of hope. I had only traveled once in my life to Jerusalem, and there were things that pained me, that intensified the sorrow in my heart, and others that had prevented me from traveling. My late father had said: ‘Don’t drown your heart in sadness – you’ve only got one, and the world is full of sorrows.’ But he didn’t take his own advice, and he drowned his heart in sadness and passed away. So why did I go against my judgment and travel, knowing that Jerusalem was like one large funeral? ... Anyway, the trip was not as boring as I had imagined it. The train cut through tens of kilometers fast and I drowned myself in thought.<sup>40</sup>

It is clear that this is the narrator’s first journey by train, and he hints euphemistically at the restrictions that governed his ability to travel until the late 1960s. The vague language of “things that prevented me” reveals a lingering tentativeness in writing about this era. The shuffling tone of the passage also mimics the ambivalent combination of the exciting novelty of train travel—en route to seeing a relative—with the narrator’s apprehension about the wisdom of his actions. He is so absorbed in himself that he does not even pay attention to a famously picturesque route, rising into Jerusalem’s surrounding hills. He is, instead, immersed in reflection, and almost physically surrounded (*munḥaṣir*) by the silver lining of family reunion. When he characterizes the motion itself, moreover, he

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<sup>40</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*al-Khaṭṭ al-Wahmī*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Salāman wa-Taḥīyya* (Acre: Dar al-Jalil, 1969), 23.

uses strong language: the train cuts or even plunders (*nahaba*) tens of kilometers. It is as though the mechanism were damaging the landscape in its wake, leaving the protagonist unsure of how to relate to this new mode.

In another story from this collection, “*Qirsh Ṣāgh*,” Taha begins with a more casual approach to travel, yet grinds the tale down into confrontation. Unlike the protagonist in “*al-Khaṭṭ al-Wahmī*,” this narrator steps on board with a light-hearted air:

For a villager like me, traveling to a city far away could be quite exciting and exhausting at the same time. And that’s what happened to me that day. I had left my village, which was calm and quiet on all sides, on the slope of one of the highest hills in the Galilee...I left, heading for the big city, stretching out with madness along the coast. And after I had finished my simple—or not so simple!—work in Tel Aviv, I rode the train home. Traveling on a train for a villager like me, who’s traveled little, is a thrill and an opportunity not to be passed up.<sup>41</sup>

In a self-deprecating tone, the narrator (later revealed to be a local school teacher) twice emphasizes his place as a modest villager, unaccustomed to train travel. Yet he gives an interesting spatial characterization of the rural and urban environments that he navigates. His home is geometrically boxed in (*mutarabbi‘a*) as though it were contained in a square of quiet, while the city of Tel Aviv seems an insane, uncontrolled coastal expanse. The distinction is vivid and aptly captures the traveler’s sense of bewilderment at this growing urban heart of Israel’s economic industry. He is excited, to be sure, but admittedly out of place.

As he settles in, the narrator expresses his preference for trains: “The traveler feels as if he’s in the middle of life, not isolated or in a prison of choice, like someone in a motorcar or a bus, even though it is quite a long journey by our standards.”<sup>42</sup> The characterization of the car, which might be thought to allow driver and passenger greater flexibility and agency compared to the passive place of a rail passenger, is particularly

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<sup>41</sup> Taha, “*Qirsh Ṣāgh*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Salāman wa-Taḥiyya* (Acre: Dar al-Jalil, 1969), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Taha, “*Qirsh Ṣāgh*,” 44.

striking. It emphasizes the extent to which the narrator hopes to draw energy and even community from the train. Train travel is a novelty, perhaps even a luxury, and with it come expectations of relaxed and genial community. Indeed, as he takes a window seat to enjoy the seaside view (again in contrast to the insular narrator of the previous story), a friend of his happens to arrive and occupy the adjacent seat. “How lucky,” he thinks. “It would be a little boring to take quite a long journey without a companion.”<sup>43</sup>

Quickly, though, Taha turns things sour. After briefly flicking through their respective newspapers—significantly, one is in English and the other in Hebrew—the men begin to converse, in Arabic, about peace, travel, the occupation, and ongoing negotiations to resolve the geopolitical issues caused by the Six-Day War.<sup>44</sup> They attempt to blend in visually but they find themselves exposed aurally. In another turn on the theme of sound, Taha implies a Jewish Israeli perspective from which the Arabic language is simply a set of disconcerting phonetics. As Suleiman has noted, many Israelis associate Arabic first with the neighboring states, with which there are histories of conflict, second with the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and only third with the Palestinian Arab citizens that live within Israel.<sup>45</sup> As such, though the men could perhaps have read quietly without disturbance, it is the sound of Arabic that colors and alters the space of the train carriage. Within minutes, two burly police officers have sat down next to them. Their trip turns into an ugly, rapid-fire interrogation—What do you do? Where’s your ID? Why are you traveling? Do you travel often? How do you know each other?—and ends with the pointed recommendation that, “It’s better if you don’t travel much.”<sup>46</sup> The policeman, a stereotypical figure of authority, thus concretizes in this story a

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<sup>43</sup> Taha, “*Qirsh Şāgh*,” 45.

<sup>44</sup> These “direct negotiations” refer to the Jarring Mission, the United Nations-sanctioned process that lasted from 1967 until 1973, but ultimately brought no actionable results.

<sup>45</sup> Suleiman, *A War of Words*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Taha, “*Qirsh Şāgh*,” 50.

skepticism concerning travel, and hints with a barbed tone at the status quo ante that did, in fact, limit Arabs' freedom of movement around Israeli territory.

Yet the story devolves still further. Although the police try to reassure the other passengers by feigning that the two men are “with us” because they collaborate with the government, the deceit falls on deaf ears. One female passenger yells out with another barrage of questions, even calling for the men’s arrest and, at the very least, for their names to be recorded. As the two men respond sharply to each accusation, the rhythmic, staccato pace of dialogue becomes a sinister mimic of the train itself: with every cranking revolution of the wheels, another question or loud accusation. In a symbolic gesture implying that such suspicious treatment seems endless, Taha never quite brings this “poisonous atmosphere” to an end.<sup>47</sup> The story concludes open-ended with the exasperation of the ongoing brawl and the friend’s recollection that, a week earlier, he had been watching a train on the platform and a policeman had yelled at him to leave.<sup>48</sup> These inhospitable snapshots dash the narrator’s early idealism in full. The train is more alienating than exciting, the community more suspicious than welcoming. Given his assessment of road travel, he is left with only fraught options: the isolation of cars and buses, or the acrimony of trains.

As the narrator’s intimation suggests, non-rail travel does not seem any more auspicious. When Yusuf and his friends discover, in “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” that the front-page photograph of their friend Sami is related to suspicions of *Fatah*-organized violence against Israel, the atmosphere in Paris Square transforms. Taha’s dialogue is a frenzy of reported speech that communicates an instant shift into panic:

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<sup>47</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, “*Muhammad ‘Ali Taha wa-l-Taṭawwur al-Bāriz fī Qiṣatinā*,” in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta’ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāsiyya ‘inda Muhammad ‘Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu’assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 88.

<sup>48</sup> Taha, “*Qirsh Ṣāgh*,” 55-56.

‘Sami is *Fatah*. Do you understand?’ Sweat covered their faces. Hassan Mihna said, ‘What did he do?’ And Yusuf al-‘Abdullah: ‘We have to hurry to the station.’ Ahmed Lafī said, ‘Is he linked to the bombings?’ And Kamil Mahmud: ‘Does the paper say which village he is from?’ And Mustafa answered, ‘Absolutely.’ They started to walk, in silence.<sup>49</sup>

The dialogue is neither conclusive nor calming. Comments disjointedly fly past each other and the young men wonder about their own susceptibility to suspicion. Taha does not explicitly describe the group then boarding a bus or reflecting on the journey to their village by any other means. As they walk *away* from Carriages Square, the place seems ironically devoid of its function. On the one hand, it has taken on a tense and urgent functionality: Get us out of here. On the other, it does not fulfill this purpose. The place seems to track the ambivalence that the characters themselves undergo in being forced to move, yet enjoying only a limited capacity to do so. This is a strangely productive paradox that Karen Grumberg has illuminated in her discussion of roadblocks and checkpoints. Carriages Square, like these iconic zones of the current military occupation, is “a space of transition” through which people move. Yet it simultaneously “delays or denies movement,” in this way inscribing some of the spatial power dynamics that course through Israeli-Palestinian public spaces and thwart or disrupt characters like Yusuf.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of the story, the day after the village is ransacked by Israeli security personnel, Taha crafts a poignant image: “The workers’ bus left full and came back empty.”<sup>51</sup> The force of this image is twofold. First, it highlights the compartmentalization of travel between the rural node and the urban hub: the bus serves a clinical purpose of transporting labor, and the workers enjoy only this prescribed, imposed route. Implicitly, again, Carriages Square has only a stunted functionality, at least for the Palestinian Arabs. Second, the image deepens the vulnerability that accompanies the incident of Sami’s

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<sup>49</sup> Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 42.

<sup>50</sup> Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 130-132.

<sup>51</sup> Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 34.

suspicion. That workers would resort to moving around the city of Haifa—bemusedly out of place, at best, abused and alienated at worst—is a subtle indicator of the pressures imposed on village life at this moment of heightened geopolitical tensions.

These three stories capture different experiences of travel: detached, accosted, and panicked. Yet what unites them across the various modes of transport is, paradoxically, their negation of routes and roads. In each case, Taha short-circuits the path, whether by emotional self-absorption, hostile argument, or a sense of political vulnerability. As tales linked by thwarted voyages, they combine to suggest two overarching aspects of Taha's ultimate concern of collective identity.

First is the question of isolation. In an article about the great Nigerian work *Things Fall Apart*, Nirvana Tanoukhi points out that Chinua Achebe never depicts roads: “There are no roads in Achebe’s novel, certainly no roads of adventure, risk, or encounter. The grand encounter with the colonizer unfolds instead as the seeping of the white man into the cultural fabric of Umuofia.”<sup>52</sup> This stylistic choice creates a “narrow range of physical setting,” yet it is precisely through this focus on a cloistered, albeit changing social world that Achebe achieves his elegant and evocative portrayal of the village.<sup>53</sup> Taha would likely appreciate this outlook, since he has expressed the belief that, “The picture of the Palestinian nation was well preserved in the village in the State of Israel but not in the town or city. The city changed a lot. You cannot see the picture of the Palestinian people in Tiberias or Haifa, only in the village.”<sup>54</sup> Yet Taha’s characters do attempt to find themselves in places beyond the village, whether in Paris Square or Jerusalem or along a bewildering Tel Aviv coastline. Their physical environments are thus more opened up, yet without mitigating a sense of internal isolation. There remains a

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<sup>52</sup> Nirvana Tanoukhi, “African Roads,” in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, eds. Theo D’Haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir (London: Routledge, 2011), 459.

<sup>53</sup> Tanoukhi, “African Roads,” 460.

<sup>54</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *Slumber and Awakening*, 117.

lingering and mobile sort of “*ghurba*.” Taha situates his fiction, then, somewhere between the postcolonial model in which Achebe harnesses parochial isolation with great finesse, and a more liberated form of fiction in which movement and travel may not be marred by ambivalence or even physical threat. He extracts from the motif of movement a collective unease about journeying out of the village and into a range of other Israeli spaces.

The second, interlocking theme in collective identity that works through Taha’s use of movement is freedom. The stories clearly impose a persistent challenge to physical movement, but the effects of this curtailing also have psychological consequences:

Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act. Being free has several levels of meaning. Fundamental is the ability to transcend the present condition, and this transcendence is most simply manifest as the elementary power to move. In the act of moving, space and its attributes are directly experienced. An immobile person will have difficulty mastering even primitive ideas of abstract space, for such ideas develop out of movement—out of the direct experiencing of space through movement.<sup>55</sup>

Tuan implies here that impinged movement is a limitation on both physical freedom and the abstract understanding of space. Since Palestinian collective identity has long been entwined with the problematic question of land, this stifling of movement is tantamount to curbing broader notions of collective identity that are rooted across Israeli-Palestinian territory. Taha’s comments about the village reinforce this choking effect. If he speaks of locating a sense of Palestinian spirit only in the village, this may be due not only to the transformation of urban environments post-1948, but also to an inability to seek out urban locations and to enjoy the “power” and the “room” through which one can experience cities like Haifa and Jerusalem “directly” and on individual terms. It is significant that these serious challenges to freedom—and the freely experienced conception of Israeli space—persist well beyond the end of military rule in 1966. For Taha and his characters, the spatial wounds of that era remain open, and the impossibility of traveling with

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<sup>55</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 52.

assurance and a sense of belonging serves as a constant reminder of the marginalization that tinges the collective identity.<sup>56</sup>

It is useful, as is so often ironically the case, to note a comparison with the history of the Jewish people, itself redolent of the problem of moving through threatening environments, being contained in others, or being forced to move from place to place. Leah Garrett writes in an article about Jewish perceptions of place in Europe, “When we consider the landscapes of literature, it is very important to be aware of the way that power structures affect the author and the people the author describes.” Frequently, in Taha’s stories, these power structures are filtered through modes of transport, such that a train trip, a bus terminus, or a town square can reinforce the ways in which Palestinian Arabs seem removed from, yet vulnerably caught up within the State of Israel. It is important, Garrett continues, that we not assume landscapes to be universally free and appealing. Indeed, as Taha aptly demonstrates, they may be “neither safe nor free.”<sup>57</sup>

### **CIRCULATION: FOREIGN AIRWAVES AND HEBREW PAPERS**

While travel gives a tangible, bodily means of exploring collective identity through movement, Taha also evinces an interest in a more ethereal kind of motion. In “*Kalimāt Tuqāl*” (Words are Uttered), characters express shock at receiving bad news from outside Israel over the radio. The central event of “*Bayān Raqam 1*” (Announcement Number 1) is the eponymous announcement of the outbreak of war. The protagonist in “*Isbāniyya*” (Spain) is skeptical of pen, paper, and stenograph in the courtroom during his trial. “*Salāman wa-Taḥiyya*” is a tale about a Galilean woman who

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<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that this confinement of novelistic space persists. As Bouskila points out, most stories by Riyad Baydas—who has been writing since the mid-1980s—“are played out in a confined space such as a bus, cab, or plane.” Although Bouskila suggests that this technique renders the characters “more simple and accessible to the reader,” I would suggest that it highlights the ongoing lack of unbridled freedom and association. Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 77.

<sup>57</sup> Leah Garrett, “Landscapes in the Jewish Imagination,” in *Studying Cultural Landscapes*, eds. Iain Robertson and Penny Richards (London: Arnold, 2003), 111.

has lost contact with many relatives in Jordan and Lebanon and who tries to recover news of her family through writing letters. At least five stories take an interest in newspapers. In exploring these motifs, Taha achieves a similar encapsulation of how collective identity is challenged and cut off. His characters see around them the trappings of fluid, efficient flows, yet they themselves grapple with outmoded or problematic means of communicating and documenting their place in the state. Taha conjures this modern disenfranchisement through radio, documents and personal communications, and newspapers.

Radio is used cursorily by Taha but it sends an important message nevertheless. In “*Kalimāt Tuqāl*,” a tone of disbelief pervades the story as a young man hears the news of the death of his uncle over the radio: “They’ve lied so much! Why not this time?”<sup>58</sup> The tone stems from more than natural denial: the narrator cannot believe the news because he cannot fully believe the source. The death occurs in 1967, not coincidentally the year in which the Egyptian airwaves, in particular *Sawt al-Arab*, were notoriously misleading about the progress of the Six-Day War. Listeners across the Arab world could catch pronouncements of an Arab nationalist victory and an imminent march on Jerusalem when in fact the Israeli Air Force had dealt a decisive blow to the Egyptian military.

In “*Bayān Raqam 1*,” the protagonist Hasan, a teacher who has spent several years working in a Bedouin village, describes a transistor radio as one of his three friends. Seeing the life around him as humdrum, Hasan seeks refuge in radio broadcasts, yet the focus is on an imagined, anticipated piece of news. We never see the character actually listening to the radio so much as we hear his hopes for an announcement of war, which he believes would finally change the situation on the ground and make life meaningful,

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<sup>58</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Kalimāt Tuqāl*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Salāman wa-Taḥīyya* (Acre: Dar al-Jalil, 1969), 6.

presumably by both challenging the Israeli status quo and by shaking the desert community where he struggles with boredom. Neither radio, then, gives its owners the reliability or the excitement that they seek. The medium offers disingenuous reports on the one hand, and neutral depoliticized material on the other. Compared to an increasingly vibrant Hebrew public sphere—the Israel Broadcasting Authority ran multiple stations and had improved its offerings and capabilities throughout the 1960s and 1970s—the picture of Arabic-language media in Israel is found wanting in variety as well as veracity.

In more concrete terms than radio waves, Taha's use of writing and documentation shows a kind of marginalization that seeps down to the most basic social level and problematizes the fullness of civic status for Arabs living in Israel. "*Salāman wa-Taḥiyya*" features an aging village mother, Umm As'ad, who has struggled for years to make contact with her son, living and perhaps fighting in Lebanon since the early 1960s. She has not heard from him in five years: "not from a bird, not from a beast, not on the radio."<sup>59</sup> The gamut of possibilities reads like a parody, but she continues earnestly to write letters and becomes absorbed by the lack of knowledge of, and communication with her son:

The death of her husband did not seem an important event in Umm As'ad's life. She stayed much the same, all of her interest focused on her son, any news of him, and her search for him. Her letters didn't stop. If anything, she sent more. And when she heard news of old men or an old lady coming back from Lebanon to one of the villages in the Galilee she would push her body to go and see them and ask about her only boy. Unfortunately, none of those who returned knew her son or had heard anything about him. Like her, they were elderly and never left their home or hut.<sup>60</sup>

Umm As'ad lives in a cocoon of tragedy. Too frail to leave her modest home, she dwells on her missing son and sends letter after unanswered letter. She is also emotionally cut off, such that even her husband's death has no discernible effect on her. The village

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<sup>59</sup> Taha, "*Salāman wa-Taḥiyya*," 18.

<sup>60</sup> Taha, "*Salāman wa-Taḥiyya*," 18-19.

leader, the *mukhtar*, is detached and unreliable, leaving Umm As‘ad to depend only on informal and poorly linked networks, themselves consisting of elderly people much like her. It is even unclear at the end of the story, when she is told by a villager named Abu Mustafa that As‘ad has been dead for five years, what the source for this information is, and whether or not it can be trusted. Umm As‘ad wails behind closed doors in lonely grief, yet a communicative cloud still surrounds her story.

“*Salāman wa-Taḥiyya*” effectively uses the written word—and the lack thereof—to shed alternative and less optimistic light on the argument often made that more open lines of communication after 1967 “expedited the process” of strengthening Palestinian bonds across the Green Line.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, there was increased cross-pollination at some levels, as *al-Jadid* published stories and articles from across the Arab world, opportunities such as international travel became more feasible, and many (from the West Bank, if not Lebanon) secured short-term permits for return visits. Umm As‘ad, though, represents a limited trickling down of this more open network. She is plagued by delays, inefficiencies, and frustrations in her simple attempts to make contact beyond the borders. Her efforts are unhappily fruitless to the bitter end.

Another older protagonist, the farmer Abu Mahmud in “*Isbāniyya*,” also finds himself at the mercy of a system of documents and communications that cuts him out. He is being tried for trespassing on nationally owned land (that is, land purchased or taken over by the Jewish National Fund) and felling a number of trees. In his defence, he produces a set of old Ottoman documents of ownership known as “*kawāshin*.” “They’re from the Ottoman days,” Abu Mahmud announces. “And the land knows my flesh and my sweat. It knows me as well as my wife.” Scanning the documents, the judge asks the JNF lawyer for his opinion, and the latter curtly dismisses the document since the accused

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<sup>61</sup> Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 12.

is a “present absentee” (*ḥādir ghā’ib*, or *nifkad nocheah* in Hebrew). This is a paradoxical category crafted after 1948 to designate Palestinian Arabs who had remained within Israel but moved to a different location, irrespective of how long the absence lasted or whether it was voluntary or forced. In effect, this was a legal mechanism to create internally displaced persons and to claim their lands.<sup>62</sup> With little delay, the judge follows this precedent, concurs with the lawyer, and fines Abu Mahmud for his actions.<sup>63</sup>

The geographic implications of the term “present absentee” deserve attention. Like the English gloss, both Arabic and Hebrew terms draw on words that connote physical presence and absence. Colloquially, the term therefore implies that its subject is “here and there.” This simplicity aptly captures the physical dislocation of present absentees, but also a more existential kind of split in which this compound term is really an opposition—not “here *and* there”; “here *but* there.” Indeed, it is this oppositional meaning that the state intends and exploits. While the Hebrew term is clinical, the Arabic is more complex. “*Ghā’ib*” can carry connotations of truancy, which almost posits absenteeism as a transgression. “*Ḥādir*” connotes both physical presence and the present moment. It is not just “here” but also “the here and now.” In this sense, to be designated absent is not just to be conceived as being “there” geographically, but also to be uprooted temporally.

This temporal side of dislocation is evident in “*Isbāniyya*” as Taha paints Abu Mahmud as out of place in a new legal system. He has refused to hire a lawyer, trusting to his own sense of history and principle, and this decision disadvantages his case. His words mean little if unfiltered through counsel. His documents mean nothing, superseded by quickly formulated laws that facilitated the consolidation of Jewish Israeli ownership.

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<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the wrangling over the term’s scope in the Israeli government, see Tom Segev, *The First Israelis* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 80-82.

<sup>63</sup> Taha, “*Isbāniyya*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Salāman wa-Taḥiyya* (Acre: Dar al-Jalil, 1969), 35-36.

Appropriately, the narration flicks constantly between the courtroom and the farmer's memories of his original, frenzied expulsion in 1948. The first recollection opens with a succinct, evocative phrase: "the crops were plentiful" (*al-ghilal kathīra*). "Ghilal" is etymologically linked to "aḡhlāl," meaning shackles or manacles, as well as to "istighlāl," which suggests exploitation or abuse of the work of others.<sup>64</sup> Taha muddies the memory of an abundant harvest with the constrictive trauma that has taken over. These oscillations also lend an edgy nervousness to the structure of the story. Like its protagonist, the narrative has not found its footing. Indeed, as Mahmoud Ghanayim has suggested, the title of the story itself is located in another realm: "*Isbāniyya*" points to the "travesty of a trial" that characterized the Spanish Inquisition through which Jews and Muslims alike were victimized.<sup>65</sup> Nabih al-Qasim sees a didactic function here, linking the tale to a history of resistance in al-Andalus, though this analogy too belies marginalization and displacement.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps more importantly, it also overlooks a prior symbolic function of al-Andalus, which as Peled has noted, figures in earlier Palestinian poetry as a symbol of "approaching catastrophe" and often with "dark foreboding."<sup>67</sup>

Comments from Taha suggest that the spatiotemporal tensions of "*Isbāniyya*" are hardly confined to the courtroom. Speaking of perceptions of Jewish Israelis, Taha suggested that, "Until the 70s or maybe the 80s, the picture of the Jew in the Arab village was bad because they only knew the policeman, the secret serviceman, the income tax collector."<sup>68</sup> If the first two positions are predictable given their link to fear and retribution, the income tax collector is a noteworthy addition that stereotypically concerns documents, ordering affairs, and being a responsible member of a wider economic

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<sup>64</sup> Taha, "*Isbāniyya*," 30.

<sup>65</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Qasim, "*al-Taṭawwur al-Bāriḏ*," 86.

<sup>67</sup> Peled, "Annals of Doom," 181.

<sup>68</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *Slumber and Awakening*, 134.

structure. In response to the verdict, however, Abu Mahmud does not deign to engage this system. Instead, he returns to the land the next morning, wielding his axe. The word “*fa’s*” is somewhat ambiguous here. Ghanayim sees it as meaning a hoe, which lends to his analysis the productive connotation of a man going back to try and work the land.<sup>69</sup> The accusation from the trial—“You felled seventy trees” (*khala’ta sab’in shajara*)—is much less equivocal, however, highlighting the frustration in his response.<sup>70</sup> As the closing image, this confirms that Abu Mahmud will continue, out of principle but equally out of a sense of displacement, to act outside a new set of laws and to spurn new norms of documentation and ownership. He does not respond in writing or with an appeal. Rather, he finds that he can maintain a sense of place only through defiant actions, and it is precisely these that promise to lead him into further difficulties.

In addition to these obstacles in communications and documents, Taha also problematizes a quintessential document of *personal* place: the identity card. In Paris Square, in “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” Yusuf steps up to the newspaper stand where he sees the picture of his friend Sami. Unable to read Hebrew, Yusuf oscillates between naïve questioning and denial: “Has he become a Member of the Knesset like Shaykh Jabr? Has he become head of the government like Golda? Maybe a general like Dayan? Impossible!”<sup>71</sup> This amused flicker is tempered by skepticism: “One of our people is only photographed once in his life—when his I.D. card gets cut. There’s no way his picture can be in the newspaper!”<sup>72</sup> As he realizes that newspapers print images of those both for and against the government, Yusuf’s dichotomous conclusion does not do justice to the

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<sup>69</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Taha, “*Isbāniyya*,” 35.

<sup>71</sup> Shaykh Jabr most likely refers to Jabr Muadi, a Druze politician from near Acre who served several Knesset terms. Golda Meir was Israeli Prime Minister at the time of writing, Israel’s first (and only) female premier. Moshe Dayan was the famed, eye-patched general and Minister of Defence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 38.

<sup>72</sup> Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 38.

nuances of his ambivalence. The invocation of top political leaders has a harmless naïveté about it, reinforced by Yusuf’s Hebrew illiteracy as he stares at the picture. Yet his comment on capturing one’s picture merely once, for documentary purposes, is sinister. In one sense, it posits visualization—snapping a bureaucratic photo—as a coercive and documentary practice, logging and collecting information on a minority that the state marginalizes. In another, since this would be the *only* instance of visualization, it suggests that the antithesis of an Arab Golda Meir or Moshe Dayan would not be an unsuccessful Arab citizen or a Shaykh Jabr. It would be an invisible one.

Five other youth pass by at this point, four of whom Yusuf mentally identifies only by name and profession, as if logging those very names and I.D. pictures along with the youth’s functions as cogs of Israeli industry. Though employment opportunities did improve after 1967, many entered the economy in construction jobs, undereducated for public sector employment and barred “for security reasons” from Israel’s burgeoning high-tech industry.<sup>73</sup> The rigidity and auspicious timing of their arrival, as the square seems otherwise empty, almost mimic a planned military role call. Taha brings the group into view as a procession or convoy (*mawkib*) that Yusuf’s mind ticks off: “Mahmud al-Sa’d, the factory worker. Muhammad Lafi the digger. Kamil Mahmud and Hasan Mihna, two construction workers. Yusuf al-‘Abdullah gestured and called them over.”<sup>74</sup> This ready individual identification by Yusuf paradoxically suggests the collective anonymity of the group as a mechanical list of unskilled workers.<sup>75</sup> This sense is furthered by the invective hurled at the young men by the unnerved Jewish shopkeeper, Binyamin: “He’s from your village, Mustafa... It’s over... You’re all *Fatah*, I don’t want to see you again

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<sup>73</sup> Kaufman, *Arab National Communism*, 76.

<sup>74</sup> Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 39.

<sup>75</sup> Taha’s portrayal of ambivalence is in particularly stark contrast to one of Mahmud Darwish’s most famous poems, “Identity Card” (1964). Darwish’s poem is voiced as a response to an Israeli official who requests to see identification and expresses sharp, passionate pride in his character, family, and history as an Arab in this land.

at my shop. You're all the same."<sup>76</sup> Binyamin essentializes the group with physical, dehumanized language. This final phrase literally means that the men are from "the same metal," that is, cut from the same cloth. The word "*ma'din*," connoting material origin, as in a mine or natural resource, is powerfully reductive.

Yusuf's tale also embodies a classic motif of circulation and collective identity: the newspaper. Since the seminal work of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, newspapers have been understood as crucial to the process of emerging collective and national identities.<sup>77</sup> The daily or weekly lynchpin of "print capitalism," newspapers for Anderson serve several purposes. They foster a sense of "simultaneity," as accounts of what occurs on a given day or in a given week forge links between individuals consuming the reports, whether or not they were present. Newspapers also serve an important linguistic purpose in the development of national identities by "fixing" certain forms of language into consistent print form and implicitly creating a hegemony of numbers wherein larger and dominant groups dictate the language of dissemination and make a particular language the medium for mainstream communication.

There are limitations to Anderson's work vis-à-vis Middle Eastern nationalisms. In particular, Anderson's encapsulation of the place of language in print capitalism fails to graft onto the more complex linguistic registers that characterize Arabic (though the language is often misleadingly understood as being purely diglossic). Moreover, classical Arabic as a "sacred language" did not fall in the same way that Latin did when it ceded to various European vernaculars.<sup>78</sup> Newspapers nevertheless hold an important place in Israel/Palestine for the cultivation of collective identity. Rashid Khalidi's landmark study

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<sup>76</sup> Taha, "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*," 44.

<sup>77</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> For a critical perspective on nationalism and the "split vernacular" of the Arabic language, see Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37-62.

of historical narratives and the emergence of Palestinian nationalism pre-1948 relies heavily on a rigorous sweep of journalism in early twentieth-century Palestine.<sup>79</sup> The cultural journal *al-Jadid* has been hailed for its contribution to resuscitating literary and intellectual exchange after the *Nakba*. Nascent political groups such as the nationalist *al-Ard* (disbanded in 1965) would begin their canvassing by starting small publications and attempting to capture public attention and imagination.<sup>80</sup> For the Jewish community, newspapers were vital for the establishment of Modern Hebrew from its non-spoken Biblical roots and uniting immigrants otherwise divided by the languages of their various home countries.

Tellingly, Taha's newspapers are never in Arabic. Yusuf cannot interpret the paper beyond its front-page image of his friend Sami. The verbally abused characters on the train in "*Qirsh Şāgh*" read in English and Hebrew. These moments reflect the dearth of local Arabic-language media as it lagged significantly behind in the public sphere. Until as late as the early 1980s, the Communist paper *al-Ittihad* was the only legal Arabic-language newspaper, although some cultural and academic journals such as *al-Sharq* did circulate in the 1970s.<sup>81</sup> What was true for newspapers was also true for books, as Palestinian Arab citizens worked in a predominantly Hebrew public sphere at the expense of their own cultural history. The paucity of original works in Arabic contrasts with the number of books translated *into* Arabic: a revealing list that includes the memoirs of Israeli politicians (David Ben-Gurion, Abba Eban, and Moshe Dayan, to name a few), the utopian work *Altneuland* by Theodor Herzl, Randolph Churchill's account of the Six-Day War, an anthology of Hebrew poetry, and—perhaps the most

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<sup>79</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 53-62.

<sup>80</sup> For an extensive study of the mechanisms that repressed nascent political organizations, see Ron Harris, "A Case Study in the Banning of Political Parties: The Pan-Arab Movement El Ard and the Israeli Supreme Court," *bePress Legal Series*, Paper 349, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> For a thorough history of Arabic-language media in Israel, see Amal Jamal, *The Arab Public Sphere in Israel: Media Space and Cultural Resistance* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

striking—*The Diary of Anne Frank*.<sup>82</sup> From his days in the Israeli education system, Taha recalls that, “We studied *Genesis, Isaiah, Kings*, we studied *Pirkei Avot* (the Sayings of the Fathers) and we were also tested in these chapters for the *bagrut* (matriculation examinations). We studied the history of the Zionist movement, but we did not study the history of our own people.”<sup>83</sup> This sense of being stifled in one’s collective identity and limited in the means through which a “community of sentiment” can develop is infused into Taha’s work through the proliferation of exclusively non-Arabic newspapers.<sup>84</sup>

Beyond this, Taha’s newspapers suggest a sinister aspect to the desire for access to information and greater contact with the Palestinian Arab world outside Israel. In “*al-Lahm al-Nayyi*” (Raw Meat), a surprise nighttime interrogation of a laborer includes questions about what newspapers he reads. Too much contact or controversial sources of information are liable to prompt trouble.<sup>85</sup> Yusuf’s experience in Paris Square is again exemplary. When his friend Mustafa, educated enough to read Hebrew, deciphers the article that declares Sami a suspected *Fatah* operative, the men panic and think about their own relations to this wider Palestinian community. Hasan asks whether “*Fatah* is coming closer to us,” to which Yusuf answers, “My brother is in Jordan,” prompting the response, “My cousin Hasan is in Syria.”<sup>86</sup> The dialogue scarcely coheres, but the reflex to think of relatives abroad exposes a profound vulnerability that may paradoxically emerge with increased links. While various modes of consolidating collective identity

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<sup>82</sup> Shmuel Moreh, *Bibliography of Arabic Books and Periodicals published in Israel 1948-1972*, Surveys and Research Aids no. 2, Mount Scopus Center for Research on the Palestinian Arabs and Arab-Israeli Relations, Jerusalem 1974.

<sup>83</sup> Caspi and Weltsch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 129.

<sup>84</sup> The term is Arjun Appadurai’s and better encapsulates the affective aspects of collective identity than does Anderson’s formulation of “imagined communities.” For his first discussion of the term, see Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy,” *Public Culture* 2 (2), 1990, 1-23.

<sup>85</sup> For a brief analysis of this story, see Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 133.

<sup>86</sup> Taha, “*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*,” 44.

point to local disenfranchisement, Taha does not overlook the sense in which broader ethnic and national ties across the region also complexly impact the local sphere.

This, then, is another aspect of Taha's stories that offers subtle alternatives to received ideas. If revived ties across state borders create solidarity and promise, Taha challenges this notion by highlighting the possibility that they bring even greater hostility. In the provocative end to the tale, with his home in a crippled state, Sami in fact returns:

In the morning the workers' bus came and it returned empty. The village continued to live in fear and its people would talk in whispers, avoiding Sami's house. A week passed... two weeks... three. And then one afternoon Sami 'Ayad came home. Sami ibn Sa'di. Back to his house, with people marveling and asking questions.<sup>87</sup>

The simplicity of Sami's return plays on tropes of return in Arabic literary culture. Several important works emerge from a protagonist's dramatic, mysterious, at times alienating reintegration into the home environment. Certainly, some classics of this theme—Yahya Haqqi's *The Saint's Lamp*, al-Tayyib Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and most notably Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa*—had been published by 1970. Yet Taha's return strikes an anti-climactic and ambiguous note. Sami's exoneration is implicit, yet we are left wondering not just what he might have done to attract a front-page headline, but where he had gone to do so. If his family and friends are able to question him and link his tale to specific places and events, the reader is left with a snapshot of Sami only as a product—or subject—of an unnerving regional atmosphere. As Yusuf and Mustafa flip through a newspaper the following day, it is this same uncertainty that characterizes the end of the tale: "Mustafa looked at Yusuf al-'Abdullah and said, 'Nothing. Not his name. Not the name of our village.' And the two kept looking at each other."<sup>88</sup> The flat tone suggests no real sense of joy or relief. Even without news,

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<sup>87</sup> Taha, "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*," 45.

<sup>88</sup> Taha, "*Hikāyat Ibrīq al-Zayt*," 46.

the damage has been done, filling the space between Yusuf and Mustafa not with catharsis but with insecurity. They do not know how to respond to each other in the same way that they cannot know what stories and front-page images could appear the following day, with immediate local repercussions. They do know, however, that these networks of information may ignite personal and collective vulnerability, equally dangerous from one village over as from foreign cities like Beirut or Amman.

### **IDEOLOGY: SOCIAL(IST) REALISM AND DIFFERENCE**

One short story, from the early 1980s, begins to give the themes of movement and circulation a productive, didactic spin. “*Wa Ṣāra Ismuḥu Fāris Abū ‘Arab*” (His Name Became Faris Abu ‘Arab) revolves around a young man, Faris, who works at a restaurant in Haifa and who, disenchanted with his social conditions, begins to read newspapers, to engage in political discussions, and to rally for the rights of his fellow workers. Much of the story takes place on a bus, which becomes a literal and figurative vehicle for communal mobilization. Reading newspapers, having brought angst or threat to so many previous characters, becomes a symbol of Faris’ political education and maturity. This story in some ways completes an arc that Taha began in the early 1970s with *Jisr ‘alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn* and epitomizes a final aspect of Taha’s interest in collective identity: the dignity of the downtrodden, and their struggle to overcome difference.

In the broadest terms, these differences are linked to political power and economic wellbeing. Faris sees the government as “exploitative” and “spilling the blood of the workers.” Bristling against the corruption and collaboration of the local leader, the *mukhtar*, Faris slowly yet charismatically—grabbing a microphone and speaking out

publically—must gather around him a group of comrades, his “*jamā‘a*.”<sup>89</sup> The zenith of his political actions comes in a rarely depicted public clash that centers on geographic claims. Faris learns that Israeli land authorities intend to take over and cultivate a nearby swath of land, and he rallies his own comrades and twenty more to stand in protest, armed only with sticks and stones. A contrast is clear not only in the weight of resources—military vehicles and weaponry will go against fragments from the earth—but also in attitudes. Faris is passionate and galvanized, whereas the Israeli authorities seem casual: they are simply “arriving on the lands to till them.”<sup>90</sup> Ownership is implicitly assumed, and Faris spiritedly rejects the political implication.

Adding gravitas to his protagonist’s dignified stand, Taha’s rhythmic language echoes the determination of Faris’ effort in the face of much greater force: “Five cars arrived, and three more, and then one with soldiers in their green uniforms... And the men stood their ground. They stood their ground. And Faris resisted and resisted.”<sup>91</sup> Taha invokes the two classic Palestinian concepts of “*ṣumūḍ*” (steadfastness) and “*muqāwama*” (resistance). As the former applies particularly to Palestinian Arabs holding on to a sense of home and place within historic Palestine, and the latter would at the time have characterized more strident actions from beyond Israeli borders, Taha constructs a consummate, bridging hero for his story. Moreover, wounded in the fray, Faris shows his willingness to put a cause and set of principles over his own safety. This commitment sees him almost literally put on a pedestal, raised above the shoulders of other villagers and bestowed with his new moniker, “Faris Abu ‘Arab.” Out of the smoke of a politically driven clash, Taha presents a young and defiant ideological patriarch.

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<sup>89</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*Wa Ṣāra Ismuhu Fāris Abū ‘Arab*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *‘Ā'id al-Mi‘ārī Yabī‘ al-Manāqīsh fī Tall al-Za‘tar* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1989), 84.

<sup>90</sup> Taha, “*Fāris Abū ‘Arab*,” 85.

<sup>91</sup> Taha, “*Fāris Abū ‘Arab*,” 86.

The same disparities—and the attempts to challenge them—also course through the opening story of *Jisr ‘alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn*, “*al-Lajna*” (The Committee), and revolve around a spatial theme. In the absence of a strong character progression such as that of Faris, the tale narrates the attempts of an established young committee in a village to work with their *mukhtar* on a series of projects, most urgently a main road. The youth express frustration at the consolidation of power in this one figure, and Taha lampoons him by suggesting that he does so much he could not possibly spare a moment’s rest:

How does he ever rest, the *mukhtar*... the legitimate father of the village. Well, father, mother, head of everything that moves in our community. He verifies birth certificates, signs documents, and signs death certificates. He was the reason for all the fights, and he was at the head of every public service. No way he rests.<sup>92</sup>

Using both celebratory and tragic social events and covering the documentation of a human life in one clean sweep, Taha creates a satirical image of the *mukhtar* as hovering in every home, present—indeed taking the lead—at all major events. Evidently, there is little substance to support his contributions beyond his mere presence and his clerical role. If anything, he tirelessly pursues only his own ends. The committee rebels against this noxious status quo and, through persistence and popularity, it begins to overpower the *mukhtar*. In a climactic meeting over coffee, the nominated leader Ibn Rabbah stoutly refuses the *mukhtar*’s request to take a position and join their effort. The communally conscious, younger generation has prevailed. They will be able to build their road and construct the means for enhanced geographic connectivity in their area.

The criticism of power structures is not new. As Stefan Meyer notes, “Ever since the beginning of the Arab short story (and other literary genres) in Israel...the *mukhtars* have been the object of intense criticism for serving the powers-that-be and seeking only

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<sup>92</sup> Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, “*al-Lajna*,” in Muhammad ‘Ali Taha, *Jisr Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn* (Nazareth: Manshurat al-Sadaqa, 1978), 14.

personal gain.”<sup>93</sup> Yet Taha does not merely criticize. He constructs a defiant, clean break from an oppressive leadership tradition, one that even physically stifled the people by denying them access to reasonable roads out of the village. Taha strengthens the collective call for this change by narrating in a first-person voice: the village becomes ours, the reader a participant in the struggle.<sup>94</sup> He also filters his criticism through the prism of generational conflict to add vigor and promise. He emphasizes the need for a younger generation to emerge and, rather than to overcome difference as such, simply to leave it in their wake as they surge forward collectively.

Despite being quite straightforward, these are the works for which Taha receives the greatest praise. ‘Adil al-Usta marvels at the political progression of the character of Faris.<sup>95</sup> Fakhri Salih considers “*al-Lajna*” to be transformative with its clarity of writing that departs from traditional styles and searches for deeper engagement with Palestinian concerns.<sup>96</sup> The precise appeal of these narratives is that they go beyond the commitment, in the Sartrean sense of a politically conscious *littérature engagée*, of Taha’s other work. The distinguishing line is somewhat fine. After all, virtually every short story of Taha’s is grounded in some recognizable social reality. Although he maintains the distance of fiction when he talks about his work, Taha readily admits that, “I depicted the different spheres of life which I have lived in my childhood” and that characters and images from his own experience “inhabited my imagination” during the writing process.<sup>97</sup> And there is, for Taha as for others, a wealth of difficult and memorable experiences on which to draw:

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<sup>93</sup> Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 66-67.

<sup>94</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, “Muhammad ‘Ali Taha Yu’assis li-l-Nathr al-Sākhir fī Adabīnā al-Maḥallī,” in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta’ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāṣiyya ‘inda Muhammad ‘Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu’assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 47.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Adil al-Usta, “Nuz‘at al-Tajrīb,” 130.

<sup>96</sup> Fakhri Salih, “Ba‘da al-Hikāya wa-l-Lahja al-Sha‘biyya fī Jisr ‘Alā al-Nahr al-Ḥazīn,” in *Qaṣṣ al-Athar: Ta’ṣīl al-Tajruba al-Qiṣāṣiyya ‘inda Muhammad ‘Ali Taha*, ed. Ibrahim Taha (Acre: Mu’assasat al-Aswar, 2001), 80.

<sup>97</sup> Assadi, *Mohammad Ali Taha*, 11.

“I remember everything: the people, the friends, the bullets, the departure, hunger and fear. These events are engraved as unforgettable and undeletable lines and chapters in my memory, like a hard disc.”<sup>98</sup> The blur among personal experience, social environments, and Taha’s world of fiction complicates the realism of his work.

Yet stories like “*Fāris*” and “*al-Lajna*” unequivocally embrace a clear didactic stance and evince an interest in workers, political power structures, and a new generation of youth. As such, they can be more specifically characterized as *socialist* realism. The term, whose origins are traced to Soviet journalist and writer Maxim Gorky, refers to engaged artistic production that, more so than social realism in general, is committed to communist principles. As Sabry Hafez puts it:

The exponents of this type of writing conceived of the development of society in terms of a battle for the future through a revolutionary class struggle, in which the writer, under the guidance of the party, becomes the artist in uniform. So he is obliged to portray what is positive and reveal and condemn the imperfections that hinder the march of society.<sup>99</sup>

Although Arabic fiction, as Hafez argues, began to move out of this phase after the “heyday” of the Arab world’s Marxist thinking in the 1950s, it is not surprising that the style infused Palestinian works in Israel a little later. As I discussed in Chapter One, the communist party was by far the most influential and organized political force for the Arab community until the 1980s, as well as the core of the literary and publishing establishment. Taha would have been interested in toeing a party line not just out of his own ideological inclinations. He had been accused by the influential communist critic Imil Tuma of “skirting reality” in his work, and Tuma’s opinion was not to be underestimated.<sup>100</sup> His scathing reviews of another writer, Tawfiq Fayyad, severely

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<sup>98</sup> Assadi, *Mohammad Ali Taha*, 17.

<sup>99</sup> Sabry Hafez, “The Modern Arabic Short Story,” in M.M. Badawi, ed., *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 300.

<sup>100</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 7.

damaged the latter's career in the early 1960s.<sup>101</sup> Taha also gained exposure to the characteristics of this literary school, since Gorky enjoyed a revival in 1968. A series of articles in *al-Jadid* marked the centennial of his birth and Taha, writing for the magazine at the same time, would have read panegyrics praising Gorky's commitment to a literature that ennobled the people and illuminated their struggles.

Although an explicit effort has not been made to distinguish Taha's socialist realist writing within his oeuvre, a preference is apparent in the critical reception of his work for these driven, didactic vignettes. The implications for collective and geographic identities are clear. If Taha exposes difference and disenfranchisement in a variety of ways, he also suggests that there may be an ideological way out, and that its success will both defend and develop local lands. Notably, Taha's is a path that carves its way through the Israeli system and domestic politics, but it relies fundamentally on a sense of social cohesion and purpose from Palestinian Arab centers. Against the fray of political and economic difference, Taha wrests political optimism from collective marginalization.

### **CONCLUSION: COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND GEOGRAPHIC SCALE**

Nirvana Tanoukhi, building on the work of Neil Smith, has argued for a reassessment in our understanding of physical geography in literature, for a deeper exploration of the "entanglement between literary history and the production of space." Moving away from uncritical and abstract notions of distance and fixed coordinates, Tanoukhi works with Smith's term "geographic scale," which aims to include the cultural and social "dimensions of specific landscapes." Tanoukhi writes:

Geographers might talk of the regional scale, the scale of the watershed, or the global scale, for example. These scales are of course also conceptualized, but the conceptualization of geographic scale here follows specific processes in the physical and human landscape rather than abstractions lain over it...Geographical

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<sup>101</sup> For a full account of this episode, see Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 49-73.

scale is in no sense natural or given. There is nothing inevitable about global, national, or urban scales...These are specific to certain historical and geographical locations, they change over time, sometimes rapidly sometimes slowly, and in some cases a scale that operates in one society fails to appear in another.<sup>102</sup>

By Tanoukhi's admission, the concept of geographic scale has only been tentatively developed. Nevertheless, it helps to conceptualize the themes of marginalization and difference that course through Taha's post-1967 work. It is not that a place like Paris Square is twenty minutes—or thirty, or forty—from the village where Yusuf and his friends live. Rather, it becomes distant from their experience by virtue of the forces of its production and the layered complexity of its history. Furthermore, geographic scale illuminates the ambivalent entanglement that lies at the heart of developing some form of Palestinian Arab identity when that very effort may bring palpable threats. Wielding a Palestinian flag, writing to a relative in exile, or simply speaking Arabic may lead to a public brawl or a private interrogation.

This chapter has sought to critique and complicate the ways in which Taha's interest in collective Palestinian identity in Israel emerges. He expresses variation in naming and geography that convey the fractured nature of his people, the multiple meanings of place names, and the dynamism of sound in negotiating or recovering Israeli-Palestinian spaces. He uses the problematic motif of travel to show persistent problems of isolation and hindrances to both physical and psychological freedoms. With the related theme of circulation of messages and information, Taha highlights limitations in the access and technology that are crucial to collective identity. Yet he also offers a foil to these hurdles in flashes of socialist realism that place faith in a communist worldview. Taha's short stories after 1967, then, though they are often pigeon-holed into a

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<sup>102</sup> Nirvana Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Structure*, eds. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce W. Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 83-84.

straightforwardly realist category, disclose the ambivalence of responding to the circumstances in which Israeli-Palestinian societies, though they brush against each other in a small, contested state, remain geographically worlds apart.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MUHAMMAD NAFFA‘, HANNA IBRAHIM, AND WRITING “THE LAND”

Depicting a clash between a young group of agitators and the Israeli security forces, Muhammad ‘Ali Taha’s renowned story “*Wa Ṣāra Ismuḥu Fāris Abū ‘Arab*” ends with an iconic image of protest. While the story is primarily concerned with the journey towards political mobilization and this didactic climax, Taha bases his ideological message deliberately in a world where mobilization revolves around territory. Indeed, the mid-1970s witnessed several upheavals and confrontations around the ownership of land, in particular in Israel’s northern areas. The crux of this phase was on March 30, 1976, known as Land Day (*Yawm al-Arḍ*), when Arab citizens demonstrated against land expropriation in the Galilee and the eventual clashes with Israeli authorities ended with six casualties and many more injuries and detentions. Land Day, which has been commemorated annually since 1976, provides the geographic and historical “backcloth,” to use a term from geographer Oren Yiftachel, for Taha’s moralizing in “*Fāris Abū ‘Arab*.” Yet writers Hanna Ibrahim and Muhammad Naffa‘ are the two who most strikingly bring the problem of expropriation to the forefront.

Naffa‘, whose narrative style tends towards detailed depictions of his home in the Galilee as well as violent portrayals of conflict, is often hailed as “one of the most important writers dealing with this motif.”<sup>1</sup> As Nabih al-Qasim writes in *al-Jadid*, “In all his stories, he moves us directly into the village and its surroundings, with all its customs and traditions, both good and bad, and he achieves this with a calm and fluid style.”<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim is a stalwart of the Arab writing community in Israel and along with Habibi was one of very few remaining authors, albeit young and inexperienced at the time, who

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<sup>1</sup> Taha, “Towards a Minority Literature,” 232.

<sup>2</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, “*Ra’ī ft Qiṣṣatayn min ‘Adad ‘al-Jadīd’ al-Akhīr*,” *al-Jadid* 11-12, 1972, 69.

remained in Israel after the devastation of 1948.<sup>3</sup> He composed a handful of vignettes entitled *Ṣuwar min Yawm al-Arḍ* (Pictures of Land Day) in the aftermath of the riots, and two of his best-known stories revolve around the problem of dispossession. Read together, Naffa' and Ibrahim's respective approaches to portraying a land under threat reveal important variety and contrasts. Between them, there is much more to Land Day and the territorial controversies of the 1970s than the idealized snapshot of a young man leading his first protest with great fervor.

Given its salience in the cultural and political history of the Palestinian Arab minority in the post-1967 years, it is crucial to engage with the process of land expropriation and the legacy of Land Day closely. This chapter explores a number of questions that are pertinent to such a politicized aspect of the literary scene. What was the cultural impact of land confiscations and Land Day on Palestinian Arab communities in Israel? What are the textual responses to state expropriation of Arab lands and villages? How do Hanna Ibrahim and Muhammad Naffa'—two supposed champions of “the land” in literature—tackle the theme of a contested landscape? How do their particular strategies in using the land as a literary trope extract the latent complications of the term and of those who write and mobilize in its name?

First, I consider the historical context of Land Day and suggest that the event occupies an ambivalent political place in Israel, representing a hallmark of Palestinian national resistance and mobilization, yet also indicative of a distinctive internal struggle for civic rights as Israeli citizens. I then discuss the short stories of Muhammad Naffa', exploring his portrayal of the diverse forms of violence that characterize expropriation, and reflecting on the implications of his choice to set his fiction almost exclusively in and around his remote home village of Beit Jann. In the discussion of Hanna Ibrahim that

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<sup>3</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa'b*, 37.

follows, I focus on the depiction of Jewish characters as a means to overturn simplified and stereotypical notions of territorial contestation in Israel/Palestine. I also highlight his response to Land Day in a few short vignettes, which adopt a moderate tone and use the built spaces of house and prison to move away from the open fields of protest. Taking pride in these acts of resistance, Ibrahim also glimpses the ambivalence and consequences of such mobilization.

### **LAND DAY: PROTEST AND PROBLEMATIC LEGACY**

Before our eyes are pictures of martyrs. I did not know personally any of our six beloved friends, but their holy blood that spilled on the dust of this nation is another great reason that calls all our people to hold on to their national land more than ever before, and more strongly than ever before.<sup>4</sup>

In April 1976, writer and journalist Salim Jubran wrote stirring pieces in the Communist paper *al-Ittihad*, chastising the Israeli government for the crackdown on Arab citizens on March 30. Here, Jubran encourages his community to take more, and greater strides in clinging to their land, clearly embracing a surge of activism and commitment not seen in such force since 1948 and the decimation in that year of the Palestinian Arab population. His range of vocabulary for the landscape—Jubran writes of the blood spilling into the soil or dust (*turāb*), the importance of clinging to the nation (*waṭan*) and the sacrifices of this day devoted to land (*arḍ*)—evokes something multifaceted against the straightforward and strident tone of his writing. Despite its clear name in translation, Land Day was not simply a protest about land. As I suggested in the introduction, the notion itself encompasses the material and symbolic, the social and political. The unfolding of Land Day and the textual responses that it prompted belie these intricacies and, at times, their ambivalences.

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<sup>4</sup> *Al-Ittihad*, April 1, 1976.

Land Day was part of a broader escalation of tensions between minority and state. In the mid-1970s, the Israeli government was looking to expand Jewish settlements in the Galilee region, capitalizing on fertile farmland, providing for a steady stream of immigrants, and fracturing a region of the country more densely populated by Arab citizens. The Koenig Report, a policy document leaked in part in February 1976 and released in full in September, framed the issue as a “demographic problem” that could see an Arab majority develop in the Galilee by 1978.<sup>5</sup> Its author Israel Koenig, the Ministry of the Interior’s District Commissioner for the Galilee region, advocated a number of solutions. He proposed to “expand and deepen Jewish settlement in areas where the contiguity of the Arab population is prominent,” to curb “breaking of new ground” by Palestinian Arab communities, and to develop stronger Jewish leadership in cities like Nazareth and Acre with large Arab populations, thus creating a foil to the increasingly bold and popular Communist party branch, Rakah.<sup>6</sup> Ariel Sharon, an aide at the time to Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, spoke of a desire to “spray the Galilee with Jews,” implying that the region was troubled by a kind of pestilence to be watched, managed, perhaps even cleared entirely.<sup>7</sup>

In early 1976, the Ministry of the Interior published a specific plan to expropriate 21,000 thousand dunams (over 5,000 acres) in Area 9, which included land around Sakhnin, ‘Arraba, and Deir Hanna.<sup>8</sup> Understandably, there was outcry among Arab communities to this process of “Judaization of the Galilee” (*tahwīd al-Jalīl*). Unlike in earlier years, however, the community was better equipped to act. The expanded

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<sup>5</sup> “Top Secret: Memorandum-Proposal-Handling the Arabs of Israel,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976), 191.

<sup>6</sup> “Handling the Arabs of Israel,” 193.

<sup>7</sup> Shoukri Abed, “Galilee Village Fights Israeli Land Grab,” *MERIP Reports*, No. 83 (Dec., 1979), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Khalil Nakhleh, “*Yawm al-Ard* (Land Day),” in *The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in History, Politics and Society*, eds. Nadim Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh Khoury (Haifa: Mada al-Carmel, 2011), 87.

freedoms of the post-1967 era had ushered in a phase of “intense political mobilization.”<sup>9</sup> Local and regional networks turned national, first with the formation of two bodies, the National Committee of the Arab Local Council Heads in 1974, which operated as a “semi-official parliament,” and the National Committee for the Defence of Arab Land in 1975.<sup>10</sup> On March 6, then, regional leaders convened a meeting in the town of Shefa ‘Amer and called a general strike for March 30. Talks, pamphlets, and newspaper articles spread the word countrywide, and *al-Ittihad* avidly anticipated this principled stand. Bold headlines proclaimed that “Demonstrations answer the call of the land,” and that, “Tomorrow, Tuesday March 30, the Arab masses hold a general strike out of a firm desire to defend their land and a noble life in their nation.”<sup>11</sup> Still the only regular Arab newspaper in Israel, *al-Ittihad* appealed to its readers by stressing a sense of dignified duty and personifying the land as crying out for help. Switching between the terms “*ard*” (land) and “*waṭan*” (nation), the paper made clear again that this fight over land was also a struggle for national belonging.

The March 30 strike was the perfect storm: a specific rift, to take place on a designated day, in which a concerned and well armed Israeli status quo would confront a newly organized, more committed grassroots Arab movement. Israeli police and army units were deployed countrywide for riot control, but in numerous locations in the Galilee there were violent turns that resulted in six deaths, between fifty and a hundred injuries, and 300 arrests.<sup>12</sup> Three of the deaths occurred in Sakhnin, one in ‘Arraba, one in Kafr Kana, and the final casualty in Tira was a young man from the camp of Nur Shams in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Beinin, “From Land Day to Equality Day,” *MERIP Middle East Report*, No. 150, Human Rights and the Palestine Conflict (Jan.-Feb., 1988), 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Ittihad*, March 29, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Nakhleh, “*Yawm al-Ard*,” 84.

West Bank who was in Israel only temporarily.<sup>13</sup> This was the largest and bloodiest internal clash since an isolated incident in Kafr Qasim in 1956, in which forty-eight Arab civilians were killed after unintentionally violating a curfew. Some journalists dredged up the memory of this tragedy by declaring Land Day a “second Kafr Qasim massacre” and squarely blamed the Israeli authorities for transforming a day of peaceful protest into one of “shocking carnage.”<sup>14</sup>

Land Day is widely understood as a turning point in state-minority relations. Territorial ownership was of course always crucial to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Yet Land Day vaulted the nexus of space and power to the center of the particular struggle of the Arab minority. As geographer Oren Yiftachel has offered, theorists on the origins of nationalism—from Ernest Gellner to Anthony Smith to Benedict Anderson—have tended to privilege time over space, viewing the emergence of national sentiment in terms of modernity and industrial modernization, ethnic and cultural memory, or a collective imagination of belonging facilitated by modern developments.<sup>15</sup> Violent clashes for territory such as Land Day—in the wake of the *Nakba* and the dispersion of the Palestinian people—represent the “elevation of space to an all-assuming kernel of national identity constructed through territorial struggle and socialization.”<sup>16</sup> More simply, and to paraphrase Yiftachel’s earlier formulation, the “where” of Palestinian Arab belonging in Israel became of even more intense concern than the “when.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> George Kanazi, “Land in Israeli Palestinian Literature,” *HaMizrach HeHadash*, Special Issue on the Literature of the Arabs in Israel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 179 [Hebrew]. The victims and their photographs were also published in *al-Ittihad* in the aftermath of Land Day, alongside messages of support and condolence from local councils, teachers, committee heads, and individuals.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Ittihad*, March 31, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> For a more in-depth critique of the temporal preferences expressed by these three scholars, see Oren Yiftachel, “Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine,” *Geopolitics*, 7:2, 2002, 218-219.

<sup>16</sup> Yitachel, “The Kernel of the Nation,” 228.

<sup>17</sup> Yiftachel, “The Kernel of the Nation,” 215.

Historical and political scholars have therefore seen Land Day as a galvanizing moment within Israel. Here, the insistence on standing strong and commemorating the occasion represent an awakening after a period of “suspended animation,” or “activation” after years of “quiescence.”<sup>18</sup> Land Day is the spark plug for an engine of communal and national fervor. In this argument, Land Day also springboards from local to national, or ethnonational Palestinian relevance. The assumption that the resistance embodied by Land Day has wider links would gain traction as commemorations in subsequent years saw the flying of Palestinian flags and solidarity marches in Palestinian communities outside of Israel/Palestine. Yitzchak Reiter thus argues that the plight of the Arab citizenry must be seen as “interlocking” with both Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts.<sup>19</sup> As’ad Ghanem’s comprehensive political study shows that, across different streams of political activity both moderate and extreme, a “joint Palestinian-Arab national component” has emerged.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in the years after Land Day, political organization and “broad mobilization” would gather pace with the establishment of more local yet quasi-national bodies.<sup>21</sup> These groups walked the line between representing Arab constituencies locally and voicing communal support on more general Palestinian issues: the establishment of an independent state, the refugee problem, and the activities of the PLO, based in the 1970s in southern Lebanon.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Shmuel Sandler, “Israeli Arabs and the Jewish State: The Activation of a Community in Suspended Animation,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Israel (Oct., 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Yitzchak Reiter, *National Minority, Regional Majority* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xviii.

<sup>20</sup> As’ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 61-3, 91-4, 120-22, 135.

<sup>21</sup> Beinun, “Land Day,” 26.

<sup>22</sup> Much has been written about the political developments of the Palestinian Arab minority in this time and about increasing “ethnonational” trends in areas such as voting and self-identification as Palestinian. See Sammy Smooha, *The Orientation and Politicization of the Arab Minority in Israel* (Haifa: The University of Haifa, The Jewish-Arab Center, Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 1984). Also Amal Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel: The Politics of Indigeneity* (London: Routledge, 2011).

In the literary realm, as I discussed in Chapter One, this kind of political ignition is embodied in poetry. In an article about the theme of territory in Arabic literature in Israel, George Kanazi argues that poetry has since the early twentieth century held the mantle of criticizing the Zionist enterprise, decrying land sales to the Jewish population, and condemning the injustices of land confiscation. Though Kanazi's article does make reference to prose, it consistently finds its way back to poetry: the work of Ibrahim Tuqan and 'Abd al-Rahim Mahmud before 1948, and the resolute verses of Tawfiq Zayyad, Samih al-Qasim, and Mahmud Darwish since. Kanazi echoes the notion that land is a dynamic and versatile symbol: "It is the past, the heritage, the present, the history, it is the mother, the homeland *to which all values are attached*."<sup>23</sup> Yet he also adopts a common, more restricted interpretation that this theme and its vehement poetic mediation helped to "crystallize" Arabic literature into a particularly politicized mould.<sup>24</sup>

The vehemence of poetry and the transformation of Land Day into a politically Palestinian national symbol must nevertheless be tempered with the profoundly local nature of the event, as well as the complexities that are hidden by a vocally critical poem or a photograph of a protestor waving a Palestinian flag. Kanazi writes of a shift in poetic themes that is in fact quite subtle. If Tuqan and Mahmud decry Zionism unconditionally, poets like Zayyad and al-Qasim after 1948 rail against the injustices of the Israeli system, nested within the state and taking Israel as their arena of action creatively and politically. Zayyad, not limiting himself to rousing verses, was elected mayor of Nazareth, the largest Arab town in Israel, in 1975. Such activity within the Israeli system is a stark contrast to the rejectionist attitude prevalent among the Palestinian diaspora and its leadership at the time. It does not suggest that figures like Zayyad had any particular attachment to the

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<sup>23</sup> Kanazi, "Land in Palestinian Israeli Literature," xx. Emphasis mine.

<sup>24</sup> Kanazi, "Land in Palestinian Israeli Literature," xx. See Chapter Two for my discussion of this pervasive, tactile language in framing identity and literature in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

State of Israel. Indeed, an important theoretical study by Nadim Rouhana has argued that there is a dearth of the “affective” component of citizenship among Palestinian Arab citizens.<sup>25</sup> But Zayyad’s commitment to action within Israel is a noteworthy choice nevertheless, a similar—if more audacious—kind of hybrid cultural negotiation as predecessors in the Knesset like Imil Habibi also lived.

Contrasts emerge too among Palestinian Arab citizenry themselves. In Laurie King-Irani’s words, Land Day is the only “transconfessional, national holiday” among Arab citizens, which implies that the day’s very uniqueness belies important differences in the collective.<sup>26</sup> While the general strike and protests spread nationwide, the core of the movement was concentrated in the Galilee, and only the Galilee suffered outbreaks of violence. Perhaps more critically, King-Irani highlights that the broader emergence of communal identities in Israel tends towards the local and regional:

People in Nazareth think of their country not as the territory that happens to fall within officially demarcated borders, but as *al-Jalil* (the Galilee), a place whose history, flora, open spaces and built landscapes they read very differently than their fellow Jewish citizens do.<sup>27</sup>

The divergence is not confined to Jewish citizens: the landscape would equally be “read differently” by Bedouin in the Negev, the urban population of East Jerusalem, or even villagers from the Triangle, a densely populated cluster of towns and villages that straddles the Green Line. Tamir Sorek has suggested that these contrasts also manifest in the predicament of constructing memorials. In the absence of “one national sovereign,” and in the context of negotiating a civic role within Israel or anticipating a backlash from Israeli authorities over a statue to mark Palestinian Arab martyrs, Arab citizens engage in “cautious commemoration,” balancing acts of public memory shifting somewhere in

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<sup>25</sup> See Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*, 130-150.

<sup>26</sup> Laurie King-Irani, “Land, Identity, and the Limits of Resistance in the Galilee,” *Middle East Report*, No. 216 (Autumn, 2000), 43.

<sup>27</sup> King-Irani, “Land, Identity, and the Limits of Resistance,” 42.

between Palestinian Arab nation and Israeli state.<sup>28</sup> These intricacies help to clarify an apparent paradox wherein Yiftachel suggests that Jerusalem lies at the heart of the conflict—the “kernel” of identity—and yet the Galilee rises here as the Palestinian heartland within Israel, with Jerusalem receiving little attention.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to poetry, it is in short fiction that the treatment of land expropriations—and at times the moment of Land Day itself—takes on these more politically nuanced shades and commands greater ambivalence. The shift stems partly from genre. Fiction, as I discussed in Chapter One, carries a lighter burden than poetry in terms of didactic and political expectation. Moreover, the longer form and the absence of a public, performed interpretation of the work better allow for marginal settings and less charged depictions, for example of Jewish characters. It would be unlikely to find Jewish characters given voice in poetry as Hanna Ibrahim attempts in his short stories.

Land Day cannot be seen simply as the moment when Palestinian Arab citizens “woke up” to their reality and quickened an inexorable process of increasing the Palestinian aspect of their identity, as if national belonging were measured only in ratios. Rather, this traumatic occasion and its broader civic context represent the struggle of holding onto one’s place in Israel physically while also negotiating the extent to which one supports, and is supported by other Palestinian Arab communities inside Israel and beyond the Green Line. Similarly, the processes and pressures of land expropriation in Israel cannot be seen as straightforward or easily tackled by all-out mobilization. These are multifaceted features of Israel’s literal and figurative landscape whose subtleties and

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<sup>28</sup> Tamir Sorek, “Cautious Commemoration: Localism, Communalism, and Nationalism in Palestinian Memorial Monuments in Israel,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (2), 2008, 345-348.

<sup>29</sup> Incidentally, the reverse is true after the outbreak of the First Intifada, when Jerusalem became the most common setting for a number of poets and the locus of the national battle for independence. See Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 127-138.

polyvalence become clear through the work of Naffa' and Ibrahim, and their interest in this deceptively clear-cut theme of "the land."

### **MUHAMMAD NAFFA': THE COMPLEX VIOLENCE OF EXPROPRIATION**

Scholars outside Israel/Palestine have overlooked Muhammad Naffa' or, at best, as in Barbara Harlow's work, used him for incidental comparisons in discussions of Palestinian resistance writing.<sup>30</sup> Yet local critics have viewed him as a crucial writer of the homeland who conjures rustic, detailed portrayals of his home village; so detailed, in fact, that they can be difficult to understand because of a reliance on localized idioms and references. He is also held up as a didactic model, writing with vehemence against the material and conceptual threats imposed by the State of Israel as well as the pre-1948 powers of the Yishuv and the British administration. The intensity of this aspect of his writing sits well with an illustrious political career, as Naffa' rose through the ranks of the Communist Party to serve as Secretary General and, in the early 1990s, was elected to the Knesset.

This section is concerned with complicating this perception of Naffa''s thematic center. I suggest that his prerogative is showing the dynamism not just of the land itself, but also of the myriad threats that it faces. In his work—he published four anthologies of short stories between 1975 and 1980—we find a careful balance. To be sure, Naffa' writes searing, violent portrayals of the traumatic process of land loss by force. Yet he also dwells deliberately on the subtler kinds of threat that unfold through legal and political claims that the government imposes on the land. Through a range of stories, Naffa' portrays both a complex landscape and an equally, ominously complex infrastructure that is coming to dominate it. Moreover, the rustic and sincere pieces that

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Harlow, "Return to Haifa: 'Opening the Borders' in Palestinian Literature," *Social Text*, No. 13/14 (Winter - Spring, 1986), 15.

portray his home area of Beit Jann with tenderness are not free of anxiety, as Naffa‘ evokes skepticism concerning the moment of rupture between traditional customs and the demands and norms of modern Israeli-Palestinian society. This choice to write so exclusively about Beit Jann also has implications for the breadth of “the land” as a theme, problematizing the widespread tendency to allegorize a local place to the level of the nation at large.

Habib Bulus aptly divides Naffa‘’s conception of the threat to the land into two aspects: the violent, which highlights the “ferocity of an unjust ruler,” and the bureaucratic, which takes place “in the name of the law and democracy.”<sup>31</sup> Within these categories, though, the process of confiscation has multiple shades and dynamic characteristics. As Naffa‘ constructs his elegant pictures of village life, he also shows a methodical, if faceless threat that comes from many sides.

“Because We Love the Land” (*Li-annanā Nuḥibb al-Ard*) from the collection *Kūshān* (1980) tells a typically basic story. A farmer in a village community works a day on the land, only to return home and find a document that confiscates his land on the grounds that it was, previous to being cultivated, “woodland belonging to the state.”<sup>32</sup> The following day, however, the man adheres to his usual routine and sets out early to work the fields. When asked why by his son, the narrator, the villager responds simply, “Because we love the land,” closing the story with this message.

The contrast that drives this piece is not a violent one. Rather, Naffa‘ sets detailed descriptions of traditional practices and values against a rigid, clipped Israeli bureaucracy. His conjuring of the rural environment is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>31</sup> Habib Bulus, “*al-Ard fī Qiṣaṣ Muḥammad Naffa‘*,” in *al-Riḥla al-Ūlā: Maqālāt fī al-Adab al-‘Arabī al-Filasṭīnī al-Ḥadīth*, ed. Habib Bulus (Nazareth: Bayt al-Sadaqa, 1986), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Mohammad Naffaa, trans. Jamal Assadi, “Because We Love the Land,” in *Three Voices from the Galilee: Selected Fiction from Mohammad Naffaa, Zaki Darwish, and Najī Daher*, ed. and trans. Jamal Assadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 69.

Out in the street everything in the village was awake and the camels, loaded up with hay, were already making their way back from the fields to the threshing area, to unload and then return. The chickens and pigeons were picking up the seeds that had fallen on the road and pecking busily at the cowpats and the camel dung. My father, striding ahead of us, was looking at the surrounding fields as if he were responsible for their harvest. ‘The barley is short here; the land was muddy when they planted, you can see from the seedlings over there.’ He looked over the fence and continued, ‘Oh dear... the water has washed the soil away!’ And because he kept looking here and there, he kept walking off the road, bumping into the branch of one of the almond or olive trees planted by the earth walls on either side of the road, making the dew drops fall on my face, because I was walking right behind him, trying to follow exactly in his footsteps. He would take care for a little while and mutter, only to repeat his blunder again, until eventually we reached the field. He made his way to the large thorny tree which formed a hedge around our land and, pushing it quickly aside, we entered. The birds flew up from the olive trees in the middle of the field and landed elsewhere. He looked at my brother, who had been walking alongside me and was watching the birds wistfully: the matter was more serious than he imagined. Without more ado, my father took his jacket off and my mother put the provisions and the bucket of water under the fig tree and... work began.<sup>33</sup>

Naffa‘ invests more than any other Palestinian Arab author of the time in the visualization of his settings. His ekphrastic language is so careful that he has been likened to a “talented painter who dips his brush in the magnificence of the land.”<sup>34</sup> Having grown up himself in an agricultural village, plowing fields, working on the threshing floor, and herding animals, Naffa‘ is well positioned to convey this vibrance and to create a pastoral world that buzzes with symphonic harmony.<sup>35</sup> The animals seem consciously to know their place and to perform their functions smoothly, and the descriptions emphasize liveliness and mobility. The village itself has awoken (*istayqaḏa*), the camels move back and forth with their loads, and the birds are attentive, picking (*yaltaqiḏ*) and examining (*yufattish*) seeds and dung. The depiction typifies the cultivation of belonging and place through practice, activity, and closeness with the terrain. The scene’s rhythms, which include the full ecosystem of animals, crops, and natural conditions, evoke David

<sup>33</sup> Naffaa, “Because We Love the Land,” 66-67. For the Arabic text, see Muhammad Naffa‘, “*Li-annanā Nuḥibb al-Ard*,” in Muhammad Naffa, *Kūshān* (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1980), 19-23.

<sup>34</sup> Bulus, “*al-Ard fī Qiṣaṣ Muḥammad Naffa‘*,” 50.

<sup>35</sup> Assadi, *Three Voices from the Galilee*, 9-12.

Seamon's harmonious "place ballet" that I discussed in Chapter Two, and which represents a kind of holistic pulse and regularity that Habibi's young protagonist Mas'ud struggles to attain in the absence of both family and this agricultural core.<sup>36</sup>

Though some dismiss Naffa's style as long-winded and indulgent, it is worth reiterating the centrality of the village to the recovery of Arabic-language writing in Israel. With the loss of urban centers after 1948, the local village became the bastion of Palestinian belonging and perseverance in the new State of Israel, with poetic and prosaic renditions serving as the means to recover and maintain a literary medium whose urban core had disintegrated. Naffa', more than any other writer in prose, gives this rich setting full narrative attention.<sup>37</sup> In "Because We Love the Land," he assiduously observes the moving parts of a morning routine, but in other stories he gives similarly close renditions of the ways in which village inhabitants cook and eat, arrange funerals to commemorate loved ones, and develop social and romantic relationships.<sup>38</sup> Beyond this interest in practice and routine, Naffa' commands an astonishing array of superficial knowledge. One of his stories names fourteen types of village food, nine types of grape, seven types of grass, and countless trees and fruits that abound in one area alone.<sup>39</sup>

Suleiman Jubran praises Naffa's graphic sense and suggests that his intense interest in language is comparable to the style of a founding figure of modern Arabic literature, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq.<sup>40</sup> Yet there is an important difference in Jubran's analogy. For al-Shidyaq, an intellectual leader during the Arab renaissance, or *Nahda*, names and close descriptions were part of a lexicographic and linguistic impulse. His prerogative was the translation of seminal texts (most notably the Bible) and the development of Arabic in a

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<sup>36</sup> Seamon, *Geography of the Lifeworld*, 56. See Chapter Two for my discussion of the place ballet.

<sup>37</sup> Suleiman Jubran, "The Village in the Short Stories of Muhammad Naffa," *HaMizrach HeHadash*, Special Issue on the Literature of the Arabs in Israel (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 182.

<sup>38</sup> Jubran, "The Village," 185.

<sup>39</sup> Jubran, "The Village," 184.

<sup>40</sup> Jubran, "The Village," 184.

modernizing world that would see increased contact with Europe. For Naffa‘, the task is not epistemological. It represents the “textual rescue” of an “alienated” geography, one of the three literary “tasks” advanced by Joe Cleary and previously discussed in the introduction.<sup>41</sup> Naffa‘ extends this “rescue” well beyond the macro scale of place names, which numerous writers including Habibi, Taha, and Ibrahim index, and delves into microscopic details of plant life, food, and animals. His is a more comprehensive kind of cultural defence amid territorial contestation.

In keeping with Naffa‘’s rustic ideal, the farmer—and father to the narrator—is portrayed as both omniscient and humble. He diagnoses problems with the harvest specifically and immediately, and becomes so engrossed in his surveying that he occasionally steps off the road. This detail offers two particular insights. First, Naffa‘ conjures a moving and delicate metaphor of generational continuity. The son is sprayed with moisture from the leaves since, rather than keep to the road, he opts to follow his father’s path devotedly, implying his own future working this land. Second, Naffa‘ deliberately establishes that it is not an easy path to tread. The villager stumbles and bumps into obstacles, while the technical and natural complications that he notices signal a relationship with the soil that demands commitment and labor as well as knowledge. With a theatrical ending to his exposition—“and work began”—Naffa‘ confirms that such an idyllic landscape only emerges in concert with conscientious work.

Naffa‘’s emphasis on working the land is central to his nuanced constructions of Israeli-Palestinian geography and to the particularities of writing within Israel. Physically distanced from the old fields and villages, exilic writers have often constructed romanticized depictions of a bountiful, nurturing homeland. Naffa‘, by contrast, engages the relationship up close. Lefebvre is particularly useful in understanding the importance

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<sup>41</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 193.

of this manual involvement. He distinguishes between a “product” in space—something that can be repeated and abstracted, since it springs from a set of material relations and processes—and a “work,” which is unique and natural. As Lefebvre argues, “‘Nature’ cannot operate according to the same teleology as human beings. The ‘beings’ it creates are works; and each has ‘something’ unique about it even if it belongs to a genus and a species: a tree is a particular tree, a rose a particular rose, a horse a particular horse.”<sup>42</sup> Naffa’s farmer, then, is not so much engaging in the material “production of space” but acting as a shepherd to natural “works,” taking it upon himself to nurture the land, to know its fruits, plants, and animals, and to devote his labors to enhancing it. This is no trivial task. As Lefebvre cynically continues, “It is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by ‘anti-nature’ – by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labor and its products...Nature is dying.”<sup>43</sup>

Importantly, working the land also refutes an important viewpoint of the settler colonial discourse that threatens indigenous inhabitants. As Cleary argues, a basic aspect of this discourse lies in the dialectic of enlightened metropolitan modernity versus a “backward” anti-modern local tradition. In this framework, “it was the European settlers who were deemed to embody the values of progress and modernity; the slatternly natives who supposedly epitomized recalcitrant tradition.”<sup>44</sup> For the Zionist movement, as for the French in North Africa and the British across their empire, there is a further geographic implication. If the local people are “lazy” and “carefree,” they can be viewed as territorially unattached and commanding no work ethic.<sup>45</sup> Settlement becomes justified at least in part by this notion that the land has been neglected and undeveloped. As the old adage goes in the Israeli-Palestinian case, here was a “land without a people for a people

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<sup>42</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 70.

<sup>43</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> Omri, “Settler Colonialism in North Africa,” 180-181.

without a land”); a maxim that effaces the Palestinian population by detaching it from geography. Naffa’ counters both of these marginalizing discourses. His protagonist is anything but lazy and negligent and he suggests, with his sons in tow, a deeper lineage of working the lands with commitment and knowledge. Far from being a “backward” and “carefree” villager, this character shows a refined sense of the tough, unpredictable nature of an agricultural life, not least in the face of a national contest over his territory.

Indeed, the obstacle that threatens the villager the most comes from outside his hardy world. Returning home, the family finds a government notification:

We would like to inform you that the Boundaries Commission has discovered that the plot of land in your possession is the property of the state, since it was previously woodland belonging to the state. This order will be considered in effect from the date of your receiving this notice. Any violation will render you liable to prosecution. Note: You may appeal within two months of the date of receipt.<sup>46</sup>

The language of the government memo is clipped and direct, even awkwardly so compared to the flowing language depicting rural practices. It emphasizes its own claim to the land, repeating the words “*ard*” (land) and “*dawla*” (state), consciously reinforcing the link between Israel and its territory. The latter term, however, typically denotes the formal entity and administration of a state, rather than its people, its history, and its character. Crucially here, “*watan*” (nation) is absent. Naffa’ reserves this more affective term only for his own villagers and he restrains the ability of the Jewish Israeli administration to project nationhood into his writing.

While other villagers storm furiously into the house with their own documents of expropriation, the father remains stoic. He gets up the following morning and proceeds as usual, as other villagers ask mockingly why he makes the effort since “the field is gone.”<sup>47</sup> Calderbank’s translation renders this sentiment passively, though interestingly in

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<sup>46</sup> Naffaa, “Because We Love the Land,” 69.

<sup>47</sup> Naffaa, “Because We Love the Land,” 71.

Naffa's Arabic it is both active and colloquial: "the land *has* gone" (*al-ard rāḥat*), suggesting a more definitive rupture and even a kind of desertion by the land itself, conceding defeat like so many villagers.<sup>48</sup> This tone makes the story's conclusion all the more poignant. The father turns an otherwise trite axiom, "Because we love the land" into a humble, touching lesson. Assuming the voice of the plural, he presumes a collective responsibility as well as occupying a didactic role vis-à-vis his children, the narrator and his brother. The reader is also enveloped in the message. As Nabih al-Qasim has pointed out, Naffa' frequently uses a first-person voice to simulate unity: in moving through the narrative, the reader feels as though he himself is the narrator.<sup>49</sup> Al-Qasim points out the same use of voice in certain stories by Muhammad 'Ali Taha, similarly intended to simulate the collective and invite the reader in. Unlike Taha's protagonist in "*Isbāniyya*," though, whose frustrations lead him to fell seventy trees, Naffa's farmer responds to the external threat by continuing his work with calm and dignity. With the clear shift in style, Naffa' has his reader discover that, the value of his florid and detailed descriptions notwithstanding, the crux of the relationship between farmer and land, "*fallāḥ*" and "*ard*," is unadorned and deeply ingrained. In Lefebvre's sense, he very much espouses a "work" ethic and a sense of belonging.

If "Because We Love the Land" portrays a somewhat stereotypical notion of expropriations—a curt government message threatens this hardworking, principled farmer—Naffa' emphasizes elsewhere that the process of confiscation is more complex. In "*Tamrīn fī al-Difā' al-Madanī*" (Training in Civil Defence) the protagonist, Dib, is depicted as something of an outcast, "the strangest man in the village" and a sort of

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<sup>48</sup> Naffa', "*Li-annanā Nuḥibb al-Ard*," 23.

<sup>49</sup> Nabih al-Qasim, "'*Kūshān*' li-Muḥammad Naffa'," in *Dirāsāt fī al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī al-Maḥallī*, ed. Nabih al-Qasim (Acre: Dar al-Aswar), 77.

bumpkin with an odd profession and mismatching shoes.<sup>50</sup> Dib owns a very small plot that he looks after, names, and whose boundaries he knows well. He comes across the narrator, who is a lawyer, when he receives an expropriation notice similar to the farmer's. The narrator expresses surprise at how Dib has come to him:

I was taken aback by this case and how the state had found someone like Dib, as far as you can get from the jobs that men usually do...and how his name and his folder must have moved from one government office to the next, from one employee to another. I imagined the employees, stylish and well put-together, rushing and scurrying about from room to room, carrying Dib's file under their arms, pronouncing his name, deliberating, smoking, drinking coffee, talking on the phone, researching, procrastinating, and then printing his name on the typewriter and sending the letter in the post.<sup>51</sup>

This snapshot offers much more than a letterhead view of land confiscations. To be sure, Naffa' paints a bureaucracy that is heavily laden with activity, but this is an administration that is highly mobile, even frenetic. Whereas Taha, in "*Fāris Abū 'Arab*," depicted Israelis arriving on the land in casual terms, Naffa''s Israeli employees are slick and energetic, stretching their work to the far reaches of Israeli territory and engaging furiously in the localized bureaucracy of the office. They are also utterly dispassionate. In the office, Dib is simply a file or dossier (*malaff*) to be checked and pushed along the expropriations pipeline. It is striking that the narrator finds himself exhausted by Dib's case as the story progresses. In the courtroom, he laments a feeling of lethargy and drowsiness.<sup>52</sup> He uses the word "*nu'ās*" to describe his state, a deeply charged word that has been used critically to condemn the perceived quietude and submissiveness of the Palestinian and Arab worlds at large in the face of the *Nakba* and its aftermath. This story becomes a warning of the energy in the Israeli operations behind the faceless communiqué—again, Naffa' only describes the state in clean, formal terms as the

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<sup>50</sup> Naffa', "*Tamrīn fī al-Difā' al-Madanī*," in Muhammad Naffa', *Kūshān* (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1980), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Naffa', "*Tamrīn fī al-Difā' al-Madanī*," 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> Naffa', "*Tamrīn fī al-Difā' al-Madanī*," 34.

“*dawla*”—and the difficulty of remaining steadfast in the face of its motivated, widespread actions.

Similarly, in “*Ḥaydar Raḍīya Allāh ‘Anhu*” (Haydar, May God Be Pleased With Him), Naffa‘ shows the bureaucracy stretching into unexpected areas of the homeland. This story focuses on the expropriation of a piece of land that holds an old shrine managed by local religious authorities. Setting farmland aside, the tale asserts that the government is indifferent towards incumbent norms of land administration: “The government is not concerned about the people’s feelings, nor about what they consider holy, and they do not differentiate between regular land and land under the *waqf*.”<sup>53</sup> While to the government the site seems unremarkable, it is exemplary of the local meaning and value that characterizes “place” and a sense of belonging. An attack on this shrine is also a metaphoric assault on the people and widens the gulf between “*dawla*” (state) and “*waṭan*” (nation). Moreover, Naffa‘ touches a specific nerve in the Israeli context. He gives a stark alternative to an entrenched state narrative about pluralism and tolerance that I discussed in Chapter Two and that revolves around the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, where the state pulled back from directly administering the holy site after the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967.

An important layer of complexity, though, lies in that the transaction in “*Ḥaydar*” works through an intermediary rather than through the state directly. Taking a harsh stance and textually “shaming” these so-called “collaborators” and traitors is a crucial internal nuance to the problem of expropriation in Naffa‘’s work.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, he wrote a searing story entitled “*al-Khā’in*” (The Traitor) devoted to this character. The use of collaborators was common in the days of the Mandate and Israeli military rule, including

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<sup>53</sup> Muhammad Naffa‘, “*Ḥaydar Raḍīya Allāh ‘Anhu*,” in Muhammad Naffa‘, *al-Aṣīla* (Haifa: Arabesk), 24.

<sup>54</sup> Taha, “Towards a Minority Literature,” 224.

at the level of village leadership through the representative figure of the *mukhtar*. Hillel Cohen evocatively refers to this network of subterfuge as an “army of shadows,” and although Ibrahim Taha suggests that, for Naffa‘ as well as others like Hanna Ibrahim, “collaboration is a passing phenomenon” and the guilty party eventually “listens to his conscience and follows it,” the motif remains salient.<sup>55</sup> Naffa‘ affirms that the threat of collaboration is persistent beyond the days of the military government and that confiscations of land, externally technical, widespread, organized, and energetic, also have this dangerously internal component within rural communities themselves.

Of course, Naffa‘’s portrayal of expropriation is not limited to the bureaucratic realm and he at times depicts the hard physical violence of the process. Just as his microscopic lens on village life is unique among local writers, so Naffa‘’s lens on violence is particularly vivid. He uses exceedingly visceral scenes to express the trauma of land loss, but also adopts certain temporal settings and a historical perspective that highlight his hopes for resilience against a ruthless threat.

Israeli violence against the homeland is often relayed in gendered terms: the land that villagers cherish and nurture, and which itself embodies the life-giving force, suffers a violation, a rape (*ighṭiṣāb*). In a brutal story, “The Camel” (*al-Jamal*), Naffa‘ combines this conventional interpretation with the animal world, constructing a fuller depiction of menace and destruction. The story is set in the 1970s, but its narrator is preoccupied with the passage of time, since thirty years have passed since he last saw this deserted spot. He thus stands on barren ground as the story opens and he begins to recall a day of harvesting with his camel, Ghadeer. The feminized portrayal of the land is clear. The sweat of the villagers and the earth’s dust form an ephemeral shape that reminds the narrator of pigtailed. The wind is likened to a mother caressing her child. When harvested of its wheat,

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<sup>55</sup> Taha, “Towards a Minority Literature,” 224.

the land is personified as lying open, “unembarrassed by its fresh nakedness,” its openness “ignoring the borders between different pieces of land.” Uniquely, Naffa’s landscape evokes a range of feminine characters—the pigtales connote a youthful daughter, the wind a caring mother, and the open fields a wife or lover. His landscape is rich, sensuous, and touching, a center of sustenance and yet transcendent of these social ties, expanding freely beyond arbitrary demarcations.<sup>56</sup>

The story quickly transforms into an immensely detailed, traumatic account in which Naffa narrates the death of the camel Ghadeer in a field fire, a blaze ignited by the proto-organization of the Israel Defence Forces, the Haganah. The narrator recalls the atmosphere changing sharply:

The horizon about the wide hill on the eastern shoulder of the field became distorted. Moving, dark shadows rose from the ground and crept everywhere. They were a row of men who had rooted themselves like the scattered teeth of a ghost. The work slowed but did not stop. A machine gun let out a clacking splash of bullets. Horror. In the blink of the eye, the field had a heart attack. Everything froze. The gaze of every farmer was directed at the damned hill. The flares and the squeaking of the bullets wandered aimlessly in every direction. The dust of the harvesting which had arched like beautiful pigtales was smothered by the smoke of the fires. The burned wheat crackled and the hay spread on the land turned into fire and ash.<sup>57</sup>

Naffa’s flowing style, mimetic of the swirling dust, is reduced to sharp bursts, much like the staccato of bullets and crackling flames. Naffa shies away from crafting individual Jewish characters, but he paints the image of the Haganah with a striking blend of the mechanical and the ephemeral, encapsulated in the disorienting image of a ghost’s teeth. He conveys the danger of a mechanized threat that uses guns, flames, and military formations, yet there remains an unknowable element to these forces—spreading shadows

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<sup>56</sup> Naffaa, “The Camel,” in *Three Voices from the Galilee: Selected Fiction from Mohammad Naffaa, Zaki Darwish, and Naji Daher*, ed. and trans. Jamal Assadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 34.

<sup>57</sup> Naffaa, “The Camel,” 34.

across the field—that suggests the Haganah moves quickly, indiscernibly, and thus all the more dangerously.

As the villagers and the narrator try to escape the assault, a bullet strikes Ghadeer, and the narrator describes the camel's death with shocking precision, as it chokes on its own blood. The field continues to burn, and the narrator returns a few days later, now describing the disintegration of the animal's body into the earth. On the blackened ground, fat flows from its wounds and seeps into the soil. The hump slowly shrinks and loses its firmness. The exposed, lacerated flesh turns black. The implication is clear: an organized, armed threat to the land necessarily results in the exaction of a profoundly violent trauma. So much so that it stopped the agricultural routine for the thirty years that have passed.

As much as Naffa' portrays a ruthless violation with variously gendered, ghostly, and mechanical shades, he also uses narrative techniques to restore a sense of hope and resilience. The fact that this story is related as memory is critical. Naffa' uses a shift in the temporal frame—al-Qasim calls it a “jump” in time (*qafaza zamaniyya*)—to craft a link between the 1970s expropriations by Israeli authorities with earlier threats to the land.<sup>58</sup> In this case, he looks back to 1948, though his short story “*Yawm Shāraka al-Ḥarrāthūn fī A'māl al-Thawra*” (The Day the Plowmen Took Part in the Revolution) invokes the Arab Revolt of 1936. Bulus suggests that the link extends even further to the centuries-long rule of the Ottoman Empire and forges a narrative of struggle and belonging with historical roots.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, this depth suggests an intense challenge to Palestinian belonging, confirming that this homeland has long been contested and multivalent. On the other, it highlights the longevity of Palestinian presence

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Qasim, “‘*Kūshān*’ li-Muhammad Naffa’,” 77.

<sup>59</sup> Bulus, “*al-Ard fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad Naffa’*,” 28.

and continuity, however embattled, and paints the expropriators as only fleeting forces. Moreover, Naffa‘ ends “The Camel” and other such tales by personifying the land as looking toward “the new season” (*al-mawsim al-jadīd*) of cropping and reaping.<sup>60</sup> The leap in time is as important as this seasonal temporal setting. The time of harvest becomes not only a vehicle for more detailed, vivid descriptions of village life, but also a trope that implies a quiet persistence; a conviction that there will be more harvesting seasons ahead in the continual practice and the crucial “work” of renewing and cultivating the land.

### A CALL TO ACTION AND THE LIMITS OF DEFENDING THE LAND

Like Imil Habibi, Naffa‘ was active in the Israeli Communist Party from a young age, though the latter’s prime came after his productive period of writing in the 1970s. He represented the youth both regionally and nationally, and he served one term in the Knesset in the early 1990s, followed by three terms as the party’s General Secretary.<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, Naffa‘ infuses his literary work with an interest in the class struggle and at times with a call for collective action. In his stories, this call revolves around threats to the land, and its main hindrance is paradoxically a strict adherence to rural norms, traditions, and beliefs, and the perceived gap between the old norms and the “new generation” (*al-jīl al-jadīd*).

When writing about Naffa‘’s commitment to rising up in the territorial battle, critics use two terms interchangeably: preservation, or “protection of the land” (*muḥāfaẓa ‘alā al-arḍ*) and “defence of the land” (*al-difā‘ ‘an al-arḍ*). Yet a more careful gloss of the terms encapsulates the generational tension. With its connotations of memory and safeguarding, “*muḥāfaẓa ‘alā al-arḍ*” implies a process of upholding local customs and traditions, enshrining and taking pride in the longevity of Palestinian presence in this

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<sup>60</sup> Bulus, “*al-Arḍ fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad Naffa‘*,” 31.

<sup>61</sup> Assadi, *Three Voices from the Galilee*, 8-9.

historic land. “*Al-difā‘ ‘an al-arḍ*” is a more active formulation; the act of pushing back and repelling inheres in the linguistic root. Indeed, the phrase almost suggests taking up arms, as the derivative words “*midfa‘a*” and “*midfa‘iyya*” refer to types of gun, cannon, and artillery. Naffa‘’s work often sits in the space between these terms. His characters itch to shake tired belief systems and rise up in a collective struggle, but at the same time they acknowledge—often through lyrical descriptions—the core value of a grounded, rooted set of social practices best captured in the pastoral setting.

The story “*Taghayyurāt fī Wjihāt al-Naẓr Tujāh Yūsuf al-Ṣadīq*” (Changes of Heart Towards Yusuf al-Sadiq) is an apt example. In this piece, villagers rally around a local landmark when it is threatened by expropriation, and to be re-marked as the tomb of a Jewish figure, Yusuf HaTzadik. The tomb itself is unadorned—“nothing more than a stone”—and yet it becomes a common point of affection for the people of the area. It “entered their daily lives” and represented a unifying symbol.<sup>62</sup> As the story expresses exasperation over the threat to the tomb, where it springs from and why, the site becomes the topos of a class struggle that demands unification. The climax seems to press a quite simple didacticism:

At the beginning of a new phase, thousands stood there, all friends of the land for the defence of the land, and the towns and villages became like one massive friend of every stripe and color. They began not just to talk about resisting but actually to resist. Their words no longer painted the battle. They were a part of it.”<sup>63</sup>

Naffa‘’s language is deceptively straightforward. He plays on the name of the tomb, as the villagers become “friends of the land” (*ṣadīqī al-arḍ*) who are inherently bound to it as well as, in this new stage of collective action, to each other. It also emphasizes a contrast with the Hebrew name. “*Tzadik*” is a Biblical term that refers to one who is

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<sup>62</sup> Muhammad Naffa‘, “*Taghayyurāt fī Wjihāt al-Naẓr Tujāh Yūsuf al-Ṣadīq*” in Muhammad Naffa‘, *Rih al-Shamāl* (Acre: al-Aswar, 1979), 106.

<sup>63</sup> Naffa‘, “*Yūsuf al-Ṣadīq*,” 112.

righteous, good, and giving. From the same root comes the word for charity: “*tzedaka*.” Yet the Arabic “*ṣadīq*” is etymologically related less to righteousness than to truthfulness, belief, and honesty. Naffa’s expropriations couch their claim in terms of devoutness and history, but it is the local people who have truth on their side, such that even this unmarked stone is a symbol worth defending.

To be sure, this collective uprising has an idealized, almost fantastical aspect. The description of village and town coming together as a massive, committed whole is somewhat cosmic in language and proportion. In fairness, however, Naffa’s text seems aware of the drawback. In conceiving of his uprising explicitly as “a *new* phase,” he critiques the ways of the older world. In “*Ḥaydar*,” we find another instance of the young leading the way against “the workings of power,” pushed by their love of the land and a belief in its sanctity.<sup>64</sup> Attachment to the homeland is common between the generations, but the old generation is characterized as politically inactive and steeped in deterministic axioms. The short story “*al-Arḍ Marṣūda bi-Ahlihā*” (The Land is Looked After By Its People) delves into more details about the natures of this system. Here, Naffa’ treats beliefs in sorcery, tricks, and destiny, and again stresses a generational shift by constructing a tale in which the threat of expropriation spurs the people to shed these ideas and to band together, as though expelling some evil from their land.<sup>65</sup> In “The Creaking of the Oak Trees” (*Khafaq al-Sindiyan*), a more internal narrative from the perspective of an individual character, Naffa’ adds to his criticism of traditional beliefs a sense of skepticism about practice and custom, portraying a young man who is struck by pangs of conscience when dispatched to commit an honor killing of his sister, pregnant out of wedlock.

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<sup>64</sup> Bulus, “*al-Arḍ fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad Naffa’*,” 45.

<sup>65</sup> Bulus, “*al-Arḍ fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad Naffa’*,” 47.

Mahmoud Ghanayim is critical of “*Khafaq al-Sindiyan*” in quite strong terms, concluding that the literary-minded reader is interested not just in the subject at hand but in how it is expressed technically and artistically. He concludes that Naffa‘ is often of greater use to the anthropologist or sociologist, than to the scholar of literature.<sup>66</sup> In Anna Bernard’s terms, this hints at a “reader-response understanding” in which literature is treated only as a kind of cultural access point.<sup>67</sup> It is certainly the case that Naffa‘ at times stands behind hackneyed images of the rise of his proletariat. Yet to some extent his stories are evoking a modernist tension commonly mediated in the cultural realm. Across these examples, characters do not disagree about their devotion to the land or even the importance in particular of the rural environment. The tension emerges in whether—and how—to appropriate the best aspects of the old and to adapt them to rapidly changing circumstances and challenges. Bulus elaborates in bold language:

Defending the land and resisting expropriation in all its forms comprise an incentive to discard the old, and to discard the agents of power... In order to preserve the land, and in order to stay on the land of the nation, there must be cooperation and unification, breaking the ancient, obsolete barriers and following new political and social principles.”<sup>68</sup>

This conflict and its harsh attitude towards the rural hinterland hit a personal nerve: Naffa‘ grew up in a remote farming community whose ways he undeniably cherishes in his writing. He is also, however, a modern communist politician, torn between these two realms.<sup>69</sup> If the didactic image of surging crowds leaves something to be desired aesthetically, it is at least in part because Naffa‘’s political career and his writing were embroiled in this fundamental dilemma: how to drive forward while remaining grounded and reverent towards historical tradition and belonging; how to break tradition and yet guard it for national posterity.

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<sup>66</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa‘b*, 193.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Bulus, “*al-Ard fī Qiṣaṣ Muhammad Naffa‘*,” 43.

<sup>69</sup> Jubran, “The Village,” 191.

With these various stories of mass uprising, Naffa' embodies the literature and politics of mobilization and the workers' struggle. Most critics, though, are unable to throw their full weight behind him, offering harsher criticism than, for example, they aim at the work of Muhammad 'Ali Taha, who is not innocent of straying into clichés. Bulus is the most lenient, pointing out Naffa's insistence on "planting slogans" into his short stories but couching his critique in the language of forgiveness, as though giving a friend a free pass. Others place their critique instead at the nexus between language and localization. Al-Qasim calls Naffa' a "prisoner" of the village environment, uncomfortable and unsuccessful writing beyond it.<sup>70</sup> Jubran notes that the heavy village colloquial is a frustration for the reader and a virtually insurmountable barrier for the translator.<sup>71</sup> Ghanayim bemoans Naffa's interest in the local, suggesting that, while some aspects of his depictions are artistically and technically solid, in most cases "this insistence on the local village reflects negatively on the artistic aspect."<sup>72</sup> The most striking element of these criticisms of language and the local is that they place a premium on comprehensibility. Implicitly, Ghanayim and Jubran point to a paradox: Naffa' conjures a scene of the collective, yet he writes with a narrative voice that is not readily accessible to all across the landscape.

I would suggest, in contrast, that this alleged weakness offers two crucial messages in the Palestinian Arab cultural sphere in Israel. The first of these is firmly literary. The hyperlocal atmosphere, at the expense of full clarity, conveys that there is something unknowable and perhaps inaccessible in the historical and social connection that his farmer characters develop with their lands. Indeed, as a spiritual and mystical core, as well as the material one that gives sustenance to the village communities, it

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<sup>70</sup> Al-Qasim, "Kūshān' li-Muhammad Naffa'," 71.

<sup>71</sup> Jubran, "The Village," 186.

<sup>72</sup> Ghanayim, *al-Madār al-Ṣa'b*, 192.

seems only fitting that the land evokes its own enigmas and secrets. Ironically, Naffa's short-circuiting of the general reader's understanding form not just his own tribute to a particular swath of northern Israel, but in a universal sense to a wonderfully unfathomable homeland that needs continually to be worked. Naffa's rejoinder to Ghanayim might be to suggest that, were the land entirely comprehensible, it would be a less intriguing symbol and a less enchanting communal substrate.

The second aspect of Naffa's perhaps unintentional contribution is more sociopolitical. In his story "*Jihāz al-'Arūs*" (The Dowry), Naffa embodies a female voice in order to criticize local leaders for their spinelessness. Here, however, the objection is not only built on weakness in the face of Israeli expropriation, but also on the unwillingness to resist the Israeli authorities' on the issue of conscripting youth into the army. Indeed, the eponymous bride finds this weakness even worse than a failure to respond to expropriation. This is no small detail, since it singles Naffa out as belonging to a very particular community within Israel: the Druze.

Uniquely among Israel's non-Jewish population, the Druze are subject to mandatory service in the Israel Defence Forces and have long been considered as a group apart from the Palestinian Arab mainstream. Though the Druze sect is an offshoot of Shi'a Islam, Israelis have attempted to distance the community from this association. This even occurs in the academy: a piece by Aharon Layish from 1976, the same year as Land Day, discusses Islamic family structure and looks to distinguish that of the Druze as separate and, by implication, of greater promise in terms of cooperation within the Israeli state.<sup>73</sup> Although Naffa himself was a conscientious objector in his youth, there is some weight to the state's distinction. Whereas many Palestinian Arabs decreasingly self-

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<sup>73</sup> Aharon Layish, "The Status of Islam in the Druze Family in Israel," *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash*, Vol. 26, nos. 3-4, 1976, 149-161. [Hebrew]

identify with a term that includes “Israel” or “Israeli,” a significant number of Druze do consider themselves “Israeli Druze.” Even among those who do not adopt the Israeli identifier, very few self-identify as “Palestinian.”<sup>74</sup> And while a town like Sakhnin boasts a memorial to the Arab victims of Land Day, the largest Druze village, Daliyat al-Karmel, contains a monument to soldiers who have served in the IDF. In fact, Israel’s first monument to include the Arab population, erected in 1974 in the cemetery of the Druze town Hurfeish, was also built in honor of “Arab warriors” who had fought for Israel.<sup>75</sup>

This brief moment in “*Jihāz al-‘Arūs*” reminds us that—for all the ringing calls to a collective revolution—there is important heterogeneity within the Palestinian Arab minority. And precisely because it may be irksome to some critics, Naffa’s particularist approach in portraying the Druze environment of Beit Jann, and in doing so with a local linguistic flair, is both his greatest literary asset and the source of a central ambivalence. As Naffa casts light on the value of land and heritage, he also betrays the limitations of advocating a universal solidarity and uprising. Just as some words may be difficult to comprehend for the non-local reader, so some social and political battles are unique from one village to the next.

#### **HANNA IBRAHIM: THE ALTERNATIVE CHARACTERS AND SPACES OF EXPROPRIATION**

The remainder of this chapter discusses Hanna Ibrahim, since his response to expropriations and Land Day offers an important foil to Naffa’s didactic particularism. Moreover, if Naffa’s work is lacking in one serious respect, it is in the realm of character. Ibrahim’s contribution to the literary mediation of the land at risk is to depict Jewish characters with nuance and even sympathy. Contrasting their work highlights the intricacies that fiction brings to a torrid phase of expropriations, combining an emphasis

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<sup>74</sup> Sorek, “Cautious Commemoration,” 341.

<sup>75</sup> Sorek, “Cautious Commemoration,” 341.

on land, practice, violence, and the generation gap with an interest in exploring Jewish actors in Israeli society and considering the disadvantages of a grassroots insurrection.

Part of Ibrahim's moderation, in comparison with Naffa's political drive, comes from a contrasting personal background, as both an elder statesman of Arab literati in Israel and as a quieter political figure. He was born in 1927 in the village of al-Ba'na in the Western Galilee. He went to high school in Acre and joined the Palestine police force in 1945. In 1947, he joined the League of National Liberation that had agreed to the principle of partition after the 1947 UN plan. In the years after 1948, Ibrahim was left on a lower socioeconomic rung and supported himself through different forms of construction work, even laboring in quarries as a "stone-cutter," until 1969.<sup>76</sup> Through his writing, he rose to become director of the *al-Ittihad* publishing house in Haifa, and in 1974 took up a position as editor of the famed Communist newspaper of the same name, which he served until 1978. He also became more involved in local politics, serving al-Ba'na as a local councilman and later joining Israel's first all-Arab political party, the Arab Democratic Party, in 1989. Not rising into the ranks of the Knesset, and refraining from heated national moralizing in the vein of Naffa' or Muhammad 'Ali Taha, Ibrahim has operated at a more restrained tier of political and cultural prominence in Israel.

Ibrahim began writing short stories in the 1950s and consolidated his work in three anthologies, all published in the 1970s. Like Taha's most recent works mentioned in Chapter Three, Ibrahim's titles betray the importance of the land to his oeuvre: *Azhār Barriyya* (Wild Flowers) stresses a raw natural aspect of Palestine, while *Rīḥat al-Waṭan* (The Smell of the Homeland) suggests its powerful sensory evocations. Beyond short fiction, Ibrahim wrote a volume of poetry entitled *Ṣawt min al-Shāghūr* (A Voice from

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<sup>76</sup> Jamal Assadi, ed. and trans., *Father and Son: Selected Short Fiction by Hanna Ibrahim Elias and Mohammad Ali Saied* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 3.

Shagur), as if crying out from his home region, as well as a biography of Hanna Naqara, “the people’s lawyer” who defended Arab citizens in land-related legal cases and was a well-known advocate for the territorial rights of the local Arab population.

Ibrahim’s most careful response to the problem of expropriations comes shortly after the turbulence of the 1970s, with a story set in late 1982 story entitled “Fathers and Sons.” The story revolves around a Jewish land administrator, Yitzchak Goodman, and a contractor named Ma’ruf whom Goodman has employed to design a new settlement and to build a house for Goodman himself. He then receives two letters: one from Ma’ruf inviting him to an annual gathering, the other conscripting him from the reserves into active duty in Lebanon. In a free indirect style, Ibrahim has Goodman remember his own father, an arch-Zionist who spouts extremist views in his old age. He attends Ma’ruf’s event, at which the latter’s brother gives an uncomfortable speech that tackles expropriation head-on. Goodman wonders about giving the land back as a gesture of reparation, but without further development he deploys to Lebanon and is killed in action.

Unlike Naffa’, Ibrahim does not engage in elaborate descriptions of the land. Minor details instead suffice to suggest the contrast in familiarity between Goodman and Ma’ruf. Goodman believes the hilly spot to be grand and promising, and he projects imagination onto the “stretches of plain land, valleys, hills and slopes in all directions” to see wooded areas of pine and oak, red-roofed cottages, and swimming pools in the dugouts created by quarrying.<sup>77</sup> The Jewish engineer’s vision is ambitious and expansive, and—however ambivalently—Ma’ruf gives Goodman credit for his commitment to work and community. He himself, though, knows the contours of the land better, noting

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<sup>77</sup> Hanna Ibrahim, “Fathers and Sons,” in *Father and Son: Selected Short Fiction by Hanna Ibrahim Elias and Mohammad Ali Saied*, ed. and trans. Jamal Assadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 54. The detail of the red roofs is noteworthy, since it has become the signature of Israeli settlements in the West Bank: if surveying the territory from a distance or aerially, Jewish areas are often marked out by this palette.

mentally that the land is “on top of the hill, limy, and had no agricultural merits.”<sup>78</sup> His name reiterates the bond: “*ma‘rūf*” has connotations of being known, recognized, and acknowledged in positive terms. The land implicitly knows the contractor just as he recognizes its natural features. Moreover, Ma‘ruf has an intrinsically modest and tangible grasp of the land: a lone carob tree in the plain reminds him of his personal status as an orphan. The landscape quietly echoes his isolation, as the carob embodies the problem of a quite literally rooted belonging that is at once firm in its place and also marginalized into solitude. A retired policeman steps out of a house nearby, which reminds Ma‘ruf of a more brazen marginalization: part of his father’s land was seized by this very sergeant, who contracted Arab laborers to build his house and subsequently refused to pay them appropriately. Like Tuan’s old armchair, as discussed in the introduction, the carob tree represents a sentiment of “place” imbued into a single object. It opens up a world of meanings for Ma‘ruf, some painful rather than affective, in contrast to the representation of the territory as a blank slate for the imagination of an engineer with a technical and professional, if not a deep personal attachment to it.

As the two protagonists part ways, Goodman suggests he may not be able to attend Ma‘ruf’s gathering since his father is ill. Ibrahim introduces this character through Goodman’s eyes as a die-hard Zionist of the old guard, who delights in tales of running Palestinian Arabs off the land in the 1948 War. If the actions of the government are seen in Naffa’s work as ruthless, clinically organized, and widespread, Goodman’s father somehow finds the expropriations unsatisfactory, a sign of softening in the young Israeli generation. Ibrahim’s depiction is crude, but there is greater complexity in Goodman’s response:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibrahim, “Fathers and Sons,” 56.

He [Goodman's father] became a source of harassment to his child and his daughter-in-law, who both did not know how to apologize to their visitors for the old man's misbehavior. What added insult to injury was that the old man, who upon retiring was a major in the army, didn't want to accept orders from civilians, even in his own family. Medical treatment had a negative effect on him. He was distanced from reality to his past memories, which he narrated in detail, focusing on massacres he had heard about or taken active part in during what is called here the National Liberation War.<sup>79</sup>

Goodman sees his own father in difficult and embarrassing terms. His recollection is littered with phrases that establish his discomfort and ambivalence regarding these personal roots: harassment, adding insult to injury, and apologizing for his father's behavior. There is even some desperation in that medical treatment only sharpens his father's unpalatable senses. Here is a protagonist, then, who should be the embodiment of a cold, efficient operation of expropriations and land development in the Galilee, and yet Ibrahim allows Goodman to distance himself from that hardened, stereotypical outlook. His unwillingness to emulate his father emerges again in the light of his own impending service. Goodman not only fears his deployment to Lebanon, but also believes the whole operation unnecessary.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, many in the Israeli public echoed this sentiment at the time, as the 1982 massacres in the southern Lebanese Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila brought unprecedented local criticism of the Israeli army and tarnished its previously glittering reputation.<sup>81</sup>

Ibrahim's strategy here is significant. He creates an uncommon degree of complexity in a Jewish protagonist, but he does so partly by means of an unforgiving, almost crazed hardliner. In this way, Ibrahim does not negate the harshest facets of territorial contestation. Interestingly, though, he does the same with Ma'ruf. At the annual gathering, Ma'ruf's brother Musa breaks the careful, celebratory tact of the evening's

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<sup>79</sup> Ibrahim, "Fathers and Sons," 56.

<sup>80</sup> Ibrahim, "Fathers and Sons," 58.

<sup>81</sup> I will discuss Lebanon in greater detail in Chapter Five, as Zaki Darwish explores Lebanon through the lens of transnational Palestinian identities and the problems of negotiating and crossing borders.

discussions with an improvised, and again rather crude rant about expropriations. He criticizes the Israelis present for indifference, denying Palestinian Arabs basic rights, and being complicit in a state-run assault against the Arab minority. He closes by addressing Goodman, acidly noting that he is enlisting Ma‘ruf to build a villa on the very land that his father had lost three decades prior.<sup>82</sup>

To further Musa’s marginality, he also becomes a lens for the character of Goodman’s wife. After Musa’s outburst, she expresses her sorrow to him at his family’s losses, as well as at the loss of his father, who evidently died in one of the events recalled by the older Goodman. It is only a brief snapshot of Goodman’s wife, but it is full of sympathy and a redemptive interest in engaging with Musa’s personal history in spite of his unforgiving words against her community and her husband. This image is far from a stereotypical depiction, as used by Nizar Qabbani and Khalil Hanna Tadrus among others, of the Jewish woman as “a promiscuous, unfaithful soldier.”<sup>83</sup>

Ibrahim’s inclusion of Jewish characters is not itself unique, but rather his range, balance, and narrative perspective. The depiction of Jews in Palestinian literature doubtless includes crude stereotypes, but it has a checkered history. Before 1948, the Jew was a unanimously negative figure: cowardly, deceptive, and using women as a lascivious tool for political goals.<sup>84</sup> The negativity sharpened in the 1920s when Zionism became a “serious force,” and some images began to draw on contemporary European anti-Semitism and its characterization of the Jew as sub-human, often a fearful creature like a snake or a spider.<sup>85</sup> After the rupture of 1948, there was a notable shift. While writers like Kanafani, from the Palestinian diaspora, sometimes held on to certain

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<sup>82</sup> Ibrahim, “Fathers and Sons,” 59.

<sup>83</sup> Reuven Snir, “The Image of the Jew in Modern Arabic Culture,” *Moznaim*, January 1995, 33. [Hebrew]

<sup>84</sup> ‘Adil al-Usta, *al-Yahūd fī al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī Bayna 1913-1987* (Nablus: Ittihad al-Kuttab al-Filastiniyyin, 1992), 161.

<sup>85</sup> Snir, “The Image of the Jew,” 33.

stereotypes, there were a handful of more neutral, even positive depictions that emerged among Arab writers within Israel. Two decades later, after 1967, critical portrayals reemerged locally, offering Jewish characters most frequently as vindictive figures of a foreign (that is, Zionist) authority. Even Habibi, though he did not emphasize this foreignness, tended towards “cruel, stupid, and prejudiced Jewish characters.”<sup>86</sup>

On the one hand, demonizing images have thus persisted—writing in 1995, Snir argues that “the Arabic literary system has not yet freed itself of a stereotypical attitude towards Jews.”<sup>87</sup> Yet Palestinian writers, especially within Israel, have often evoked different shades. Snir notes the irony here that “those who have suffered more than any other Arab nation from the Arab-Jewish conflict, have produced poets and writers who contend with a depiction of the Jew and with Jewish-Arab relations in the most authentic and balanced way.”<sup>88</sup>

Al-Usta and Ghanayim disagree on the dynamics at play in this uneven trajectory. The former argues that, after 1948 and more sharply after 1967, perhaps spurred on by communist politics and a growing acceptance of living in proximity to Jewish people within a single state, writers abandoned the binary vision of “Jewish and non-Jewish.” Al-Usta effectively replaces this outlook with another binary—“Zionist and victim of Zionism”—that makes room for sympathizing with Jewish characters at the mercy of their own national system. Al-Usta attributes more positive Jewish characters to the notion that, while the Zionist enterprise is for many “a racist movement that caused the tragedy of the Arabs of Palestine,” not all Israelis fall under its ideological spell.<sup>89</sup>

Ghanayim is somewhat more cynical. He suggests that the shift in the 1950s and 1960s is linked to the military government. Writers had to dodge or mollify censors in

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<sup>86</sup> Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 118.

<sup>87</sup> Snir, “The Image of the Jew,” 34.

<sup>88</sup> Snir, “The Image of the Jew,” 34.

<sup>89</sup> Al-Usta, *al-Yahūd fī al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī*, 161-164.

order to have their work published and to avoid retribution. After 1967, in an atmosphere of greater civic freedoms, the negative images could return in new forms: the employer and the landlord as authority figures, as well as the policeman and soldier.<sup>90</sup> Yet Ghanayim primarily contends that Palestinian writers in Israel were less concerned at this point with Jewish characters. Arguing that they were more interested in entering cultural circles in the Arab world, Ghanayim sees “indifference” as the dominant sentiment in treating “the Jewish presence in Israel,” giving rise to characters only “in a superficial manner in accordance with certain common preconceived notions.”<sup>91</sup>

If Ibrahim is not alone in conjuring Jewish figures, then, he stands out nevertheless for trying to engage their viewpoints via his free indirect narrative voice, refuting historical binaries, and working with a multiplicity of characters. To be sure, there is some gaucheness in “Fathers and Sons” as it constructs complexity of character to an extent by triangulation with paragons of extremism. Its plot moves, as a result, with a stilted rhythm. Yet the story is uniquely powerful in its attitude to expropriation and the contentious issue of the land. In a public sphere saturated with superficial portrayals, though admittedly not exclusively negative, Ibrahim is interested both in a more complex Jewish persona and in the possibilities for “mutually constitutive impact” with an Arab protagonist. In portraying both the engineer and the contractor in a moderate light, Ibrahim strives for interpersonal dynamics that are enriched by the unavoidable proximity of Israeli and Palestinian societies.<sup>92</sup> Ibrahim takes this “peculiar” or even “incestuous intimacy,” to use Suleri’s and Cleary’s formulations, and makes it productive.<sup>93</sup> As they

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<sup>90</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 130-136. Ghanayim draws on a range of writers for these post-1967 depictions, briefly from Imil Habibi and Muhammad ‘Ali Taha but predominantly from Riyadh Baydas, whose literature gains prominence in the late 1980s.

<sup>91</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies*, 7.

<sup>93</sup> Cited in Ashcroft et. al, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 183-184. Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 57.

both drift from rigid ideological poles, Goodman and Ma‘ruf meet in the middle ground. They try to forge a space for social and professional interaction while remaining keenly aware of the distance that remains between them, as well as the difficulties of moving into this zone from the clashing margins.

Ibrahim’s conclusion is more poignant in the context of this uncertain middle ground. Goodman resolves quietly to give the land back to Ma‘ruf and Musa, but he tells no one—not even his wife—and is promptly killed by a landmine when he deploys to Lebanon. The story ends by noting Ma‘ruf’s grief, though not without a backhanded word on the decency of this man by way of an office janitor: “As if he were not a Jew!”<sup>94</sup> Ibrahim again places the crude beside the complex, and he thwarts a gesture of penance by holding it within Goodman. Stereotypical flashes aside, there are layered, ambivalent sympathies in this story from Jewish and Palestinian Israelis alike, and the conclusion offers a neat, albeit gloomy irony: the conciliatory plan is buried in the land itself with, of all people, the Jewish engineer sent to work on confiscated ground.

In further contrast to Naffa’—and countering Ghanayim’s assertion of “indifference” as the prevailing attitude of Arab writers towards Jewish figures—Ibrahim has an established history of working from the perspective of Jewish characters around the theme of the land. He is perhaps best known for his story “*Mutasallilūn*” (Infiltrators), written first in the 1950s and republished in 1972 in his first anthology, *Azhār Barriyya*. Here, Ibrahim tells the story of a Jewish woman, Sarah. Sitting on the bed with an evening newspaper and reading reports about infiltrators returning from exile and attacking homes, she hears a knock at the door. Sarah opens to find an older Arab man with a younger woman and her infant child. Initially caught off guard, she invites them into her home, feeds and clothes them, and listens to their story before they set out again.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibrahim, “Fathers and Sons,” 60.

The following morning, Sarah is called over by a passerby on her way to work and told that two infiltrators were killed in their area. She walks to the site to find the man and woman, but no child. She impulsively blurts out, “Where is the baby?” and then covers her knowledge by noting that the woman is nursing. That night, Sarah’s husband Shmuel comes home, but she keeps the story to herself. “*Mutasallilūn*” ends as dark and stormy weather cloaks the house. Sarah resolves to keep this incident to herself and to stop reading the evening newspaper.

By far the most notable aspect of this story is the measured use of a Jewish woman as protagonist. With the opening, Ibrahim uses sympathetic background to construct a threatening stormy atmosphere:

Sarah looked at her watch with concern and looked at the overcast sky. Grey clouds rose from the western horizon as though they were rising from a steaming cauldron. A cool wind descended and the last leaves fell from the fig tree that stood next to the house. It was late for Shmuel to have come home.<sup>95</sup>

The landscape itself seems to assault Sarah. The clouds gather ominously, and the tree outside sheds its leaves to the wind, as opposed to standing tall and sturdy. As the rain begins to fall, Sarah shivers from the cold and waits anxiously for her husband to return. A car arrives and a policeman comes to the door, handing Sarah a newspaper and informing her that her husband will in fact be away for the whole night. Ibrahim thus creates a thoroughly unforgiving atmosphere for Sarah—she senses that this is the first time in her married life that she is truly miserable—and adds to it a threatening headline in the Hebrew paper: “Infiltrators break into a house in Kfar Yahu and kill...”<sup>96</sup> The headline is harsh but the image is poignant nevertheless. Sarah cannot complete the

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<sup>95</sup> Hanna Ibrahim, “*Mutasallilūn*,” in Hanna Ibrahim, *Azhār Barriyya* (Beit Berl: Dar al-Nashr al-Arabi, 2000), 72. In this instance Assadi’s translation can be misleading, suggesting a “hut” rather than a modest, built home, and glossing the sky as “ghastly” rather than rendering a more involved sense of the gathering storm, as is the original focus.

<sup>96</sup> Ibrahim, “*Mutasallilūn*,” 72.

headline and, since raindrops have stained the page, she wipes them away before reading, as if smudging the text and dissolving its callous message.

The paper's term "infiltrators" requires some attention. In Arabic, "*mutasallilūn*" suggests an act of penetration and permeation but the term is not used with a malicious edge.<sup>97</sup> That is, the "*mutasallil*" was a figure sneaking back into Israel/Palestine simply to return to a lost home. Indeed, some words deriving from the same linguistic root connote family connections: "*sulāla*" refers to a lineage or line of ancestry. There is also a range of terms to capture those more brazen kinds of infiltration back into Israel. If not "*mutasallil*," it has been the terms "*muqāwama*" (resistance), "*niḍāl*" (struggle), and in particular "*fidā'ī*" (a commando, or a freedom fighter) that have called up images of a militant returnee with an interest in penetrating Israel to strategic or even violent ends.

In Hebrew, perhaps predictably, the word and its usage come somewhat closer to these sinister meanings. As a legal term, "*mistanenim*" was defined well after 1948. Shira Robinson points out that the state had not defined the term explicitly in its 1952 laws concerning citizenship. In the years of military rule, a definition emerged that had sweeping breadth: an infiltrator would be "a person who has entered Israel knowingly and unlawfully," a person who was a national of any of the Arab states that had declared war on Israel in 1948 (this includes all of Israel's direct neighbors), or even someone who had merely visited these areas, or had "left his ordinary place of residence in an area which has become a part of Israel for a place outside Israel."<sup>98</sup> Apart from internally displaced Palestinians who had fled, for example, from a village in the Galilee to the urban center of Nazareth, the term therefore encompasses any Palestinian returning from anywhere outside of Israel. It was used widely in government and media publications as a standard

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<sup>97</sup> Assadi also misses the mark here with the more aggressive translation of "Intruders."

<sup>98</sup> Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 248.

term and, despite a broad and technical legal definition, the word helped to focus on the act of returning secretly over land. Etymologically, it derives from “*lesanen*,” which means to filter or sift through. “*Mistanenim*” is intrinsically concerned with the porosity of borders on the ground.

If both “*mutasallil*” and “*mistanen*” imply borders, there is nevertheless an important conceptual distinction. The former connotes a struggle with the existence of borders and a desire to break them down. Indeed, it is the imposition of a border that creates the figure of the “*mutasallil*” and carves geopolitical cleavages into the Palestinian national landscape. With no borders, there is no need for infiltration. Conversely, for the Israeli government viewing the “*mistanen*” as a threat, the term springs from a desire to maintain established boundaries, and to project acts of return and infiltration as violations. The discord between these terms is fundamental: having borders on the one hand, having no borders on the other. Despite corresponding literal meanings, the terms’ origins at this theoretical level are diametrically opposed.

Importantly, this binary precludes a comparison with the Jewish nation’s own history of infiltration. In 1939, in response to the populist Arab Revolt and on the eve of World War II, the British sought to limit Jewish immigration, capping it at 75,000 over five years and closing the borders thereafter. Yet over the next decade, the Haganah assiduously used ships to pierce the British barricade on the Mediterranean and to smuggle in European immigrants. Jewish immigrants to Israel/Palestine have long been termed “*olim*,” deriving from a Biblical word that means ascending, or rising up, and giving Zionist immigration both religious and nationalist tones. These secret immigrants, though, are neither “*olim*” nor “*mistanenim*.” They are known instead as “*ma’apilim*,” which also has connotations of rising up, but in a more literal sense of being daring and

brave. The noun “*ha’apala*” is also the word for mountaineering; the adjective “*ma’apil*” is common parlance for someone audacious.

In Haifa, the Ministry of Defence sponsors a museum to this era of “*ha’apala*,” which is translated as “clandestine” rather than “illegal” immigration, though the acts were evidently illegal under the laws of the British Mandate. The Clandestine Immigration and Naval Museum includes some of the vessels, beached in the museum’s courtyard, in which immigrants were concealed in the hull or various secret compartments. A significant part of the museum, with displays of documents, photographs, uniforms, and naval instruments, is itself a ship that smuggled over four hundred Jews into Palestine in the 1940s. Here is a national monument that celebrates acts of infiltration during the British Mandate. Indeed, it binds a narrative of Jewish infiltration to that of the Israeli navy, enveloping both in the history of how Israel developed a particular branch of its renowned, technologically advanced military. The museum’s title and the inspiring edge to the term “*ha’apala*” therefore chip away at an ambivalent history. That these Jews were “illegal immigrants” to the British authorities matters less than that they were courageous barricade-breakers to the Zionist leadership.

It is precisely these complexities in the notion of the infiltrator that Ibrahim manipulates, as Sarah responds with sensitivity to the Palestinian Arab family at the entrance to her home. A measure of alertness notwithstanding—she is holding a pistol as she opens the door—Sarah invites the family inside and is sympathetically observant. By the sound of the old man removing his shoes, she perceives that they are waterlogged. She notices his knees shiver. She wonders whether the droplets on his face are tears or rainwater.<sup>99</sup> Sarah quickly tosses the gun aside and offers the family fresh clothes, a

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<sup>99</sup> Ibrahim, “*Mutasallilūn*,” 74.

heater, food, and tea, overturning (like Goodman's wife) a stereotype of expedient, deceptive, or cold attitudes towards the Arab population.

The most remarkable aspect of Sarah's response is her willingness to listen. Rather than turf the family outdoors into the rain and darkness, she hears their harrowing story of being expelled in 1948, losing wife and mother, and returning to Israel once only to be discovered by authorities and deported. In accepting and sympathizing with the story, Sarah shows an uncommon openness to a Palestinian narrative of the *Nakba* and its aftermath. The conversation also takes place in Arabic rather than Hebrew, identifying Sarah as a Jewish immigrant with roots in the Arab world, one of the quarter of a million Jews who flocked to Israel after 1948 from countries including Iraq, Yemen, and Morocco. It is a distinction that serves as a reminder of the internal diversity of Israel's Jewish population in ethnic and linguistic terms, even though this population—and likely Sarah herself—have since 1948 distanced themselves from the Arabic language.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, it remains important that Ibrahim departs from a literary norm in which Jewish characters come from the Eastern European Ashkenazi community, the wellspring of Zionism and still the core of Israel's sociopolitical elite.<sup>101</sup> Since the “clandestine immigrants” hailed from European countries, this detail shores up the sense that Sarah is a post-1948 arrival: an “*olah*” rather than a “*ma'apila*” and certainly not a “*mistanenet*.” Though not a part of Israel's own history of infiltration, Sarah shows great sensitivity towards a Palestinian narrative of return. Ibrahim uses the character's sympathy and perspective to problematize the state's outlook on its borders. Sarah blurs the distinctions that the state has established between rightful, courageous Jewish acts of return, and insidious Palestinian attempts to do the same.

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<sup>100</sup> For a discussion of “Arabic as a Jewish language in Israel,” see Suleiman, *A War of Words*, 153-159.

<sup>101</sup> Snir, “The Image of the Jew,” 33.

Once the family has left Sarah's home, a grim ending seems inevitable, and indeed Sarah is distraught when she is called over to see the two bodies (the baby is missing) in the field. Again, the weather rages at the end of the story, although here it seems to represent an internal state of turmoil. Albeit in dark circumstances, the landscape mirrors Sarah more than it assaults and frightens her. Yet Ibrahim again offers an ambivalent conclusion that, as with Yitzchak Goodman, carries critical as well as sympathetic tones. Sarah refuses to discuss her trauma and resolves never to read the evening newspaper. Ibrahim suggests a newfound insularity, a turning inward away from the suffering of the conflict around her. On the one hand, Ibrahim has taken a bold step in approaching the issue of crossing back into Israel not through the lens of a difficult journey narrative, as Zaki Darwish would do in 1983, but from the perspective of an unexpectedly compassionate Jewish character. On the other hand, Sarah's story, like Goodman's redemptive idea to return the land to Ma'ruf, will remain her own. And without Sarah's input, the infiltrators are denied their narrative and are destined instead to be part of the entrenched outlook that crafts threatening newspaper headlines and casts these infiltrators only as dangerous "*mistanenim*" or Palestinian "*fidā'iyyūn*."<sup>102</sup>

Ibrahim's unique, ambivalent portrayals of expropriation and infiltration also extend to a handful of stories that, in the heat of the mid-1970s, address Land Day directly. In a set of short vignettes entitled *Ṣuwar min Yawm al-Arḍ* (Pictures of Land Day), Ibrahim gives characteristically balanced snapshots of Land Day that favor built, vernacular spaces over depictions of protests in the agricultural heartland. Though these vignettes are free of multifaceted Jewish characters, they nevertheless continue to inject nuance into the textual legacy of land confiscations by exploring smaller acts of

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Milshtein suggests that this shift in framing is a common end to narratives about the figure of the infiltrator. Milshtein, "Memory 'from Below': Palestinian Society and the Nakba Memory," in *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, ed. Meir Litvak (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 81.

resistance, the enshrining of March 30 into cultural memory, and the potential repercussions of protest.

Two stories in particular achieve this diverse, measured approach. “*Hīna Lam Ta‘udd al-Mar’a al-‘Arabiyya Dil’an Qāşiran*” (When the Arab Woman No Longer Played a Minor Role) relates the story of Umm Mustafa, a woman whose house is surrounded by Israeli forces, and who enacts her own protest within the home, knocking down the first soldier to enter and causing the troops to back a retreat. Ibrahim’s use of geography in this story is shrewd. The tale opens with the sunrise, described sneaking through the window of the house as “*mutasallil*.”<sup>103</sup> With the profound resonance of this word, Ibrahim casts infiltrators in a commendable light. The sunrise implies that not only is there great hope in their acts, crossing back into the homeland at serious personal risk, but also that the phenomenon is natural and enduring. Just as the sun will rise, so Palestinians will continue quietly to sift through the borders on their way home. He also has the protagonist, an older woman, think back to the early days of her married life, when she and her husband attempted to go to Acre but were stopped, harassed, and sent back to Sakhnin because they did not have permits. With this contextual detail, Ibrahim establishes historical continuity that ties the constriction of movement in the 1950s and 1960s with the present-day challenges of expropriation. Sakhnin was the heart of the Area 9 protests, witnessing three of the six deaths that occurred on March 30, 1976. Ibrahim conveys the town with an arc of steadfastness that grapples with different impositions and spans the life of the Israeli state.

In Umm Mustafa’s act of resistance, knocking down a soldier as he enters her home, Ibrahim then mobilizes the land actively. The soldier does not fall *to* the ground.

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<sup>103</sup> Hanna Ibrahim, “*Hīna Lam Ta‘udd al-Mar’a al-‘Arabiyya Dil’an Qāşiran*,” in Hanna Ibrahim, *Azhār Barriyya* (Beit Berl: Dar al-Nashr al-Arabi, 2000), 167.

Rather, “the ground rose up to his face” and pushes his entire group back.<sup>104</sup> The joining of forces adds rich, natural gravitas to the woman’s actions. As the title of the story suggests, this moment is concerned with foregrounding the role that women play in the defence of the land, but it also serves to give rhetorical weight to these private acts of strength that take place behind closed doors.

The remainder of the story takes on a metatextual dimension around what Umm Mustafa would say when later asked to tell the story. Interestingly, her future narrative does not narrate the event in much detail. Rather, it extols the virtues of consciously committing to the defence of the land, working the soil in spite of court orders, and defying the authorities by marching from the police station straight back to the fields. The story closes with four couplets that rally around Area 9 as a whole, address Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin directly, and praise “the lawyer of the land” Hanna Naqara.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps unwittingly, Ibrahim presents the extrapolation onto a broader regional scale as a double-edged sword. Umm Mustafa gains a place in the canon of protest and becomes an icon of the principled stand against injustice. In doing so, however, she sheds the private and familial history that is so important to her act of courage. Her narrative risks being subsumed into a world of axiomatic slogans.

If Umm Mustafa is both a source of pride and a cautionary tale against the flattening effects of national memory, another narrative from this short series offers a glimpse into the more palpable kinds of risk associated with protest. The story “*Ka-l-Jism al-Salīm Idhā Shakā Minhu ‘Uḍw Tadā‘at Lahu Sā’ir al-A‘ḍā*” (The Healthy Body, If a Limb Complains of Illness, the Other Limbs Come to its Aid) revolves around a young man who is imprisoned after taking part in the Land Day protests. Like the second half of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibrahim, “*al-Mar’a al-‘Arabiyya*,” 168.

<sup>105</sup> Ibrahim, “*al-Mar’a al-‘Arabiyya*,” 169.

Habibi's sixth vignette in *Sudāsiyya*, the story is spatially confined to the prison and focuses on the attempts to grasp a sense of belonging and heritage from within its cold, dark cells.

Whereas Habibi employs letter-writing and older family memories to construct the prison as a space of censorship and constriction, Ibrahim focuses on the problems that have prompted the prison sentence in the first place. Here, Ibrahim merges pride in protest with a measure of concern about embracing the cause uncritically. The protagonist enters the prison wounded and is treated by its staff. He appropriates his head bandages as a badge of honor and status, suggesting that they make him resemble a dignified *shaykh* of the area. He thinks about all the locations where protests took place on March 30, logging them carefully in his mind as if part of an official record and to ensure that no casualties are forgotten.<sup>106</sup> He hears other prisoners chanting the Qur'an to themselves at night, and he speaks with a fellow prisoner about the importance of their acts. There is certainly commitment and confidence in the prison. Prisoners keep their resolve and chant the popular slogan, "Land of the Galilee, with our souls we redeem you" (*Bi-arwāḥinā nufaddīk yā turāb al-Jalīl*), giving the sense that no force in prison can silence them.<sup>107</sup> And yet there is no affirmative, didactic conclusion to match this confidence. Ibrahim closes the story with pathos, as the protagonist looks across at his prison-mate as someone who has "paid the highest price for defending the land; a worker who owns nothing more than the house in which he lives and a garden no bigger than a single dunam."<sup>108</sup> The humility of the concluding image is ambivalent. Ibrahim's prior conjuring of the figure of the *shaykh* highlights the very absence of that figure in the jail cells, and in his place the large numbers of humble villagers who bear the brunt of the landmark protests. The proud

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<sup>106</sup> Ibrahim, "Ka-l-Jism al-Salīm Idhā Shakā Minhu 'Uḍw Tadā'at Lahu Sā'ir al-A'ḍā'," in Hanna Ibrahim, *Azhār Barriyya* (Beit Berl: Dar al-Nashr al-Arabi, 2000), 165.

<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim, "Ka-l-Jism al-Salīm," 165.

<sup>108</sup> Ibrahim, "Ka-l-Jism al-Salīm," 166.

tone that courses through the “*suwar*” certainly grants power and voice to these unsung characters, but Ibrahim remains acutely aware of the disproportionate costs that a modest villager can suffer by an act of protest.

While he stands with Naffa‘ behind the protest movement, then, Ibrahim also seeks a literary depiction of the risks that have accompanied Land Day. He does not indulge in mass mobilization, and his glorifications of those who stand up in defence of the land are tempered with caution. Despite some shortcomings in style, it is remarkable that Ibrahim constructed these varied portrayals of confiscation, protest, and infiltration not only in the years after Land Day, but in the heat of the historical moment itself.

### CONCLUSION

In 1979, Shoukri ‘Abed (then a graduate student at Harvard) wrote about returning home to his village of Mi’liya in the western Galilee. Three Israeli families from the Sinai had arrived in the village, sparking clashes and prompting a meeting with members of the Knesset to resolve the matter. A few weeks later, bulldozers began to clear tracts of land merely 200 meters from Mi’liya, paving the way for a new settlement. Thirty-five villagers were arrested in subsequent protests and neighboring villages, a mere three years after the seminal clashes in Area 9, not far away, threatened to hold “another Land Day.”<sup>109</sup>

In spite of the dramatic events of March 30, 1976, protests could not entirely stem acts of confiscation and expropriation across Israel. Indeed, the state established sixty-two new Jewish settlements in the northern Galilee in the 1970s.<sup>110</sup> But it would be a mistake to view this process as monolithic or simple. ‘Abed speculates that Mi’liya had avoided earlier confiscations because it was predominantly Christian, suggesting that the

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<sup>109</sup> Abed, “Galilee Village Fights Israeli Land Grab,” 25.

<sup>110</sup> Yiftachel, “Kernel of the Nation,” 237.

expropriations were crafted with an awareness of local demographic variations. Muhammad Naffa's short stories, meanwhile, touch on the particular battles of the Druze community—a group both within and apart from the Arab minority—against conscription as well as confiscation. And, as Laurie King-Irani notes from a visit to Saffuriyya/Tzipora on Land Day in 1992, expropriations can manifest both subtly and harshly, through the quiet cultivation of pine trees over olive groves as well as the rumble of bulldozers.<sup>111</sup>

Through the short stories of Naffa' and Ibrahim, this chapter has cast the theme of the land (*al-ard*) in multifaceted terms. Too often the notion of rallying behind and in defence of the homeland emerges as an axiom of Palestinian national sentiment or as a simple act of belonging to counter a domineering Israeli state. Yet these writers, in contrasting ways, subvert this simplicity. Naffa's close and finely observed renditions of his own village are both enchanting and at times too detailed and particular to command a sense of unity. He depicts a homeland stunning in its detail and fractured by those very idiosyncrasies. And while Naffa's stories communicate the different shades of the violence of expropriation, Ibrahim explores Jewish actors with sympathy, consciously crafting a spectrum of perspectives. Paradoxically, reading these authors' stories side by side becomes a rejoinder to those interpretations of Land Day that accept at face value the waving of Palestinian flags within Israel, the use of poetic axioms encouraging "*al-difā'* 'an *al-ard*," and an understanding of expropriation as a crude and uncomplicated process. Naffa' and Ibrahim, with pride as well as cynicism and detail as well as detachment, advance the theme of the land as a central, but at times ambivalent notion in Israel's Arabic-language literature.

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<sup>111</sup> King-Irani, "Land, Identity, and the Limits of Resistance," 43-44.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE BODY AND THE LAND IN ZAKI DARWISH'S "AL-KHURŪJ MIN MARJ IBN 'ĀMIR" (1983)

In Hanna Ibrahim's "*Mutasallilūn*," the narrative of the infiltrator is mediated through the perspective of Sarah, the Jewish female protagonist. While Hanna Ibrahim employs this strategy to problematize borders and the perception of border crossings from an imagined Jewish perspective, Zaki Darwish adopts a different approach. In his 1983 short story "*al-Khurūj min Marj ibn 'Āmir*," Darwish gives the figure of the infiltrator himself a rich and conflicted voice. In this story, which portrays the brutal journey of two men daring to cross the plain of Marj ibn 'Amir, or the Jezreel Valley, back into Israel and to navigate to their hometowns, Darwish evokes an intensely phenomenological struggle with the land and the ways in which conflict has altered its physical characteristics and its multiple meanings.

Darwish produced this piece at an important historical crossroads. In the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967 had tarnished reunion with anxiety for Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the early 1980s saw equally conflicting fortunes. The activism and mobilization of the mid- to late 1970s continued, furthering existing relationships and sympathies with the Palestinian national movement. Across the Litani River in the north, however, the Lebanese Civil War sparked in 1975 had escalated, and the right-wing government (Israel's first since the state's inception) embarked on a ruinous invasion—a disastrous "war of choice" that was widely understood as an attempt to crush the Palestinian state-within-a-state that had developed in southern Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> Once again, Palestinian Arabs living in Israel and campaigning for greater civic privileges were presented with a

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent contemporary account of the domestic intrigue and build-up to the war from an Israeli perspective was given by two journalists. See Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

challenging dilemma of allegiance and identity: where, and how vociferously, to stake one's ground, and how to balance a sense of place in Israel with the state's actions against Palestinians in Lebanon.

In a close study of Darwish's visceral, harrowing story, this chapter explores the relationship among bodies, borders, and the geographic shifts of a national conflict. From the perspective of Darwish's characters, how have Israeli/Palestinian landscapes been contested and altered? How are their bodies implicated in the relationship to the homeland, and how do geopolitical shifts and acts of infiltration take their toll? In narrative and contextual settings, in the early 1950s and 1980s respectively, how does Darwish portray Palestinian Arab identities in a mobile and conflicted context, both in the aftermath of the state's establishment and in the grip of a cross-border invasion?

After summarizing the plot of the story and accounting for the lack of attention to Darwish in scholarship, I suggest that Darwish's negotiation of geographical identities and anxieties in "*al-Khurūj*" works on three levels. First, Darwish uses the villages of al-Birwa and Deir al-Asad to register the gradual effects of conflict and mechanization over the territory of Israel/Palestine, showing the force of the overarching national conflict that eclipses local contestations of belonging between the two protagonists. Second, I employ Edward Casey's concepts of "displacement" and "desolation" to argue that, as the two men journey across the plain, they suffer phenomenological, bodily consequences that question the core of their relationship with this ground that they cherish. I enhance this reading through the lens of an intertextual relationship with Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and the idea of the story as a tragedy, insights also noted in the most extensive critical work on Darwish by Muhammad Sa'id. Third, I consider the resonance of the work against both its post-1948 novelistic timeframe and the era of its publication in 1983, as Israel was embroiled in its invasion of Lebanon. The iconic final

scene of “*al-Khurūj*”—the surviving protagonist stands in the rain, at dawn, on the Israeli side of the Green Line—is interpreted as the vision of a Palestinian Arab subject who reemerges in Israel fumbling yet defiant, confident yet disoriented. Darwish gives only a partially successful infiltrator whose bond with the land is profoundly shaken and who grapples with the tensions of ethnic and national identities that transcend formal borders.

### **STYLE AND GENRE: THE NEGLECT OF DARWISH IN CRITICAL WORK**

There are a number of reasons that this story and Darwish’s work more generally—by 1983 he had published three collections of short stories and two plays—have been almost entirely neglected in scholarship, even though Mahmoud Ghanayim counts Darwish among the “pioneers and trend-setters of Arabic prose” in Israel.<sup>2</sup> As I will discuss in greater detail, the story’s plot lends itself to symbolic and didactic interpretations that belie the work’s complexity. There is also a question of style. Darwish writes with terse, figurative language. Palestinian critic Shakir Farid Hasan suggests that Darwish is unlike other Arab writers in Israel in his use of this clipped language, but ultimately argues that the idiosyncrasy has worked against him. Hasan sets Darwish apart from those who “abuse words” and overindulge in description, yet situates Darwish in a critical context that is biased in favor of that more effusive style.<sup>3</sup>

There are also personal and structural reasons for the critical oversight. The fame of his older brother Mahmud was already widespread in the 1970s when Zaki Darwish began to write, eclipsing the latter’s work. Darwish was also less involved than many of his counterparts with Palestinian Arab cultural institutions in Israel. Habibi, Taha, and Ibrahim contributed to journals like *al-Jadid* in creative, critical, and editorial capacities. Naffa’ took an active role in the communist political establishment and social movements

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<sup>2</sup> Ghanayim, *Quest for a Lost Identity*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Shakir Farid Hasan, “*Madkhal Ilā ‘Ālim al-Qaṣṣ wa-l-Riwā’ī Zaki Darwish*,” *al-Jabha*, October 12, 2006.

of the 1970s. Darwish's career, however, has long been in teaching, with only a less prominent editorial role at the journal *al-Sharq*, distancing him from the institutional interplay that so often nurtured the careers of young writers.

"*Al-Khurūj*" specifically has perhaps evaded attention in part because its length sets it uncomfortably in between forms. The story was initially released in Israel as a book in 1983, but billed as a story (*qiṣṣa*). In a later edition, though, it is characterized as a novella (the Arabic term "*nūvīlā*" is a direct import). The formal categorization is not insignificant. On the one hand, the story's length likely prevented it from ready publication and reception in a cultural journal. On the other, following the "over-valorization" and "allure" of the novel that I discussed in Chapter Two around Habibi's *Sudāsiyya*, "*al-Khurūj*" is seen as deficient. In Muhammad Sa'id's assessment, for example, the story's focus on two characters limits its ability to explore a broader spectrum of human existence, while its length stunts the opportunity for greater character development over time; both facets for Sa'id of a worthy novel.<sup>4</sup> In spite of these critiques and the scholarly lacuna, "*al-Khurūj*" demands attention for its immensely evocative and visceral engagement with the complexity of belonging in the contested landscape of Israel/Palestine, for the phenomenological depth of its main character Salim, and for its compelling use of borders and the historic Marj ibn 'Amir as the core setting.

The plot of "*al-Khurūj*" is deceptively clear-cut. Darwish portrays the nighttime journey of two men, Salim and Nimr, as they attempt to cross the Green Line north of Jenin and to reenter Israel, where they live. The story opens as the men are tossed out of a military vehicle and sent tumbling into the night. In increasingly difficult conditions—the rain begins to beat down, the darkness is total, and the threat of security searchlights is

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<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Sa'id, "*Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn*," in Zaki Darwish, "*al-Khurūj min Marj ibn 'Amir*" (Acre: Mu'assasat al-Aswar, 1997), 79-80.

omnipresent—Salim and Nimr move across the flat plain of Marj ibn ‘Amir and seek out their hometown of Deir al-Asad. The men reminisce about their village lives and also recall harrowing incidents, including Salim’s previous expulsions across the Lebanese border. Mid-journey, Nimr feels a shooting pain through his leg, which leaves him unable to walk. Salim begins to carry him, but it is unlikely that they will both last. In a visceral, shocking moment, Nimr steps away on the pretense of relieving himself and slits his left wrist. He dies of blood loss. Salim performs a hasty, superficial burial in the muddy plain and strives on. The story closes as dawn breaks and Salim realizes that he has successfully crossed into Israel near the Jenin-Haifa road. Caked with sweat and dirt, he muses on his relation to the name of Palestine (“*ṭn*” being Arabic for clay). The rain washes Salim clean and he walks on.

#### **GRAY PLACES: THE CHANGING LANDSCAPES OF DEIR AL-ASAD AND AL-BIRWA**

In the journey across the plain, Salim and Nimr look to two destinations. Their explicit target is Deir al-Asad, a village near Acre in northern Israel. Yet they also hark back to al-Birwa, the village in Israel where they came to know each other and to which Salim in particular traces a deep sense of belonging. Looking back in memory and looking forward in hopeful anticipation of a difficult journey’s end, Darwish constructs these towns as sites of negotiation in a changing landscape. Salim and Nimr contest their rootedness and express varied relationships with the land. Yet their evocations are not idealized or static, registering the changes that Israel/Palestine underwent in the slow devolution to the *Nakba*, towards a flattened and militarized national space. Both the British and the Zionists are implicated in this slide, as Darwish depicts places pervaded by national territorial conflict and scarred by bullets.

The story's first glance home comes as Salim and Nimr debate whether or not the atmosphere portends rain. Nimr's reminiscence is idyllic:

Didn't we always love the rain? Yes...but everything was so different. That was in our village in those old houses, wrapped in a blanket or sitting around the fireplace, after we had buried grains of wheat deep in the ground, filled the house with olive oil, olives, cracked wheat, honey, and cheese, and we sat watching the drops of rain like a liquid thread connecting the sky and the land. Someone would say, 'Dear lord, let each drop be a loaf of bread!' And another would interrupt, 'Don't exaggerate! Each drop is a grain of wheat, that's all we need.'<sup>5</sup>

Darwish depicts the home village through a lens of sustenance. The villagers plunge wheat into the depths of the earth (*a'māq al-ard*) and are repaid with the figurative depth of a life-sustaining bond. The house brims with the fruits of their labor, stashing both raw natural products like olives as well as worked, cultured foods like cheese into the same space that shelters people. Home is inseparable from produce, as though they form a family sleeping under one roof. So, too, the earth and sky seem joined, as the tactile image of a liquid cord gives wholeness and continuity to the connection between person and place. It almost evokes an ethereal umbilical cord, nourishing those who huddle in the original, life-giving "protective center of the house."<sup>6</sup> As with Muhammad Naffa's farmer in "Because We Love the Land," discussed in Chapter Four, Darwish's bond between man and land remains modest. One villager is rebuked for asking too much of the rain and its symbolic value. Nimr recalls and idealizes a fertile, humble balance of home and belonging. Indeed, his vision resonates with more universal manifestations of landscape sentiment that see the homeland as "an archive of fond memories" enhanced by

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<sup>5</sup> Zaki Darwish, "*al-Khurūj min Marj ibn 'Āmir*" (Haifa: al-Jadida, 1983), 9-10. Jamal Assadi, "The Emergence from Iben Aamer's Meadow," in *Three Voices from the Galilee: Selected Fiction from Mohammad Naffaa, Zaki Darwish, and Najī Daher*, ed. and trans. Jamal Assadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 56. This chapter differs slightly in its translation style. Assadi's translation of Darwish's work tends to be stilted. I aim for more fluid but still relatively literal translations, so I have provided my own glosses that I believe are smoother, though they may otherwise appear similar to Assadi's. For the sake of clarity and comparison, I cite both the original text and Assadi's translation for passages of significant length.

<sup>6</sup> Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 39.

“the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet Nimr’s idealism is contested. In an unspoken response, Salim critiques Nimr’s vision as partial and hypocritical. He chides his companion mentally: “Do you remember in those days how many of my young, ripening olive trees you cut down—trees that I loved as much as I love my own children today? You’ve never felt that kind of love.”<sup>8</sup> Salim anthropomorphizes the olive trees that he cultivates, making explicit the familial bond that Nimr’s recollections only imply. If Naffa’s construction of a rich connection to the land relies on practice and rhythm, Darwish deepens this concept by highlighting its sensory impact on the human body, crafting in Salim perhaps the most profoundly organic character of the post-1967 prose canon. Darwish invokes senses of touch, “holding the little white buds as they blossom”; hearing, as he detects the crack of other olive buds bursting open; and smell, claiming that when Nimr tried to hide behind an old Roman olive tree, Salim could smell the intruder into this realm that he knows.<sup>9</sup>

Darwish employs smell uniquely to establish a particularly deep bond. According to Tuan, human smell is “much atrophied” compared to our vision and to the olfactory senses of animals that use smell to articulate space and to detect dangers and threats around them.<sup>10</sup> In the opening scene of Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun*, the character Abu Qais lies on the ground, smells the rich scent of damp earth, and imagines that he is smelling his wife’s hair.<sup>11</sup> Not unlike Naffa’s open field discussed in Chapter Four, the earth is gendered by Kanafani in romantic, anthropomorphic terms. Yet Salim, through his

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<sup>7</sup> See Tuan, *Space and Place*, 154-159. Tuan’s discussion is wide-ranging, exploring the expressions of landscape sentiment from American Plains Indians to the Maori in New Zealand and back to the ancient Greeks.

<sup>8</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 11.

<sup>9</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 11.

<sup>10</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 1999), 21.

sharpened sense of smell, moves closer to the natural world, suggesting a primal kind of identity that cannot be acquired—unlike, for example, the trappings of civic Israeli status. Smell is to some extent a motif for Darwish. In an earlier story, “*al-Fashl ‘alā Khaṭṭ al-Istiwā’*” (Defeat on the Equator), the narrator detects a kind of “greeting by smell” (*taḥiya ‘iṭriyya*) at the time of dawn and dusk, feeling that he can “fly home on its wings.”<sup>12</sup> The image of flight, linking scent explicitly and fantastically with home, animalizes the narrator and tightens the innate bond. Human becomes more natural and nature becomes more human.

Beyond the external senses, Salim expresses his bond with the land at an internal level. He likens his growing olive branches to something “creeping over the surface of my heart,” inscribing the flourish of these striking, craggy trees onto the life force of his own body, the branches as metaphorical veins on his heart.<sup>13</sup> Salim thus takes the dispute between the two, which ended in Nimr chopping down trees, as both an emotional and a physical wound. By contrasting the depths of a physical bond with the land, Salim portrays Nimr as a relative outsider. The two engage in a contestation of place that is fought locally between villagers and companions. Salim takes more pride in place and inscribes it more deeply in his own being. Initially, this contrast suggests a straightforward, didactic reading of the work. It is Salim, after all, who is proven right about the rain. It is Nimr who dies, feeling betrayed by the pain in his leg, and accepting that Salim must be the one to soldier on. When the story is understood in this light as simply “establishing the right to remain on the land” and as a corrective tale against the

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<sup>12</sup> Zaki Darwish, “*al-Fashl ‘alā Khaṭṭ al-Istiwā’*,” in Zaki Darwish, *Shitā’ al-Ghurba* (Haifa: al-Sharq, 1970), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 11.

expulsion of the *Nakba*, the analysis leaves a conventional sense that only one like Salim with a strong, internalized relationship with the terrain can stand up to its challenges.<sup>14</sup>

This cannot be a complete reading of the complex relationships that the story evokes with the landscapes of home. “Creeping over the surface of my heart” is a loaded phrase that seems also to suggest territorial encroachment, an Israeli presence that moves *over* Salim and creeps along his Palestinian heartland. This alternative connotation functions on a flat, superficial plane rather than the axes of depth and interiority that Salim values. And closer consideration of Salim and Nimr’s experiences of being captured before they were flung out of the military vehicle reveals crucial similarities that disclose the difficulties of negotiating a flattening, militarized landscape. That Salim survives rather than Nimr certainly suggests a significant contrast in local attachments to place, but Darwish subjects both protagonists to a decades-long devolution of their home ground, whose national scale eclipses their internecine local contestations.

Nimr, whose capture narrative is told first, was chased in Deir al-Asad by a large group of men. He suggests that he was familiar enough with the urban landscape to evade capture—“I could have taken cover in one of the houses in one of the narrow alleys”—but opted not to embroil others in the chase. Nimr’s instincts in the built environment are not put to the test, but it is worth noting that in the modern era the Israeli army thinks sophisticatedly about how to tackle urban settings. Many generals are versed in the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Israeli military institutes take an interest in so-called “operational” spatial and architectural theories.<sup>15</sup> Avoiding this clash, Nimr continues out of the village, knowing he “must reach the fields of olive trees and cacti between the village and the mountain, and there they have no hope. I hit the upper

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<sup>14</sup> Ahmad Dahbur, “*Waqā’i’ Safr al-Khurūj Hasab Qiṣaṣ Zaki Darwish*,” *al-Ḥayā al-Jadīda*, March 15, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Eyal Weizman, “The Art of War,” *Frieze*, Issue 99, May 2006.

neighborhood and from there came to an old ruin next to the olive mill.”<sup>16</sup> Here, Nimr overestimates his own familiarity and understanding of the land beyond the village, confident that he will be safe hidden away in a more natural setting. Yet the ancient, demolished house is an eerie symbol of Palestinian tragedy. That Nimr would feel safe in a building that conjures house demolition is poignant and ironic. Indeed, his hiding is put to a catastrophic end. As soon as he takes cover, “bullets come down above me and around me like rain.”<sup>17</sup> The image is a hardened, military twist of the liquid cord, replacing a nourishing home with a demolished structure and morphing raindrops into bullets. Fearing that others may get harmed, Nimr surrenders and is taken to the camp of Majd al-Krum.

Salim’s narrative, which frames “*al-Khurūj*,” is revealed towards the end. His is a more visceral story in which he is chased from the village outskirts by dogs and hides in a nearby cave. Though it seems a deeper and darker hiding place, one of the dogs finds him. Mocking the way Salim lauded his olfactory sensitivity over Nimr’s, Darwish turns the tables: “he [the dog] could smell me.”<sup>18</sup> In a gruesome climax, Salim lures the dog in, stuffs his hand down its throat, and strangles it. His cold attitude is echoed in an earlier short story “*al-Kilāb*” (The Dogs), whose opening declares that, “I always have, and still do hate dogs more than anything else.”<sup>19</sup> Other dogs appear at the mouth of Salim’s cave, however, and are quickly backed by a swarm of soldiers bearing rifles. The use of dogs as a foreign tool of fear links Darwish again to Kanafani. In *Mā Tabaqqā Lakum* (All That’s Left To You) (1966), Hamid kills the Israeli soldier whom he encounters in the desert when he hears dogs barking and closing in on him. The dogs represent a gulf of

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<sup>16</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 18-19. Darwish, “The Emergence,” 58.

<sup>17</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 19.

<sup>18</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 54.

<sup>19</sup> Zaki Darwish, “*al-Kilāb*,” in Zaki Darwish, *al-Kilāb* (Acre: Manshurāt al-Aswar, 1980), 43.

understanding as well as part of a simplified, blunt rendering of Israeli soldiers.<sup>20</sup> Not unlike Kanafani's Hamid, Salim is punished for his jarringly violent attempt at self-preservation against these unfamiliar forces.

There are critical similarities between the two tales. In both, there are threats that course through the village as well as the natural surroundings. Nimr darts through the alleyways and ultimately takes refuge among the olive trees. Salim dodges the police and then hides in a small cave in the mountain against which Deir al-Asad is nestled. The men had the same idea: when Salim meets Nimr in the camp, he muses that "he had been wandering somewhere on the mountain too." The two men are also stopped in their tracks by the same thing: bullets. In a natural image perverted, bullets rain down around Nimr and wear thin his resolve. He concedes defeat because he cannot bear to think that others will be hurt on his account. Salim, meanwhile, puts up a fight against the dogs but is rendered helpless and ineffective by armed soldiers at the mouth of the cave. Darwish masks the similarities in these narratives by framing the story with them and adapting a non-linear narrative style. In effect, though, the two narratives that directly precede the opening of the story—the capture of Salim and Nimr, before they are flung into a car and then flung out across the border—tell the same story.

This common thread is by no means trivial, since it signifies the end of a process that permeates the work as a whole. Darwish's exploded chronology that includes memory and reflection at times thwarts an immediately clear understanding of the temporal arc of the plot. Yet the progression is clear as the places best known to Nimr and Salim devolve from verdant and natural to gray and mechanical.

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<sup>20</sup> Shimon Ballas, "The (Ugly) Israeli in Arab Literature," *New Outlook*, November-December 1974, 78. Interestingly, dogs appear often in contemporary Israeli culture. There is an emotional scene in the film *Beaufort* (2007) in which soldiers argue about endangering a sniffer dog that is part of the bomb squad; the dog's trainer has clearly developed a bond with this animal that is integral to his work. Conversely, in *Waltz with Bashir* (2006), the protagonist suffers nightmares that include vicious, salivating dogs running at him in the war-torn streets of 1980s Beirut.

The first instance in this progression comes with the British Mandate and the Arab revolt of the late 1930s. In many ways, the violent clashes over land in this decade presage the decisive moment of the *Nakba* some ten years later.<sup>21</sup> The British administration was no friend to Arab self-determination in Palestine, and the lack of coherent policy towards the dueling claims of national belonging were a constant source of tension and confusion. A general strike in 1936 transformed into broad rebellion across Palestine, as the Arab population chafed with increasing Jewish immigration, continual land purchases by Zionists, and the putatively greater influence that the Jewish community was able to exert over the British.<sup>22</sup> When the Arab population rose up, the British quelled the uprising with a heavy hand and, as Cleary argues, more ruthlessly than any crackdowns they enacted on the Jewish population in Palestine.<sup>23</sup>

Darwish vivifies this perhaps exceptional callousness, presenting a scene of collective punishment, from the Mandate era, which revolves around the land. Security forces coerce Palestinians to carry rocks back and forth, to build and then break down walls of stone, and eventually to fall onto beds of split, thorny cacti.<sup>24</sup> This is cruel and futile work. Salim remembers the cacti as the most searing, intensive pain of his life, as the thorns stayed in his body for some weeks. The source of the pain and the pointlessly sadistic nature of the punishment are both grounded in natural distortions: moving stones, being hurt by plants, toiling excessively under a hot sun. There is an intentional perversity here, punishing an uprising around land ownership with excruciating actions that revolve

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<sup>21</sup> See Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestinians and 1948: the underlying causes of failure," in *The War for Palestine*, eds. Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12-36.

<sup>22</sup> See Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*; and Ann Mosely Lesch, *Arab Politics in Palestine, 1917-1939: The frustration of a nationalist movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979). See also the oral history-based article: Ted Swedenberg, "The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1939)," in *Islam, Politics and Social Movements*, eds. Edmund Burke III and Ira Lapidus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 169-203.

<sup>23</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 74.

around the land's own features. With thorns embedded beneath his skin, Salim even carries these wounds across the landscape, metaphorically spreading his misery as he sheds thorns for weeks to come. This powerful image distorts the idea of spreading seeds or pollen in a naturally productive process and instead portends pain and infertility. Thorns are not only sharp but sterile. Coming before 1948, the image also seems to foreshadow exile as its own kind of wound, and the expelled Palestinian Arabs as carrying their pain, almost literally, as they leave their homeland.

In the next instance of conflict over the land, the story registers an important historical shift. When Salim picks Nimr up and tries to carry him across the plain, he thinks to his own expulsion from al-Birwa:

We left al-Birwa over a year ago, a convoy of fear and suffering cutting the fields going east, and with the bullets of the Jews surrounding us west, north, and south. But they left us one opening to get out... One group fled to Sha'b, some went to Majd al-Krum, Bi'na, and Deir al-Asad, and others got to Nahef. The news spread of chases and slaughters. Did you hear what happened in Deir al-Asad? You must have heard, but I saw it all myself. They cordoned off the whole village and summoned all the men to the olive grove between Deir al-Asad and Bi'na, under a scorching sun and with everyone thirsty and frightened. Then they picked three men and, with a coldness that was bloodcurdling, they shot them.<sup>25</sup>

Contrary to the British punishment of futile, tiring manual labor, this expulsion is portrayed as mechanical and clinical. Bullets encircle the landscape, suffocating the openness of the fields. Salim's awareness of direction does not convey a privileged natural orientation, but instead suggests a dispassionate, Cartesian strategy. There is only one exit, and the word "*manfadh*" relates etymologically to others meaning effectiveness and execution. The crowd is "cutting" (*mukhtariqīn*) cleanly through this gap, like a mechanical bore pointed east. Darwish's use of place names here, unlike Taha's acts of aural "recovery" or Ibrahim's logging of Land Day protests, reinforces the widespread

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<sup>25</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 48-49. Darwish, "The Emergence," 64.

frenzy of the *Nakba*. Place names come thick and fast, mimicking the shock of flight or expulsion that occurred across so many villages.

In this fearful atmosphere, rumors fly. Salim describes an event in Deir al-Asad that, unlike falling on cacti, is chillingly calculated. Though fictionalized, it is redolent of the well-known Deir Yasin massacre of 1948, which Benny Morris suggests incorporated public intimidation and even execution.<sup>26</sup> It also recalls the 1956 incident at Kafr Qasim, when the military government imposed a sudden curfew and Israeli border police shot nearly fifty Arab civilians who unknowingly violated its conditions. This seminal event quickly entered national memory and is still commemorated and compared with similar instances of injustice and arbitrary force.<sup>27</sup> In the decade between the Arab Revolt and this snapshot of the *Nakba*, Salim's Deir al-Asad and al-Birwa have morphed into warlike spaces whose misfortunes spread across Israel/Palestine, like the thorns that he sheds.

These echoes across the landscape are salient. Edward Relph has argued that the rapid and far-reaching flows of globalization have made places increasingly similar to each other. It is this lack of clear geographical differentiation that he terms "placelessness." In "*al-Khurūj*" we see this effect of placelessness develop through conflict rather than increased mobility and technology. The consequences and infrastructure of territorial dispute are homogenizing, making it more difficult over time for Salim and Nimr to navigate and relate to their surroundings. When he moves to Deir al-Asad, Salim does develop a clear attachment to this adopted home village, but it is hardened and monochromatic. The village's residents "struggle with stones" and the "naked mountain" that abuts their houses. Salim's green fields of old, "a green sea that

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<sup>26</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 126-128.

<sup>27</sup> For a history of this event and its evolution in memorial culture, see Shira Robinson, "Local Struggle, National Struggle: Palestinian Responses to the Kafr Qasim Massacre and Its Aftermath, 1956-66," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2003), 393-416.

merged into a blue sea,” and the seasonal shift from green to yellow to brown, have all turned to a “mixed gold.” And rather than work with wheat and olives, Salim must “split the stones” to get his food.<sup>28</sup>

This monochrome—the way in which the grayness of stone mirrors the metallic guns and bullets—renders the landscape harder to know. Importantly, the shift is also evident in Salim’s experiences being thrown across a different border into Lebanon. On the first occasion, Salim boasts that he returned to his village before dawn. On the second, he finds the task more difficult. He remembers being driven away blindfolded but knowing by physical sense alone where the turns of the car were leading him. Suddenly, though, he confronts a situation that he could not predict. Instinctively, by his bodily familiarity with the land, Salim feels the landscape shifting. Taken off the roads he has long recognized, Salim finds himself standing at a military camp at the Lebanese border. Soldiers shoot deliberately past his head (a mock firing squad) and shock him into unconsciousness. The contrast between a smooth return and a near-fatal encounter attests to the changes in the Israeli-Palestinian landscape that were taking root. They are inseparable from the haunting clang of metal and bullets, and they are registered spatially in Salim’s quick ability to detect when he is on the unfamiliar ground of a whole new set of roads and structures. This is a vivid example of the flattening of the binary between “place” and “space,” which I discussed in the introduction. Out of a well-recognized fertile landscape comes a new geography of military bases, strategic paths, vehicles and guns, and a bridging of place with concrete spaces of confrontation.

Interestingly, the author’s celebrated brother Mahmud Darwish also evokes metallic monochromes in his novella, *A Memory for Forgetfulness* (1986). In a journey through the war-torn streets of Beirut in August 1982, the narrator is shrouded by the

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<sup>28</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 34-35.

grayness of war. Woken by mortar shells, he complains that, “the fever of metal is the song of this dawn.”<sup>29</sup> He sees the besieged Beirut coastline “changing its marine nature and turning into metal.”<sup>30</sup> The smoky horizon is “a huge egg made of steel.”<sup>31</sup> Later, “this very sky is a cage.”<sup>32</sup> Israeli jets flit above him as “sparkling silver insects.”<sup>33</sup> Even a crowd of people, standing under “a sun veiled by all the colors of ash,” seems sharp and cold: “a human fence.”<sup>34</sup>

Like war-torn Beirut and al-Birwa and Deir al-Asad rocked by the build-up to the *Nakba*, Marj ibn ‘Amir was not immune to the changes threatening the land’s “placial” character.<sup>35</sup> It is particularly poignant that the plain is valorized by all Israeli parties—whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim—as being a fertile zone, one with rich and heavy soils and a long history of prosperous cultivation. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod describes its “luxuriant” agricultural wealth.<sup>36</sup> Yet the landscape that Nimr and Salim trudge through is far from fertile. It is swampy yet thorny, dangerously soft and yet painfully sharp. This strange border—the plain is cut by the Green Line—is therefore not simply a formal imposition and a barrier to be crossed. Rather, it is a zone that bears marks that alter its centuries-old character as a source of agricultural promise and diversity. The blankness of the mud, the sting of the thorns, and the ever-present threat of a searchlight or patrol vehicle reiterate the theme of a landscape transforming and losing its luster. In this sense, Darwish appears to give an alternative to Meron Benvenisti’s notion of “white patches”—the monotonous tone in which Zionists saw Arab villages across Palestine as “terra

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<sup>29</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi, *A Memory for Forgetfulness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> The term is Edward Casey’s and succinctly encapsulates what Relph calls a “sense of place.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, ed., *The Transformation of Palestine* (Illinois: Northwestern Press, 1971), 126.

incognita” on which the names, symbols, and structures of the State of Israel would efface and supersede Palestinian and Arabic markers.<sup>37</sup> In “*al-Khurūj*” places seem grayed rather whitened. If there is a new layer on this geographic “blank slate,” it is metallic and sharp.<sup>38</sup> It is a landscape that Salim and Nimr find brutal to traverse, and which registers profound effects on their bodies.

### **DESOLATION: THE TREACHEROUS CROSSING OF MARJ IBN ‘AMIR**

The above shifts that take place in al-Birwa, Deir al-Asad, and the terrain between home and Lebanon focus on manual changes—the production of flattening military spaces and the undoing of Palestinian place—that take physical geography as a canvas for human attachment and “backcloth” for insidious impositions. Yet “*al-Khurūj*” also explores changes at the phenomenological level and endows the earth with character. While Salim and Nimr find the plain difficult to traverse in part because Israeli border police surround it, they ultimately struggle more with its natural features. Muhammad Sa‘id argues that the material changes stand against the protagonists, but ultimately the natural landscape supports them. This contrast, for Sa‘id, is “clear symbolism” that verifies the rich, inherent bond between man and homeland.<sup>39</sup> I would argue, however, that this contrast is too clean. Nature, too, assaults Salim and Nimr. Their journey takes on a theme of betrayal not *of* the land, but *by* it, experienced viscerally through the body. Only Salim survives the harrowing crossing, but he emerges as a subject whose relationship with the soil he has cherished is newly ambivalent, shaken to its bodily core.

Discussing the phenomenological challenges that plague Salim and Nimr requires an understanding of Marj ibn ‘Amir as an active force. As I have suggested since the

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<sup>37</sup> Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes*, 55-56.

<sup>38</sup> Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscapes*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Sa‘id, “*Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn*,” 79-80.

introduction, geography has its own particular power. The process of developing geographic attachment or producing certain spaces is not a one-way projection but instead an act of reciprocity. According to Edward Casey, conveying agency to the land and the earth in this way is crucial to undoing a prevalent “humanocentric” premise. “Natural” or “wild” places, in Casey’s terms, are generally assumed to be marginal. They are exterior to built environments where humans literally and figuratively “cultivate” and “civilize.”<sup>40</sup> Casey’s argument suggests that places that appear wild or natural must be seen to command greater agency. Humans come to know such places not by the ways in which we have shaped them, but rather by their “pre-formed” inherent characteristics. Though human bodies are the means by which we explore, for Casey it is landscape and atmosphere that must “take the lead.”<sup>41</sup>

Marj ibn ‘Amir does not entirely resemble a “wild place” as Casey defines it. It is a former site of cultivation and, given Israel’s sheer size, no site is ever far from built environments of some form. Even the expansive Negev desert in the South is peppered with kibbutzim, Bedouin camps, and military infrastructure. Yet the plain evokes two of the most important and negative characteristics that Casey puts forward as fundamental to the wild place. Salim and Nimr’s stories exemplify “displacement” and “desolation” as the bodily bond with their homeland disintegrates.

“Displacement” is evidently an important component of how the two men relate to their homeland. Darwish’s treatment of displacement is not merely an axiomatic reflection on the exile and expulsion of the *Nakba*. Rather, the story opens with a compelling image that sets up the theme of being uneasy on the ground. A car tosses the two men out into a cold night, turns back towards Israel, and rings out shots on its way. A

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<sup>40</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 186.

<sup>41</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 225.

deep stillness sets in. The opening word (*qadhafat*) is the verb for throwing, or flinging the men out, emphasizing from the onset their extreme spatial dislocation. Darwish uses the word “*sukūn*” to describe the tranquility that follows the gunshots, using a word whose root inherently connotes a physical form of settlement and habitation. To be “*sākin*” could mean to be seated in a chair as well as to be living in a particular place. It is a firmly grounded concept. From the start, then, Darwish suggests a paradoxical relationship between dislocation and settlement, binding the notion of being grounded with a state of moving, even tumbling around. A heightened sense of mobility and spatial vulnerability ironically form part of the literal “*sukūn*” of these two men.

“Desolation” is a more subtle aspect of wild places, referring to an intensified loneliness and hopelessness. Desolate landscapes, which Casey describes as primarily bearing the characteristics of barrenness, vastness, impenetrability, and isolation, often leave a traveler “feeling forsaken,” as the landscape defies “such reassuring qualities as amiability and invitingness.”<sup>42</sup> The body is the basic vehicle through which these sensations reverberate. Casey offers a phenomenological schematic that conceptualizes the body in relation to further general characteristics of wild places. The body stands on the ground, which itself is covered with “things” both animate and inanimate, giving the earth a “sensuous surface.” The surroundings above ground form the “array” (or the interplay of different arrays), and Casey theorizes the visual “arc” and the atmosphere as those components that give light, color, and depth. The arc is the “ethereal end of the spectrum” that we look towards, and it holds its own imaginative force as the curving, panoramic limit of the body’s visual field.

Salim and Nimr experience desolation from the very start:

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<sup>42</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 192.

They turned away from the road going west, and they entered the plain. The land was dry and fallow. It was empty of everything except invisible thorns, though the cold numbed the feeling of pain and the thorns were not tough or dense enough to be a problem. Salim walked in front, trying to walk in a straight line, and Nimr walked behind. He couldn't see him at all, so he had to follow the footsteps. Everything around them was quiet, broken only by the sounds of cracking thorns and dry grass beneath their feet. There was no light coming from Jenin or Muqeibila or Jalama. And the sky and horizon and earth all blended into one pitch-black whole.<sup>43</sup>

As the men embark, it is apparent that the meadow's features are sparing and barren. Only wispy grass and thorns comprise its sensuous surface. Along with the cold, though, these minimal "things" give only numbness. Even the thorns are not enough to prompt much of a response. The most striking image in this opening is the all-consuming darkness described in earthly terms and merging everything around, above, and beneath them. This complete blackness represents a particularly ominous start since it is reminiscent of the "disrupted experience" that Casey suggests occurs where "ground and things are lacking, or arc and atmosphere remote."<sup>44</sup> It also simulates Tuan's sense of being lost, an experience in which body and space become futile: "There are the regions to my front and back, to my right and left, but they are not geared to external reference points and hence are quite useless."<sup>45</sup> The disorientation of the two men is not only a product of physical displacement, then, but is also related to the lack of positive sensuousness and ambiance that form thicker, fuller experiential fields. Moreover, the cold exacerbates the physical inability to feel. Indeed, the cold is a common motif for Darwish. In the story "*al-Sindiyaana*" (The Oak Tree), the cold night air signals the protagonist's wife's turn from away from him, into a tortured internal consciousness.<sup>46</sup> In "A Night of Cold," Darwish portrays the chill as an implacable force, in this case against

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<sup>43</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khuruj*," 21-22. Darwish, "The Emergence," 59.

<sup>44</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Zaki Darwish, "*al-Sindiyaana*," in Zaki Darwish, *Shitā' al-Ghurba* (Haifa: al-Sharq, 1970), 37-39.

a Jewish soldier, whose numbing body eventually falls from a watchtower.<sup>47</sup> Here, the cold turns on Salim and Nimr. It combines with the blackness in a suffocating type of estrangement in which the men have no arc to structure their bodily fields. They are navigating an isolating, imperceptible space.

Nimr does not last long in these conditions. After a few hours, and under the battery of increasingly heavy rain, his body suddenly gives way. The men stand up after crouching low to avoid a searchlight. Notably, this is the only force that illuminates the night. Unlike more nuanced depictions of Jewish Israelis by the likes of Ibrahim, these characters are replaced by a panoptic and disembodied ray of surveillance. Nimr feels an intense pain in his leg and cries out:

His cry was strange against the calm and dark night. It cracked the silence and they both thought that the far-off mountains echoed it back. Salim thought that a bullet had come from some unknown place and pierced Nimr's body. How else could you explain that scream, sharp as a knife?"<sup>48</sup>

Salim's point of reference for Nimr's pain is material, referencing the bullets that have altered their landscapes and likening the acute sound to a metal blade. And yet Nimr's pain is eerily natural: some kind of nervous, neuralgic shot. He seems too young for the sciatica that he mentions as a possible cause and he does not relate the pain to the bitter cold. Nimr's suffering is encapsulated instead in terms of betrayal: as Salim says, "I've never had a part of my body betray me in a crisis, so how has your leg done this to you?"<sup>49</sup> Nimr's body becomes the vehicle of his failure, and the symptom of too difficult a task of negotiating the land. The pain extends phenomenologically into their journey, used as a new measure of distance and space: "Deir al-Asad was moving further away

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<sup>47</sup> Darwish, "A Night of Cold," in *Three Voices from the Galilee: Selected Fiction from Mohammad Naffaa, Zaki Darwish, and Najji Daher*, ed. and trans. Jamal Assadi (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 42-46.

<sup>48</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 31. Darwish, "The Emergence," 62.

<sup>49</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 36.

behind the waves of pain that were striking Nimr.”<sup>50</sup> The treachery of the body seems to make the landscape physically more vast and the crossing more dangerous. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Tanoukhi’s conception of “geographic scale” can enrich our understanding of such unorthodox yet illuminating perceptions of distance. The metrics are not miles or minutes here, but blasts of synaptic pain.

Ibrahim Taha has suggested, without further exploration, that “*al-Khurūj*” evokes an intertextual relationship with Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Sa’id has elaborated by looking for formal comparisons between the two pieces. The “raw material” for both stories comes from narratives related to real, or at least conceivably real events. Both have a certain unity of time and place. Both revolve around two characters (though Hemingway is more focused on the old man than the young boy) and do not establish any others. Darwish and Hemingway both use internal monologuing as a narrative style to engage the characters’ predicaments more deeply.<sup>52</sup> The undoing of Nimr’s body is among the clearest of these overlapping moments. In Hemingway’s famous tale, the old man is trying to reel in the giant fish that he has been diligently tracking when his hand begins to cramp. “I hate a cramp, he thought. It is a treachery of one’s own body. It is humiliating before others to have a diarrhea from ptomaine poisoning or to vomit from it. But a cramp, he thought of it as a *calambre*, humiliates oneself especially when one is alone.”<sup>53</sup> The old man distinguishes between a physical failing that is socially embarrassing and the cramp—a treacherous pain that affects his craft. Like Nimr’s leg that affects his journey, the cramp prompts a sense of shame grafted onto the body as a superficial injury.

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<sup>50</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 35.

<sup>51</sup> Ibrahim Taha, “*Zaki Darwish wa-l-Kitāba al-Muthaqqafa*,” *al-Jabha*, June 21, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Sa’id, “*Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn*,” 84-89. A complete table of formal comparisons, which includes the cramp, is given on page 95 of Sa’id’s text.

<sup>53</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (St. Albans: Panther, 1976), 51-52.

While Salim valiantly bears Nimr on his back for a short time, there is no sustainable way to combat the crippling pain. During a short rest, Nimr decides impulsively that he must sacrifice himself. He steps aside, pulls out a small blade, and slits his wrist. Salim hears a second cry of pain. The exclamation is the same (“*akh*”) and it is striking that Salim senses a shift as Nimr’s body gives way to the ground. Salim, tortured by guilt, steels his nerves and decides to make a hasty burial. Left in a small hole and thinly covered by damp mud, Nimr suffers an ignominious half-interment that is the final gesture of the betrayal that dogs his ties with the earth. He is left as “a raised and prominent thing in this flat field,” jutting out as “a distinct mound” that is patently at odds with its surroundings.<sup>54</sup> It is perhaps apt, suicide being anathema to Islamic religious traditions, that not one typical burial ritual can be observed. Nimr’s body is neither washed nor shrouded. Most significantly from a spatial perspective, Salim’s disorientation would prevent him from placing Nimr’s body such that his head faced southeast towards Mecca. Ceremonial ambivalence notwithstanding, Salim knows that the rains will expose his friend’s body, leaving it perhaps for birds or insects. Nimr is to suffer an open-air dissolution as gruesome as the suicide itself.

Nevertheless, Salim tries to take comfort in the truism that Nimr’s body has returned to the land: “Nimr, my friend, are you in exile now? No, you can’t be. This plain stretches west and then north until it meets your home, and the soil will soak up your blood and deliver it back.”<sup>55</sup> With a calm, flowing image of organic disintegration, Salim tries to imagine Nimr’s energy coursing through the land. Yet his romantic form of solace is undermined by the grotesque way in which Nimr’s body gives way. His is not a quiet seeping of energy back into nature and atmosphere, a tranquil embodiment of the idea

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<sup>54</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 47-48.

<sup>55</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 49. Darwish, “The Emergence,” 68.

that, “From the wild world the lived body proceeds, and to this same world it is always in course of returning.”<sup>56</sup> Rather, Nimr’s return is rapid and bloody: his body comes apart with split skin and his blood flows out into cold, thorny mud.<sup>57</sup> Further undermining an elegiac return to the ground, Salim understands immediately that Nimr’s death will haunt him for years to come. He cannot see him through the dark, yet he moves towards Nimr and feels his friend’s blood coming onto his own hands and face. Salim, too, loses balance in this moment, his strong and reliable body now decentered as well.<sup>58</sup> He feels that he may “carry around this blood like sediment settled in his conscience, and that it would stay there for years, maybe forever.”<sup>59</sup> The solidity of this image overpowers the fluidity of the opened arteries, portraying the blood not flowing underground to its village source but sinking as a traumatic pool in Salim’s memory.<sup>60</sup>

After Nimr’s death, Salim’s journey becomes more grueling, and the atmosphere and the landscape turn their back even on him:

The rain fell. At the beginning the drops were separate and scattered, hitting his sweaty and tired body like a fresh breeze. Then they began to fall harder, cruelly and powerfully striking his left cheek, and stinging like needles. They were large drops of water, and Salim imagined that the rain was not falling in drops but was more like a continuous open funnel between the clouds and the earth. In just minutes, as he expected, the earth had turned into dough, and when he tried to lift his right foot his shoe stayed planted. He wanted to carry it but struggled to find it,

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<sup>56</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 225.

<sup>57</sup> “*Al-Khurūj*” is not the only work in which Darwish toys with dark and gruesome bodily imagery, but he tends to do so elsewhere in an obviously fantastical manner. The short story “The Man Who Lies a Lot,” for example, features the image of a cannibalistic Israeli soldier (an intentional falsehood, though not an uncommon slander) that is the climax of an aggravating web of deceitful rumors spun by the protagonist. Nimr’s suicide, by contrast, is intensely real and relatable. See Zaki Darwish, “The Man Who Lies a Lot,” in *A Land of Stone and Thyme*, eds. Nur and Abdelwahab Messiri (London: Quartet Books, 1996), 132-136.

<sup>58</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 66.

<sup>59</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 46.

<sup>60</sup> It is worth noting how the salience of this visceral, haunting memory links Salim to an insidious problem in postcolonial literature. Michael O’Riley has suggested that haunting has the effect of dispatching the present into the past, prompting an obsession with memory at the expense of the here and now. Salim’s brutal experience of death, however, shows why haunting remains a powerful and possibly insurmountable concept. Darwish’s images even carry Shakespearean tones of haunting. The exhortations in *Macbeth* such as “Out, out damned spot” or “Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him?” will invade Salim’s future and reinforce the traumatic image of blood that will not wash away. See Michael O’Riley, “Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter,” *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 3, No 4 (2007), 1-15.

and when he pulled it out it was full of water and clay and his foot would not fit inside. He left it behind, and soon he had to give up the second as well.<sup>61</sup>

The rain that Salim had foreseen at the story's opening—and which he originally thought might help to fend off patrol vehicles—now assaults him. Darwish first anthropomorphizes the atmosphere as striking Salim physically. The larger the drops become, the more unnatural they seem, not just hitting Salim but cutting into his body like needles. Darwish's image of the "open funnel" takes Nimr's finely tuned metaphor of a thread binding earth and sky and transforms it into an uncontrollable and aggressive image. The removal of the shoes is deceptive. It seems initially to suggest a productive return to a more natural form of movement, the body coming into direct contact with the sensuous surface of the ground, leaving behind a material encumbrance. Yet in over an hour, Salim is unable to walk as much as a hundred meters. Losing his instincts, he finds himself at a place that is particularly muddy. He sinks to his knees and, though barefoot, he cannot step any further. Moreover, he does not know where he is. He considers a detour around the swamp but admits that it could be "larger than he imagined, stretching both east and west."<sup>62</sup> Salim has lost the instinctive bearings in which he takes pride.

Just as there is no physical stability, no "undergirding support" given by the ground itself, there is no longer reliable assurance in Salim's emotional responses to his surroundings.<sup>63</sup> He hears a car drive past and establishes that it is moving from east to west. This car, rather than his natural knowledge, seems to orient him. He rejoices at being close to the road—the plain will not drown him, like it did Nimr, but will carry him all the way home. When Salim tries to move on, though, he immediately gets caught in the thickest mire yet: "With a new wave of determination and zeal, Salim tried to move

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<sup>61</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 66. Darwish, "The Emergence," 72.

<sup>62</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 77.

<sup>63</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 212.

forward, but he just couldn't. The land was like yoghurt, gluey, his feet sank down and his legs plunged into the mud until he was up to his waist."<sup>64</sup> A flash of hope is instantly thwarted by the increasingly difficult, homogenous, and sludgy terrain. The sound of the car and sinking into the mud complete Salim's reversal. He has been stripped of prior convictions in sensing the landscape, and he has unwittingly begun to orient himself by mechanical rather than natural references.

With this departure from a harmonious phenomenological bond, Darwish begets a greater ambivalence in Salim, stemming from the sharp contrast between this rational, artificial orientation, and Salim's extreme commitment to his act of return. Pressing on, though unable to walk across the plain, Salim throws himself down and resorts to rolling. It is a poignant image that envisions Salim as a child, his slate of territorial knowledge wiped clean. He begins to experience the world, again, at the most basic sensory level, in the same way that a crawling child finds her way around a room, locating objects and understanding their relationships to a particular place.<sup>65</sup> It is as if the violent storm transforming that liquid cord has severed his connection to the earth or, as it were, the motherland. Yet the image of rolling also commands immense determination. If Ibrahim to some degree takes the journey of his infiltrators for granted, Darwish highlights the intense desire and ambition that lie behind this act of breaching borders. Salim is "persistent, persistent, persistent," the repetition of "*muthābir*" mimicking his resort to brute willpower over instinct. His efforts have an almost Sisyphean tone to them: he knows that he may be expelled yet again—the analog to the fabled rock rolling down the hill—but Salim will return, no matter the cost. His resolve at the close echoes the single-

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<sup>64</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 78. Darwish, "The Emergence," 76.

<sup>65</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, 23.

mindedness captured earlier in the story when he orders Nimr in unequivocal terms: “Forget everything except returning. That’s all there is. That’s the only hope we have.”<sup>66</sup>

Through the mighty attempt to get home, Darwish returns Salim to the clay not in burial like Nimr, but in a primal reassessment of how he relates to the earth on which he sprawls. When Salim emerges into Israeli territory successfully, he is surprised to find out where he is. Happy to have crossed alive, he realizes—by the glow of a flash of lightning—that he has “veered west much more than he’d thought.”<sup>67</sup> He is close to the Jenin-Haifa road, along which lie several Jewish settlements through which it would be impossible to wander. His uncertainty about how to proceed is far from his previous confidence that he never makes mistakes with directions. In this ambivalence, Salim tellingly acknowledges that “the journey started over,” splitting along the Green Line what had previously been understood as a continuous walk home. In considering this path to come, Salim self-consciously strategizes moving in a particular direction because the wind will be at his back and may ease his physical efforts. His approach has become fully rational, rather than intrinsically guided by bodily instinct and familiarity.

The complex twists in Salim’s dynamic with the ground of Marj ibn ‘Amir, constituting a strange kind of belonging that cruelly challenges his body, lead at the story’s close to an ambivalent reemergence. In the final moments, Salim thinks of the name “*Filastīn*” and muses that the word for “clay” (*tīn*) comprises half of the national name. The earth inheres in the people with whom he identifies and the name of the land on which he stands. Obsessing over the word, Salim attempts to reclaim it, using it no less than seven times and repeating adages to sustain himself: “We are from the clay...to clay

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<sup>66</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 20.

<sup>67</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 80.

we return...Nimr returned to the clay..."<sup>68</sup> Salim thinks even of immersing himself in clay and plunging into it. The symbolism is clear as an expression of deep, grounded belonging, ironically accentuating the fact that the story's closing image depicts Salim being washed clean by the resurgent rain. Darwish deploys a classic Biblical trope of baptism. But if the rain is cleansing and purging, it is also washing away that very essence of the clay that Salim is trying to repossess.

The ambivalence of this symbolism is sharper in "*al-Khurūj*" than in other pieces where Darwish uses rain. In the story "*al-Ard*" (The Land) the protagonist Abu 'Ali is trying to build a home and prays that the rain not interfere. Darwish then uses the rain to portray the unpredictability of the natural world, but ensures that Abu 'Ali's house remains standing: his walls are "steadfast" (*ṣāmid*), evoking the famed Palestinian notion of "*ṣumūd*."<sup>69</sup> In "*Shitā' al-Ghurba*" (The Winter of Exile), which also narrates a journey home, the rain pours down and the path is covered in "thick mud" (*tīn waḥīl*) but it does not disturb the journey significantly or cause the disoriented, reflective ending that characterizes "*al-Khurūj*."<sup>70</sup>

Standing in Israel and setting out anew, Salim moves forward and notices a fresh breeze. In this apparently hopeful image, he feels the wind at his back: the natural world is spurring him on, renewing his strength and guiding him home. Yet Darwish has given an unsettling precedent. In the dark before daybreak, Salim had tried to navigate by the wind and suggested that, were the wind blowing behind him, he would be moving in the wrong direction.<sup>71</sup> At the close of his story, then, Darwish does not give an uncomplicated image of meteorological harmony pressing on into Israel. Rather, he closes with perhaps another betrayal. The breeze could carry Salim to a nearby Jewish town or into the arms

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<sup>68</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 79.

<sup>69</sup> Zaki Darwish, "*al-Ard*," in Zaki Darwish, *Shitā' al-Ghurba* (Haifa: al-Sharq, 1970), 24-25.

<sup>70</sup> Zaki Darwish, "*Shitā' al-Ghurba*," in Zaki Darwish, *Shitā' al-Ghurba* (Haifa: al-Sharq, 1970), 73-80.

<sup>71</sup> Darwish, "*al-Khurūj*," 66.

of a military patrol rather than set him right in the final stretch. The wind swirls with ambiguity rather than assurance, as its currents reiterate Salim's bond with his homeland while emphasizing that they may not bear him down the path that he expects.

Muhammad Sa'id finds this ending both "tragic" and "surprising." On a broad thematic level, he suggests that tragedy is a compelling overarching theme for the story, for a number of reasons. There are no flashes of humor. The story is a monumental battle between great binaries: to be or not to be; to remain on the land, or not to remain; man versus nature.<sup>72</sup> "The end of the story is tragic because Salim al-Husayn has continued on his way towards his goal without his friend." And Nimr's death is tragic in itself.<sup>73</sup> There are also certain tropes of a tragedy in a classical, theatrical sense. There is a unity in the plot: "one crisis and one basic predicament and one idea along one trajectory that goes towards the climax."<sup>74</sup> There are omens and signs, such as the rain and the death of a close friend. Indeed, Marj ibn 'Amir is almost like a flat stage with lighting (or lack thereof) and sound.<sup>75</sup> In this context, what is "surprising" to Sa'id is that this ending, just across the Green Line, stops short of Salim's expected "goal" of Deir al-Asad. Sa'id suggests that Darwish leaves the story hovering in a manner that is inappropriate to a tragic mode that should have an obvious beginning and a clear end.

I would suggest, however, that Salim's arrival in Israel is indeed a complete end in itself, which highlights the ambivalence that Darwish has crafted in Salim's relationship with the land. As I have noted, Darwish declares that "the journey started over" when Salim emerges from the plain and realizes that he is in Israeli territory. If the

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<sup>72</sup> Sa'id, "Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn," 78.

<sup>73</sup> Sa'id, "Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn," 82.

<sup>74</sup> Sa'id, "Mumayyizāt al-Nūvīlā fī al-Qiṣṣatayn," 86.

<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that Darwish had published two plays by 1983, both with similarly Spartan settings. *Al-Mawt al-Akbar* (The Greatest Death) is set between an urban street and a small house. *Lā* (No) moves between a courtroom and a patch of desert with a dry tree, mimicking the minimalist location of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

character embodies a committed, iconic kind of infiltrator, he nevertheless acknowledges difference in the journey ahead, now firmly in the territory of an Israeli state whose land he loves yet cannot fully recognize. Salim is shaken and uncertain in his phenomenological bond, but he is not despairing and has not abandoned this territory for a life beyond its new borders. Betrayed yet determined, he walks on.

### **CROSSING THE LINES: BORDERS AS DYNAMIC SETTINGS**

This chapter has focused closely on two geographic aspects of “*al-Khurūj*”—changes that wreak havoc on the protagonists’ home environments over time, and the desolation and physical disorientation that plague their journey across the plain. It is also important, however, to consider the broader valence of Darwish’s settings, since the most important transformations in the story occur over borders. Darwish uses both the Green Line through Marj ibn ‘Amir and the Lebanese border as spaces that compel multiple historical meanings around the story’s timeframe and the turbulent early 1980s when “*al-Khurūj*” was published.

In its long history, Marj ibn ‘Amir has been renowned as a centre of mobility, transport, and trade. It served as a land link through Palestine between Egypt and Mesopotamia. The ancient trade route, the Via Maris, intersected the plain in many directions.<sup>76</sup> Its Arabic name is drawn from the seventh-century Islamic conquests, while its Hebrew name, Emek Yizre’el, recalls an ancient Biblical city. One of the Hebrew words for “God” (“El”) inheres in this name. Both languages thus hark back through nomenclature to the earliest days of their respective cultural presences in the region.

For Salim, the chain of history and the plain’s thematic implications as a zone of movement might seem to give a degree of consolation. After burying Nimr, Salim thinks

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<sup>76</sup> Kamal Abdulfattah, “Marj Ibn Amer,” *This Week in Palestine*, Issue No. 139, November 2009.

to himself, “The land does not recognize borders,” invoking the wholeness of Palestine in the hope that Nimr is not left half-buried in some foreign land.<sup>77</sup> And yet, just as the violence of Nimr’s death undercuts the image of blood running home through the soil, so Salim’s own language of belonging is hesitant. He describes their circumstances as those of “exile within exile within the homeland sowed with new borders.”<sup>78</sup> The rhythmic phrasing constantly shrinks the spatial frame of belonging, emphasizing containment as well as displacement. The metaphor of planting new borders, meanwhile, as if cultivating crops in the plain, is a provocative allusion to the historical connotations of fertility.

The agricultural metaphor is also apt for the early post-1948 setting. The placement of the border is strange to Salim, forming an unnatural cleavage across his home landscape. Moreover, the language of cultivation was a cornerstone of Zionist rhetoric and political culture. The Jewish community in Palestine had, since the earliest waves of immigration in the late nineteenth century, valorized the figure of the pioneer (*halutz*) who became the national paragon. In a somewhat simplified Zionist national narrative, it would fall to these characters to complete David Ben Gurion’s vision of “making the desert bloom” with collective settlements in the very valley through which Salim treads.

The difficulties that Salim faces in crossing the Green Line through this charged territory attest to the place’s character as a site of contestation and to the shifting meanings of its natural fertility. As he struggles towards Israeli soil, Salim wishes that there were less rain; a drier swamp would be sturdy and traversable. Ironically, dryness is a hallmark of more recent controversial history that saw draining of the plain’s marshland in order to create habitable ground. This strategy formed part of a broader set of structural

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<sup>77</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 49.

<sup>78</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 35.

changes that, in many ways, cut local Palestinians such as Salim himself out of the process of controlling the fate and form of the land, instead facilitating construction by the Yishuv. In an era of reforms, Ottoman authorities had in the mid-nineteenth century passed land reform legislation that classified territories across the empire and created a system of registration and, therefore, sale. Large tracts across Palestine were registered to absentee landowners rather than to the local Palestinians who worked the earth. Those with the power to sell were seldom those with that particular attachment to the landscape. Land ownership by the Jewish community in Palestine had not changed substantially under the Ottomans but, after the British inherited this legal code in the 1920s, purchases by the Jewish National Fund skyrocketed. Over 100,000 acres of land were purchased in transactions that excluded the Palestinian Arabs who cultivated the land on a daily basis.

Putting this loss in perspective, Darwish carefully emphasizes how Salim began with eight acres and then managed to increase his holdings to about one hundred acres. Nimr thinks glowingly of the achievement of his companion, who always rose first to start work before sunrise and who produced the best and brightest fruit in the area.<sup>79</sup> A hundred acres, though, is a mere fraction of the territory sold, and Marj ibn ‘Amir was among the lands bought and drained for settlement. In the first half of the 1920s alone, landowning families in Lebanon sold roughly 60,000 acres in the plain area.<sup>80</sup> In the 1980s, the plain was targeted by the state’s Judaization programs, against which the Land Day riots had rallied. Marj ibn ‘Amir thus remained a contested area three decades into the state’s existence. In this context, Salim’s wish for drier land has fraught implications.

The Green Line through Marj ibn ‘Amir is not the only borderline that “*al-Khurūj*” negotiates. The line separating Israel from Lebanon, the only neighboring Arab

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<sup>79</sup> Darwish, “*al-Khurūj*,” 41.

<sup>80</sup> Philip Mattar, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Palestinians* (Facts on File: New York, 2005), 291-3.

state to feature in the story, also holds a prominent place. Salim's first memories are from a bitterly cold winter in Jezzīn before returning back across the border to Israel. He is later dropped at the border and forced to find his way back home a second time. If the Green Line emphasizes the ambivalence and contestation that characterize the protagonists' relationships with the contours of an Israeli landscape in historic Palestine, the Lebanese border reinforces different, though equally torn identifications that transcend formally imposed state borders.

Lebanon holds significant documentary value. Darwish himself moved with his family to the village of Jezzīn in southern Lebanon after al-Birwa was depopulated in 1948. After one year, the family infiltrated back into Israel and settled in Deir al-Asad. In interviews with translator Jamal Assadi and critic 'Atif Manna', Darwish acknowledges that, "My life actually started in Deir al-Asad," that the village still holds a "warm place" in his heart, and that in this story the author uses that locale as a "substitute" for the lost home of al-Birwa.<sup>81</sup> The author's personal story and his two home villages thus track the historical setting of the story and give the basis for Salim's background. Indeed, Salim is the name of the author's father.<sup>82</sup> This closeness to historical events pays homage to the perseverance of some of the 100,000 Palestinians who took the risky journey across the border, moving between places in which their sense of belonging was unstable.

Nimr, described as "suspended between Lebanon and Palestine," also evokes complex geographic identities.<sup>83</sup> His balancing act suggests a struggle for place and identification that emerges from marginalization in both settings. While his alienation in Israel is clear—he must negotiate his minority identity in a new state—his experiences in Lebanon are estranging in other ways. Palestinian refugees were not absorbed into that

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<sup>81</sup> Assadi, *Three Voices from the Galilee*, 39. 'Atif Manna', "Zaki Darwish Bayna al-Dhikrayāt wa-l-Ḥanīn li-Mahmud Darwish," *Bokra*, August 9, 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Dahbur, "Qışaş Zaki Darwish."

<sup>83</sup> Darwish, "al-Khurūj," 40.

state after the *Nakba*. Viewing the influx as a threat to state security and to the tenuous balance of populations that has long characterized Lebanese demography, the government contained the refugees in rudimentary camps.<sup>84</sup> “Political and security issues” generally took precedence over humanitarian concerns, although the United Nations Relief Works Agency did provide some assistance, in concert with Lebanese authorities.<sup>85</sup> Many of these camps still exist in this difficult and isolated space. Sari Hanafi argues that, throughout the six decades since 1948, a range of actors have contributed to the spatial, legal, and social containment of the camps as “spaces out of place,” or spaces of “exception” where tension and violence have swelled.<sup>86</sup>

As Muhammad ‘Ali Taha implies in the story of ‘A’id al-Mi‘ari, running and selling loaves of bread through Tall al-Za’tar, a lack of attachment to the Lebanese state pervaded the spatial matrix of the refugee camps. Palestinians named streets after those of their hometowns, ordered houses and rooms in familiar ways, called the camps by the names of their own home villages, and to some extent grafted their former geographies onto new sites.<sup>87</sup> As Parmenter argues, these were productive strategies to generate positive, affective links: “Re-creating certain aspects of home imbues the camp with form and meaning otherwise absent in exile.”<sup>88</sup> But no feat of naming could overcome the more troubling aspects of the camps. These were “the most squalid of all exile environments” and with “leaky tents, hastily built huts and tin shacks, long lines for food and medicine, poor sanitation, rain, cold, mud,” the camps were a debilitating reminder of the suffering

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<sup>84</sup> The most thorough analysis of Lebanon’s sectarian narratives and the confessional system is Kamal Salibi’s *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

<sup>85</sup> Dalal Yassine, “Unwelcome guests: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon,” *The Electronic Intifada*, July 13, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Sari Hanafi, “Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon As a Space of Exception,” *REVUE Asylon(s)*, No. 5, September 2008.

<sup>87</sup> In this respect, these refugees can be compared to early European immigrants in Israel, who used relics, ornaments, and furnishings to create a “diaspora chronotope,” a sense of the old homes extending into the new state. See Grumberg, *Place and Ideology*, 174-187.

<sup>88</sup> Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones*, 67.

borne of the Israeli state and of the reluctance of the Lebanese authorities to provide services, support, and conceivably a new home.<sup>89</sup> Darwish's use of the Lebanese border expresses the ambivalence of identifying across a wider landscape but doing so through stark challenges and a sense of threat and isolation. The winters in Lebanon are bitter and cold, and the journey home is familiar but perilous.

If Lebanon conjures the complexity of transnational and local identification in the first years of the Israeli state, its resonance in the 1980s is equally dynamic. The difficulties faced by Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps had persisted with the state's internal tensions, so much so that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon is frequently cited as one of the major drivers of the Lebanese Civil War that raged from the mid-1970s until 1990. Throughout the 1970s, the PLO was based in Lebanon and was able to militarize and conduct cross-border attacks against Israel from this location. This aspect of PLO militarization went alongside skirmishes with different local factions that included Maronite Christians as well as Sunni and Shi'a groups. Indeed, the trigger event of the civil war was a massacre of Palestinians by members of the Maronite militia, the Phalange.

Israel's role in this conflict was also pivotal. In June 1982, ostensibly in response to an assassination attempt against an Israeli official, the Israeli army invaded southern Lebanon in an attempt to destroy well-established PLO infrastructure in the south and to help install an Israel-friendly Maronite regime.<sup>90</sup> The campaign was unsuccessful and its signature tragedies were massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Phalangist forces enacted the large-scale slaughter of refugees, but the camps were within

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<sup>89</sup> For a fuller ethnographic account of the tense relationships between Palestinians in the camps and their Lebanese neighbors, see Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Place and Identity in Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> The idea of aligning with minorities was not new. David Ben Gurion had coined the concept of the "alliance of the periphery" as a proposal to anchor Israel's place in the region through non-Arab ties with Iran, Turkey, Kurdish populations, and the Maronites in Lebanon.

an Israeli cordon and in a southern region under IDF control. The event quickly became a rallying cry across the Palestinian diaspora.

The events at Sabra and Shatila also reverberated within Israel. A historic strike was called in 1983 to protest the events.<sup>91</sup> The Communist paper *al-Ittihad* was replete with fiery condemnations of Israel. The events are remembered annually and are often invoked comparatively as a barometer of violence. During the most recent war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006, journalist and author Suhail Kiwan branded the conflict as “another Sabra and Shatila.”<sup>92</sup> Others have compared the massacres to ongoing Israeli actions in Gaza. Interestingly, as the massacres prompted greater Palestinian Arab solidarity across the Lebanese border, they also helped to spur increasing support for Palestinian national rights and the recognition of refugees’ plight among the Israeli Jewish population. This had been Israel’s first “war of choice,” in contrast to previous conflicts perceived as necessary to the state’s existence. Advocacy groups like *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now) counted many soldiers among their ranks, led campaigns that called for accountability, and criticized Israel for its part in the massacres. There were clear political consequences: Ariel Sharon was held “personally responsible” and departed his post as Defence Minister, while Prime Minister Menachem Begin retired from public office in late 1983, spending the last decade of his life mostly in private. At the same time, Israeli citizens were forced to grapple with a continuing and traumatic military invasion and a stain on the reputation of the army that had so swiftly secured victory in 1967.

Against this rich transnational history across the story’s timeframes, the final tableau of “*al-Khurūj*,” as Salim stands clean in the rain, perhaps has an alternative

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<sup>91</sup> Peleg and Waxman, *Israel’s Palestinians*, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Suhail Kiwan, “*Ahdāf*,” (editorial column), *Kull al-‘Arab*, 28 July, 2006, 18.

connotation. To be sure, Salim represents the challenge of making a grueling journey home across an evolving Israeli-Palestinian landscape that seems to forsake him, yet still to ground his sense of belonging. In the mid-1980s, though, Salim's journey may also signal a new entrance into an Israeli-Palestinian landscape not of muddy clay, but of shifting sands. Salim's successful, if battered crossing may be read as an increasingly assertive sense of connection across borderlines. His emergence from the plain suggests a subject within Israel who, though bloodied, has indeed come a long way since 1948: more strident in transnational Palestinian Arab identities, more confident and supported in taking on the Israeli state, but still committed to treading on its soil and living within its borders.

## CONCLUSION

In his famous 1986 article on third-world literature, Fredric Jameson suggests that politically embroiled fiction produces characters who may be read as symbolic of their broader circumstances: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."<sup>93</sup> As Anna Bernard reminds us, Jameson's arguments about the "national allegory," though they were interpreted as a "scandalous generalization" of globally peripheral cultures, are also theorizing reception and readership, defending the authors' attempts to radiate outward their contextual differences and local challenges.<sup>94</sup> In line with this outlook, Jameson contends that these national allegories are "conscious and overt."<sup>95</sup> It becomes the task of "first-world" readers to account critically for what this may imply for their own understandings of such texts.

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<sup>93</sup> Jameson, "Third-World Literature," 69.

<sup>94</sup> Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 23-24.

<sup>95</sup> Jameson, "Third-World Literature," 80.

What little scholarship has emerged on Zaki Darwish has followed uncomplicated allegorical lines, focusing on his later work—the collections *Thalāthiyyat al-Mawt* (The Trilogy of Death) and *Aḥmad, Maḥmūd wa-l-Ākharūn* (Ahmad, Mahmud, and the Others) and framing these pieces as “literature of the Intifada.” The 1983 story “*al-Khurūj*,” emerging shortly before the fraying of tensions that would erupt in 1987, should not be retroactively considered in the same light. To be sure, Darwish clearly attempts to use the character of Salim as the kernel of some broader implication. His skills and instincts concerning the land hint at the value of agricultural, territorial knowledge for Palestinian persistence in Israel. His very survival, set against Nimr’s gritty downfall, also attests to the importance of this bond. That the events of the story represent his third expulsion in as many years from Israeli territory suggests further commitment to place in the face of adversity.

However, Salim’s allegorical value is not “overt.” Darwish builds his narrative with geographical complexities that crucially undermine his protagonists, conjuring the sense that Salim is at best an unreliable sort of paragon. His grounded reputation sits uneasily against the lack of rootedness imposed on him. His confidence is matched only by his acute vulnerability in crossing the plain and venturing back into Israel. Darwish does not leave a clean national allegory of perseverance and belonging, but instead a muddy picture whose characters are constantly on the move between places and identities, and whose assurance is offset by uncertainties, even betrayals that spring from the land for which they strive. “*Al-Khurūj*” thus occupies an important place in local Arabic literature in Israel, neatly encapsulating the long, unstable, and anxious journey of Palestinian Arab identities in the state and posing a torn subject, reentering across the Green Line on the brink of the momentous shifts of the late 1980s.

## CONCLUSION

In December 1987, the First Intifada erupted across the West Bank. Amid strikes, stone-throwing, riots, house demolitions, and the eventual deployment of the Israeli military along and across the Green Line, many wondered how Palestinian Arabs within Israel might respond. In the increasingly fraught space between nation and state, where did their allegiances lie? In their ethnographic work on the Arab citizens, Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker have pointed to a surge of empathy, following the Intifada, among Palestinians within Israel towards those outside. However, they also observed a simultaneous drive for increased civic rights as Israeli citizens, this sentiment emerging in “the absence of a shared political goal.” In fact, if there was tangible political cooperation among Palestinians across the Green Line, it seemed to be “short-lived and ineffective.”<sup>1</sup> As in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the local politics of the Palestinian Arab citizenry chafed with Palestinian concerns beyond Israeli borders.

The year before the Intifada, in 1986, a different reckoning played out in the literature of Anton Shammas, who published his novel *Arabeskot* (Arabesques) that year. The text is a lyrical blend of memoir and fiction that confronts questions of belonging and identity between the early twentieth century and the present time, and across locales, from the University of Iowa to the town of Fassuta in northern Israel. *Arabeskot* was not the first novel written in Hebrew by an Arab citizen—‘Atallah Mansur had written *Be-Or Hadash* (In a New Light) in 1966, without causing many critical ripples—but it was the first to exhibit a high degree of artistry. Shammas’ work was controversial, even revolutionary, and critics seemed unsure how to respond. As Bouskila notes, some bristled and considered the skilled use of Hebrew an “invasion” into modern Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, *Coffins on our Shoulders*, 93.

culture. Hannan Hever suggested Shammas used the Hebrew language to strike at “the Achilles heel” of the Israeli state and its “loose distinction between Israeli and Jew.”<sup>2</sup> Aharon Amir, by contrast, suggested that the work’s linguistic richness, coupled with a perspective from the state’s social periphery, could augment Israeli culture in the same way that French writing in Algeria, or English fiction in India, could enrich and expand those canons.<sup>3</sup>

These initial responses can be distilled to the problematic intersection between language and categorization. Is *Arabeskot* Hebrew literature, or perhaps “Arabic literature written in Hebrew letters”? Is it Israeli or Palestinian? Is Shammas’ choice of Hebrew an acceptance of Israel, or a rejection of Israeli culture, one that uses its own linguistic tools against it? Does Shammas endanger Hebrew literature, or does his linguistic choice betray the Arab world?

I do not mention the publication of *Arabeskot* and the outbreak of the First Intifada to suggest an equivalence or causal relationship between the literary and the political. But the two share in common a discursive problem: though their cultural dynamics are complex and entangled, the dominant frameworks for understanding them have remained rigid and uncomplicated. As I have suggested from the outset, proponents of the polar division of Israel and Palestine implicitly advance a problematically fundamental duality, even though cultural phenomena like *Arabeskot* continue to challenge its validity.

Shammas himself proclaimed the need for alternatives. He characterized the prevailing framework in Israel as one in which authors were “writing in Arabic but within the paradigm of Jewish culture.” Working in Hebrew, Shammas had clear ambitions: “I

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<sup>2</sup> Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature*, 51.

write in Hebrew, I'm still working within this paradigm and I'm not trying to break away from it, I'm trying to blow it from within."<sup>4</sup> Shammás' linguistic choice thus enacted a subtle violence against the entrenchment of duality. His project was at once far from the "Israelization" that some see in the adoption of Hebrew among Arab citizens, and the "Palestinization" that local empathy with the Intifada seemed to suggest. For Shammás, "Israelization" involved redefining the very term, trying to "un-Jew the Hebrew language," to weaken the "exclusivist bond between 'Jewish' and 'Israeli'" and to challenge the easy logic of "ethnocultural segregation."<sup>5</sup> Shammás' work underlined the imperative for thinking "across the lines."<sup>6</sup>

Shammás' skepticism of binaries in the literary sphere is shared by Joe Cleary in the political arena. The trauma of the First Intifada helped to beget the peace process and the milestone of the 1993 Oslo Accords, when Palestinian and Israeli camps endorsed the idea of a two-state solution. Yet, as Cleary argues, this "solution" too traffics in a well-trodden and unsatisfactory duality. For Cleary, Oslo "represents a return to the principle of territorial division and separate Jewish and Palestinian states embodied in the 1947 UN partition proposals." There is, however, an important difference: "in the interim period Israel has secured control over territory well in excess of anything conceived in the 1947 plan."<sup>7</sup> According to Cleary, this geopolitical shift means that, in any final negotiations, Israel would be given the opportunity to consolidate gains from both the 1948 and the 1967 wars, and the resultant Palestinian state would be limited and dissected, and its "autonomy, either political or economic, would inevitably be chimerical."<sup>8</sup> While in theory the peace process could pursue a more equitable division of territory and become

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<sup>4</sup> Caspi and Welstch, *From Slumber to Awakening*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition*, 77-78.

<sup>6</sup> For critical readings of *Arabeskot* along these entwined lines, see Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded*, 248-283; Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition*, 73-93; and Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*, 136-159.

<sup>7</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 47.

workable for both states, Cleary concludes simply that it is “the whole principle of a two-state solution that needs to be questioned.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, in recent years, some have started to advocate for a “one-state solution,” a bi-national state or federation that reinstates the geopolitical unity of Palestine under the pre-1948 British Mandate borders. If a two-state partition seems deficient, though, Cleary suggests that the one-state alternative is even more so, “utopian in the most puerile sense of that word.”<sup>10</sup> From a Palestinian perspective, as Cleary notes, the one-state solution demands that Palestinian Arabs “completely re-define their struggle so that its goal would no longer be the establishment of a separate Palestinian state.” Instead, Palestinians would have to accept that geopolitical developments under Israel’s aegis now preclude partition, and they would be forced to “re-articulate their struggle as one to secure full civic rights as citizens and full national rights as equal partners in a common bi-national Palestinian-Israeli State.”<sup>11</sup> From a Jewish Israeli perspective, on which Cleary does not elaborate, the one-state option spells the dismantling or even destruction of Israel as “Jewish and democratic.” This would occur in the most basic sense through a new demography that overturns the Jewish majority, and in more complex ways through necessary changes to laws that privilege the immigration of Jews and protect the language, narratives, anthems, and holidays that lie at Israel’s symbolic core. As ever, a clean solution is elusive, but the critical implication is that the entire strategy for how we understand geopolitical and territorial entanglement needs to be seriously interrogated.

Though *Arabeskot*—and its rough coincidence with the First Intifada—does represent a changing tide in the parameters of Palestinian-Israeli cultural discourse, it is hardly the first literary expression to have challenged an Israeli-Palestinian binary in

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<sup>9</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Cleary, *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*, 48.

critical ways. Throughout this dissertation, I have focused on the close reading of Arabic-language texts from among the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel between the years of 1967 and 1983. I have argued that, well before the advent of *Arabeskot*, and in a different language, textual mediations of Israeli-Palestinian geographies and their crucial relationship to personal and collective identities are often ambivalent, contested, and situated in the fluid in-between spaces of these entangled societies. I have suggested that the Arabic short story in Israel during this period after the 1967 War is best seen as an active site of anxious, hybrid negotiation, whose forms, characters, and environments convey the dilemmas of establishing a sense of place in the context of a dispersed Palestinian nation, territorial uncertainty in Israel/Palestine, social and political marginalization within the state, and the changing geography of a homeland under another's sovereign rule.

In developing this argument, I have also shown that writers deal with geography in contrasting ways, and I have emphasized different facets of the experience of contested Israeli-Palestinian spaces. In Chapter Two, I explored Habibi's use of everyday environments—Mas'ud's house in a small Galilean village, the streets of Haifa where Umm al-Rubabika roves, and the al-Libban slope on the road between Nazareth and Haifa—and their dimensions of anxiety and incompleteness in the context of Palestinian reunions after the Six-Day War. In Chapter Three, I suggested that Taha's interest in geography also centers on vernacular environments but revolves primarily around movement: from train travel to a well-trafficked square in Haifa, and the forms of circulation embodied in the newspaper and the radio. Taha also highlights the place of sound in the texture of public space, especially as a means to recover the Palestinian names of towns and villages.

In Chapter Four, I shifted the focus to the often-simplified theme of “the land.” I discussed the centrality of land contests and land expropriation to the writing of Naffa‘ and Ibrahim. I suggested that Land Day—the iconic moment of land-based protest in the 1970s—occupies an ambivalent place between the local and national, a tension that is equally striking in Naffa‘’s rich portrayals of his home, the Druze village of Beit Jann. In short stories by Ibrahim, the anxiety over land and protest surfaces through Jewish characters. I read the moderation of Ibrahim’s Jewish characters and his engagement with the phenomenon of infiltration as a function of the uncanny, inevitable proximity of Israeli and Palestinian societies within Israel.

In Chapter Five, I explored Zaki Darwish’s evocation of the phenomenological effects of territorial contest. I argued that Darwish inscribes a profound bond with territory through the human body, marking its changes not through the land protests of the 1970s but through the traumas of the pre-state era in his characters’ homes of al-Birwa and Deir al-Asad, and in their brutally challenging journey across the historically significant and once familiar plain of Marj ibn ‘Amir. More viscerally and perhaps more tragically than the other writers, Darwish communicates the violence and ambivalence of persisting in a national homeland being changed and governed by another’s hand.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

As I suggested in the introduction, there are three clear contributions that this dissertation makes to the study of Arabic literature in Israel. First, I have employed a flexible framework that looks microscopically at language, narrative structure, etymology, and imagery, enriched by geographic theories concerning the complexities of space and place. This distinguishes my work from Barbara Parmenter’s humanistic study of Palestinian literature, as well as the scholarship of local critics such as Nabih al-Qasim,

Habib Bulus, and Ibrahim Taha, who have discussed language, the land, and Arab and Palestinian identity in only the broadest terms. Similarly, the flexibility of my approach offers a foil to the work of Mahmoud Ghanayim, whose work suffers from an almost pedantic absorption in aesthetic categories, developmental cultural trajectories, and periodization.

Of course, we cannot dispense with these categories entirely. Much like the “culture concept” for modern anthropology, timeframes and literary types—as well as notions like “identity” and “the land,” or “Israeli” and “Palestinian” for that matter—provide important intellectual scaffolding. An overemphasis on phases and paths, however, or an acceptance of these categories as stable, misses the fluidity of texts that refuse to be boxed in. Though my dissertation takes 1967 as a seminal moment and comes to a close in the mid-1980s, I have shown that transitions and periods are blurry. While the 1960s saw the end of military rule, Habibi and Taha both demonstrate that anxieties about restricted movement persisted for several years. If Land Day was a critical moment of mobilization, Ibrahim and Naffa‘ confirm that the land confiscations, depictions of the local village, and the Jewish characters embroiled in the process were meaningful tropes both before and well after 1976. When watershed moments and teleological tracks such as “crystallization,” “politicization,” or an “opening up” to modernism are too rigidly imposed, it is through close reading that the texts offer their more flexible meanings.

Second, in keeping with the limited timeframe of the dissertation, I have paid careful attention to the historical context of the short stories discussed. Too often works are separated from their context, or contextualized in general and then read as somehow apart from that very history. By contrast, I have incorporated archives related to Habibi’s tenure in the Knesset, as well as secondary historical and political sources. These details,

from the history of a home village to the texture of Land Day as a set of protests and now a widely commemorated event, are important aspects of Arabic literature in Israel, and all the more so when the writers in question are largely untranslated and have not attracted significant scholarly attention beyond the local Arabic-language sphere.

Third, I have worked with the intricacies of language and postcolonial theory to highlight how Hebrew and Arabic, or Israeli and Palestinian, interact closely and in productive tension. I have worked with scholarship written in Hebrew, and I have shown that Hebrew names and terms, even if they appear sparsely in certain short stories, nevertheless play a critical role. From Taha's depiction of children playacting as Israeli soldiers and calling out Hebrew names to Habibi's use of a particular Israeli neologism for a frozen sweet, the interplay of these languages reveals compelling conflicts unique to the entangled nature of Israel's Arabic literature. Similarly, I have employed postcolonial concepts of hybridity and anxiety to explore the closeness of Palestinian Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens. Characters like the "infiltrator" or the hardy worker of the land are common to both Arab and Zionist narratives, and characters frequently clash in everyday settings, such as Sarah's home, the newsstand in Paris Square, or the alleys of Salim and Nimr's hometown.

As they live and work within Israeli society, Arab authors in Israel thus cannot be viewed uncritically only as part of a Palestinian national culture that is diametrically opposed to a unified Jewish Israeli or Zionist hegemony. As scholars in various disciplines—Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg in popular culture; Zachary Lockman in history; Livia Alexander in film; and Gil Hochberg and Anna Bernard in literature—have begun to collapse these categories and to work bilingually, this dissertation has ventured a similarly rich engagement with Palestinian Arab fiction *within* Israel and its hybrid geographies and identities.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This dissertation lays the groundwork for at least three avenues of expansion. First, the theoretical framework, which allows for an exploration of space and place in historical context and with sensitivity to shifting identities in minority communities, might be productively applied to other regions and cultural situations characterized by contested territory, marginal minorities, and struggles with state authority for rights, institutions, symbols, and narratives. Apart from the nearby possibilities—the small Jewish population in Turkey, for example; or the Christian community in Iraq—comparisons could also develop from the postcolonial writing of East and West Africa or the separatist battle in Ireland.

Two more paths for expansion remain firmly in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere. Here, building on my close engagement with Hebrew terms and etymology deployed by Arab writers, scholars may interrogate more broadly the Palestinian Israeli community's critical use of the Hebrew language, especially where it diverges from the use of Arabic within similar contexts. For example, Sayyed Kashua's Hebrew satires may be productively read against Habibi's use of irony in Arabic. Or Shammas' Hebrew descriptions of his family home in Fassuta might be compared to Naffa's rich rendering of Beit Jann in often colloquial Arabic. This expansion may also include the work of Iraqi Jewish writers in the 1950s and early 1960s in Arabic, and their subsequent writing in Hebrew, building on the work of Ammiel Alcalay, Rachel Brenner, and others, and further complicating the confluences of Arabic and Hebrew, Jewish and Arab.

Second, in the spirit of incorporating a range of cultural materials, I have set the stage for an interdisciplinary inquiry that would explore the other forms and texts through which anxiety and hybridity are negotiated and relayed. This effort might best be focused on a particular moment, such as Land Day, looking beyond fiction and into poetry, media

reports, memorials, and annual commemorations that have developed since. This approach might stress a holistic approach towards cultural output. As Yasir Suleiman has pointed out, literature and the “construction of national identities” are often “elite-mediated” activities.<sup>12</sup> It is also important to embrace outlets like music, mass media, and activism, whose populism may evoke different power structures compared to the literary canon.

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In an article on self-representations by the Jewish diaspora, Elizabeth Grosz suggests that there is a strange kind of privilege to the lens of exile. These are communities defined by “exclusion from a social mainstream,” and they are able to cultivate the perspective of an outsider who can critique the system and note its flaws in different, perhaps more objective ways than those on the inside.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, with “its own history and self-representations,” an exilic community remains empowered to combat the negativity thrown its way, building a sense of self and collectivity in writing despite marginal conditions. Grosz sums up this “borderline position of the exile” eloquently as a blend of the peripatetic and the resilient: “not at home in one place or another, nomadic, meandering, indirect, yet not necessarily lost and abandoned.”<sup>14</sup>

As is so often the case, this insight drawn from the history of the Jewish people seems eerily apt for a Palestinian Arab predicament. Writers like Imil Habibi, Muhammad Naffa‘, and Zaki Darwish are not exiles beyond their homeland. Nevertheless, in many ways they move and write on the periphery of mainstream Israeli society, a position that is readily conducive to analytical critiques of the state to which

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<sup>12</sup> Yasir Suleiman, introduction to *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “Judaism and Exile: The Ethics of Otherness,” in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, eds. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1993), 69.

<sup>14</sup> Grosz, “Judaism and Exile,” 69.

they belong as citizens, if not as Jewish nationals. Yet they commit in their writings and political activities to finding a sense of belonging, however fraught, in the state's Israeli-Palestinian interstices. These authors tackle head-on the searing questions of cultivating one's place in Israel, moving through newly named Israeli or Zionist representations of space, working a land under threat, and balancing the apparent contradictions of Israeli civic and Palestinian national spheres.

Perhaps Imil Habibi captures it best. "Life is not made up of parallel lines," he writes in *Sudāsiyya*. "The lines are entwined."<sup>15</sup> Lines do seem to occupy an outsize place in Israel. Since the early days of Zionism, the claim to the land has been emboldened by cartography, which facilitates the naming of spaces and gives coherent, material form to a new state that long existed as only a notional abstraction. The Green Line, so called for the green pen used in Israeli-Jordanian talks that drew a post-1948 boundary on a shabby map, has for over sixty years been a symbol of separation between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. So too the Blue Line has demarcated Israel's border with Lebanon. And of course "red lines" are a watchword of political rhetoric and punditry. It may be easier to see Israel and Palestine along these lines as antagonists or nemeses. But it is more enriching to accept the entanglement and ambivalence that accompany the breaking of binaries and the crossing of borders. It is a task that embraces the untidy work of living, writing, and reading between the lines.

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<sup>15</sup> Habibi, "Wa-Akhīran Nawwara al-Lawz," 37.

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