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UNIVERSITY OF KENT
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

**‘For those who have no doorway’:
Palestinian literature and national consciousness**

Submitted for the Degree of PhD in Postcolonial Studies
at University of Kent in 2006

by
Clemency M. L. Schofield

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the part played by Palestinian literature in the formation of national consciousness. The importance of literature to national and anti-colonial struggles has long been recognised, but in the Palestinian situation it has taken on additional significance. Firstly, in the absence of territory it sought to unite a geographically dispersed people, many of whom had suffered severe trauma on being ejected from their homes and lands. A national imagining was vital to overcome feelings of alienation, both from the land and from other sectors of the population, and to create the idea of a national homeland, based on claims to spatial and historical belonging. Secondly, it had to counter a powerful ideology: that of the Zionist claim to the same land. The land is not just a geographical space; it is invested with memories and narratives, and it comes to embody what it means to be Palestinian. Thus the struggle is not only over the land but also over the *meaning* of the land. However, when a nationalist struggle is predicated largely on tropes of possession of a feminised land, a specifically gendered conception of national agency emerges, one that envisages the masculine as active and the feminine as passive. This thesis therefore investigates the implications of such an imagining. The question of how women themselves relate to the gendered discourse of nationalism – both how they attempt to insert themselves as national agents and how they contest masculinist tropes – is also considered. Additionally, Palestinian women frequently have to cross the psychologically-imposed threshold between the private and public realms, a division that is reinforced not only by patriarchy but also by fundamentalist visions of nation. In this respect, the significance of literature as an imaginary realm in which dominant paradigms can be questioned and reconfigured must not be underestimated. Finally, this thesis examines how writing helps overcome the sense of alienation associated with exile. A powerful dialectic is at work in exilic consciousness: the here-and-now of the hostile present is countered by the there-and-then of a sustaining past, but it is out of this dialectic that possibilities for the future emerge. I look at the way in which the playful appropriation of exile as the motif of our post-modern consciousness is challenged by much Palestinian exilic writing. Some writers find consolations in the condition of exile, while others reconfigure the meanings of return and journeying. The complexity and multivalent nature of Palestinian writing create a heterogeneous conception of nation that becomes the ideal of an inclusive national consciousness.

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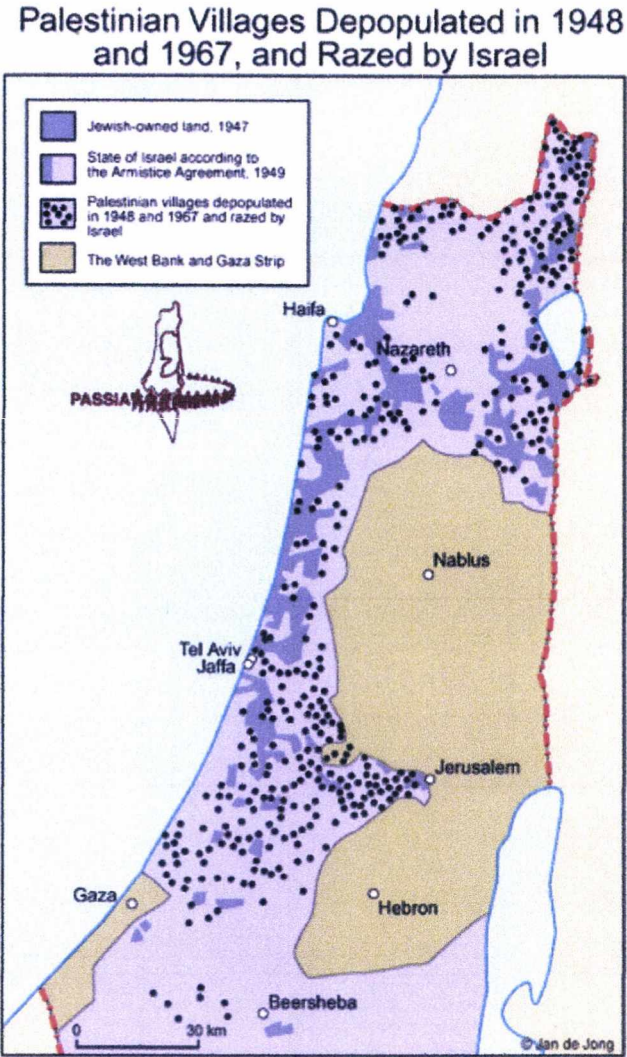
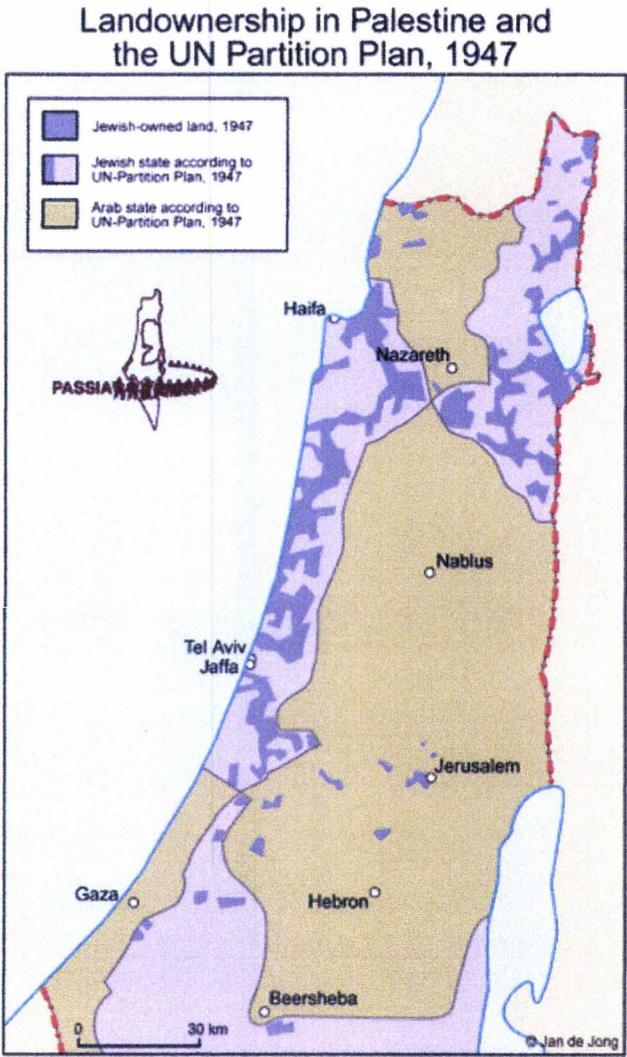
ABBREVIATIONS

Where I have cited from anthologies and collections, I have given abbreviations as follows. Full references appear in the bibliography.

<i>AMPL</i>	<i>Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature</i> (ed. Jayyusi, Salma Khadra)
<i>ATE</i>	<i>The Adam of Two Edens: Poems</i> (Darwish, Mahmoud)
<i>LST</i>	<i>A Land of Stone and Thyme: An Anthology of Palestinian Short Stories</i> (ed. Elmessiri, Nur & Abdelwahab)
<i>PAW</i>	<i>The Poetry of Arab Women</i> (ed. Handal, Nathalie)
<i>PW</i>	<i>The Palestinian Wedding</i> (ed. Elmessiri, Abdelwahab)
<i>UIWP</i>	<i>Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems</i> (Darwish, Mahmoud)
<i>WFC</i>	<i>Women of the Fertile Crescent: Modern Poetry by Arab Women</i> (ed. Boullata, Kamal)

PALESTINE FACTS

MAPS



Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
(PASSIA)

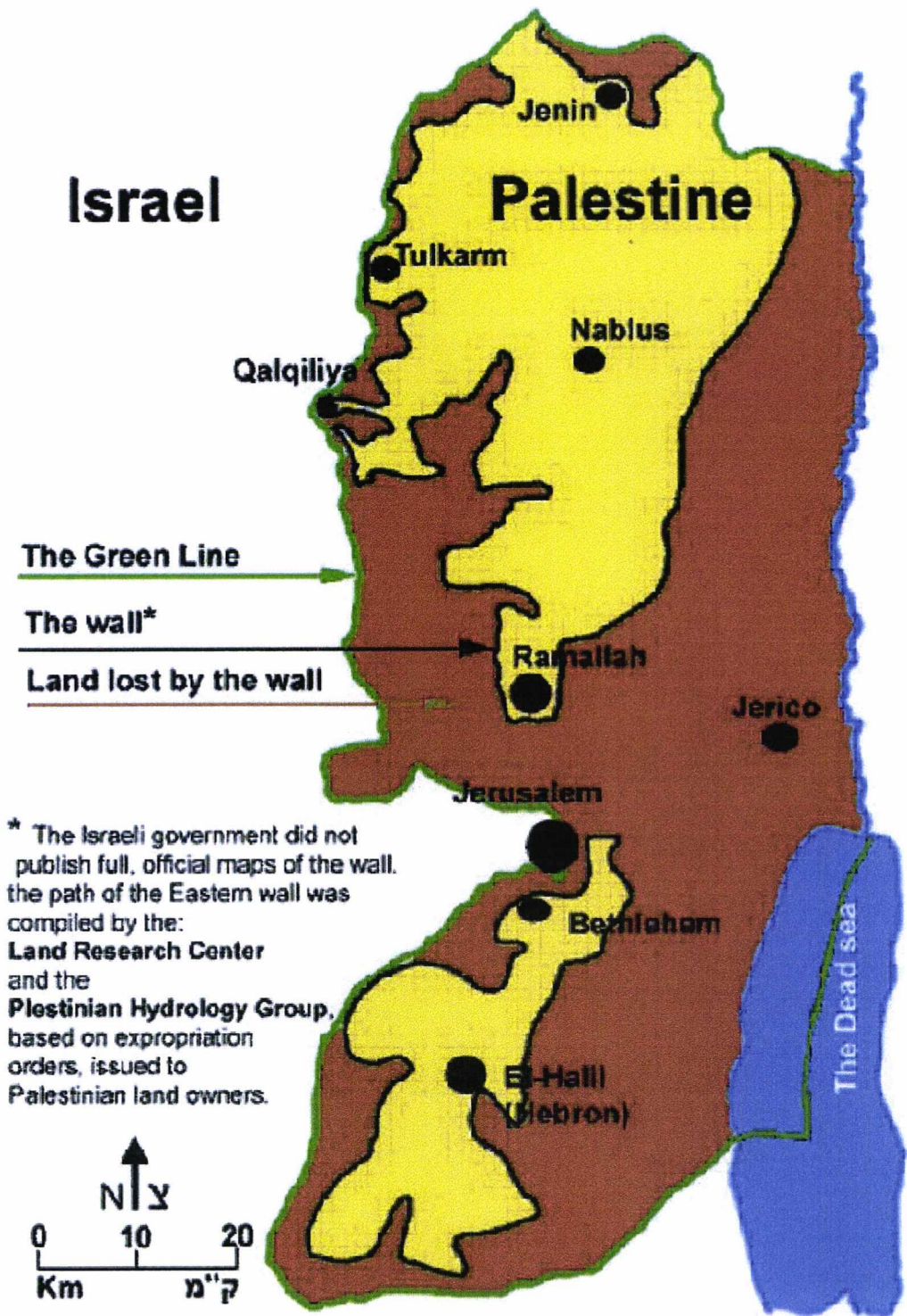
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Outlining Areas A, B, and C

Map from Foundation for Middle East Peace
www.fmed.org

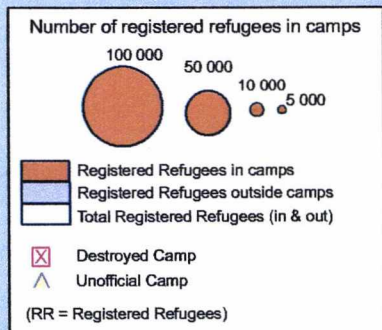


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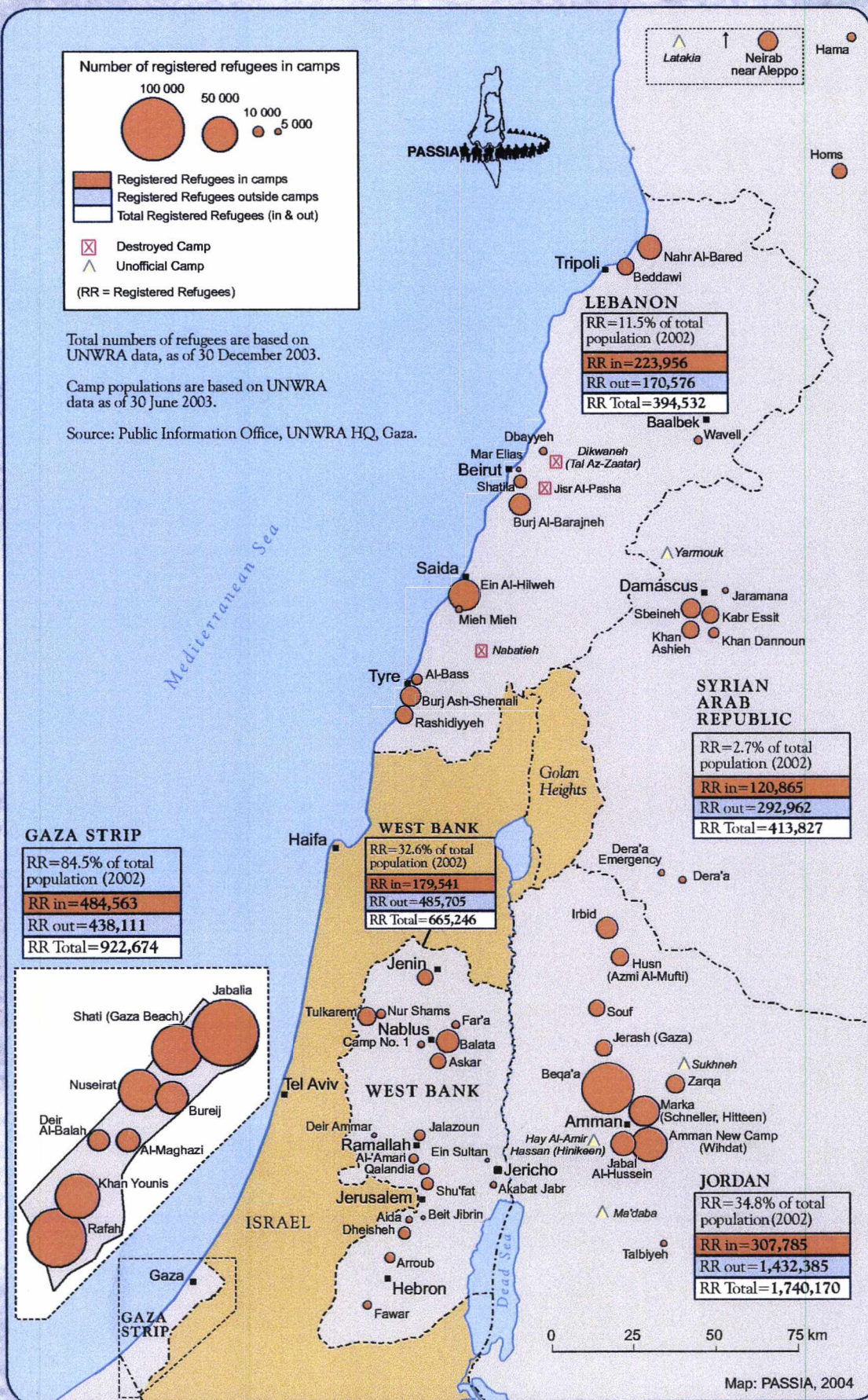
Palestinian Refugees - Area of UNRWA Operations



Total numbers of refugees are based on UNWRA data, as of 30 December 2003.

Camp populations are based on UNWRA data as of 30 June 2003.

Source: Public Information Office, UNWRA HQ, Gaza.



INTRODUCTION

The words with which I have chosen to frame this study come from a Mahmoud Darwish poem, 'Guests on the Sea' (*AMPL*155-7), the complete line posing the question: 'who can remember how the words lit up into a homeland for those who have no doorway?' It struck me as encapsulating the primary concerns of modern Palestinian writing: the importance of memory; the power of language to create real and imaginary homelands; the still largely unfulfilled need for a 'doorway' that can define an inside and its relation to the rest of the world. That poetic line brings together debates about culture and nationalism, but instead of abstracting these debates to a metropolitan centre, it roots them firmly in the history and material reality of those 'without': without a homeland, without sovereignty, and without equal rights and therefore 'without' (in the sense of being outside of) the wider community of nation-states. I had considered using in the title a line from another Darwish poem that reads 'Ours is a country of words'.¹ I decided against it because although, as I argue, without dwelling on the land the Palestinians constructed a narrative of belonging, the land always remained for them more material, more real, than merely words. Throughout this examination of Palestinian literature, any leaning towards the transcendental or idealised is matched by appreciation of the country as it is and a determination by those on the 'inside' to stay where they are.

The Palestinian struggle for national liberation follows a long tradition of anti-colonial endeavours, and it confirms some aspects of postcolonial theory while challenging others. If nations are 'imagined communities' (Anderson) and 'inventions' (Gellner), it follows that imaginative literature is vital in their construction and maintenance. Edward Said argues that 'literature has played a crucial role in the re-establishment of a national cultural heritage [and as such] literature not only mobilised active resistance to incursions from the outside, but also contributed massively as the shaper, creator, agent of illumination within the realm of the colonised' (Said 'Figures' 1-2). I will put the case that in the instance of the Palestinians, literature performed a particularly important role for two reasons. Firstly, the events of 1948 saw them converted almost overnight into a refugee nation, no longer dwelling on the land of

¹ The line comes from 'We Travel Like All People' (*UIWP*11), the final two lines reading: 'Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me rest my road against a stone./Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me see an end to this journey.' Glenn Bowman used the words for the title of his essay "'A Country of Words": Conceiving the Palestinian Nation from the Position of Exile'.

Palestine but dispersed widely throughout the world and in hugely varying situations.² In the absence both of territory and of modern state apparatuses (such as museums, a national press, educational institutions) literature had to unite the scattered people and create a sense of national belonging that was, in the absence of borders to delineate a geographical space, predicated on emotional and historical attachments. As Timothy Brennan points out, the idea of the nation not only refers to ‘the modern nation state’ but also to ‘something more ancient and nebulous – the *‘natio’* – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging’ (Brennan 45). Palestinian literature involved an imaginative reconstruction (in the sense of putting back together) what had been ruptured in 1948, its task to ‘reassemble from bits and pieces [. . .] a continuous, recognizably Palestinian discourse with which to beguile the insidious effects of diaspora and deterritorialization on Palestinian national identity’ (Siddiq ‘Ropes’ 88). The collective acts of memory enacted by literature become national narratives that reinsert the people into history. Secondly, Palestinian claims to the land had to battle against Zionist ideology that based its claims on Biblical authorisation. Palestinian poetry seeks out features of the land and makes them into symbols of the people and their resistance, so that people and land become one. Palestinian literature affirms the people’s attachment to the land. The crisis faced by the Palestinian people was mirrored by the struggle of writers to be heard and recognised, not only in the face of Israeli censorship but also because of the absence of supportive institutions of state. Mahmoud Darwish has explained how: ‘The problem for Palestinian poetry is that it started without outside help, without historians, geographers, anthropologists; so it had to find on its own all the resources needed to defend its right to existence’ (Darwish *La Palestine* 27). It might appear that Palestinian national consciousness is purely reactive, that it was awoken only by the *nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948. Nationalist sentiment and action were evident before 1948, but here I wish to stress the importance of a developing national culture as a positive and creative act. Fanon says that national culture ‘is the whole body of efforts made by a people in thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence’ (Fanon 188). The act of self-creation necessary to the anti-imperial struggle

² In 1948 approximately 750,000 Palestinians fled the country, most to refugee camps in surrounding countries, others (chiefly the professional and educated classes) finding employment in Arab States or in the West. Another approximately 170,000 remained within Israel. For excellent reconstructions of the experiences of the refugee camp dwellers and of those within Israel, see Rosemary Sayigh’s *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* and Nur Masalha’s *Catastrophe Remembered*, respectively. Both books contain many oral testimonies.

brings a people to full self-realisation; it is both 'emancipatory' and 'empowering' (Parry 'Resistance' 178, 179).

On a theoretical level, I have found most useful those theorists who favour a 'materialist' approach. By this I mean those to whom in a postcolonial sphere the politics of liberation and resistance theory are paramount, rather than those who concentrate on textualist accounts of the coloniser/colonised relationship. However, such a focus did not precede my reading of the material, but rather the concerns of the literature pointed me in that direction. I admit to having started out with an aversion to the stridency and coercive tone of much nationalist and resistance literature; and I was impressed by poststructuralism's dismantling of atavism, essences and grand narratives, and its resulting tendency (most noticeable in Homi Bhabha) to suggest the discursively-constituted ability of the marginalized to challenge and undermine imperial power. I soon began to feel uncomfortable with the way in which such readings favour textuality over materiality, readings that seem misguided in the Palestinian context: opposition cannot be reduced to a play-on-words. Much has been written on the intersection of the postcolonial with poststructuralism and postmodernity, and it is in this area that disagreements among postcolonial theorists often appear. Although the 'materialist' is most frequently associated with Benita Parry,³ many other commentators, even though they do not agree with Parry in every respect, have expressed concern over what Parry describes as a 'preference within the postcolonial discussion for hybrid, mestizo, or creolised formations [that privilege] a fissured postcolonial identity, and [that scant] the intelligibility, mutability, and inventions of the indigenous' ('Directions' 72). In the same vein, Linda Hutcheon remarks that such 'radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury and the dominant order' (Hutcheon 'Circling' 131), and Childs and Williams comment on the perception of the postmodern 'simply as a continuation of Western hegemonic practice, situating the main debates within European thought' (Childs & Williams 204). Stephen Slemon cautions that:

[. . .] postcolonial studies needs always to remember that its referent in the real world is a form of political, economic, and discursive oppression whose name, first and last, is *colonialism* [. . .] we need to remember that resistances to colonialist power always find material presence at the level of the local [or] we risk turning the work of our

³ Other writers who are often associated with materialist criticism are Neil Lazarus, Timothy Brennan, Edward Said, and Laura Chrisman.

field into the playful operations of an academic glass-bead game.
(Slemon 52).

As Said comments in an interview, 'Academics have lost touch with the, shall we say, existential density of real human life' (Said 'Wild Orchids' 179).

In this respect, Edward Said's work follows an illustrative trajectory, from his early engagement with poststructuralism (particularly the influence of Foucault on his writing of *Orientalism*) to his later awareness of its lack of engagement with the real and with the agency of the colonial subject. In his essay 'Travelling Theory', he discusses his concern with the rarefication/reification of theory when it is 'relatively untested by and exposed [*sic*] to the complex enfolding of the social world' (211). Commenting on the 'disturbing circularity of Foucault's theory of power', Said contends that Foucault's sense of history is 'ultimately textual, or rather textualized', which in turn means that his archaeologies

[. . .] make not even a nominal allowance for emergent movements and none for revolutions, counterhegemony, or historical blocks. In human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible, limits power in Foucault's sense, and hobbles the theory of that power (216).

This observation is of crucial significance when considering the possibility of challenging and resisting power within the context of postcolonialism and liberation struggles. In the same essay, Said argues that Foucault's theory 'has drawn a circle around itself, constituting a unique territory in which Foucault has imprisoned himself and others with him' (215), and this a point to which he returns in an interview with Mark Edmundsen. Commenting that even iconoclastic theorists like Derrida 'in time become prisoners of their own [. . .] "manner" [and] prisoners of their own language', he observes that such a trend in turn leads to an unacceptable level of Eurocentricity (Said 'Wild Orchids' 166-7). For Said, this is where the application of what he terms 'critical consciousness' is so important, something he describes as 'a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory' ('Travelling Theory' 210). Said is not setting up an opposition to theory, but rather insisting on a critical engagement with it and 'the necessity of theory to respond to what a large part of the world [is] experiencing' (Said 'Wild Orchids' 168).

The two critics most often singled out for criticism by those of a more 'materialist' inclination are Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Bhabha's focus on the discursive or textual disruption of colonial authority (principally through mimicry and ambivalence) shifts attention away from the lived reality of those involved in liberation struggles, and dilutes the antagonism and strongly oppositional nature of the colonial encounter; in effect it re-situates the site of resistance within European writing. Parry argues that:

Where the politics of the symbolic order displaces politics, and the theoretical assault on the retention of oppositional categories writes out conflict, there is no space for anti-colonialist theories inscribing contest, or anti-colonialist practices that were/are manifestly confrontational. (Parry 'Directions' 77).

Neil Lazarus takes Bhabha to task over his (Bhabha's) allegedly wilful misreadings both of Fanon and of Said's *After the Last Sky*, claiming that Bhabha 'seems simply to appropriate Said, to assimilate him to his own theoretical interests and preoccupations' (Lazarus 44). The same charge of a preference for textuality and discourse over an attention to social praxis is often levelled at Spivak. Despite the usefulness of her concept of 'strategic use of positivist essentialism' (Spivak 205), Spivak's concentration on discourse analysis, and her question of whether the subaltern can ever really speak him/herself, tend to deny the colonised a clearly defined subject position from which they can enunciate their oppositional stance. If an interest in 'the politics of the symbolic order' is indeed the motivation behind postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, the problem for those still engaged in liberation struggles is that, as Simon During puts it, 'the concept of postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity' (During 125). For the Palestinians, the formation of a distinct national identity entails the adoption of a stance both of opposition and difference, the performance of resistance, and the necessity of insisting on the social, economic and political nature of the suppression of their rights as a national body. One of the problems for the Palestinians is that their literature is the means by which they constitute themselves discursively with reference to non-metropolitan reality, but at the same time they are excluded from the dominant discourse.

Above all else, the best Palestinian writing does not lose sight of the individual: the suffering of individuals under both occupation and nationalism, and the importance of the individual voice. Anthony Appiah is a critic who pays close attention to the way in which concern for the individual translates into a transnational humanism. His analysis

of the relationship between the postcolonial and the postmodern in *In My Father's House* is most helpful. He discusses Yambo Ouologuem's novel, *Le Devoir de violence*, and the way in which it seeks to delegitimize realism and the realist novel's underpinning of failed nationalist projects. In this, the novel may appear to be postmodern but Appiah claims that 'the basis for that project of delegitimation is very much not the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal; [. . .] in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering' (Appiah 246). For Appiah, the 'post' in postcolonial is both 'post' realist writing and 'post' nativist politics; it should emphasise 'a *transnational* rather than a *national* solidarity'. He continues:

Postcoloniality is *after* all this: and its *post*, like postmodernism's, is also a *post* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of 'more than thirty republics'. But it challenges them in the name of the ethical universal; in the name of *humanism*, 'le gloire pour l'homme'. (251)

The use of the concept of 'humanism', allied as closely as it generally is with a discredited Enlightenment humanism, does not sit easily with postmodernism's rejection of grand narratives. However, Appiah, along with Said and Fanon, considers essential an attempt to retrieve a humanism that embraces difference within a post-colonial world. Underlining the undesirability of making clear divisions between theory and practice, or textuality and materiality, is the fact that Spivak argues that she wants 'to bring humanism and difference together' and that 'the principles of a universal humanism – the place where indeed all human beings are similar – is [. . .] lodged in their being different' (quoted in Robbins, 566). Such a coupling of difference (the individual) with the universal appears to lie behind Samih al-Qasim's comments about writing that starts with the individual being able to communicate with the rest of the world (see interview in Appendix II, p.243).

Aijaz Ahmad, with his refusal to allow the category of Third Worldism to obscure class and gender biases within 'imperialized formations' made me rethink many assumptions. He reminds us that as the nation-state is the channel through which anti-colonial resistance passes, 'there is simply no way of breaking out of that imperial dominance without struggling for different kinds of national projects and for a revolutionary restructuring of one's own nation-state'. Such a recognition both of the necessity of nationalism and of the fact that no one nationalism is ever monolithic, means that one should '[strive] for a rationally argued understanding of social content

and historic project for each particular nationalism' (Ahmad 11). The title of this thesis prioritises both literature and national consciousness, their connection having been stressed many times before, with Franz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, among the earlier theorists, explaining the vital role national culture plays in liberation struggles. I found the chapter 'Resistance and Opposition' in Said's *Culture and Imperialism* particularly helpful in understanding the way in which the relationship of literature, and culture generally, changes with the evolution of nationalism and independence. Whilst Palestinian literature has been relatively under-explored in the area of postcolonial studies (particularly when compared to Asian and African literatures), an increasing body of critical work on Palestinian literature is becoming available which examines it not only for its oppositional credentials but also the ways in which it contests emerging hegemonic nationalist discourses. I found work by Joe Cleary, Barbara Harlow, Mary Layoun and Helena Schulz particularly illuminating, along with the work of Palestinian critics such as Amal Amireh, Lisa Suheir Majaj and Munir Akash. I have cited many other critics throughout this thesis for their invaluable insights, but others I cite where I find myself disagreeing with their interpretations, an exercise which made me think more carefully about the material I have been studying.

A word about 'bad' versus 'good' nationalism is necessary here - what has been termed the distinction between 'an oppressive state national ideology and the ideology of a national liberation struggle' (Abdo 151) - with the concept of the 'doorway' in our original line of poetry providing a useful starting point. The doorway demarcates both a coming-in and a going-out. The inward movement represents the coming back home to what has been lost, a reclamation of the ontological security that was shattered, but it can also warn against the construction of a reactionary and exclusionary brand of nationalism which shuts the door on alternative imaginings of what the nation could be. Going out through the doorway signifies not only the security of knowing that there is now a home to go out from but, more importantly, an awareness of what Fanon terms the 'universal dimension' of national culture. He writes: 'The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication. [. . .] National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension' (Fanon 199). It is notable that many Palestinian writers, Said and Darwish among them, are aware of the dangers of such parochialism and isolationism. The coercive nature of nationalism (its 'bad' aspect) I discuss particularly in Chapter 2 on nationality and masculinity. Anne McClintock contends that, whilst '[a]ll nationalisms are gendered,

all are invented, and all are dangerous [. . .] there is nothing fictive about their power to conjure up the loyalties of life and death, or to provoke the state's expert machinery of wrath' (McClintock 'No Longer' 104). This is the Janus-faced aspect of nationalism: a sense of national identity and a belief in the nation are essential in liberation struggles, yet nationalism's propensity to concentrate power in the hands of a few (against which Fanon warns) means women, the poor and ethnic minorities are frequently denied access to equal rights within the national polity. Jameson comes to the conclusion that 'a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world' (quoted in Lazarus 'Transnationalism' 45), and Said recognises that 'conventional nationalism was revealed to be both insufficient and crucial, but only as a first step' (Said *Culture* 271). My engagement with Palestinian literature has made me aware of the indispensability to liberation struggles of national identity together with a belief in the value of a nation state, but also of the dangers of nationalism's atavistic and exclusionary tendencies.

In attempting what I believe is a wide-ranging examination of Palestinian literature, I encountered a number of problems. First among them was the limited availability of translated material.⁴ The fact that I examine already translated material implies that this material has achieved a level of authority (I hesitate to say canonicity) in representing the Palestinian experience to the outside world. Projects such as PROTA (initiated by Salma Khadra Jayyusi) select, presumably both on literary merit and authenticity, those texts through which the Palestinians wish themselves to be known. This thesis would have been unimaginable without Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. However, whilst such enterprises are invaluable, real publishing clout lies with European and American publishing houses and they choose on the basis of what sells.⁵ Besides the publishing business determining what I might wish to read, I am also aware that I bring my own expectations of 'Third World literature', and Middle Eastern literature in particular, to bear on my selections. Am I choosing texts because they supply what I want to read, and ignoring others that do not fit my particular bill? Having just lamented the lack of translated material, I am aware at the same time that there are many writers and 'canonical' Palestinian texts that I have not examined (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra especially springs to mind). For these omissions I will plead pressures of

⁴ A number of publications will appear in the autumn, sadly too late for this thesis, among them a collection of Samih al-Qasim's poetry in new translations, the last novel written by Emile Habiby before his death in 1998, a new collection by Mahmoud Darwish, and a collection of Palestinian women's short stories entitled *Qissat*.

⁵ Aijaz Ahmad discusses the circulation of Third World texts in *In Theory*, see particularly pp. 78-81.

word count. Whilst on the subject of translations, I also know that, inevitably, much is lost in translation. This is particularly so with Arabic poetry which relies on a musicality of sound (the tradition still being overwhelmingly oral) and uses repetition to an extent with which Western readers are unfamiliar. In some cases, where I have read more than one translation of the same text there are considerable variations and choosing which is 'best' is purely a personal matter. Another restriction was, of course, that of word count. I had hoped to include a section on oral testimonies⁶ but I decided that this should also involve a study of folklore and 'street' performance, a study beyond my present resources of space and time. I do not claim a comprehensive knowledge of Palestinian literature – that I leave to the many Palestinian critics and experts in the field – but I do believe that an undertaking such as this is valid and worthwhile as an exercise in trying to understand what Said called 'discrepant experiences' (Said *Culture* 35).

Why did I decide to take Palestinian literature as my topic, and why has this thesis taken on the shape it has? My interest was stirred when I came across the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish whilst studying for my MA, and the subject of Palestinian writing engaged me to such an extent that I chose Palestinian women's writing as the subject of my MA dissertation. What struck me was that although Palestinians were frequently in the news, we in the West have little access to how they view their situation; they were more often 'spoken for' than represented themselves.⁷ Given that literature tells us 'what a people thinks of itself' (to paraphrase Macherey⁸), a study of the Palestinians' imaginative projection of their lives and history seemed the best point of departure for deeper understanding of how they see their place in the world. The shape of this thesis was decided by what I came to see as the overriding concern of Palestinian literature: the land. Therefore my opening chapter discusses the significance of the land in Palestinian literature and the ways in which its meaning has changed over the period under review (1948 up to the early 2000s). I trace the evolution of these changes and discuss the importance of collective memory and a Palestinian land rhetoric as counternarrative. In order to unsettle any tendency towards essentialism and uncorrupted beginnings, and to reinforce the power of story-telling, I have included a

⁶ I included a section on women's oral testimonies in my MA dissertation, focusing on how they often told an alternative version of events and history to that of official (masculine) discourse.

⁷ This problem of lack of self-representation is addressed by Said in *A Question of Palestine* and in his essay 'Permission to Narrate'.

⁸ Pierre Macherey, *The Object of Literature*, 234, originally 'The role of literature is to say what a period thinks of itself'.

section on Anton Shammas' *Arabesques*. The first chapter concludes with an examination of narratives of return, where writers are forced to pose the question: A return to what?

In the course of my reading about the land and how it is imagined, I was struck by the by-no-means uncommon trope of land as woman in Palestinian poetry, a trope that projects the man as heroic redeemer and honourable fighter. My second chapter is an exploration of the consequences of such an imagining, and begins with a consideration of nationalism as a masculinist enterprise and ways in which hegemonic masculinity shapes the discourse of Palestinian nationalism. If in order to be a defender of the land and nation one has to be a man, then what is defended therefore becomes Other, that is, woman. A helpless feminised figure becomes a prerequisite for masculine performance. In addition, given the continued occupation of the land/woman by the enemy, masculine failure cannot be admitted and is projected onto the feminine. Here I found most useful Kaja Silverman's theories of the 'dominant fiction'. I also examine the fetishisation of the land-as-woman and how the fetish, haunted by contradiction and failure, is ultimately a reminder of failure. I felt that an alternative vision of national agency was necessary, and it was gloriously supplied by Emile Habiby's anarchic novel *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*. I conclude the chapter with an examination of how the tropes of men as liberators, heroes and martyrs, and women as passive agents defined by their biological role as birth-givers, continue to inflect the poetry of the first *intifada* and PLO communiqués.

My third chapter is devoted to women's writing, and it starts with a look at the particular difficulties faced by Palestinian women writers. Besides the traditional prohibition on women's public discourse, Palestinian women have to contend with the 'mixed blessing' of the national cause: on the one hand, it created opportunities to break with the pattern of a gendered division of labour; on the other hand, its primacy acts to postpone any radical restructuring of gendered hierarchies of power and dominance. This chapter considers the ways in which Palestinian women writers negotiate a space for themselves as women as well as members of an embattled collective. I have divided this chapter into sections concerning women finding their own voice, how women view themselves as national agents, and finally how women write war.

My fourth and final chapter concerns the writing of exile. Exile has been described as the defining condition of being Palestinian, and in the course of my reading I was struck by the split consciousness exhibited by exilic literature. I have therefore

structured my discussion around the dialectic of presence and absence that is evident in this literature. As Mourid Barghouti put it, you ‘get’ displacement like you get asthma and there is no cure. Remembering what has been lost and longing for a restoration to wholeness produces what Clifford terms the ‘defining tension’ of loss and hope that marks exile (Clifford 312). The first section looks at a wide range of writing on exile, poetry, memoirs and the novel. I was disturbed by the post-modern appropriation of exile as a representative motif for our times – an alienated, free-floating, deterritorialised existentialism, free from the constraints of nationalism – and the way in which such a conception stands in complete contrast to the crippling sadness, statelessness and material destitution of so many Palestinian exiles. To end this first section I therefore examine an indisputably post-modern novel, *Prairies of Fever*, in order to follow through the consequences of seeing exile as this free-floating, rootless, liminal mode of being in the modern world. The second section looks at Edward Said’s memoir *Out of Place* in order to understand his ideas on intellectual exile and for the way in which his writing holds in balance many of the contradictions faced by the exile. The third section examines the themes of exile, return and the journey in Mahmoud Darwish’s later poetry. This later poetry appears to concern itself less with the daily realities of exile and instead takes on a more universal and transcendental perspective. He refers to myth and lost civilisations in order to achieve a universal dimension for the Palestinian situation, and in order to emphasise how the past saturates both present and future. He particularly uses the ideal of al-Andalus both to criticise modern Palestinian politics and to provide a template for what a future could resemble. The awareness that return is impossible gives a special significance to journeying; not returning, not settling, holds open possibilities for the future. Ernest Bloch has written: ‘but *in that* we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible’ (quoted in Layoun *Wedded* 164), and so it is with Darwish: the open-endedness of the journey expands horizons. I end this thesis with a brief conclusion.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAND (*EL ARD*) IN PALESTINIAN LITERATURE

If there is a common centre to all Palestinians, a pivot to selfhood, it is unquestionably el ard. . . . A Palestinian's whole mythology of hope, and the vivid immediacies of his daily life, were forever rooted in the land. His metaphoric and pragmatic mediations on meaning – and his place in that meaning – came from the land. (Fawaz Turki, 'Meaning in Palestinian History: Text and Context', 373)

*La terre est une synthèse: elle est à l'origine de la poésie et elle en est aussi la matière et le langage. Parfois la terre et la langue sont inséparables. La terre est l'existence physique de la poésie.*¹ (Mahmoud Darwish, *La Palestine comme Métaphore*, 117)

A nation's struggle for independence centres primarily on the land. In colonies the indigenous people strove to eject the coloniser from the bounded territory that gave spatial definition to a nascent sense of nationhood. However arbitrarily such boundaries were drawn by the colonising powers, the people within those borders had the common aim of liberating the land. The spatial dimension of nationhood at the same time articulates a temporal axis as the sense of belonging reaches back in time, to a historical construction of a people's rootedness to the land. A nation's land narrative thus performs several functions: a temporal projection of past connection together with a projection into the future of a utopian ideal of land and people; and a geographical mapping that is more than just physical as it also performs a mapping of the mind – what Edward Relph describes as 'a point of departure from which we orient ourselves and take possession of the world' (quoted in Parmenter 4). Julie Peteet makes a distinction between place and space where, drawing on E. Valentine Daniel's distinction between 'ontic forces' connected with *being-in-the world*, and 'epistemic units' relating to *seeing the world*, she argues that 'one is linked to a place by a sense of identity with and belonging to that has roots in deep and enduring affect', whereas space is that area from which one views the world (Peteet 'Transforming' 170). It is significant that it is an existential crisis, or trauma, that forces this articulation of a sense of place. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek in *Tense Past* argue that retrieval fundamentally implies a sense of loss, that 'memory begins when experience itself is definitively past' (Antze & Lambek xiii). No longer is a seamless belonging to a place taken for granted; the crisis

¹ 'The land is a synthesis: it gives birth to poetry and in it is also poetry's material and expression. Sometimes the land and language are inseparable. The land is the physical existence of poetry.' (My translation. In English there is not the same nuance between *langage* and *langue* present in French.)

makes it imperative to stake a claim to that place by which the nation can 'orient' itself. It is forced to construct a narrative of its connectedness to the land, and belonging comes to be asserted as natural, paradoxically so since the claim depends on both severance and linguistic construction.

For the Palestinians it was *al-nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948 that made necessary an articulation of belonging to a certain place.² It would be erroneous to suppose that Zionist appropriation of land in Palestine had failed to produce a response from both the peasants and the urban elite prior to this climatic event.³ In the 1930s and 1940s poets such as Ibrahim Tuqan and Abd al-Raheem Mahmoud were writing what would later be termed resistance poetry,⁴ and the Palestinian Rebellion of 1935-6 had widespread support. However, such was the dependence of the majority of the Palestinian population on the land - Barbara Parmenter quotes a figure of 60 per cent of the people being dependent on agriculture and ancillary occupations prior to 1948 (Parmenter 22) - that this rootedness and existential dependency had not been narrativised until that point. Fawaz Turki quotes the legendary incident of Abd al-Raheem Mahmoud who, on being required by the Mandate authorities to procure an identity card, retorted 'My land is my identity' (Turki 'Meaning' 374). In *Where the Jinn Consult*, Soraya Antonius gives the reader the reaction of a landowner to the concerns of his son that the land might be taken from the Palestinians:

You think the ingliz are going to take the land? How can they? [. . .]
It can't be killed, like a sheep. It can't be driven to the desert, like
a camel. And not even the ingliz can put it in their suitcases and
sail away. It has always been here and it always will. (Antonius 91)

In an essay entitled 'Rootedness versus Sense of Place', Yi-Fu Tuan describes rootedness as a sense of 'being at home in an unself-conscious way', of belonging that does not have to be defined, 'an incuriosity toward the world at large and an insensitivity toward the flow of time' (Tuan 4). The spatial disruption of 1948 also entailed a loss of continuity and a disruption of the Palestinians from their past. It is possible to discern the temporal dimension involved in a narrative of the land that is of

² In his Introduction to Halim Barakat's *Days of Dust*, Edward Said writes that the word *nakba* 'suggests in its root that affliction or disaster is somehow brought about by, and hence linked by necessity to, deviation, a veering out of course, a serious deflection away from a forward path' and that therefore we should 'interpret *al-nakba* as a rupture of the most profound sort'. (Said, 'Introduction', xvi)

³ Rashid Khalidi details the history of resistance to Zionist settlement prior to 1948 in *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, pp.89-144

⁴ The term resistance literature, or *adab al-muqawamah*, was first used by the writer Ghassan Kanafani in 1966 in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966* (Harlow Resistance 2)

great importance when a nation like the Palestinians strive to insert themselves in history. If Tuan's hypothesis is correct and a sense of place involves a conscious construction of a land narrative, together with an awareness of more global and historical forces, it is clear that the Palestinians as a national body had not developed the necessary ideology to express this sense of place. The notion that the land had 'always been there and it always will' meant that the people had not prepared for such an inconceivable event as losing their entire lands. That shattering of certainty entailed the severing of Palestinians from the place in which they had found meaning. This was not just a geographical severing; it was also social as families and clans⁵ were broken up and dispersed to refugee camps in neighbouring countries. As Turki suggests, the land helped a man define his place in the symbolic order, and notions of honour were intimately connected to the land.⁶ Nothing that had happened in their history had equipped their collective consciousness to understand and deal with *al-nakba*. Said explains this as a linguistic void, stating of the Palestinian: 'Furthermore nothing in his [*sic*] history, that is, in the repertory or vocabulary provided to him by his historical experience, gave him an adequate method for representing the Palestine drama to himself' (Said 'Introduction' xv). Some 750,000 Palestinians were dispossessed of their land and forced into exile, an experience that produced a national trauma. Kai Erikson's discussion of the significance of what he calls 'collective trauma' is useful here. He writes:

By *collective trauma*, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma". But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (Erikson 187)

It is the community, Erikson points out, that offers a 'repository for binding traditions' as well as 'context for intimacy' (Erikson 188). With the traditional community destroyed and with no one institution to represent them, the Palestinians had to find a new way of articulating their sense of nationhood, and in the early years of statelessness

⁵ The Palestinian clan, or *hamula*, encompassed family ties that stretched back many generations and that were intimately connected with large areas of land and many villages. Marriages outside the *hamula* rarely took place. Said K. Aburish describes this clan structure in *Children of Bethany*.

⁶ Helena Lindholm Schulz quotes an Arab/Palestinian proverb – 'He who has no land has no honour' (Schulz 93).

it was primarily through the creation of an explicit literary 'land rhetoric' that such a sense was forged.

The demographics of the Palestinian situation after 1948 had a bearing on literary production. Those who ended up in refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank and neighbouring countries, were the poorer sections of the population, mostly those who had been peasant farmers and their families. This section of the population was largely illiterate (a situation that rapidly changed, however, as families were quick to take advantage of free education offered in the camps)⁷. The wealthier urban families and landowners usually had the resources to settle in other countries, often living initially with members of their extended families in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, or in the West. In the first decades after *al nakba* nearly all literary output came from this group of exiles (who were, additionally, exposed to the literary experimentation taking place in Arabic letters at the time). Of those Palestinians who remained within the new state of Israel (approximately 170,000), living as second-class citizens, learning Hebrew as a second language, and having to interact with an alien and hostile culture, little was heard until the 1960s. From this constituency there emerged a generation of writers who became some of the best-known names in Palestinian and Arab literature, among them Mahmoud Darwish (who lived Israel until going into exile in 1971), Emile Habiby, Anton Shammas, Samih al-Qasim and Tawfiq Zayyad. The opening of the borders between Gaza and the West Bank and Israel after the 1967 war meant that those previously isolated within Israel could make contact with poets and writers from other areas. It was inevitable, however, given the huge disparity in experience since 1948, that the literary focus and development of these different groups should diverge, in the early years at least.⁸

1.1 The writing of nostalgia and the recreation of a lost Paradise

For most of the first two decades after 1948, the Palestinians were in a state of shock, and the period was marked by a sense of great loss, of mourning and of nostalgia, that

⁷ Fawaz Turki writes in his autobiography *The Disinherited*: 'Education, probably seen as the only tangible investment for the future, became to a Palestinian family the most crucial and the most momentous accomplishment ever. There was nothing else a young Palestinian could hope for, cling to, touch with his being. We studied like ones possessed'. (Turki *Disinherited* 41).

⁸ Joe Cleary estimates that at present almost a million Palestinians live within Israel, with approximately three million living in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip. Another four million live in the diaspora, 'most as proximate exiles in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, just across the border from what was once their home'. (Cleary 186)

was reflected principally in poetry. The following poem, 'Orange Blossoms' by Hasan al Buhairi (*AMPL* 137) recreates the lost land as an archetypal Paradise.

Do you ask about the orange blossom,
its charm, and all its magical delight?
How dawn arrests the caravan of morning
to catch perfection of it, shimmering bright?

About the fragrance when the stars restore
wine to the reveller through the midnight hours
about the dew drops and about the nights
which string the pearls around the budding flowers

for necklaces which paradisaal gems
covet for their celestial treasury?
Do you ask about the flowers that blossom, rich
with gems excelling heavenly harmony?

It was *our* sky that warmed and fostered them
with purest sunshine that could give them birth
and that which nourished all their grace and beauty
and all their fragrance – was our native earth.

The adjectives used in this poem stress the Edenic qualities of the lost land, and there is also a suggestion of Arabian Nights sensuality in the 'caravan of morning' and the 'reveller' in the 'midnight hours'. Furthermore, this is not a passive nature – dawn, the stars, the nights, and the flowers all possess the power to transform reality. In the lyricism produced by remembering the orange blossoms the land becomes poetry, and 'the flowers that blossom, rich/with gems excelling heavenly harmony' signify poetic diction, thus making the land and language inseparable, as Darwish contends. Above all, it is the 'native earth' of Palestine that nourishes these poetic ideas. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's 'In the Deserts of Exile' (*PW* 69-71) uses similar tropes to conjure a land of plenty, with the emphasis on a feminine land of great beauty providing all that sustains life, with no effort required on the part of the (male) dweller.

[. . .]
Our Palestine, green land of ours;
Its flowers as if embroidered on women's gowns;
March adorns its hills
With the jewel-like peony and narcissus;
April bursts open in its plains
With flowers and bride-like blossoms;
May is our rustic song
Which we sing at noon,
In the blue shadows,
Among the olive trees of our valleys,

And in the ripeness of the fields
We wait for the promise of July
And the joyous dance amidst the harvest.

O land of ours where our childhood passed
Like dreams in the shade of the orange grove,
Among the almond trees in the valleys-
Remember us now wandering
Among the thorns of the desert,
Wandering in rocky mountains;
[. . .]

A luscious fertility is granted to Palestine, with the bursting open of 'bride-like blossoms', the ripeness and the fields, the protecting shade of the orange grove. In contrast to the months of plenty that represent the lost paradise, the present embodies aridity. Writing such as al-Buhairi's and Jabra's idealises the lost landscape, its images of purity and abundance pointing to a pre-lapsarian past: it is poetry of nostalgia. It uses easily-understood symbols such as oranges, flowers, olive and almond trees, in order to summon up what Carol Bardenstein calls 'a virtual homeland that can be accessed at will regardless of the circumstances preventing access to the "actual" homeland' (Bardenstein 21). It would appear that such poetry fails to articulate more than an aesthetic response to the loss of the land. It lacks specificity and makes little assertion of a Palestinian *right* to the land, which characterises later Palestinian poetry.

In an illuminating essay on Israeli and Palestinian discourses of rootedness, Carol Bardenstein discusses what she calls 'ambiguous nostalgias' (Bardenstein 19). Nostalgia is seen variously as a 'reactionary escapist response' to an uncomfortable and painful reality, and, on the other hand, as a means of instigating a collective memory that enables a more active involvement with the present, Bardenstein using the work of Raymond Williams and Maurice Halbwachs to illustrate the dichotomy. Williams, she asserts, views nostalgia as 'inauthentic and reactionary', an opiate 'that suppresses critique of the present by offering a comfortable falsification of the past' (20). In *The Country and the City*, Williams highlights the contradictions inherent in the 'idea of an ordered and happier past set against the disturbance and disorder of the present'. He also examines the 'idealisation' of a presumed pastoral innocence before the eighteenth century industrialisation of agriculture in England, and he claims that such an idealisation 'based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual bitter contradictions of the time' (Williams 45). Although Williams is directing his criticism here towards the elite of rural English society, there

are parallels that are still relevant. The 'deep desire for stability' is evident in the poetry just discussed and also, as will be seen in the next chapter, where representations of heroic manhood cover the inability to perform masculinity, an inability initiated by the loss of the land. Bardenstein then quotes Maurice Halbwachs who argues that nostalgic recollection ties people to "collective frameworks of social reference points which allow memories to be coordinated in time and space". Bardenstein backs up this point of view by citing Frederic Jameson's contention that nostalgia that is "conscious of itself" can induce a "lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude" (Bardenstein 20-1).⁹ In a sociological study of nostalgia, Fred Davis argues that nostalgia is not only capable of 'muting the negative' (Davis 37) but also that its 'abiding involvement with the existential problem of sustaining continuity of identity', particularly when faced with "events" that bestir our sense of aloneness in the world' make it an essential resource, rather than a self-indulgent form of escapism (Davis 41). The shared symbols of nostalgia possess a referentiality that militates against such 'aloneness' because they can be understood by all Palestinians. Hassan Khader points out that pre-1948 Palestine was certainly no paradise, and that for those who relied on the land it was a time of hardship and oppression (see Appendix II). However, nostalgia's 'structural integrity' (Davis 77) encodes the imaginative reconstruction of the lost entity in such a way that the exaggerations and extravagances affirm a relationship with the land and between the people of the land. The importance of this integrity is summed up by Davis when he argues that 'at the most elemental level collective nostalgia acts to restore, at least temporarily, a sense of sociohistoric continuity with respect to that which had verged on being rendered discontinuous' (Davis 103-4). Given the extent of the collective trauma suffered by the Palestinians after 1948, it is unsurprising that some of the early poetry suggests a passive, or reactionary, nostalgia, as the sense of numbness and disbelief required time to be worked through. However, as will be examined a little later, it must also be viewed as the beginning of the formulation of a land narrative that not only united a dispersed people by means of evoking memories held in common, thereby helping to overcome feelings of alienation, but also laid the foundation of both a textual reclamation of the land and a narrative of resistance.

⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (trans. & ed. Lewis A. Coser) Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991. Frederic Jameson 'Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia' in *Salmagundi*, 10-11, 52-58.

The symbols of the lost homeland can also be transposed in a more literal sense. In 'My Father and the Fig Tree' (AMPL 356-7), Naomi Shihab Nye writes a poem about her father, now living in Texas, and his obsession with fig trees, in which she observes: 'In the evenings he sat by my bed/weaving folktales like vivid little scarves./They always involved a fig tree./Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.' The family moved house many times until finally 'in the middle of Dallas, Texas' they found a house with a fig tree in the yard. "'It's a fig tree song!'" he said,/plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,/emblems, assurance/of a world that was always his own'. In exile, each time he plucks a fig he is plucking a moment in time, an act that provides 'assurance' that he still has some mastery over place and time. In a Proustian manner, sights, sounds and smells are enough to trigger nostalgic associations of loss, grief and a disappearing world, rather as bookmarks indicate a place to return to. Just as for Naomi Nye's father the figs recall a specific place in time, so Mourid Barghouti, who left Palestine in 1967 and returned in 1996, reflects that his 'relationship with place is, in fact, a relationship to time', that places yearned for 'are really periods of time' ('Songs' 64). For Barghouti, places cannot be reclaimed because they are really times that are past. In his memoir, *I Saw Ramallah*, he complicates the matter of nostalgia and the possibility of being able imaginatively to reclaim a lost time or place. Longing, he writes, 'has nothing to do with the mellowness of memory and remembering'; rather, it 'is the breaking of the will' (*Ramallah* 88). The implication is that the dispossessed are left only with symbols.

In an essay entitled 'Autocartography: The Case of Palestine, Michigan', Anton Shammas relates the story of a Palestinian-American woman, A., whose grandparents were born in Palestine and who had had to flee in 1948. A. attempts to access her grandmother's memories of Palestine, only to find that for the old lady 'Palestine is no more than a lemon tree in the backyard of the house she left in Jaffa [. . .] just a tree in the backyard, hidden away from the bustle of main-street politics, the tree under whose shadow she always imagines herself sitting, dreaming away her days'. Even though Jaffa is now Yafo and the lemon tree must be long gone, it remains 'so deep-rooted in her mind, its fragrance so overwhelming' (114). Shammas, in the following passage, describes how the significance of the lemon tree is memory only, rather like a passive nostalgia that cuts one off from reality:

The grandmother, then, thinks lemon: a very particular tree, totally outside the language of politics, or the language of history, and

certainly outside the language of historiography that attempts to deal with her plight. And that tree is part of her plight – impossible to forget, to let the tree slip away, because if she did, as she believes, her whole life would slip away, her whole self, what she has been, what she is, and what she will ever be. (115)

It is as if the lemon tree becomes a signifier for which there cannot be a chain of substitutions; it becomes real in a way that isolates it from everything else. The danger is that the signifier becomes everything, detached from the signified and all its painful associations with the present-day reality of Palestine, a reality that uncompromisingly deconstructs the imagined Palestine. In the manner in which Williams maintains that nostalgia served ‘to evade the actual and bitter contradictions’ of a given time, so the lemon tree prevents the grandmother and people like her understanding what has happened to them. Such over-endowed symbols seem to replay the good nostalgia/bad nostalgia debate. If the nation as a whole cannot conceptualise its past other than in such symbols, then the implication in Shammās’s argument is that it cannot understand its present. At the same time, if letting such intense reminders of the homeland slip away means losing one’s conception of self, then holding on to them at least keeps despair at bay. Barghouti asks: ‘But what remains to the exile except this kind of absentee love? What remains except clinging on to the song, however ridiculous or costly that might be?’ He concludes: ‘The long Occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine’ (Barghouti *Ramallah* 61, 62).

At the same time Barghouti foresees the dangers inherent in the overuse of symbols in poetry of nostalgia, because it freezes Palestinian time in the past and because he believes it is in the interests of any occupation ‘to transform the homeland in the memories of its native population into symbols, mere symbols.’ He goes on to explain he had always felt uncomfortable with the idea of ‘maps on key chains or gold bracelets’ and ‘pictures of cities and villages hanging on the walls of friends in the diaspora.’ The crime of occupation is, he argues, that it ‘left us as we had been. [. . .] It did not rob us of the visible relics of the past, but it deprived us of dreams of an unknown potential for achievement’ (Barghouti ‘Songs’ 63). In *After The Last Sky*, Said says of ‘albums, rosary beads, shawls, little boxes’ that they are ‘intimate mementos of a past irrevocably lost [that] circulate among us, like the genealogies and fables of a wandering singer of tales’. He too warns that they can become ‘encumbrances’, because ‘carry[ing] them about, hang[ing] them up on every new set of

walls [they] shelter in' means Palestinians do not 'acknowledge the frozen immobility of [their] attitudes'. He concludes 'In the end the past owns us' (Said *After* 14).

Not all the poetry of this time was pure nostalgia. Other poets of this generation combined nostalgia with a defiance that marks a desire to act. Abu Salma was born in Galilee in 1907, and from 1948 until his death in 1980 lived in Damascus. His poetry is full of yearning and a sense of displacement. 'What horizon but this one defines my world?' he asks when speaking of Palestine. In the same poem, 'I Love You More' (AMPL 97), he uses pathetic fallacy to suggest that the land longs for its original inhabitants as much as they long for it, and that neither the land nor its people can flourish without each other. He writes: 'No more do birds flutter among the high pines,/or stars gaze vigilantly over Mt. Carmel./The little orchards weep for us, gardens grow desolate,/the vines are forever saddened.' Whenever he hears the name of Palestine, his 'words grow more poetic', suggesting an organic and aesthetic unity between land and writer. The lines 'Is it possible these words could be torches/lighting each desert and place of exile?' suggest a unity that will inspire a determination in exile, one that does not stop at the point of lament. In 'We Shall Return' (AMPL 96-7) there is the same pathetic fallacy, for example: 'The valleys call me and the shores/cry out, echoing in the ears of time!/Even fountains weep as they trickle, estranged./Your cities and villages echo the cries.' The symbols found in these two poems – the lemon tree, the orchards, gardens vines, valleys and fountains – not only conjure up the lost paradise but, unlike the two poems examined earlier, they also summon the writer to action. Such an impulse could be the start of the formulation in which, according to Frederic Jameson, nostalgia that is 'conscious of itself' induces a 'lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude' (Jameson 'Benjamin' 68). The transformation of an indulgent or passive nostalgia into one that spurs action is evident in 'We Shall Return'.

Yes, we'll return and kiss the moist ground,
love flowering on our lips.
We'll return some day while generations listen
to the echoes of our feet.
We'll return with raging storms,
holy lightning and fire,
winged hope and songs,
soaring eagles,
the dawn smiling on the deserts.

Just as with the nostalgic recollections of the lost homeland, it could be argued that the talk of return is couched in highly idealised imagery, one that bears little relation to reality; but the rhetoric is designed to inspire the Palestinians to pull themselves out of their lethargy and sense of numbness.¹⁰

Besides the will to act, there also emerges in Abu Salma's and other poets' writing at this time an overt criticism of the powers that allowed the catastrophe to happen – for the Palestinians these were the Arab regimes and the West. Abu Salma's 'My Country on Partition Day' (*AMPL* 95-6) explicitly accuses the West of double standards where he states: 'In the West man's rights are preserved,/but the man in the East is stoned to death./Justice screams loudly protecting Western lands/but grows silent when it visits us!' Such an awareness provides a platform from which to demand justice. In an essay entitled 'Visions of the Return' published in 1963, A. L. Tibawi sets out to study, in the light of failed political and military activity, the attempted rebuilding of other resources, particularly 'emotional strength' through literature and art (Tibawi 507). In order to counteract the idea that was being put forward in some quarters that Palestinians, as Arabs, would settle in other Arab lands and reconcile themselves to the loss of their homeland, Tibawi's essay is an early demonstration of the 'deep spiritual aspiration in the soul of every Palestinian' to return to the native soil of Palestine (Tibawi 509). Ahmad Fahmi's 'The Land of *Jihad*' (Tibawi 512) restores the legacy of fighting for a holy cause to the land and people of Palestine, and its accusation that Palestine was '[a]bandoned to persecution' also points the finger at foreign powers. Similarly Mahmud al-Hut claims in an untitled poem that it was the incompetence of the League of Arab States that led to the loss of Palestine: 'Palestine would never have fallen,/Never would its lions have been dispersed,/Had not seven mighty states tried to rescue her -/Truly astounding was the outcome' (Tibawi 513). Tibawi also quotes from a long poem entitled 'Hymn of Hate' by Kamil Nasir (described by Tibawi as a Christian Arab Nationalist) that claims that 'If Jesus could see it [Palestine] now,/He would preach *jihad* with the sword!' (Tibawi 516). By invoking the Christian faith to be his witness, Nasir, in the line 'The West's dagger is red with blood', is turning on its head the claim of Western imperialism to bring civilisation and the light of Christianity to colonised lands. It is noticeable that in the act of defining themselves as Palestinians

¹⁰ Salma Khadra Jayyusi writes: 'The fifties were dominated, it must be remembered, by a wish for redemption following the failure of 1948, and this often expressed itself through ostentatious heroics or at least through the affirmation of strength and defiance, of anger and loud rejection, that preserved the rhetorical eloquence and self-assertive tones of the traditional poetic language'. (Jayyusi, *AMPL* 22-3)

connected to a certain tract of land, a distance opens up between them and the other Arab nations. There is a widening of perspective brought about by the trauma that suggests the formulation of a conscious rhetoric of the land that has gone beyond the stage of 'an incuriosity toward the world at large and an insensitivity toward the flow of time', in Yi-Fu Tuan's words. The Palestinians, in this early poetry that is inspired by nostalgia, are inserting themselves into history. If identity is formed in relation to the Other, then the Palestinians were, through their unshakeable attachment to their land, forging an idea of nationhood that could not be satisfied by pan-Arabism. Here, also, one can sense the beginnings of a national articulation. Whereas prior to 1948, loyalties were primarily to clan and village, the necessity of voicing injustice created the concept of the Palestinians as a national grouping. Fawaz Turki contends that the Palestinians were 'brought to the edge of hysteria' in their efforts to unmask the injustices done to them, and that the extent of their disaster was matched only by their absolute faith in the return (*el awda*). In the meantime, Turki argues, they had to create a new ontology through which to orient themselves, to create a sense of at-homeness. He asks:

And where else to do that but in a transplanted Palestine, a transplanted and reconstructed Palestine, a Garden where the Palestinian Adam, so familiar with his domain, finds nothing that he cannot name, nothing that he cannot isolate, describe, and explain. (Turki 'Meaning' 376)

Again, Palestine is likened to Eden, with the 'Palestinian Adam' naming, laying claim to and keeping at the forefront of consciousness the features of the land. Turki certainly does not view this act as one of passive nostalgia; rather it is empowering and it keeps alive the vision of the return. Without that vision, he argues, 'without being reunited with that other component of the self, *el ard*, living in exile was to inhabit a grammar of being without a future tense, a tense of reality indispensable to the notion of feeling' (Turki 'Meaning' 376).

1.ii 'Here we shall stay': voices from within Israel

In the 1960s a change of emphasis began to emerge with the voices of the Palestinian poets who had remained inside Israel telling a different story: one of *sumud*¹¹ (steadfastness), of a love for the land that was shaped by an intimate knowledge of it in both its glory and misery. There is a shift from the emphasis on loss and mourning to a

¹¹ *Sumud* cannot be reduced to passive endurance but signifies as well 'unyielding resistance and defiance' (Schulz 106).

positive assertion of Palestinian right to the land. This is partly explained by a change in the perception of the Other. In the early years, the Zionist entity was seen as the Invader, but this evolved to become a perception of the other as the Coloniser or Occupier.¹² The occupation entails the principle of taking over and dwelling on someone else's land, and the prolongation of this occupation, beyond even the most pessimistic predictions of the initial period of upheaval, added to its perceived illegitimacy and moral dubiousness.¹³ The sense of helpless looking on, relieved at times by the rhetoric of triumphal return, was absent from this new poetry. Instead, the link between the Palestinians and the country that went back centuries, granted an intimate knowledge of the land that the occupier could never achieve, and this uneradicable link became a symbol of a specific Palestinian identity. In contrast to the early laments such as 'Orange Blossoms', which could have referred to any lost landscape, the specificities of Palestinian reality began to emerge. The voices of this new existentialism belonged to such poets as Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim and Tawfiq Zayyad. Darwish has said in an interview that the voice of realism emerging in the new poetry was born of a desire to correct 'a lot of fantasizing, too many verbal victories that tried to compensate for the defeat that the nation was suffering'. Poetry, he says, needed to forge 'a stronger tie to reality', and that therefore 'there was the urge to liberate poetry from empty rhetoric and romanticism and bring back to it the pulse of life' (Shehadeh 'Interview' 58).

Darwish's 'Identity Card', written in 1964, asserts a proud Palestinian identity in response to the increasing marginalisation of the Arab population. In the stanzas reproduced here the poet makes explicit his link with, and right to, the land, a link that reaches back generations, in contrast to the asserted right to the land of its new occupants. Darwish writes:

Record!
 I am an Arab
 Employed with fellow workers at a quarry
 I have eight children
 I get them bread
 Garments and books
 From the rocks.
 I do not supplicate charity at your doors

¹² I am indebted to Hassan Khader for this observation (see Appendix II, p.247).

¹³ Darwish stated in an interview: 'I have often said that the Israeli repression transformed me into an Arab, and that disappointment with the Arabs transformed me into a Palestinian' (quoted in Boullata 'Diaspora' 163).

Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber
So will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
I have a name without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are enraged
My roots
Were entrenched before the birth of time
And before the opening of the eras
Before the pines, and the olive trees
And before grass grew

My father . . . descends from the family of the plow (*sic*)
Not from a privileged class
And my grandfather . . . was a farmer
Neither well-bred, nor well-born!
Teaches me the pride of the sun
Before teaching me how to read
And my house is like a watchman's hut
Made of branches and cane
Are you satisfied with my status?
I have a name without a title!

Record!
I am an Arab
You have stolen the orchards of my ancestors
And the land which I cultivated
Along with my children
And you have left nothing for us
Except for these rocks.
[. . .]
(<http://www.humboldt.edu/~jar33/right.html>)

For the poet, survival is linked to what is indigenous – the rocks, pines and olive trees, the plough – and he refuses the symbols of the occupier's power. The ellipses after both 'father' and 'grandfather' visually inscribe a line of descent; along with the expressed pride in his roots, the poet suggests with his use of ellipses the plough drawing a line on the land, marking out Palestinian territory.¹⁴ Such poetry is far removed from idealised visions of a return, describing instead how Palestinians are forced to live under

¹⁴ Translations of poetry can differ quite widely, and this is especially so with translations from Arabic 'since Arabic meter is quantitative rather than stressed, and the music of diction is quite different' (Elmessiri 21). However, in two translations of Darwish's 'Identity Card' that I have seen the ellipses appear in exactly the same places.

occupation. Similarly, Zayyad's 'Here We Shall Stay' combines defiance and the reality of Palestinian existence:

[. . .]
Here we shall stay
Like a brick wall upon your breast
And in your throat
Like a splinter of glass, like spiky cactus
And in your eyes
A chaos of fire.
[. . .]
Here we shall stay
Like a wall upon your breast
Washing dishes in idle, buzzing bars
Pouring drinks for our overlords
Scrubbing floors in blackened kitchens
To snatch a crumb for our children
From between your blue fangs.
[. . .] (*AMPL* 327-8)

Just as in 'Identity Card', the poet asserts a distinct identity, one that he is determined will contest any attempt at erasure, symbolised by the 'spiky cactus' that it is impossible to eradicate. Darwish challenges the occupier to record his presence so that it cannot be denied; Zayyad seizes the image of the 'brick wall' that the Israelis would use to wall off the Palestinians from Israeli consciousness as a weapon in the fight. He uses the adjectives 'idle', 'buzzing' and 'blackened' to convey the moral impoverishment of the Zionist dream in opposition to the materially impoverished, yet defiant and just, nature of the Palestinian cause; and the 'blue fangs' of the new state are the same colour as its flag. Both these poems focus their acts of resistance on menial work, which Said describes as 'a form of elementary resistance, a way of turning presence into small-scale obduracy'. The daily carrying out of such menial labour, Said continues, 'brings you to a performance of your actual condition that [. . .] sparks your consciousness of what you are all about' (Said *After* 100). The menial nature of the work alluded to in these poems reinforces the subjected nature of the Palestinians' existence under occupation in a manner that makes the individual acutely aware of his/her marginalisation. Such a situation of being on the margins of society paradoxically brings about not an erasure of identity but it 'spark[s] the consciousness' to an even more acute awareness of presence.

One striking difference between the earlier poetry of nostalgia and the poetry of the 1960s is the use to which symbols are put. The trees, flowers, vines and landscapes of the former were used to represent an unsullied idyll, one that evoked an idealised

environment of the imagination, not of reality. In contrast, the younger poets within Israel use the features of the land to represent their own connection to the land and their determination to stay on it. In Darwish's 'Identity Card' the speaker is proud of his identification with the rocks of the land (all that the occupier has left him and his family) because they signify not only endurance but also that which cannot be removed. Ted Swedenburg argues that such a use of symbols is more complicated than that which James Clifford refers to as the 'Western "salvage paradigm"' – that the preserving impulse is not motivated by 'naïve romanticism or the desire to restore a pure origin'. Instead, he continues, it is unsurprising, in the face of attempts to eradicate Palestinian presence, that 'when Palestinian writers and artists mobilize rural signs, they describe this activity not as the production of meaning but as the deployment of signs with natural and authentic relations to their referents' (Swedenburg 'Peasant' 21).

Samih al-Qasim's 'A Homeland' (*PW* 59-60) inverts the symbolism of fertility and abundance of the lost paradise – the fields and their harvest, 'ancient springs', almond and olive trees – into signs of the impoverishment of the land and its people under occupation. Such a rhetorical move can be read as a refusal to rely on mere symbols. The following are the second, third, fourth and final stanzas.

So what,
When the yellow fields
Yield no more to their tillers
Than memories of weariness,
While their rich harvest pours
Into the granaries of the usurper!

So what,
If cement has diverted
The ancient springs,
Causing them to forget their natural course,
When their owner calls,
They cry in his face: "Who are you?"

So what,
When the almond and the olive have turned to timber
Adorning tavern doorways,
And monuments
Whose nude loveliness beautifies halls and bars,
And is carried by tourists
To the farthest corners of the earth,
While nothing remains before my eyes
But dry leaves and tinder!

So what,

When in barren space the satellites spin,
And in the streets walks a beggar, holding a hat,
And the song of autumn is heard!
Blow, East winds!
Our roots are still alive!

This poem, in refusing the comfort, or luxury, of nostalgia, demonstrates that even if the 'usurper' has distorted all that previously made up a man's symbolic order, there is a force at work more fundamental than the fate of the fields or of one beggar – unseen, below the scorched earth, the people's roots remain alive. In 'On the trunk of an Olive Tree' (*PW* 55-7), Tawfiq Zayyad links his role as seer with that most evocative symbol of Palestinian steadfastness, the olive tree. The rocks of Darwish's poem, the spiky cactus and the olive tree are not immediately objects of beauty in the way that are almond trees, oranges and blossoms, but the olive tree's exceptionally deep roots allow it to flourish in the barren hills inland from Palestine's fertile coastal plain, making it indispensable to the agrarian economy. The deep roots of the olive tree stand for the roots of the people in their land, roots that, according to Darwish, 'were entrenched before the birth of time'. 'On the Trunk of an Olive Tree' microscopes wider history into immediate and familiar items. The following are extracts from the third and fifth stanzas.

I shall carve the number of each deed
Of our usurped land.
The location of my village and its boundaries.
The demolished houses of its peoples,
My uprooted trees,
And each crushed blossom.
And the names of those master torturers
Who rattled my nerves and caused my misery.
[. . .]
I shall carve:
Kafr Qasim, I shall not forget!
And I shall carve:
Dayr Yasin,¹⁵ it's rooted in my memory.
I shall carve:
We have reached the peak of our tragedy.
It has absorbed us and we have absorbed it,
But we have finally reached it.

¹⁵ In October 1950 at Kafr Qasim, a bus full of Palestinian workers returning from the fields at dusk were killed by Israeli forces because the workers were unaware of a curfew that had been imposed during that day. Fifty-one villagers were killed, including twelve women and seventeen children. Dayr Yasin refers to the massacre in April 1948 of 250 villagers, among them many women and children, by Zionist paramilitary forces (*AMPL* xxviii-xxix). Both events are frequently commemorated in Palestinian literature.

[. . .]
 And to remember it all,
 I shall continue to carve
 All the chapters of my tragedy,
 And all the stages of the disaster,
 From beginning
 To end,
 On the olive tree
 In the courtyard
 Of the house.
 (PW 55-7)

For Zayyad it is important to carve (the metaphor implying indelibility) the physical features that have been destroyed by the occupiers onto the symbol of Palestine itself. He also carves the names of massacres that have become symbolic of Palestinian suffering, so that they cannot be forgotten. He is carving history in language and in poetry. The reference to the 'village and its boundaries./The demolished houses of its people' points to another feature of the landscape, the cactus, a feature that, whilst not beautiful in itself, signifies permanence. The prickly-pear cactus used to be planted as a boundary fence around Palestinian villages. After 1948 when so many villages were razed to the ground, the cactus could not be eradicated. In the intervening years it had continued to grow and reproduce, thus becoming a literal delineation of Palestinian absence-as-presence, a symbol of an unbreakable bond with the homeland.¹⁶

It is worth noting how an ability to read the landscape becomes a means of tracing a former Palestinian presence in the face of attempts to obliterate it. Carol Bardenstein describes visiting Ghabsiyah in Galilee, a village destroyed in 1948 and subsequently planted over by the Jewish National Fund with pine trees. Whilst the casual visitor sees only the planted trees, former Palestinian inhabitants read another script. They identify rubble and strewn stones as belonging to certain houses and, in particular, trees enable them to reconstruct a map of the village. Bardenstein describes how one villager identifies the house of the former *mukhtar* (headman) by two tall palm trees that used to flank its entrance, although, as she adds, they now flank only 'an empty space, announcing only a lack or an absence' (Bardenstein 9-10). Prickly pear cacti mark the former village boundary, and a few remaining fruit trees the orchards that had once flourished. The forest planting of the JNF projects seeks to erase Palestinian traces, an act that Bardenstein refers to as 'promoting "collective", if selective forgetting'

¹⁶ Schulz points out that the colloquial word for cactus and the Arab word for patience are both *sabr* (Schulz 106).

(Bardenstein 9), and Said calls the 'interplay between geography, memory, and invention' (Said 'Invention' 182).

It is important to remember that the poets we are talking about here were refugees in their own land. Darwish has spoken of his shock at finding, upon his return, that he was a 'stranger in [his] homeland' (Shatz 72). All of the historic land of Palestine, apart from Gaza and the West Bank, came under absolute Israeli control after 1948, and in the process some 400 Arab villages were destroyed and planted over with trees to obscure the fact that they had ever been there. Darwish's family's experience is typical of many. The family fled to Lebanon in the face of the violent ejection of Palestinians from their villages, only to return a year later. As they had been absent when the census of Arabs within Israel was taken, their legal status became 'present-absent aliens', a status which meant they could not travel from one village to another without a special permit. They found their old village of Birweh destroyed and their land being farmed by Yemeni Jews. In *Memory for Forgetfulness* Darwish describes the heartbreak of his grandfather at finding that what had defined him as a man had been appropriated and given another meaning by a superior force:

My grandfather died with his gaze fixed on a land imprisoned behind a fence. A land whose skin they had changed from wheat, sesame, maize, watermelons, and honeydews to tough apples. My grandfather died counting sunsets, seasons, and heartbeats on the fingers of his withered hands. He dropped like a fruit forbidden a branch to lean its age against. They destroyed his heart. [. . .] He said goodbye to friends, water pipe, and children and took me and went back to find what was no longer his to find *there*. (Darwish *Memory* 88)

The land was the grandfather, he was its fruit, but now, even if they were living on it, it had ceased to be Palestinian. Darwish emphasises his grandfather's consanguinity with the land in 'To my grandfather' (*PW* 145) when he writes: 'What grave sends you forth,/Wearing a vest the color of a rock, stained with ancient blood,/Garbed in a cloak the color of soil?' The grandfather's loss of his trees and crops becomes paradigmatic of the Palestinians' alienation from all that had previously been theirs. The physical and psychological destruction of the grandfather represent what happened to a whole generation, but the younger generation had to adapt to the new reality and, importantly, produce a counternarrative, one that reinserted them into history. The only way in which it was possible to reforge the link with what had been lost and to incorporate it into the new reality was to conceptualise it in language. The land became a social construct, the reclamation of it a collective and culturally mediated practice. Trees and

the cactus, as we have seen, provided metaphors for the people's rootedness in the land, and the increasing emphasis on a peasant past created an ideology of a symbiosis between people and land.¹⁷ Darwish's poem 'A Lover from Palestine' describes the enduring emblematic nature of such symbols. Part of the poem reads:

How can the ever-verdant orange grove be dragged
To prison, to exile, to a port,
And despite all her travels,
Despite the scent of salt and longing,
Remain ever green?
I write in my diary:
I love orange and hate the port.
And I write further:
On the dock

I stood, and saw the world through winter's eyes.
Only the orange peel is ours, and behind me lay the desert. (*PW* 123)

However, the poet also interrogates the gap between the idealised vision of the homeland that always remains green, and the reality of Palestinian existence, which is constantly threatened by the desert of homelessness, with the orange peel representing a hollow and withered casing of unfulfilled dreams. Similarly, in Ghassan Kanafani's short story, 'The Land of Sad Oranges', the sight of oranges is enough to remind a refugee family from Jaffa of the orange groves that have been stolen from them. The young boy, through whose eyes the story is told, sees his heartbroken uncle dying, with a piece of shrivelled orange peel on the table beside him.¹⁸

Another feature of the poetry of this period is the way in which the land becomes a feminine figure of desire, the lover, a configuration that allows the (male) poet to become one with the land.. Such a merging between the poet and the beloved helps overcome feelings of alienation. In skilful hands, the desire to become one with the beloved manifests itself as one of inter-dependence and mutuality, and not as one of domination. The figure in Samih al-Qasim's 'The eternal fire' (*PW* 39-43) is that of a man who wandered the earth for seventy years and who comes to recognise that 'you are all women . . . all women'. The plural 'are' is a result of the desired object being the merging of the land and woman. The speaker declares: 'I submit myself to you,/Knowing that/I shall turn to mist between your palms.' Addressing the female figure, he acknowledges that 'Between [her] hands' he has been everything he is.

¹⁷ See Ted Swedenburg's study of the importance of the peasant in the construction of Palestinian nationalist ideology, 'The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier'.

¹⁸ See Kanafani, 'The Land of Sad Oranges' in *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*.

Between your hands I grew, matured, brought back, returned,
and became without your hands just mist, and I returned to dust
and became mere absence without your hands.
Can it be that I am nothing but your hands?

The poem ends with the lines, 'I am the everlasting fuel/And you are my eternal fire.' This poem emphasises the interdependency of land and poet; the fuel makes the fire burn more brightly but without the fire the fuel can achieve nothing. However, in 'To a cloud' (*PW* 103) Rashid Husayn declares 'I am the land [. . .] I, cloud of my life, am the hills of Galilee,/I am the bosom of Haifa/And the forehead of Jaffa.' In this poem the longing to become one with the beloved is so strong that the poet and his words become the object of desire, an autoeroticism that, it could be argued, is a result of alienation rather than the claimed unification. The last stanza reads:

Waiting for you, my poetry turned to earth,
Has become fields,
Has turned into wheat
And trees.
I am all that remains of our earth,
I am all that remains of what you love,
So pour . . . pour with bounty,
Pour down the rain.

The fields, wheat and trees, which usually signify a force beyond the human, are now subsumed within the masculine voice. The thrust of this poem is very different from Al-Qasim's 'The eternal fire', where the longing always recognises the power of the feminine Other. The problematics of the gendering of the land will be fully discussed in the next chapter, but it is not difficult to imagine how the opportunity to thus empower the male (along with the more strident tones of resistance poetry) was seized upon by poets less gifted than the ones mentioned here.

In her essay 'The Contemporary Palestinian Poetry of Occupation', Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi discusses how these trends damaged aesthetics in much of the poetry of the period. She argues that following on from the success of the early, defiant poems of Darwish and Zayyad, a new generation of poets repeated and imitated this vein of writing, producing poetry of a 'formulaic nature' full of 'exhausted images, and standard devices' (Ashrawi 85). The tendency in such poetry is for the poet to position himself as rebel/prophet/martyr, which Ashrawi considers 'quite unrealistic' and narcissistic (Ashrawi 88). Salma Khadra Jayyusi elaborates on the same problem in her Introduction to *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*.

Nor could the poets' vision, focused as it was on the notion of heroic grandeur and on celebrating an enduring challenge to injustice, allow them to see, in their own lives and in the lives of those around them, the disintegrated and humiliated existence of men and women rendered gratuitous victims to coercive regimes. As citizens poets knew well enough that terror and suffering determined their own and other people's destinies, making them all, together, the victims and not the heroes of their times; as poets they ignored this. (AMPL 53)

Ashrawi's essay, published in 1978, laments the 'lack of any objective study or criticism' of contemporary Palestinian poetry and the tendency to offer a defence of its shortcomings because it is Palestinian and therefore serving the cause, whilst at the same time she stresses that objectivity should also take into account the 'social, political, and cultural' conditions under which the poetry was produced (Ashrawi 83). In her preface to *Resistance Literature*, Barbara Harlow, however, sets out a case for applying a different set of critical criteria to resistance literature given the distance between and the widely differing interests of the criticising institutions in the West and the exigencies of fighting for independence and justice (xvi-xx).¹⁹ Abdelwahab Elmessiri's Introduction to *A Palestinian Wedding* reminds the reader that revolutionary art has its own aesthetic paradigms, and that the overstatements of such poetry should be read not only against literary conventions but also against the context of the times, when the Palestinian revolution produced many poet-martyrs (Elmessiri 9-10). Whilst the necessity of maintaining a clearly-defined Palestinian identity is not under dispute, especially in the years when the Palestinians had no national body to speak for them, the danger of such uncritically heroic poetry is that, like A.'s grandmother's lemon tree, it obscures reality and fails to contribute to a 'historiography that attempts to deal with [their] plight' (Shammas 'Autocartography' 115).

In *I Saw Ramallah* Mourid Barghouti, himself a poet, discusses at several points 'the overt political approach of Palestinian poetry', commenting that as the Palestinians are 'living in a time of historical and geographical farce' a measure of comedy is 'also necessary [. . .] Our tragedy cannot produce only tragic writing' (118). Whilst musing

¹⁹ Benita Parry refers to Harlow's *Resistance Literature* in her essay 'Some Provisional Speculations on the Critique of "Resistance" Literature' wherein Parry sees a danger of 'the seal of approval being awarded across the board to the cited writings by virtue of their announcing an oppositional stance.' She continues: 'Occluded by this method is the possibility of discriminating between the linguistically inert and the innovative, between the declamatory monologue and the plenitude of connotation in the polyphonic and dialogic text, between writings which put in a different content in recycled containers, and those which transgress received traditions by inventing new narrative forms' (12). See also Parry's essay 'Resistance theory/ theorising resistance or two cheers for nativism'.

on how he found on his return in 1996 that Palestinian youth was 'less fearful, less awkward, and less reserved' (159) and generally more accomplished than his generation had been, he feels obliged to return to the matter of 'that rubbish they call the "poetry of the stones"' and the poems of solidarity with the "children of the stones"' (160). He feels that the 'simplification' of such poetry:

[. . .] takes the accessible and the easy from the human condition and so blurs that condition instead of defining it, misrepresents it at the moment of pretending to celebrate it. It is the eternal difference between profundity and shallowness. Between art and political rhetoric. [. . .] I said to myself that the heart of the matter was in a detailed knowledge of life, and of the human maturity that is the foundation for all artistic maturity. [. . .] What is important is the piercing insight and the special sensitivity with which we receive experience, not simply our presence at the event, which, important as it is, is not enough to create art. (160)

The stones and the children of the stones have become symbols in the battle. Barghouti accuses such poetry of losing sight of the individual and each individual's unique positioning in and attitude towards not only the conflict, but towards all the other aspects of lived experience that should provide the richness and complexity of art. Raja Shehadeh in *The Third Way* also comments on the dangers of excessive use of and unquestioning acceptance of symbols, and the way in which it deprives, in this case, the olive tree of its specificity. He writes:

Sometimes, when I am walking in the hills [. . .] I find myself looking at an olive tree, and as I am looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol [. . .] of our struggle, of our loss. And at that very moment I am robbed of the tree; instead there is a hollow space into which anger and pain flow. (88-9)

Shehadeh acknowledges the importance of a land rhetoric yet laments that this seems to be largely reactive, a counter statement to the dominant Israeli discourse of *their* attachment to the land. As Parmenter comments, 'trees, houses, fields, and hills are no longer unquestioned elements of the places where Palestinians dwell; they must do battle with the places that the Israelis are constructing' (Parmenter 87). Shehadeh goes on to explain his 'deep resentment' at this loss of innocence, writing:

As a child I took for granted a natural pleasure in this land [. . .] but since the occupation, I have begun to think of our hills as "virginal", "molested" by the Israeli bulldozers [. . .] I am sure that my imagery would not be so replete with sexual-political symbols were I left to the privacy of my feelings. I can thank our occupiers, then, among other things, for instilling in me a political pornographer's eye for this land. (*Third* 89)

Shehadeh's sense that he had become a 'pornographer' of over-wrought symbols of the land coincides with a statement from Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* that Salma Khadra Jayyusi quotes in an essay on 'Palestinian Identity in Literature' in which Hemingway's narrator, Lieutenant Henry, argues that "abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers" (Jayyusi 'Identity' 172, Hemingway ch.27). In his novel *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, a story of a cowardly and inept Palestinian who works as a stooge for the Israelis, Emile Habiby has his narrator list the names of many of the villages destroyed in 1948, giving them their Arabic names. In the ironic tone of much of the novel, Saeed disclaims 'Do not expect me, my dear sir, after all this time, to remember the names of all the villages laid waste to which these figures made claim that evening in the courtyard of the Jazzar mosque' (Habiby 22), but of course that is just what he does.

1.iii 'Ours is a country of words': collective memory and counternarrative

The absence of a homeland, of a land that defines the nation, is one thing that unites all Palestinians, wherever they live. According to Brennan, 'insurgent or popular nationalism [. . .] is a task of reclaiming community from within boundaries defined by the very power whose presence denied community' (Brennan 58). The articulation of this loss is then both personal and collective. In Darwish's poem 'I Belong There' the first person voice does not confine the experience to the individual because all Palestinians share the memories, families and experiences enumerated in the poem.

I belong there. I have many memories. I was born as everyone is born.
 I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends, and a
 prison cell
 with a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by seagulls, a panorama
 of my own.
 I have a saturated meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a
 moon,
 a bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.
 I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.
 I belong there. [. . .] (UIWP 7)

Darwish has said 'when I tell my story, I necessarily speak a collective history [. . .]
 Destiny has required that my personal history is caught up with a collective history, and

that my people recognise themselves in my voice' (Darwish *Palestine* 13).²⁰ His ability to repossess the homeland through language – 'In the deep horizon of my word' – knows no limits, with a moon, a bird and an 'immortal olive tree' summoning the essence of life in a pastoral Palestine. At the same time, the repetition of the possessive 'have' enacts possession through memory. Darwish makes the link between memory and narrative explicit in the last lines of the same poem where he writes: 'To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood./I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: *Home*' (*UIWP* 7). Individual and collective experience are imbricated and become mutually validating as Antze and Lambek observe when they argue that: 'If individual experience provides idioms and metaphors for understanding collective experience and vice versa, there may be a kind of mutual validation, a reciprocal rendering real, that serves to naturalize what has been imagined' (Antze & Lambek xxii). Slyomovics points out that the compiler of a village memorial book must turn to Darwish the poet 'to translate Palestinian experiences of double exile or internal exile and to articulate a private poetic voice without which public history cannot unfold the meaning of the collective Palestinian experience' (Slyomovics 19). There are many poems from the same collection – *Fewer Roses* (1986) – in which Darwish articulates the collective experience of dispossession and exile, and in which he places his people in physical environments, on journeys, but always remembering the scents of home. 'On This Earth' uses fragments of memory to construct the idea of an entity, Palestine, which is more than just country.

We have on this earth what makes life worth living: April's hesitation,
the aroma of bread
at dawn, a woman's point of view about men, the works of Aeschylus,
the beginning
of love, grass on a stone, mothers living on a flute's sigh, and the
invaders' fear of memories.
[. . .]
We have on this earth what makes life worth living: on this earth, the
Lady of Earth,
mother of all beginnings and ends. She was called Palestine. Her
name later became
Palestine. My Lady, because you are my Lady, I deserve life. (*UIWP* 6)

Again, it is the quotidian details that are lyricised and that endure; they are a store against the exigencies of exilic life, unlike the 'fear' induced by the invaders' awareness of earlier ownership. In this poem the gendering of the country gives a common point

²⁰ All translations from Darwish's *La Palestine comme Métaphore* are my own.

of origin to those who have been denied an identity. However, it is striking how many of the poems from *Fewer Roses* concern themselves with travelling and transition: 'I Will Slog over This Road', 'Another Road in the Road', 'We Journey towards a Home', 'We Travel Like All People', 'Athens Airport', 'The Last Train Has Stopped'. In contrast to a journey that is undertaken over one's own territory when it becomes an act of mapping and possession, the journey of exiled Palestinians continually inscribes a symbolic lack of territory. There is a shift from a fixed vision of the land tied to one place, a sustaining vision, to one where travelling over other lands threatens existence. 'Earth Presses Against Us' articulates such a sense of desperate survival.

Earth is pressing against us, trapping us in the final passage.
 To pass through, we pull off our limbs.
 Earth is squeezing us. If only we were its wheat, we might die and
 and yet live.
 If only it were our mother so that she might temper us with mercy.
 [...]
 Where should we go after the last border? Where should birds fly
 after the last sky?
 Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?
 We write our names with crimson mist!
 We end the hymn with our flesh.
 Here we will die. Here, in the final passage.
 Here or there, our blood will plant olive trees. (UIWP 9)

The other lands they travel through are hostile and seek their destruction, unlike the 'Lady of Earth', Palestine, which is associated with everything that is sustaining, but by likening the Palestinians to the symbols that are used to represent what has been lost, Darwish indicates the fragility of their dreams as well as their physical distress. In what has by now become a familiar motif, he states that their sacrifice will replant the land with that most Palestinian of symbols, the olive tree. For the exiled, travel does not mean freedom and empowerment.

The land as rendered linguistically thus comes to symbolise Palestinian existence. It is by constructing symbols replete with meaning that the Palestinian nation in exile begins to forge its identity. The land is the basis not only of material and economic dignity but also of a moral discourse that speaks of integrity and steadfastness in the face of attempts to crush Palestinian culture. In the epigraph at the top of this chapter, Darwish seeks to articulate the intimate bond between the land and language. In the longer passage from which the epigraph was taken, Darwish claims 'The land is my original mother' (*La terre est ma première mère*) (Darwish *Palestine* 117). The land

that gave him life gives him the means to express himself as a human being. With its reliance on symbol and imagery, poetry draws its inspiration from the features of the land. The relationship between the land and language is symbiotic since the land does not intrinsically possess the metaphysical properties ascribed to it; the poet draws his inspiration from the land and is the one who articulates these qualities and sanctifies them in language. Where he writes 'As the land has been taken from me and I was exiled from it, it has changed into my origin and the focus for my mind and dreams' (117), he is making the land both the point of origin for the poet and also his addressee. It is from the land and nature that the poet creates metaphors to extend and enrich what would otherwise be a crushing existence. In a play on the multiple meanings of *la terre*, Darwish says that the land is 'the symbol of the homeland', and that it is 'all nostalgia and dreams of return'; in the sense that *la terre* is also soil, he argues that it is 'the earth of the world and that is the basis of my work' (117). However, Darwish is aware that poetry of longing, mostly written in exile, tends in its idealisation of the land to ignore the small details of the quotidian. In a discussion of the political nature of Palestinian poetry, he says that poetry 'written from afar, through the exclusive prism of patriotism' cannot give him the sense of the land, and that 'Palestine is far more beautiful than nostalgia. I have not recaptured in Palestinian poetry the flora, fauna, the outline of the landscape, in a word the real Palestine' (103). 'Afar' can mean not only from a physical distance but also from a distance created by exalted and unrealistic ideas. He has said of such notions:

Grand words such as homeland, revolution, patriotism, disfigure fragile things. The homeland is a vast concept, but when one goes to the homeland one looks for a particular tree, a particular rock, a window. These are the most heartwarming features, not a flag or a national anthem. I long for the small details. (122)

When Darwish says 'Perhaps we will find our way in the aesthetic of the quotidian, in the most simple human questions' (27), he is arguing that it is through the quotidian that the universal is reached. In Darwish's poetry from this time the tension between hope and despair increasingly remains unresolved, and it is only imaginative connection to the land that sustains the dream.

The narrative of the land is affective in that it symbolically binds a dispersed nation to a geographical location and provides comforting and sustaining images that can help overcome feelings of alienation. At the same time it serves another, equally vital, function of articulating a counternarrative to that of the present occupiers of the land.

The importance of the counternarrative can be fully understood only when it is contrasted with the power of the Israeli narrative of suffering and right to the land. In an essay entitled 'Invention, Memory, and Place' Edward Said has claimed that '[f]or years and years an assiduous campaign to maintain a frozen version of Israel's heroic narrative of repatriation and justice obliterated any possibility of a Palestinian narrative' (Said 'Invention' 184). In this essay, and also in 'An Ideology of Difference' and 'Permission to Narrate', Said describes how effective Israel was in gaining almost total sympathy in the West for its version of history to the exclusion of Palestinian attempts to insert their narrative into history. Said further contends:

Because of the power and appeal of the Zionist narrative and idea (which depended on a special reading of the Bible) and because of the collective Palestinian inability as a people to produce a convincing narrative story with a beginning, middle, and end [. . .] Palestinians have remained scattered and politically ineffective victims of Zionism as it continues to take more and more land and history. (Said 'Invention' 185)

In Zionist nationalist ideology the Palestinian is denied any connection with the land in order that Zionist claims to the land are strengthened. It is thus around the axes of land and history that the Palestinian counternarrative revolves. It attempts to demonstrate an intimate knowledge of the land that can only be possessed by those who have lived on it for hundreds of years. Darwish was addressing the Israelis when shortly after his exile he wrote:

The land which emerges as if from a chemical equation or an institute of theory is not a homeland. Your insistent need to demonstrate the history of stones and your ability to invent proofs does not give you prior membership over him who knows the time of the rain from the smell of the stone. That stone for you is an intellectual effort. For its owner it is a roof and walls. (quoted in Parmenter, 1)

The land is also asked to bear witness to the crimes committed against the Palestinians since 1948. In Jabra's 'The Mouth of the Well' (*PW* 47), the massacre at Deir Yasin – an event which, along with many other atrocities committed by the Haganah and Irgun paramilitary gangs from 1948-1951, is erased from Israeli versions of history – is related so as to focus attention on the 'mouth of the well'. The physical feature of community life, representing both purity and fertility, thus gains a voice that tells an alternative history. The poet asks:

Was it suddenly to become an opening to nothingness,
That opening of a grave, stuffed with young maidens
And bleeding pregnant women,

Their blood mixed with gunpowder?

The occupiers' actions change the well's purity and fertility – the 'young maidens' and 'pregnant women' – into death and violence. With the lines 'Then, from its sacred and abundant fertility,/Life will flow, surely it will flow/Into all our villages anew', Jabra suggests that the mingling of the blood of the women and young girls with the soil and well's water creates an avenging force that will ultimately restore the land to wholeness.²¹ In 'Poem of the Land' (*AMPL* 145-151), Darwish commemorates what has become known as the Day of the Land, when in March 1976 the Israeli army opened fire on student demonstrators and five young girls were killed. The brutality of the killing of the girls is juxtaposed with symbols of light and colour – birds, thyme and roses and violets.

In the month of March
 in the year of the uprising
 earth told us her blood secrets
In the month of March
 five girls at the door
 of the primary school
Came past the violet
 came past the rifle
 burst into flame
With the roses
 and thyme
 they opened
the song of the soil
 and entered the earth
 the ultimate embrace.

The earth, in taking the girls into its embrace, preserves their innocence. The staggered lines of this part of the poem suggest the rifles' staccato firing and possibly also a delayed recognition of what happened. In what follows the poet interweaves memories of his life and the land with the massacre of the girls in what becomes a celebration of suffering and resistance. Such poetry takes on a dimension of the epic. This poem differs from Jabra's because here it is Darwish, the poet, who through the power of language and writing, forges the synthesis of the land, its people and its voice. In an Adamic gesture, he is intent on naming and laying claim to the land, as when he writes 'I name the soil I call it/an extension of my soul [. . .] I name the birds/almonds and

²¹ In contrast to the poetry that will be examined in the next chapter in which it is always the blood of men – the hero/fighter/martyr figure – that renews the land, here it is that of women that 'will flow/Into all our villages anew'.

figs/I name my ribs/trees/Gently I pull a branch/from the fig tree of my breast/I throw it like a stone/to blow up the conqueror's tank'. The act of naming imposes the version of reality of the poet (and therefore of his people) upon the contested environment. The poem ends with the following statement of defiance: 'I am the land but you/Who walk over the land/in her awakening/you shall not pass./You shall not pass'. It is the land that gives meaning to history and grants the poet his authority to speak. In an essay entitled 'Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', Hayden White argues that all forms of narrativity imply an existing social order 'against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate'. He continues: 'And this raises the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized "history," has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority' (White *Content* 13). Bearing in mind Tuan's hypothesis that a sense of place, as opposed to an unarticulated rootedness, requires a consciousness of history and one's place in the world (that is, a sense of one's position in relation to the social and moral order), it is interesting that White continues his argument by asserting that the more 'historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography' (13), the more s/he will question the prevailing social system. The Palestinians' growing sense of authority to challenge the dominant narrative (that is, the Israeli version of history) was both enabled by, and implied, an unbreakable affinity with the land, and, prior to the formation of national representative organisations, it was primarily through literature that a moral challenge was mounted and circulated.

A challenge that is based on claims to the land is apparent in the following extract from Rashid Hussain's play *The Interrogation*:

Interrogator: In this poem you are clearly saying that my wife loves you.

The Poet: I am speaking of my land, I say I was there before you, and she will always think of me first.

Be her husband – so what!

I loved her before you did
and have first place in her heart.

[. . .]

I'll even enter your bed
on your wedding night, and come between you . . .
though you are her bridegroom
she will embrace me, desiring me most.

I will always be between you –
I'm sorry – but I was first. (*AMPL* 175)

The explicit and problematic feminisation of the land which leads to metaphors of sexual possession will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is interesting here to compare the above extract with a poem written by a woman. 'The Path of Affection' by Laila Allush, is an evocation of a bus journey from Jerusalem to 'the New Haifa'.

[. . .]

This land is still the old land
despite pawned trees on the hillsides
despite green clouds and fertilized plants
and water sprinklers spinning so efficiently.
On the startling road seized from the throat of new accounts
the trees were smiling at me with Arab affection
In the land I felt an apology for my father's wounds
and on all the bridges,
the shape of my Arab face
echoed there in the tall poplar trees,
in the winding rings of smoke.
Everything is Arabic still, despite the change of language
despite the huge trucks, and foreign tractors.
Each poplar and the orange grove of my ancestors
laughed to me, my God, with Arab affection.

[. . .]

Even with propaganda wavering in the air
languages mingling, multiplying,
around the strange outgrowths
of modern buildings,
the land was gently defying it all.
Oh my grandparents, even in the stark light of noon,
the red soil was shining
with Arab modesty
and singing, believe me,
affectionately. (*AMPL* 106-7)

In explaining the empathy that exists between her and the land, Allush uses the imagery of the family with concerns reaching across generations. In place of Hussain's man/woman analogy, she suggests a bond that is gentle and collaborative, one in which the writer and the land belong together - rather than the one belonging to the other, which parallels the Israeli attempt to possess the land by the force of aggressive modernisation. Meron Benvenisti contends that 'the landscape has endowed the Palestinians with a national identity; they have not cast their identity over it - as have their enemies the Jews - but rather molded their identity from it' (Benvenisti 256). Parmenter argues that here '[t]he family works as a metaphor for the land by invoking this intimate bond, which is unattainable for newcomers no matter how much they manipulate surface appearances' (Parmenter 84). In the poem, everything connected

with the Israelis is jarring and technological, imbued with commercial greed, but the Arab land retains its affection for its original inhabitants, and suggests joy and celebration. The 'native' inhabitant can 'read' the landscape, distinguishing between trees that are 'pawned' and the poplars and orange groves that connect to the 'Arab tune'. As a slight digression, it is interesting to compare the transcendentalism of Allush's poem with Mourid Barghouti's reflections when he crossed the Allenby Bridge into Palestine after an absence of thirty years. With the land at last there in front of him, he realises: 'It is no longer "the beloved" in the poetry of resistance, or an item on a political party program [*sic*], it is not an argument or a metaphor' (*Ramallah* 6). Later, as he travels to Ramallah, he sees Israeli settlements for the first time. The brutality of their intent strikes him and he writes:

These are Israel itself; Israel the idea and the ideology and the geography and the trick and the excuse. It is the place that is ours and that they have made theirs. The settlements are their book, their first form. They are our absence. The settlements are the Palestinian Diaspora itself. (*Ramallah* 29-30)

It could be argued that the returnee no longer has the ability to 'read' the landscape and has lost the intimacy with it that Allush's poem claims. On the other hand, the poem's sentimental strain tends to obscure the reality and the true significance of Israeli appropriation of the land - Barghouti reminds us that the settlements 'are not children's fortresses of Lego or Meccano' (29) - bringing to mind his and Shehadeh's arguments about the dangers of the overuse of symbols in Palestinian literature.

Susan Slyomovics, in her fascinating *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*, describes the fate of a Galilean village, Ein Houd, that was one of the few villages not to be destroyed after 1948 and that subsequently became a Jewish artists' colony, now known as Ein Hod. The former inhabitants of this village and of hundreds of others have jointly produced memorial books, which Slyomovics says 'form part of a large historical and imaginative literature in which the destroyed Palestinian villages are revitalized and their existence celebrated' (xii).²² Besides oral histories, maps and sketches, old photographs, and ethnographic details, these books contain poetry. In the case of Ein Houd, the poems articulate a sense of sadness and anger not only at what has been taken away from the original villagers but also over

²² Two such major undertakings are Whalid Khalili *et al* (eds), *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), and the series of memorial books published by Bir Zeit University entitled *Destroyed Palestinian Villages*, Sharif Kanaana *et al* (eds.).

what has been done to their village since. In 'I Choke on Your Sap' Hanna Abu Hanna laments what happens when Palestinian houses are taken over as museums:

I met you in al-Zib:²³ a shattered gravestone,
coffee kettles,
mud storage bins,
cooking vessels,
stone basins for kubbeh,
a grandfather's cane hanging,
crucified threshing sledges
and a skull in a cage.
Dates once inscribed on the buildings
are still fresh in my memory
speaking to me
its voice not hoarsened.

A rude alien asks me:
Where are you from?
[. . .]
I heard your sighs
from your storage bins, overturned and empty,
your sap a conductor
between a buried root and an orphaned bough –
I am shocked by the electricity of the root
touching my fugitive branch.

I choke
I choke on your sap. (Slyomovics 174-5)

Vernacular items, those quotidian details mentioned by Darwish, now represent a history from which the Palestinians have been severed. For the poet their nature has been changed, and adjectives such as 'shattered', 'hanging', 'crucified', 'overturned and empty', could as well refer to the Palestinians as to their domestic artefacts. This poem is addressed to Palestine but the writer, who belongs there, has become a tourist. The shock of recognition is registered as an electric current, the 'sap' the conductor of Palestinian history and its energy still connecting the root to the 'orphaned' and 'fugitive' son. As with the olive press in the following poem ('Arabic Inscriptions Among Alien Accents' by Kamal Mulhim), everyday artefacts, essential to everyday life, have been turned into museum pieces, their original purpose being effaced in the process.

²³ Slyomovics explains that 'Abu Hanna's poem recounts the transformation in the large house of Husayn Ataya, the former village head of Palestinian Arab al-Zib, now Israeli kibbutz Gesher Haziv (Achiv). Husayn Ataya's home and the village mosque are part of a recreation area and serve as the institutional setting for the marketing of a faux Israeli past to international tourists' (Slyomovics 174).

Birds came burdened with love,
 They landed on Jaffa's tiled roofs
 Grinding their beaks,
 Yearning, remembering memories of this place –
 [. . .]
 Ah, O, Ein Houd!
 Within your ruins, faithful to their origins
 Rise a Babel of languages.
 There is an olive press;
 We filled our jars from it
 In times long past.
 They changed the house with vaulted arches
 To a museum for stone statues,
 But it is still patient;
 They do not know that people are still faithful,
 Longing for each corner,
 For each stone of your remaining houses.
 [. . .]
 How could we forget Arabic inscriptions,
 Imprinted by family and friends
 Among the alien accents?
 Here beneath the olive tree still standing faithfully,
 Abu al-Hayja rested his head on a stone
 During the midday heat.
 [. . .] (Slyomovics 171-2)

Birds are frequently used as symbols in Palestinian poetry, here representing the ghosts and memories of Palestinians who were driven away from their villages. The mention of the olive tree and Abu al-Hayja is significant because it points to a Palestinian connection with this piece of land that reaches back to the twelfth century. Husam al-Din Abu al-Hayja was one of Saladin's generals, who was rewarded for his loyalty and bravery by Saladin's gift of a large tract of land on which Abu al-Hayja's eight sons founded villages (Slyomovics 25). A historic connection to the land such as this becomes an important plank in the argument to counteract the world's "collective, if selective forgetting" (Bardenstien 9). The poet suggests that the village-as-museum lacks any vitality, the 'stone statues' standing in contrast to the energy and movement suggested by the 'vaulted arches' of the old house. The cacophony of the 'Babel of languages' and 'alien accents' indicates a profound disjuncture between the essence of the village and what it has become. Allush also makes this organic connection between the Arabic language and the land, a connection the invader cannot achieve – 'languages mingling, multiplying, / around the strange outgrowths of modern buildings'. Slyomovics

comments how, with the village being turned into a museum, the sign has been divorced from its original function.

Its function replaced and its modalities displaced, its referent, signifying art, is a piece of sculpture to be viewed; such a transformation takes place only in a space where nature has been transformed, and all references to the Arab, as the clearest manifestation of the Other, are absent.
(Slyomovics 175)

Both these poems make the act of reading explicit: the 'Arabic inscriptions' and 'Dates once inscribed on the buildings' are Palestinian traces etched on stone. Because Palestinians can no longer settle in their own land (represented by the birds of Mulhim's poem), in their stead the Arabic buildings and artefacts continue to bear witness to their former presence. The current inhabitants thus become the aliens; 'they' implies distance, where the personal address to the 'you' that is Palestine, and the pronouns 'I' and 'we' express an affinity that the Israeli 'aliens' cannot hope to achieve. By concentrating on the small details of the stones and dwellings, and by investing them with the motifs of resistance, longevity and beauty, the remaining Palestinian houses become a metonym for Palestine itself.

Given that a land rhetoric is essential not only to help forge a common identity amongst the dispersed nation but also to present to the outside world a counter-narrative to that of the Israelis, many writers concentrated on the unembellished small details that Darwish longs for, rather than summoning up the 'exhausted' images and symbols. In al-Qasim's poem, 'I Speak to the World', the address is to the rest of the world, that it should be aware of the reality of Palestinian existence, and the poet's sense of authority grows as he moves from a request to be heard - 'I speak to the world' - to telling it. There is an awareness of loss that, in its simplicity, evokes the essentials of life, the daily activities that had given it shape:

I speak to the world . . . tell it
About a house whose lantern they broke
About an axe that killed a lily
And a fire which destroyed the world.

I speak about a goat not milked
A morning coffee . . . not drunk
A mother's dough not baked
A mud roof that flowered.

I speak to the world . . . I tell it. (quoted in Ashrawi 90)

In 'My Mother' Darwish writes 'I long for my mother's bread/My mother's coffee/Her touch/Childhood memories grow up in me/Day after day'.²⁴ Darwish has said of this poem that, thanks to the power of the poetic image, his mother has been 'transformed into a multitude of other symbols', but that it is a poem untouched by History and without the inspiration of epic (*un poème sans Histoire, sans souffle épique*), explaining that it is 'A simple litany. A man sings of his mother, and his song has the power to touch hearts' (Darwish *Palestine* 103). The poetry of many women writers displays an attention to detail that roots memory in the concrete and the everyday. Lena Jayyusi's 'Breadmother' describes in detail a woman making bread, a poem in which the poetry is derived from the activity itself (*AMPL* 350). Hanan Ashrawi's 'Women and Things' also pays attention to the small details of domestic life but combines these with reminders that they are living under occupation. Part of the poem reads:

Women make things smooth
to the touch
like the kneading of
leavened bread at the dawn of hunger;
And coarse
like the brush of a
homespun coat on
careworn shoulders and bare
arms touching on the night of deportation (*AMPL* 336)

Other stanzas of this poem replicate the juxtaposition of the homely, as embodied in the activities of the women, with reminders of the reality of life in occupied Palestine, which is conjured up by words such 'siege', 'deportation', 'search and detention', 'an undemolished house'. In 'The Words under the Words' Naomi Shihab Nye also uses this juxtaposition of the comforting with the threatening in the lines 'My grandmother's hands recognize grapes,/the damp shine of a goat's new skin', lines that are matched by 'My grandmother's voice says nothing can surprise her./Take her the shotgun wound and the crippled baby' (*AMPL* 359-60). Shihab Nye and Ashrawi suggest both the fragility and the tenacity of the quotidian; unlike those that Ashrawi criticises, these poets root their work in specificity and do not seek a glory that cannot be shared by their fellow strugglers. Darwish, too, seeks a focus on the ordinary, stating:

I am against the concept of the poet-prophet. The heroes of my poems
are ordinary people who look to themselves to create a private freedom.
Marginal beings, who reflect on their existence in a peaceful and humble
way. The modern epic is a quest with a view to formulate existential

²⁴ This poem was taken from a web site – <http://www.humboldt.edu/~jar33/Slmother.html>

questions but with a poetic expression derived from modesty and without exaggeration (Darwish *Palestine* 96)

The focus on the domestic implies a continuity that other poets seek to create by positing a timeless, unchanging landscape.

It is in the novel that attention to thick detail is most apparent. Yahya Yakhliif's *A Lake Beyond the Wind* (1991) is about the life of a village, Samakh, on Lake Tiberias, in the months leading up to the disaster of 1948. The novelist uses an omniscient narrator in those sections that describe the character of the villagers and their activities. He gives a sense of a very ordered, social hierarchy, with the village *mukhtar*'s (headman) house serving as a meeting place for the men in which the social ranking of the various village members is acted out according to where they sit, what roles they play and the extent to which they join in discussions. In *The Object of Memory*, Susan Slyomovics describes how Palestinian villagers within Israel still try to perpetuate this social meeting place even though it might now be 'a nostalgia-ridden guesthouse still maintained by former landlords and rich peasants in impoverished and reduced conditions under Israeli rule'. She goes on to quote a description of one such gathering place:

Only members of this class [landlords] still play the game by the old definitions: they treat each other as chiefs and leaders, and hold unreal conversations about topics that are irrelevant in terms of space, time or even function – about chiefs, emirs, or kings from the past, about their exploits in raids against other tribes, their generosity to their guests, their courage, and amusing anecdotes about their experiences. (Slyomovics 149)

In his novel, Yakhliif frequently gathers the men of the village together in this way but in the circumstances the talk is not of 'harvest and the calves to be born in the spring' but of 'the Jews, who'd started drilling behind the settlement of Degania and blocked the road whenever they felt like it' (2). It is ironic and poignant, bearing in mind the citation above, that the men's talk about preparing for defending their village with only ancient rifles and ceremonial swords, sounds unrealistic and fanciful.²⁵ However, Yakhliif invests his portraits of the fallible old men with fondness and respect, and he seems to be intent on recreating what might be called the whole fabric of village life, which inevitably revolves around the land. He also implies an organic unity of nature

²⁵ Slyomovics recounts the defence of the village of Ein Houd, as told her by a villager called Abu Faruq. 'Abu Faruq recalls that each village was left to defend itself; no outside leaders aided them and no leader arose within Ein Houd. Within the village, old men were the most bellicose, he recounts, tripping whenever they brandished their ancient, unwieldy swords' (Slyomovics 99).

and people, with frequent detailed descriptions of the people carrying out their activities on the shores of the lake, with passages like the one below suggesting a God-given plenitude.

At harvest time he [Haj Hussein, the *mukhtar*] got help from all the peasants. Some came to reap and some to gather up the grain, while others still came to work the threshing floor. Behind them came the poor people who gleaned the ears of grain the gatherers had dropped, or which had escaped the reapers' scythes. And behind them again came the animals, who ate until their stomachs were ready to burst. (106)

The crisis of that year increasingly intrudes on the life of the village and the cycle of its activities. Yakhlif also uses the journals of a young Iraqi volunteer to give a picture of life in the haphazardly organised and poorly equipped Arab Liberation Army. Both the innocence and simplicity of village life and the idealism of the young volunteers are about to be shattered. The novel ends with the villagers defeated and dispersed. The Iraqi, 'with the smell of defeat and disaster on [his] clothes', and a young man from Samakh alongside whom he had fought, climb to the top of a hill from where they can just see the shores of the lake. The villager, Najib, goes into a reverie, talking of his memories of life in the village:

He was talking to people he could see but I couldn't, to men and women, and to trees and horses too, in words that were tender, simple and almost broke my heart. He talked with the goldfinch and the lark and the wild quail. He addressed the fennel and the vetch, the *marar* and the wild mint. (213-4)

The fact that the speech is addressed to the birds, to plants, to the lake, emphasises the bond between the Palestinian and the land, but the profound disruption to his sense of identity and community is suggested by his speaking into a void, to an audience who cannot hear.

It becomes apparent that a shift of emphasis begins to form in the move from poetry to the novel. With its concentration of connecting metaphors and widely understood symbols, poetry seeks to summon up and recapture the essence of the lost land, to forge an imaginative reclamation. When Darwish writes of his mother it is, as he says, a simple everyday account, but through the power of poetic imagery the mother comes to stand for Palestine itself. The novel, as the genre traditionally tied to realism, has to deal with the present, and that present persistently interrogates the gap between the imaginary and the real. The novel as narrative, the telling of a story, inevitably reveals the gap between the moment of telling and the events being related. It is therefore not

only the attempted recreation of a lost Eden that makes *A Lake Beyond the Wind* so poignant but the contrast between the life it evokes and the present-day reality of the dispossessed Palestinians.

Najib's speech in *A Lake Beyond the Wind* is, like the novel itself, a deliberate act of recall. Yakhlif was born in Samakh in 1944 and therefore his knowledge of it would have come from the older members of his family and the village. Historical fiction such as this aims at verisimilitude and, apart from Yakhlif's use of two narrators, displays neither modernist devices of fragmentation nor the postmodern obsession with the reliability of memory. Nevertheless, its subtext is memory, and our knowledge both of the author's biographical details (given on the back cover) and of the events surrounding 1948 and the break-up of whole communities, ensure we read such a novel as an imaginative reclamation of the past. The fact that it was written using other people's memories makes it a collective act. In *Tense Past* Paul Antze and Michael Lambek contend that we should imagine 'memory as practice, not as the pregiven object of our gaze but as the act of gazing and the objects it generates' (Antze & Lambek xii). In the West the tendency has been to propose a model of memory that validates the idea of the private individual who can draw upon a store of fixed memories to construct and legitimate identity. This makes memory a passive act, whereas Antze and Lambek stress its dialogic nature and the fact that, as memory 'emerges into consciousness . . . it always depends on cultural vehicles for its expression' (Antze & Lambek xvii). This latter model of memory makes it a social rather than an individual activity. These writers further emphasise the close relationship between memory and narrative, in that in using memories to make sense of the past, a retrospective ordering of the different elements takes place, 'connecting the parts into a more or less unified narrative' in which the individual situates him/herself (Antze & Lambek xviii). The creation of a life narrative applies to both individuals and to societies or nations. In the Palestinian situation, without a shared territory to anchor a sense of national identity, memory becomes the national narrative.

There is also a sense that Palestinian memory is doing battle with Israeli history, the instinctive bond with the land opposed to what Darwish described as a 'chemical equation'.²⁶ In his essay 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', Pierre

²⁶ There is a danger here of opposing the 'modernity' of science and history (Israeli) to the 'primitive' emotive and affective (Palestinian).

Nora appears to take this line when he argues that memory is a living, evolving entity whereas history is 'antithetical to spontaneous memory' (Nora 9). He writes:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. [. . .] Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic. (Nora 8)

There is thus a recognition that memory serves a collective purpose – 'Memory is blind to all but the group it binds' (Nora 9). History seeks to freeze the past, and in its drive to analyse cannot accommodate the 'affective and magical' qualities that attach to memory. It could be argued that *A Lake Beyond the Wind* is a sentimental recreation of a past that never was, but if memory is acknowledged as the symbolic and always-evolving rendering of the past, then the novel satisfies the affective and magical impulses associated with story telling, encompassing both the particular and the symbolic.²⁷

Just as, in Benedict Anderson's formulation, nations are imagined communities, so Palestinian literature, with its insistence on remembering the land and life in the homeland, both draws on and creates a collective memory, a narrative that gives shape to personal and national experience. The editors of two notable anthologies of Palestinian literature have organised their material so that it tells the story of Palestinian experience. Abdelwahab Elmessiri is editor of *The Palestinian Wedding*, an anthology of poetry, where he performs a similar ordering of his material, an ordering Barbara Harlow sees as significant because:

[. . .] this volume commemorates a historical moment in a national struggle which must in the end discover its significance in the larger confrontation with the forces of repression, both political and cultural, throughout the modern world. It is in reference to this broader context that the poems collected in the volume have been ordered and arranged. (Harlow *Resistance* 65)

Nur and Abdelwahab Elmessiri, editors of *A Land of Stone and Thyme*, state that '[r]ead as a unified whole, in order of appearance, the short stories of this anthology combine to form a myth and are each a facet of a meta-narrative or framework which has been

²⁷ Ted Swedenberg's essay 'The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier' examines the ways in which popular memory can be manipulated and appropriated, arguing that 'the peasant's unifying function works ideologically to cover over significant differences within Palestinian society'. (Swedenberg, 'Peasant' 18).

imposed on them' (*LST* 4). The final section of the anthology is entitled 'Dreams of Paradise Redeemed'. The narrative is thus projected into the future but, despite the implied reclamation of a lost Eden, the stories of this section are concerned with a hostile present. The land still features as symbol but all these stories take place on the historic land of Palestine, which lends them a specificity that balances any abstraction. 'The Tree', by Rashad Abu Shawer, is a parable concerning Nixon's and the American's attempts to extinguish the song of a bird, which clearly stands for the Palestinian voice but which for the Americans is 'an enemy of the free world and is on the side of the revolutionaries'. The tree from which the bird sings is only half destroyed and the birds 'keep singing and singing until a leaf sprouts amidst the dead branches . . .' (*LST* 219-20). In 'Norma and the Snowman', Yakhliif describes life in a group of freedom fighters. As a young volunteer gazes out over the surrounding countryside, the narrator comments: 'The open country is a poem engraved in his features, in his eyes, in his fingertips and in the movements of his hands' (*LST* 225). Although the dream of redeeming the land has not yet materialised, a sense of belonging, and of memories that reach back across centuries, provides a link between past and future. A senior fighter muses to his friend:

'The open country, valleys and plains, grass, flowers, birds, nests, space, evening, fog. The open country has its own dictionary, vocabulary and alphabet. Arnun Citadel is high, towering. Through the fog, it appears redolent of history and secrets. Is it true that Salah al-din built it? And did his men pass through these lands? During the nights when the shooting stops, I can almost hear the neighing of their horses. And when the savage winds blow, I smell the memories which they planted in these regions just as they used to plant flowers in the hair of their mistresses and words in the rhythms of their poems.' (*LST* 229)

This passage emphasises a linguistic as well as an historical appropriation of the land, and the role of collective memory. The fact that memory is being narrativised is not obscured; instead, remembering becomes a symbolic act. Lambek argues that we should regard memory 'as a function of social relationships, in part a mutual affirmation of past interaction, in part the traces of our introjection of one another'. Memories thus bind people together; memory is activated as a social act, a 'confirmation of the sense of continuity (caring) and discontinuity (mourning)' (Lambek 239). As the instigator of memory, the land becomes the symbol of Palestinian experience. It articulates the sense of a journey from and also a return to a place of origin; it is the material basis for acts of

imagination that can be both limiting and empowering in their endurance; and it also gives concrete definition to the struggle for national identity.

1.iv Arabesques: can the tale ‘restore the earth pulled from under our feet’?

The relationship between the imaginary and the real, between past and present, between the land and its present-day inhabitants, and the matter of competing claims to the land – all these concepts are thoroughly interrogated by Anton Shammas in his novel *Arabesques* (1986). Shammas, an Israeli Christian Arab whose family stayed within Israel after 1948, questions notions of home and identity. In doing so, he problematises theories of memory that in many Palestinian texts lay primary claim to identity. Shammas, along with novelists Emile Habiby and Atallah Mansour, is Arab-Israeli and writes in Arabic, Hebrew and English.²⁸ *Arabesques* was written in Hebrew, the language in which Shammas, born in 1950, was educated. The implications behind this choice have been debated extensively,²⁹ but what is difficult to deny is that yoking the Arab tale to the Hebrew language – ‘the hybrid of content and language’, as Brenner puts it (Brenner ‘Hidden’ 90) – complicates cultural and ethnic boundaries, and suggests a certain permeability between the two peoples now living on the historic land of Palestine. For those on both sides whose arguments are polarised and who rely on the absolute dichotomy of self/other to reinforce their claims, this approach is unsettling. Rashid Khalidi comments on the ‘intimate intertwining’ of the Palestinian narrative with that of the Jews over the past century, a debate which is unfortunately ‘constructed in terms of a rigid polarity between the two narratives’ (Khalidi 146). As the title of the novel suggests, Shammas interweaves the narratives of the different ethnic and religious groupings who have long dwelt in the region, and this interweaving along with its non-chronological structure means the novel refuses all of them the absolutism of their originary claims. Christian Szyska argues that the narrative structure confounds a ‘logic

²⁸ Emile Habiby’s *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* was translated from Arabic to Hebrew in collaboration with Anton Shammas. Shammas’s *Arabesques* was written in Hebrew and has not to date been translated into Arabic.

²⁹ See Hannan Hever, ‘Hebrew in an Israeli Arab Hand: Six Miniatures on Anton Shammas’s *Arabesques*’, *Cultural Critique*, no. 7 (Fall 1987), 47-76; Rachel Feldhay Brenner, “‘Hidden Transcripts’ Made Public: Israeli Arab Fiction and Its Reception”, *Critical Inquiry*, no. 26 (Autumn 1999) 85-108; Rachel Feldhay Brenner, ‘The Search for Identity in Israeli Arab Fiction: Atallah Mansour, Emile Habiby, and Anton Shammas’, *Israel Studies*, vol. 6, issue 3 (Fall 2001) 91-112; Ami Elad-Bouskila, ‘Arabic and/or Hebrew: The Languages of Arab Writers in Israel’ in Kamal Abdel Malek & David C. Jacobson (eds.) *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999; and Reuven Snir, “Hebrew As the Language of Grace”: Arab-Palestinian Writers in Hebrew’, *Prooftexts*, vol. 15, issue 2 (May 1995), 163-83.

of chronological and a spatial continuity' and that it thus 'deconstructs narratives which being either politically or religiously encrypted into space, engender partly overlapping and antagonistic geographies' (Szyska 217).

This semi-autobiographical novel alternates its sections between 'The Tale' and 'The Teller', that is to say between the narrative of the narrator's family history, and the narrator (Anton) himself searching for the clue to his identity. The story weaver *par excellence* is Anton's Uncle Yusef, of whom we are told:

His stories were plaited into one another, embracing and parting, twisting and twining in the infinite arabesque of memory. Many of his stories he told again and again, with seemingly minor changes, while other stories were granted only two or three tellings during the whole of his lifetime. All of them, however, flowed around him in a swirling current of illusion that linked beginnings to endings, the inner to the external, the reality to the tale. (226)

This passage highlights the blurring of the boundaries between the imagined and the real, and how memory with its 'infinite arabesque' denies a teleological and ordered recall of the past which is usually associated with history. Uncle Yusef features prominently in 'The Tale' sections, and the story of the family is so complex and intertwined it could almost be yet another of his inventions. As the narrator of the past, he stands in opposition to the present (as represented by 'The Teller' sections), on the one hand 'a devout Catholic' who believed in eventual salvation, on the other 'he still could believe that the circular, the winding and the elusive had the power to resist nothingness' (227-8). The opposition suggested is one between mythical time and modernisation (one of the images of itself that Israel projects, in contrast to a perceived medieval mode of the Arab world).³⁰ Hannan Hever sees the arabesque as an 'analogue' to 'the position of Islamic "contractualism"'. She goes on to explain that 'the distinction between Islamic contractualism and Western corporativism is a close parallel to the distinction between the collective *Gemeinschaft*, based on personal relationships, and the impersonal and achievement-oriented *Gesellschaft* usually associated with modern technological society' (Hever 60-1). Anton, the Arab who

³⁰ The editors of *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Context* comment on the dichotomies of 'primitive versus civilized, of static versus dynamic, of passive versus active, and of traditional versus modern' with the West, Zionism and Israel being associated with the positive, and the Arab world and Palestine with the negative (Moors 2). The most famous or notorious articulation of the dichotomy was given by Theodor Herzl when he argued for the Jewish state in Palestine on the grounds that '[w]e should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism' (quoted in Cleary, 151). Decades later, Chaim Weizman argued in a similar vein - 'On the one side, the forces of destruction, the forces of the desert, have arisen, and on the other side stand firm the forces of civilization and building' (quoted in Cleary 151).

lives in present-day Israel, is left trying to reconcile these two poles: 'here I am trying to separate myself from Uncle Yusef's circular pagan-like time and follow the linear path of Christian time, which supposedly leads to salvation, to the breaking of the vicious circles' (228). The importance of the form of the arabesque is, Hever contends, that it allows Shammas to 'keep a firm grasp on the absolute reality of suffering and of human existence', whilst at the same emphasising its relative position in time (Hever 62). The cyclical nature of the arabesque which can 'resist nothingness', it could therefore be argued, serves as a diachronic axis to counter the synchronicity of the present. Shammas, however, also seems to suggest that the uncorrupted past is irretrievable and as mythical as Ar-Rasad, the rooster that guards the Crusader treasure hidden under a boulder that glows in the moonlight. He has Anton muse:

I have not managed to rescue him [Uncle Yusef] from the maze of his stories, nor have I enabled him to feel at peace with the meaning of his experience or even mine. He was well aware that his being was flawed and incomplete, like my own, and the tale, in either of its versions, does not have sufficient power to restore the earth pulled from under our feet. (228)

The utopian path that Anton seeks would contain both the mythical and oral along with the modern; as he says of Uncle Yusef, 'he did not judge between these contradictory beliefs that dwelt back to back within him, and he even conceived of them as a single entity in which the *djinni*'s Ar-Rasad was one and the same as the cock that crowed at dawn when Saint Peter denied Jesus thrice' (228).

In questioning what it is to be Palestinian, Shammas is also questioning the founding myths that those Palestinians in the diaspora had used to construct their narrative of belonging to the land. Both the Shammas family of the novel and the author's family had lived in the village of Fassuta in Galilee until 1948 when they moved to Haifa. Memories of the family house and the village appear frequently, thick with detail and a lyricism that evokes the timelessness of a cyclical pattern associated with agriculture, as in the following passage.

On the wide sill of that window I would sit and muse over the movements that break the stillness of the landscape as seen through the window. A flock of goats goes out to pasture, like a shimmering black stain, getting farther and farther away, growing smaller and spreading out again and dwindling until it vanishes over the horizon, leaving a wake of dust. A man on his donkey is crossing the valley. A woman walks with a large bundle of fodder on her head, which she has pulled from among the tender tobacco plants. A farmer plows his field with a double-shafted plow hitched to a horse, and goes from one side of the field to the other.

Furrow by hidden furrow, he gets nearer to me. (63)

Using such detailed evocations of the village suggests a closeness and belonging that counteract the dominant narrative of Jewish connectedness to the land. However, early on in the novel Shammas indicates his intent to unsettle such uncomplicated narratives. In telling the reader how the patriarch of the family moved from Syria in 1830 and settled in Fassuta, the author also gives a brief history of the village and, in doing so, reveals how the land bears multiple inscriptions.

Our village is built on the ruins of the Crusader castle of Fassove, which was built on the ruins of Mifshata, the Jewish village that had been settled after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Harim, a group of deviant priests. [. . .] The son did not rest until he had reached the place with the beautiful view that the Crusaders called Bellevue [. . .] and the villagers called Fassu-ta, as a sort of Jewish-Crusader compromise. (11)

As Szyska points out, Fassuta thus becomes a place of exile (Szyska 221). The migrations of the family had continued to Anton's day, attributed to the wander-lust of the patriarch, a "wrinkle in the mind" as his grandmother called it (10). Such a roaming disperses centres of identity and questions the idea of the land being a 'pivot to selfhood', even in farming families. The patriarch had left Syria, it turns out, in order to escape persecution by the 'Muslim clan in the village' (10). There are many references throughout the novel to Christians being persecuted by Muslims. Hever comments that Shammas, as a Christian Arab, is a member of a minority group that 'falls outside the Islamic mainstream of the minority that, at least according to the prevalent Israeli conception, tends more "naturally" to be identified with the Palestinians' (Hever 49). In an essay entitled 'The Guilt of the Babushka', Shammas has pointed out that the Jews regard themselves as a minority vis-à-vis the surrounding Arab countries, that Palestinians are the minority within Israel, and further that Christian Arabs are a minority within the Palestinian nation (quoted in Snir 167).³¹ Szyska observes how in the novel 'the village and its surroundings are invested with narratives' (Szyska 221), but it is worth noting that these stories are threaded through with narratives of Christians, Jews and Muslims, so that no single grouping can lay claim to an uncontested possession.

³¹ Yael S. Feldman addresses the significance of the specifically Christian subtext in a paper entitled 'Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality: Anton Shammas's *Arabesques* Revisited', in which he argues that for the Christian Arabs of Palestine the date of overwhelming significance is 1936, not 1948. During the Arab Rebellion of 1935-6, Christians were often persecuted by Muslims because they were accused of collaborating with the British Mandate authorities, who in turn were perceived as being supportive of Zionist ideals. (Feldman 378-385)

Despite all the thick descriptions, the process of remembering home is problematised. The matter of home and the homeland is by no means simple because for Shamas, an Israeli Arab with Israeli citizenship (albeit second-class), it is Israel that is home. The quest in *Arabesques* is not for a 'pristine undivided past', in the words of Edward Said (Said 'Ideology' 57), but for a place which will respect his unique cultural heritage, that of the Israeli Arab in today's Israel.³² Shamas had a well-publicised argument with the Israeli writer Abraham B. Yehoshua, who declared:

I am saying to Anton Shamas: if you want your full identity, if you want to live in a state that has a Palestinian character, with a genuine Palestinian culture, arise, take your belongings, and extract yourself one hundred yards eastward, into the Palestinian state that would dwell alongside Israel. (quoted in Brenner 'Hidden' 97).

Shamas refers to this argument in many of his journalistic writings, and in *Arabesques* he includes an Israeli writer called Yehoshua Bar-On who it is difficult to imagine is other than Abraham B. Yehoshua. In the novel, Bar-On and Anton travel to Iowa City for a writers' conference, one of whose participants is a Palestinian from Nablus called Paco. The polarities that are refused by the swirling and interweaving form of the arabesque are represented in Bar-On's stated preference for a 'pure', easily-identifiable Palestinian, with Paco becoming a replacement for Anton in Bar-On's novel about a Palestinian in Israel. Bar-On complains that Anton 'hasn't done a thing to me; that's the problem', and he continues:

His compatriot here speaks much more to my heart than he does. He forces me to respond and take a stand toward him. You have to bear in mind that he is still a pure Palestinian, whose strength resides in his simplicity and his lack of cynicism. [. . .] my former hero does not define himself as my enemy, at least not in the accepted sense of the word. And that makes it hard for me. On the other hand, I feel much closer to the problems of *this* Palestinian. (168).

For Anton/Shamas, the homeland and identity cannot be essentialised as readily as Bar-On/A. B. Yehoshua imagine they can.³³

³² Cleary traces the changing goals of Palestinian policy since 1948. He notes how the defeats of 1967 lessened support for pan-Arabist solutions and instead the goal of 'establishing a "secular democratic state" within the historic boundaries of Palestine' gained prominence. Cleary continues: 'The object in this instance was the creation of a binational state that would give equal recognition to the national identities of both Jews and Palestinians'. (Cleary 188)

³³ Hever further comments on the debate between Shamas and Yehoshua and the way in which he is 'presented satirically in the novel'. She writes: 'The unwillingness of Yehoshua, and of many other Israeli liberals, to acknowledge the Arab Shamas as a full-fledged Israeli, whose native land is Israel just as theirs is, was proof for Shamas that the majority is not inclined to relinquish the Jewish primacy

Once it has been accepted that an unadulterated land of origin cannot be re-entered and that your land is not regarded as yours by those who dwell in it alongside you, defining what makes a home becomes almost impossible. Shammas appears to deny any theory of uncomplicated origin when he differentiates between 'going back' and 'home'. You go back, he says, 'to someplace that you have lived in the past'. However, you go home 'to a place that even though you have never seen it in your life, still, it is as if you had; a place that is the other deep end of that pool of your created, acquired and invented memories' (Shammas 'Autocartography' 111). 'How to describe a home to someone you love . . . ?' asks Anton as he writes to his Jewish lover, Shlomith, from Iowa City. In a surprising passage that seems to negate all the detailed descriptions he has given us earlier in the novel, he muses:

I have never tried to describe my home. Because it isn't just the southern window – the *bab es-sir*, as we called it – the chill of which is still in the palms of my hands, nor the *smandra*, the cupboard where we kept the mattresses and the blankets, which towered above our heads like a threatening castle, nor the turquoise-green cat hiding behind it when she was in heat, nor the dappled light dancing on the concrete floor [. . .]
(149)

His sense of home, he says, is triggered by the memory of a family meal, but it is not until he is sitting far away in Iowa City that he feels he can conjure up 'the house of [his] childhood in the village, the smells and the sights and the textures' (149-50). Brenner argues that for Shammas the 'real home remains in the fusion of nostalgic fullness of childhood with the ambivalence and incompleteness of adulthood', and she goes on to quote Shammas on memory:

Whenever I go back to the village, I go back to something that exists only in my memory, and I keep reciting to myself an aphorism that is excessively used by the modern, identity-seeking writers in Israel. It is the famous opening lines of a poem written in 1923: "Man is nothing but a little plot of land/Man is nothing but the image of his native landscape." The above lines were written by one Tchernichovsky, a fine Hebrew poet. (quoted in Brenner 'Hidden' 98)

The fact that Shammas quotes a Hebrew poet in order to make his point emphasises similarity between the two races, rather than difference. Shammas also talks here about his sense of being 'half-baked', a sense induced by his being 'a little plot of land' in a land that now wishes to disown him. Amiel Alcalay argues that the 'narrator [of

of the State of Israel, even at the risk of sacrificing its democratic character. In the novel Shammas focuses on the way liberals fall into the trap of racist discourse patterns' (Hever 58).

Arabesques] is driven not by false nostalgia but by the need to make some sense of the delicate and layered existence that is the life of those Palestinians who stayed after the disaster of 1948' (Alcalay 277). It would appear that the social aspect of memory, of relations within the family and with neighbours, take precedence over minute details of house and village, thus suggesting an alternative basis of identity. For all the appeal of stories and memories and myths, Shammas seems to insist that it is in the present that Palestinians should seek an answer to the riddle.

1.v Return to the homeland

As has already been discussed, faith in the inevitability of a return to Palestine was an intrinsic component of post-1948 national consciousness, but it was twenty years before the possibility of a partial return presented itself. Following its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 war, Israel opened the borders between the newly annexed territories and the rest of historic Palestine, allowing many refugees to visit the homes and villages they had left in 1948.³⁴ Many of these refugees made the journey only to find that their villages no longer existed, but others revisited cities such as Jaffa and Haifa that, apart from being repopulated, had remained largely unchanged. Such is the setting of Ghassan Kanafani's novella, *Returning to Haifa*, written in 1969. It is a remarkable piece of imaginative writing both for its honesty and its comparative rarity: the uncompromising transformation by the Israeli state of the Palestinian 'lost paradise' was a reality few writers at the time were willing to face. The story relates a twenty-four hour period in which a Palestinian couple, Said and Safiyya, make the journey from their new home in Ramallah to their old home in Haifa. Since arriving in Ramallah, they had raised three sons and a daughter; the oldest son, Khalid, is determined to join the resistance, an action Said has forbidden. By means of flashbacks and stream-of-consciousness narration, we are informed of what happened on Wednesday, April 21, 1948, when the Haganah forces overran the city and the Palestinian inhabitants fled in terror. Safiyya was alone in their apartment with their five-month-old son, Khaldun, when the fighting started and, growing increasingly alarmed, she went out into the street to search for her husband. Both of them are swept towards the port in the 'rushing wave of humanity', he losing 'the ability to direct his own steps', she being 'carried along like a twig of straw' (155-6), eventually finding

³⁴ Such freedom of travel for Palestinians from the Occupied Territories was relatively short-lived as restrictions on movement became increasingly repressive.

themselves in a rowing boat looking back towards Haifa and their infant son still in their flat. It is an attempt to discover what happened to Khaldun after they left him that motivates their journey. They find their old flat occupied by Miriam, an elderly Jew from Poland (her husband, Iphrat, had died in 1956). The Jewish Agency had allocated them the flat in April 1948, and the couple had adopted and brought up as their own the baby boy who had been found there after his parents fled.

The narrative constantly splices present time with the events of 1948, the compulsive return to that climatic moment clearly driving their lives in the present. However, it is a past that has remained buried and unfronted for twenty years, and it is only discussion of a possible trip to Haifa that releases from its incarceration the name of their abandoned son, Khaldun, 'a name which had remained unspoken for so many years' (158), a spectre that is the unnameable horror at the centre of their lives. Said is known as Abu Khalid (the name of their first son born in Ramallah), and not as Abu Khaldun,³⁵ a choice that is both a denial of the past and, given the etymological similarity, a sign of the haunting of the present by the past. During their car journey to Haifa the couple never stop talking, yet as they enter Haifa 'they both realised that they had not spoken a word about the matter which had brought them there' (150). Their suppressed feelings of guilt at having abandoned their child without more of a fight stands for the collective guilt of the nation at having left their houses and lands in 1948.

Their inability to confront the past leads to the belief that things might have remained the same. As they drive up to their old house in Haifa, which Said had 'kept alive in his memory for so long', he imagines he can see the young Safiyya 'with her hair in a long braid [leaning] over the balcony toward him' (161). Once inside the flat, his eyes take in the details of what has remained the same and what has altered, but he is fixated by the vase of peacock feathers on the table, getting up to count their number and finding that now there are only five instead of the original seven. Miriam's composure and tactfulness during their hesitant conversation makes Said agitated and he leaps up demanding to know what happened to the other two feathers. It is as if the feathers are symbols of the past, and the fact that they are no longer as they were is something for which Said was unprepared. Belief in the power of such symbols – the three cypress trees outside with Palestinian names carved on them, the young Safiyya

³⁵ It was customary in Palestinian society for a father to change his first name upon the birth of his first son, taking the son's name and putting Abu (father of) in front of it. Similarly, a mother becomes Im (often also spelt Um or Umm) plus the name of the first son.

representing the days in which he was desired and important, the perfection of the feathers – helps obscure the reality of the past twenty years. And it is the missing two feathers that finally bring into the open what was silenced for so long: the name of their son, Khaldun, now known as Dov. Their firstborn son, the concentration of all that had been left behind and of the dreams that sustained them, is now serving in the IDF reserves, having been raised as a Jew and knowing nothing of his true parentage until his late teens. It is a devastating critique of the couple's, and Palestinians', delusions and repressed longings.

At midnight, Dov returns and Miriam introduces him to his 'original parents' (179), but the young man refuses to acknowledge any parents other than Miriam and Iphrat. The ensuing conversation between Said and Dov³⁶ causes Said to re-examine many of his assumptions, principally what makes a man and what constitutes a homeland. He is forced to the conclusion that what makes a man 'has nothing to do with flesh and blood and identity cards and passports'; rather that 'a human being [is] made up of what's injected into him hour after hour, day after day, year after year' (183). The return of Dov, who symbolises all that has been lost, also prompts Said to ask the question, What is a homeland? His and Safiyya's desire to return to the past and their belief in that possibility, take the form of believing that all will be as it was when they left. But after the confrontation with Dov, Said asks is the homeland "these two chairs that remained in this room for twenty years? The table? The peacock feathers? The picture of Jerusalem on the wall? The copper lock? The oak tree? The balcony?" (184). These symbols of the past are shown to have been reconfigured in another's lexicon and are now part of the narrative of the Other's homeland, and Said is obliged to concede that even though he remembers every detail of the city, Haifa 'refused to acknowledge [him]' (173). The confrontation with Dov, whilst initially prompting in Said a desire to 'get out of [there] and return to the past', forces him to admit that they "shouldn't have left anything. Not Khaldun, not the house, not Haifa" (172-3), rather than endlessly justifying their helplessness on that day in April 1948. It also forces him to articulate, along with his guilt, the legitimacy of Palestinian grievances and the justice of their cause, in the face of the Israeli using "the weakness and mistakes of others" as an

³⁶ Safiyya is excluded from the conversations between Said and Miriam and Said and Dov presumably because she cannot speak English. Instead, both on the journey and in the flat, she constantly described as crying and weeping silently, having to ask her husband to translate. From the perspective of gender imagining, such as portrayal would be interesting to examine in more detail, especially comparing her to the Jewish Miriam.

excuse for “the right to exist at their expense and justify his own mistakes and crimes” (186). In a long speech to Safiyya he can finally spell out what the concept of a homeland means, explaining:

“I’m looking for the true Palestine, the Palestine that’s more than memories, more than peacock feathers, more than a son, more than scars written by bullets on the stairs. I was just saying to myself: What’s Palestine with respect to Khalid? He doesn’t know the vase or the picture or the stairs or Halisa or Khaldun. And yet for him, Palestine is something worthy of a man bearing arms for, dying for. For us, for you and me, it’s only a search for something buried beneath the dust of memories. And look what we found beneath that dust. Yet more dust. We were mistaken when we thought the homeland was only the past. For Khalid, the homeland is the future [. . .] Dov is our shame, but Khalid is our enduring honor.” (187)

It is only by facing up to the impossibility of returning to the past that an alternative vision of what is a homeland can be formulated. They then take their leave, the story ending with Said hoping that Khalid has taken advantage of his parents’ absence to join the resistance.

Besides refusing the self-delusion of the nation that it can return to the former homeland, *Returning to Haifa* compresses many other concerns within its pages, notably the emergence of correct political consciousness and the desirability of armed struggle,³⁷ but there is one other aspect it is important to consider here, and that is the Palestinian confrontation with the Israeli, the unmentioned and unmentionable Other. In much Palestinian literature there is an absence of any attempt either to acknowledge the Israeli presence on the land or to understand the consciousness of the Other, a refusal which can be read as part of a wider national self-delusion. Kanafani’s approach is equivocal: on the one hand, Miriam is portrayed with sensitivity and sympathy; on the other, Dov appears a callous figure, representative of the generation born in Israel and of what Ashis Nandy terms ‘hyper-masculinity’ (Nandy x). During their stilted conversation in the flat (they have to communicate in English), Said learns that Miriam’s father had died in Auschwitz and that she had witnessed her ten-year-old brother being shot by German soldiers. When they arrived in Haifa in March 1948, Iphrat’s idea of Palestine was derived from Koestler’s *Thieves in the Night*, the source of his belief that the country ‘was nothing more than a stage set adapted from an old

³⁷ For two detailed but contrasting analyses of Kanafani’s espousal of armed struggle in *Returning to Haifa*, see Barbara Harlow’s ‘Return to Haifa: “Opening the Borders” in Palestinian Literature’, and Ian Campbell’s ‘Blindness to Blindness: Trauma, Vision and Political Consciousness in Ghassan Kanafani’s *Returning to Haifa*’. See also Muhammad Siddiq, *Man Is a Cause: Political consciousness and the fiction of Ghassan Kanafani*, 50-62.

legend and still decorated in the manner of the colourful scenes pictured in Christian religious books designed to be used by children in Europe' (167)³⁸ and he 'refused to let himself worry or even think about' the 'signs of destruction' that he saw around him in Haifa (169). Miriam, however, is brought face to face with and acknowledges the reality behind the destruction when she sees two Hagana fighters toss the body of an Arab child into a truck "like a piece of wood." She tells her husband, "If it had been a Jewish child they would never have done that" (169), and she links this event with the shooting of her brother by German soldiers. Everything changed for her at that point, we are told, but she could not persuade Iphrat to return to Europe, and then they are given the opportunity of adopting the abandoned child. Her acknowledgement to Said and Safiyya that they are "the owners of this house" (163) contrasts with Safiyya's bitter accusation that Miriam "acts as if it's her house!" (171), a revelation of historical awareness on Miriam's part and of a refusal to acknowledge reality on Safiyya's.

The sympathetic portrayal of Miriam is juxtaposed with Kanafani's obvious distaste for the evolution of the Zionist ideal as embodied by Dov. The terms in which Dov's arguments are couched reveal the polar reasoning, or Manicheanism, of much colonial discourse, which for Dov revolves around notions of 'civilisation' and of physical strength equating to moral strength. Said's behaviour he says was not that of a "civilized and careful man" and he declares :

"You're all weak! Weak! You're bound by heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! Don't tell me you spent twenty years crying! Tears won't bring back the missing or the lost. Tears won't work miracles! All the tears in the world won't carry a small boat holding two parents searching for their lost child. So you spent twenty years crying. That's what you tell me now? Is this your dull, worn-out weapon?" (184-5).

The brutality of Dov's assessment not only provokes Said's counterargument on morality but also makes him commit to the necessity of armed struggle and the idea that "every Palestinian is going to pay a price" for the homeland as future (187).³⁹ Kanafani thus demonstrates a measure of sympathy for the need for a Jewish homeland

³⁸ The fact that Palestine is represented in Christian children's texts indicates that the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was not widely shared or imagined at that time.

³⁹ Barbara Harlow assesses the meeting between Palestinian and Israeli, and Said's subsequent political awakening, in the light of the PFLP's commitment to a secular democratic state in all of historic Palestine, embracing Arab, Jew and Christian (Kanafani was a prominent member of the Marxist PFLP). This vision was opposed by the Palestine National Council's 1973 resolution espousing a two-state solution, with the establishment of a Palestinian state on whatever land could be salvaged from Israeli control (Harlow 'Return' 14-16).

whilst at the same time deploring the reality it has spawned. *Returning to Haifa*, like much of Kanafani's fiction, deconstructs many of the ideals to which the Palestinians had clung since 1948, and it initiates a debate about the true significance both of the homeland and of a return to it.

The difficulty in attempting to summarise the significance of the land for present-day Palestinians lies in the ever-growing divergence in experience of the different sectors of society – those in exile either in other Arab countries or in the West, those living within Israel, and refugee-camp dwellers, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon. However, some general trends can be detected. The movement away from idealised representations of the land and from the poetry of nostalgia and longing, towards the articulation of the reality of the struggle for continued Palestinian existence on occupied land, parallels the change in emphasis from the importance of those on the outside (*fi al-kharij*) to those on the inside (*min al-dakhil*). In the early decades after *al-nakba* notions of purity meant there could be no connection with the 'Zionist entity', but increasingly those Palestinians living under Israeli occupation came to be seen not only as representing the essence of *sumud* but also as those who had maintained a real instead of an imagined connection to the land.⁴⁰ Another significant shift occurred with the *intifada* of 1987. The *intifada* was characterised by the youthfulness of its initiators (they are often called 'the children of the stones') who acted without direction from their political 'elders' on the outside. Parmenter comments that not only did the *intifada* turn on its head the David versus Goliath mythology of the Israelis, it also 'shattered the symbol-laden rhetoric of the older generation of Palestinians which had evolved through decades of encounter with Israelis' (Parmenter 2). The *intifada* also saw an increasing public role for women as they confronted Israeli soldiers in order to defend their sons and the youth of the neighbourhood, and as they organised self-help groups. These moves were significant in a society where patriarchal power was customarily absolute and unquestioned. Those who had been marginalised thus acquired a new sense of agency and they articulated a reality profoundly different from that characterised either by feelings of nostalgia and loss, or by notions of heroic martyrdom, continuing and

⁴⁰ Edward Said describes how even as recently as the early 1970s Arabs within Israel were considered tainted by their close connection with Israel. He writes that now, however they are 'cherished as Palestinians "already there", so to speak, Palestinians whose lives on the edge, under the gun, inside the barriers and *kasbahs*, entitle them to a kind of grace denied the rest of us.' Furthermore, he argues that since 1970 the 'collective history' of those on the outside 'has been singularly unsuccessful, progressively graceless, unblessed, more and more eccentric, de-centred, alienated'. (Said *After* 51). See also Schulz *Diaspora* 134-5.

consolidating the trend started by poets such as Darwish and Zayyad and transformed into modernist sensibility by the poets of the 1980s.⁴¹

The idealised vision of an uncorrupted land gives way to an awareness of the importance of defending the personal - a plot of land, a house, or individual integrity. Novels such as *Wild Thorns* by Sahar Kahlifeh and *The Eye of the Mirror* by Liana Badr, and the writings of the younger generation, narrow their focus to the daily struggle of Palestinians in refugee camps, under siege, to the consequences of the proletarianisation of Palestinian workers, to the effect of house demolitions and imprisonment. No longer is the land a pastoral or Edenic vision; life becomes a matter of defending whatever private space still remains. For Darwish in *Memory for Forgetfulness* this means having the space in which to make a cup of coffee during the relentless bombardment of Beirut by Israeli jet fighters. For Muna Hamzeh, in her memoir of living in the Dheisheh refugee camp during the Al-Aqsa *intifada* of 2000 and subsequent siege of Palestinian cities by the Israeli army, it is the importance of carrying on with olive picking. She writes:

It is olive-picking season in Palestine. Bombing or no bombing, it is olive-picking season in Palestine. Soon, we will dip our bread in fresh olive oil. Life goes on. The determination to live is unwavering. The determination to live a better life is unwavering. (Hamzeh 92)

The earlier vision now seems naïve, as expressed in the first stanzas of a poem 'A Song for Childhood' by Hussein Barghouti, written during the *intifada*.

The moon rose
over childhood
And childhood was hills
gathering sparrows and flowers
in baskets under the moon
I'll pursue it, weeping and
falling on jagged stones

It is a confiscated childhood
From books and oil lamps, sometimes
to prison and release, sometimes,
sometimes my life is counterfeit
Inside a city besieged by guards.
(Meghdessian 43)

⁴¹ Among the poets whose work came to prominence in the 1980s are Ghassan Zaqtan, Ali al-Khalili, Zakariyya Muhammad, Waleed Khazindar, Mureed Barhoughty and Ahmad Dahbour, to mention just some. *AMPL* contains selections from all of them.

This poem contains the prime motifs of the *intifada* – children and stones. From a childhood gathering flowers the speaker moves to the reality of tears, jagged stones, prison and life under siege; however, he does not give up on the dream entirely, he will still pursue it. Whilst acknowledging the loss of a pure image of the homeland, the bond between poet and homeland is not relinquished. In the essay from which Barghouti's poem was taken, 'The Discourse of Oppression as Expressed in Writings of the Intifada', the poems and short stories chosen by Samira Meghdessian express an awareness and critical consciousness of oppression which she argues lead to a perception that the situation, though limiting, can be changed (Meghdessian 44). The discourse of resistance to oppression, arising directly from examples of the occupier's injustice and brutality, enables Palestinians to 'produce themselves', to use Said's phrase (Said *After* 108).

Raja Shehadeh discusses how the Palestinians had allowed themselves to be convinced that they had lost everything and how the younger generation within Israel were unable to get on with their lives because their elders 'continued to impress them with the glory of what was, a magic that could never be replicated'. He goes on to ask: 'Why had we allowed others to define for us our privation, our bereavement, and the meaning of our past? Why had we accepted our defeat as total and ourselves as maimed and reduced?' and he warns against perpetuating this same mistake (Shehadeh *Strangers* 65). Above all, what is articulated by the younger generation of poets is a desire to come to terms with a reality that cannot be wished away. In 'Dialectics of the Homeland', the poet 'Ali al-Khalili laments the over-use of symbols that has contributed to the loss of a sense of reality.

Beyond the rainy cloud, the rose, and the pagan dream
 are remnants of the old pledge.
 The lovers are no more the lovers
 And the murderers are similarly transposed,
 O homeland, drowning in mystic symbols and in blood,
 Lost homeland!
 Teach us to exist in the age of lost things
 Teach us to unlock barred doors
 To fertilize a barren land
 Discover in you the cloud and the rose
 Illuminate the tired masses.
 Homeland of lost things,
 Teach us to conceive trees and children,
 When the promised sun and the promised wind
 Are concealed or revealed
 Teach us that the murderers are visible in you

And the murdered invisible.
[. . .]
(*AMPL* 192-3)

The mention of unlocking doors has particular resonance for many Palestinians, as those evicted from their homes in 1948 still proudly keep the keys to their former properties. The poet still uses imagery connected with the land but he also asks that memories of the lost homeland should help his people live with dignity, that the integrity of the vision should not hide the murderers and that the murdered are remembered – that the land should bear witness. Although mourning the loss of the ideal, the poet nevertheless pays tribute to the power of memory to transform lives.

One of the major transformations in aesthetic sensibility occurred with the return of tens of thousands of exiles after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994, among them many writers and poets. All the abstract ideas of the lost paradise and its liberation by the heroes of the resistance in exile suddenly came face to face with a disfigured landscape and the compromised expediency of political deals. There is a sense of loss, loss of the high ideals that sustained the Palestinians in exile, that is captured in Zakariyya Muhammad's short poem 'My Things' (*AMPL* 226).

The place I inhabited
The horse that I led
The friend through whose lungs I breathed
How did I lose them?

The horse is frequently used in Palestinian poetry to stand for beauty, freedom, strength and movement. Here those qualities, along with the poet's place in the world, have been lost in a flash, the brevity of the moment emphasised by the concise and incisive form of the poem. In 'Confessions of a Palestinian Returnee' Hassan Khader writes that he believes 'that the primary cultural issue with which Palestinians must deal has shifted in the recent transformations from deciphering the essence of an idealized nation to participating in a nation of flesh and blood; making the transition from the ideal to the real.' Emphasising that the new state must work with what it finds confronting it, he continues: 'The homeland cannot be remolded into a lost paradise. The homeland is right here in front of us; it is divided and distorted, awaiting salvation' (Khader 94). The poet, Ghassan Zaqtan, has said that return felt like a 'white lie', a 'treachery of exile, text, and the idea of Andalusia, the land we inhabited for centuries' (quoted in Tamari 4). However, he also declares that he never really abandoned the land of his memories. He visited his family's village, Zakariyya, and although it 'did not look as it

was described at all', he noticed that 'the Jews who were wandering along' did not seem to relate to the place, that their detachment from it was manifest in their body movements. He was then moved to exclaim 'I did not abandon it. [. . .] This is a knowledge that is more sublime than the vehicle of yearning that brought me here, or rather the exile that brought me to my father's place' (quoted in Tamari 3-4). One of his poems, 'The Trench' describes the process of having to create a 'normal' everyday society against the unrealistic dreams of the decades of exile, or what Salim Tamari calls 'the "heroic" images of Palestine whose intellectuals had become addicted to their status as exiles' (Tamari 6). The poem starts with the lines 'How strange are the days of salt/It is as if they belong to others'. The descriptions of the countryside on which Zaqtan was reared bear little resemblance to that which is before his eyes; the reality of Palestine 'on the ground' now seems to make the dreams of exile irrelevant. He writes:

The hills forgotten in the boredom of the slopes
The mountains that aspire towards the west
The wandering caravans of death
The faith of the dead, complete.

The hands that emerge from the darkness
To tell you everything
That deep fraternity that does not lead to wisdom
The words no longer suitable for high places

Strange are the days of salt,
Now alone in the abyss
Disparaged like rotten seed
[. . .]

It is those who were forgotten, who emerged from the 'darkness', who tell the true story, and this means that the 'wisdom' and ideology of the 'fraternity' of the Palestinian movement in exile is now questioned. Not only does he have to accept reality but also to learn the history of what has happened to his fellow Palestinians who remained within Israel. However, there is a recognition in the final stanzas that the people, grouped together in their land for the first time since 1948, do possess the characteristics of a nation, even if the idealised landscape that was yearned for for so long is 'no longer necessary':

And while we ascend,
Because that's all we can do
The days roll away into the distance behind us,
Abandoned, and can never return

Our dark complexions
Our attempts at sleep
. . . Names, endlessly long titles
Dialects also
Proclaiming a countryside
No longer necessary.

How strange are the days of salt
They are not even worthy to be remembered.⁴²

As time passes, generations grow up never having known the land. They were told stories of life before *al-nakba* and many have a detailed knowledge of their family's village in Palestine. However, it is inevitable – particularly for those growing up away from the Middle East – that the concept of their rootedness to a particular place should begin to lose some of its power. In his short story *A Road to the Sea*, Faruq Wadi describes how a father and son return to visit Palestine, a country known only to the boy through his father's memories. They visit the sea, and travel over the land, and lastly locate the ruins of the father's village. Mounting disappointment at the gap between the father's idealised descriptions of the land and the reality finally erupt within the boy as he stands amidst 'the rubble of the village [. . .] the remnants of a wall and scattered stones of houses'. He can only look around in disbelief and muse:

I stared at everything. Merciless misery everywhere. I could not feel my kinship to this land. Where were the threads of continuity that had shaped themselves so beautifully in my mind through many a winter's tale? I wondered in my heart if we had not lost our way, then could not help saying "This is *it*!'" (*AMPL* 602-3)

The 'rubble' and 'remnants' are clearly metaphors for the ruins of a dream, and his wondering if they had not lost their way and found themselves in another place is symbolic of the disorientation experienced by so many returnees. Others attempt to locate an alternative Palestine. In 'Autocartography: The Case of Palestine, Michigan', A. wanted to 'go home to Palestine' but, as Shammas writes, the problem was that 'outside her imagined memories and imagined space, as created by her Palestinian father in the post-nostalgic world of Dearborn, Michigan – there was, there is, no Palestine to go to [. . .] "*rahat Falasteen*", meaning Palestine is gone' (111-2). A. eventually decides to settle in the town of Palestine in Michigan, planning to plant a lemon tree in her backyard because 'the Arabic word lamoon seemed to have found

⁴² A copy of this poem was given to me by Ghassan Zaqtan during the interview I conducted with him in Ramallah and appears in Appendix I.

refuge inside A.'s personal diction, thus letting the distant past of her grandmother permeate her own present' (115). Shammās, whilst acknowledging that 'Palestine is gone', suggests the enduring power of these symbols, even for younger generations, when he writes: 'And like the persistent grains in a giant one-way sand-glass, ever flowing through the narrow opening, Palestine of the past kept invading the Dearborn present, grain by grain, through a narrow opening, in a single word: *lamoon*' (115).

It is perhaps today more relevant to discuss what the concept of 'homeland' means for dispersed Palestinians rather than the concept of a 'land' that has changed beyond recognition. The homeland becomes a space where the Palestinians can regain self-respect and come into their identity. Ziad Abu Zayyad has argued that the experience of the Palestinians has 'forced many of them to view their return as the acquisition of national independence and dignity, and not necessarily as a literal return' (Zayyad 77). The homeland then becomes a state of mind that needs to be cultivated so that, returning to Relph's terminology, the exile can re-orient him/herself in the world. The importance of space to the individual and the difficulties in holding on to it are articulated by Ahmad Dahbour in his poem 'The Terms of Ambition'.

I assemble my points of ambition –
to drink tea at dawn, and spin freely
in the city
of my buried treasures,
and to correspond with her
who has lightened my stress.

In order to achieve this,
I need to establish in the city of my soul:
time, and a safe land.
Hardly the requisites of an agitator?

For the sake of tea, a dawn, paper, and stamps,
I need armed fortresses,
weapons to help me stand and defend.
(*AMPL* 140)

There is a sense that the minutiae of everyday life – tea, a newspaper, buying stamps – could be snatched away at any moment, and perhaps the perceived need for weapons with which to defend these inconsequential things is a hangover from days spent as a freedom fighter. Dahbour's 'need to establish in the city of [his] soul' this safe space at the same time suggests that he too sees space as a psychological entity as much as geographic one. On returning to Palestine, Fawaz Turki comments that his fellow

returnees are 'in search of a homeland' but he claims that '[his] search is for a sense of at-homeness, a connectedness to [his] roots' (Turki *Exile's* 102). In 'Guests on the Sea' Darwish cannot avoid using the imagery of a lost home(land) to articulate the attempt at finding a new 'home', even though he admits they no longer have a country. Two fragments of the poem run thus:

We did not come to this country from a country
 we came from pomegranates, from the glue of memory
 from the fragments of an idea we came to this foam
 [. . .]
 We want to live for a time, not for nothing
 but just that we can set out again
 Nothing of our ancestors remains in us, but we want
 the country of our morning coffee
 we want the fragrance of primitive plants
 we want a special school
 we want a special cemetery
 we want a freedom
 the size of a skull . . . and a song.
 (AMPL 155-7)

The importance of memory is stressed, and the mention of a school and a cemetery suggest the need for a place in which the cycle of life can be completed. The imagery of the skull at first reading suggests death, but what Darwish is asking for is a psychological freedom, a way of gaining freedom inside the head. The ellipses after 'skull' suggest that if this freedom is achieved, the song will follow.

If the power of the idea of the land has diminished for those younger Palestinians in exile who have to a greater or lesser extent integrated into their host societies, the same is not true of the generations that have grown up in refugee camps bordering Israel. Camp dwellers are largely excluded and mistrusted in their host countries, and their feelings of marginality and liminality reinforce a distinct Palestinian sense of identity. For them, keeping alive memories of life in Palestine before 1948 is a vital counterpoint to the misery and humiliations of the existential reality of the camps. In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish says of the children of the Beirut camps: '[t]hese forgotten ones, disconnected from the social fabric, these outcasts, deprived of work and equal rights', who, despite being born on foreign soil, 'learned what it means to belong to her [Palestine]' swearing they would die 'defending the scent of the distant homeland' (Darwish, *Memory* 16 & 13). In describing the effect of their feelings of alienation, he writes:

You are not going there, and you don't belong here. Between these two negations this generation was born defending the spirit's bodily

vessel, onto which they fasten the fragrance of the country they've never known. They've read what they've read, and they've seen what they've seen, and they don't believe defeat is inevitable. So they set out on the trail of that fragrance. (Darwish *Memory* 17)

The camp dwellers' refusal to integrate also projects the notion of 'return', that their situation is only temporary. Schulz argues that remembering the homeland, the recreation of the lost paradise, involves a screening out of discord and hardship, and that this 'construction of history implies remembering a morally superior social order, a sense of purity and perfection' (Schulz 110). She also notes Liisa Malkki's description of homeland as "'a moral destination'" (Schulz 10). Turki maintains that, although for many Palestinians, diaspora 'becomes *the* homeland', the idea of return is never relinquished. He continues:

Palestine is no longer a mere geographical entity but a state of mind. The reason however, that Palestinians are obsessed with the notion of Returning, though indeed there is no Palestine to return to as it was a quarter-century before, is because the Return means the reconstitution of a Palestinian's integrity and the regaining of his place in history. It is not merely for a physical return to Palestine that a lot of men and women have given or dedicated their lives, but for the *right* to return of which they have been robbed. As the struggle for this right evolves and changes, the liberation of Palestine, in a sense, becomes the liberation of men and women. (Turki *Disinherited* 175-6)

The paradigm of the land embodying a 'morally superior' existence or destination is thus universal for Palestinians. The land of Palestine becomes a metaphor for the loss of Eden, that is, of wholeness, harmony and innocence. As Darwish reminds us, the scent of the homeland for the young refugees is so real that they will die defending it, but nevertheless the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined are inevitably blurred. However fiercely or distantly the vision of the homeland is maintained, it is undeniable that their dispossession forced the Palestinians to construct a powerful and inescapable narrative of their rootedness to the land.

2. MASCULINITY AND NATION: GENDER IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

*When we remember things
One string rings out.
Woman alone
Plays on all the strings
With one stroke
Because she is the entire homeland.*
(Muhammad al-As'ad, 'A Song' AMPL 121)

*Palestine is my home, Palestine is my fire, Palestine is my revenge
And the land of eternal
My country, my country, the nation of eternity
I swear under the shade of the flag
To my land and nation, and the fire of pain
I will live as a guerrilla, I will go on as guerrilla,
I will expire as guerrilla until I will be back
My country, my country, the nation of eternity.*
(Palestinian National Anthem, full text available on www.palestinehistory.com, accessed on 04.07.06)

This chapter will set out to explore the gendered inflections of Palestinian nationalism and their manifestation in various texts. The cultural reproduction of the nationalist telos inscribes notions of what it is to be a man, and to be a woman, and this inscription has consequences for gender relations in the new state. The centrality of gender in narratives of nationalism is emphasised by Nira Yuval-Davis when she argues:

In this culturalized discourse, gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities. [. . .] gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and collectivities as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations. (Yuval-Davis 39)

Joseph Massad contends that Palestinian nationalism is 'masculine-based', and that 'the mobilizing metaphors of nationalist movements [. . .] reflect the fundamental assumptions of nationalist thought, which establishes the future gender constitution and gender roles of nationalist agents' (Massad 469). In an examination of gender in the poetry of the *intifada* Ilham Abu Ghazaleh argues that as 'poetry reflects the collective unconscious of the group' it is important to pay attention to the portrayal of male and female roles since the 'perceptions of the role of women will surely decide gender relations and the rights of women in an independent Palestinian state' (Ghazaleh 92).

It has been frequently observed that nationalism is a gendered discourse. The idealisation of a feminised land is but one aspect of this discourse.¹ Central to it are notions of masculinity that find their expression in an ideology of masculine agency and feminine passivity. Joanne Nagel notes that the rise of the concept of the nation state coincided with constructions of 'normative masculinity', which stressed notions of 'willpower, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, sang-froid, persistence, adventurousness, independence, sexual virility tempered with restraint, and dignity, and which reflected masculine ideals as liberty, equality, and fraternity' (Nagel 245). Whilst there are of course variations in what is understood as masculinity, Nagel argues that these attributes have become almost universally essentialised and therefore it is appropriate to speak of a 'hegemonic masculinity' (Nagel 247). R. W. Connell defines 'hegemonic masculinity' thus:

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 77)

Both Yuval-Davis and Connell stress the *cultural* significance and exaltation of hegemonic masculinity, and such definitions of masculinity are particularly relevant in the politics of nationalism which, for Nagel, has always been a 'masculinist enterprise' (Nagel 244). Traditionally and typically, women have been excluded from such an enterprise, from state institutions and from the decision-making process. Nationalism becomes an arena for a performative and rhetorical masculinity in which the main players are men and in which women are designated roles that serve to enhance the masculinity of its chief protagonists. In this respect Palestinian nationalism is no exception. It conceives, Massad argues, 'of nationalist agency in masculine terms'; nationalist agency 'is constituted through performances that are said to be its results' (Massad 467). Likewise, Palestinian nationalism is not unique in elevating the struggle for national liberation above individual concerns (gender, ethnic or class issues) to the extent that the centrality of liberation becomes 'the principal discourse that shapes ways of thinking' about national identity (Sharoni 36). Yuval-Davis reminds us, however, that we should view cultural discourses as 'dynamic social processes operating in contested terrains in which different voices become more or less hegemonic in their

¹ The land, the village, and the city, are all treated as feminine in the Arabic language (see Ghazaleh 93).

offered interpretations of the world' (Yuval-Davis 41). It is therefore important, despite the overwhelmingly masculinised nature of Palestinian nationalism, to be aware of the voices that contest the hegemony, voices which have the potential to unsettle or transform it.

Before examining in detail how Palestinian literature is inflected by nationalism that is a 'masculinist enterprise', it is important to trace the rise of such a discourse in the context of the Palestinian national struggle. As has already been noted, the early years after *al-nakba* were marked by a sense of loss and nostalgia, along with a certain helplessness that readily gave rise to the self-perception of victimhood among the scattered Palestinians. In the 1960s several significant events initiated a change in that perception. The defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war not only made the Palestinians realise they would have to fight their own battles, both literally and metaphorically, but also the defeat "allowed the Palestinian people to grasp its cause in its own hands for the first time since 1948" (Nayif Hawatma, quoted in Sayigh 173).² The taking over of the PLO in the mid-sixties by Yassir Arafat's Fatah organisation and its subsequent commitment to the legitimacy and necessity of armed struggle;³ the battle of Karameh (Jordan) in 1968 in which Palestinian fighters held out for far longer than anyone had anticipated and in which they inflicted heavy casualties on the Israelis; the increasing power and influence of the PLO in Lebanon – all these factors combined to produce an ideology of the Palestinians as revolutionaries and freedom fighters, marked by a refusal to give in to their fate, inspired by dignity and a belief in the justice of their cause. Victims no longer, the ideology of Palestinian nationalism that emerged in the 1960s emphasised eventual triumph and return, the gaze now being directed forwards rather than backwards to the past. In his study of the Palestinian armed struggle, Yezid Sayigh argues that the Palestinian 'success' (which was in fact a defeat in military

² Rashid Khalidi argues that several Arab states 'had a vested interest in Palestinian failure in some degree, although this was something that could not be admitted in public', though vociferous support for the Palestinian cause 'also presented opportunities for aggrandizement' (Khalidi 191-2). In *The Disinherited*, Fawaz Turki puts the argument in strong terms. He writes: 'Politically, "usurped Palestine" became a catch phrase to use in speeches by government leaders with a thirst for prestige and popularity. Pronouncements [*sic*] about liberating Palestine were heard continually. "The noble cause" was given all the vehemence that radio commentators could muster and the fierce passion with which draconian threats were made against Israel, promising its ultimate destruction, was indeed frightening. All made, presumably, on behalf of the Palestinians. But [. . .] it was known to all that the Arab governments had put the solution of the Palestine issue at the bottom of their list of priorities.' (Turki *Disinherited* 40)

³ Article 9 of the Palestinian National Covenant in 1968 declared: 'Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine and is therefore a strategy and not tactics. The Palestinian Arab people affirms its absolute resolution and abiding determination to pursue the armed struggle and to march forward towards the armed popular revolution, to liberate its homeland and return to it [to maintain] its right to a natural life in it, and to exercise its right of self-determination in it and sovereignty in it.' (Quoted in Schluz 119)

terms) 'created a new myth', one that involved a declaration of Palestinian identity being a matter of 'pride', and one that viewed armed struggle 'as the source of political legitimacy and national identity, the new substance of the "imagined community" of the Palestinians'. 'Heroic imagery and language of armed struggle' was an essential part of this imagining, he adds (Sayigh 195). The fact that Palestinian military action at this time had only a pin-prick effect on the Israeli state did not lessen its importance. Commenting that '[e]ffectiveness was not a priority' (Sayigh 120), Sayigh also draws attention to the exaggerations and self-delusion that characterised a 'rhetoric diverged from reality'. Such a divergence, he argues, was 'because the primary function of the armed struggle was not in fact military, and because the political function it performed was related [. . .] to the creation of the symbols and myths of national imagining' (206-7). According to this analysis, the real significance of military action was not its results on the battlefield, but in terms of how it altered the Palestinians' ideas about themselves: it gave them a fresh identity in which they could invest which was shorn of feelings that they were inferior or marginalized, or that their fate lay in the whims of others. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon stresses the reinvigorating effect of violence during a colonial struggle when he writes that on an individual level 'violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.' For Fanon such a dynamic applies even if 'the armed struggle has been symbolic' because the people realise that they have all played a part and that 'the leader has no special merit' (Fanon 74). Schluz argues that resistance not only militated against 'landlessness and uprootedness [and] against assimilation in host societies' but that it also 'represented resolute rejection and negation of outside labelling' (Schluz 121). The imaginative realm of writing is one of the primary loci in which the nation describes itself and the image of itself that it wishes to project to the world.

The cult of military action was, unsurprisingly, a discourse saturated with notions of physical strength, manhood and military prowess. The 'unrealistic' portrayals of the poet as martyr and hero have already been discussed, but it is interesting to note how, to a certain extent, failure in this newly-constituted ideology could be turned into triumph. Rashid Khalidi writes that 'Palestinian failure has been portrayed as triumph, or at least as heroic perseverance against impossible odds'. Whilst not denying the latter, Khalidi points out that failure reconfigured as triumph 'conveniently absolves the Palestinians from the responsibility for their own fate' (Khalidi 195). Amal Amireh contends that

‘one particularity of Palestinian nationalism is that it is a nationalism that consolidated itself in defeat’ (Amireh 751). The ambiguity upon which the glorification of military action rests then becomes apparent: the rhetoric of victorious armed struggle, which was vital to and constitutive of Palestinianess, could also accommodate failure because failure could be laid at the door of someone else. In the realm of gender relations, such an inconsistency and rhetorical sleight of hand leads to a degree of misogyny, as will be explored in this chapter.

2.i ‘My land is my womenfolk’: negotiating masculinity without land

In the Palestinian context, the emergence of a nationalist ideology was shaped by profound loss. In the pre-1948 largely agrarian society of Ottoman and Mandate Palestine where Palestinians did not partake in the politics of rule, the concept of masculinity was founded in ownership of land and the control of resources that went with it, notably of labour and dependents.⁴ Fawaz Turki explains the meaning of the famous phrase ‘*ardi-aardi*’, literally ‘My land is my womenfolk’: ‘as understood by Palestinians in its historico-cultural sense, however, the phrase reads “My land is my nobility”, - “*sharafi*”, i.e. my being what I am’ (Turki ‘Meaning’ 374). The catastrophic events of 1948 meant that Palestinians had to articulate a sense of nationhood that was based on a common origin and a common territory, specifically a ‘motherland’, and at the same time construct a concept of masculinity that did not rely on ownership of land. As has already been argued, the land, attachment to it and the fight to regain control of it, were central to the construction of Palestinian national identity.

It was a discourse that relied on the maintenance of mastery, which, in a historical context, was increasingly illusory. Kaja Silverman’s theories of the dominant fiction and historical trauma are useful here. She maintains that the dominant fiction ‘is more than the ideological system through which the normative subject lives its imaginary relation to the symbolic order’. Borrowing from Laclau’s ‘will to totality’, she explains that the dominant fiction is:

[. . .] the mechanism by which a society ‘tries to institute itself as such on

⁴ Said K. Aburish has written a history of his family which gives an informative description of village life in Mandate Palestine. It is entitled *Children of Bethany: The Story of a Palestinian Family*, and in the present context it contains a particularly interesting chapter on ‘Courtship, Marriage and Village Life’ in which he describes how the socialisation of boys, particularly the ritual of circumcision, leads to a ‘preoccupation with virility’ (Aburish 80).

the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences'. The dominant fiction neutralizes the contradictions which organize the social formation by fostering collective identifications and desires, identifications and desires which have a range of effects, but which are first and foremost constitutive of sexual difference. (Silverman 54)

The dominant fiction of a group and its discourse on gender are thus intertwined, as suggested by Turki's explanation of 'ardi-aardi'. The maintenance of the dominant fiction relies on a collective investment of belief and is necessary for the survival of social formations. Historical trauma, Silverman argues, is:

[. . .] a historically precipitated but psychoanalytically specific disruption, with ramifications extending far beyond the individual psyche. [. . .] any historical event, whether socially engineered or of natural occurrence, which brings a large group of male subjects into such an intimate relation with lack that they are at least for the moment unable to sustain an imaginary relation with the phallus, and so withdraw their belief from the dominant fiction. (Silverman 55).

The withdrawal of belief characterised the early years after 1948. The specifically gendered nature of Palestinian nationalism as it emerged after the trauma of 1948 and which circulated culturally especially through poetry and later the novel and short story, should be seen as a response to necessity, that is, of preserving belief in the dominant fiction of masculine potency as a means of group survival. It was thus a reactive formation. At the same time, this investment of belief in a symbolic order that was predicated on distinctive subordinate roles for women could not but play a large part in determining gender roles in any future polity.

The role of what it was to be a 'true' man did not emerge only as a response to the events of 1948 but was present in order to counteract the menacing increase in Zionist presence and acquisition of Palestinian land in the early years of the century. Abu Salma's 'My Country on Partition Day' links the fight for the lost land with honour and the blood of its defenders when it declares 'Though they've partitioned your radiant heart/our honour denies partition. We've woven your wedding clothes with red thread/dyed from our own blood' (AMPL 95). Abd al-Raheem Mahmoud, a revered poet and martyr who died in battle in 1948, makes an even more explicit link between a man's honour and fighting. The poems of his chosen for inclusion in *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* resonate with imagery of strength, honour and honourable death. In the first verse of 'The Martyr' (AMPL 209-10) he writes 'An

honourable man's spirit has two aims:/to die fighting, or to achieve victory'. The second and third stanzas continue:

By your life, I see my own death,
but I hasten my footsteps.
No greater wish than to die defending stolen rights
and my country,
My ears love the clashing of swords,
my soul is proud of martyrs' blood.
Behold the martyr's body
sprawled on sands, attacked by vultures,
his blood tinting the earth crimson,
haunting northern breezes with its scent.
His radiant brow covered with dust
only seems more luminous.
The smile on his lips
mocks this earthly life,
and his dreams of eternity,
shape blissful visions.

I swear this is how men *should* die
for how can I tolerate the harm of my enemy's malice,
how can I endure his aggression?
Would fear stop me if it is easy to sacrifice my life?
Am I humble? I simply can endure no scorn!
With my own heart I'll fight the enemy;
my heart of steel, my ravenous flames,
I'll stalk my land with the blade of this sword
so my people know I'm their defender.

The militarism enshrined and glorified in the second stanza – 'the clashing of swords', 'martyrs' blood', 'vultures' - becomes in the last stanza the only way that an 'honourable man' can live and die. Defeat cannot be contemplated, and martyrdom is exalted to the extent that the spectacle of the body picked by vultures becomes glorious and inspiring. The tone of the poem (which finds echoes in the National Anthem) ensures that to be a 'defender' of the nation one has to be a man. A logical consequence of such a gendered role is that what has to be defended becomes Other, that is, woman. Sharoni argues that the discourses of both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian national liberation and national security 'involve explicit or implicit assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and gender relations'. She continues:

[. . .] both discourses affirm the centrality of territorial sovereignty for the preservation of their national collectivities. Consequently, men in both communities are socialized to be the protectors and liberators of their nations – that is, to seek to either maintain control or gain control over land. Women, on the other hand, are cast as those whose role is

to reproduce the nation and, are, therefore, in need of protection. This gendered division of labor and power reinforces the tendency to represent nation and its territory as a woman to be protected, or in some cases occupied. (Sharoni 37-8)

Femininity becomes a commodity, something owned by the male rather than being able to stand for itself. In Darwish's poem 'A lover from Palestine' (*PW* 121-7), the poet pursues images of a woman, first of all as a 'thorn in my heart', then as a song, then as a 'lone voyager' glimpsed at a port, as 'a shepherdess without sheep,/Pursued among the ruins', as a 'maid in night clubs', or 'hanging your orphans' rags on the washline'. Every image is one of feminine helplessness, and in the last stanza this entity is named Palestine. With the lines 'I am the flower of youth and the knight of knights!/I am the smasher of idols./I plant the Levantine borders/With poems that set eagles free' the ending of the poem becomes a song of praise to the poet and his deeds. The movement of the poem suggests that a helpless feminised figure is a prerequisite for masculine performance; the woman is idolised as an entity needing masculine protection and rescue.

The land as woman is a trope common to nationalist discourses throughout the world, and another poem by al-Raheem Mahmoud, 'Call of the Motherland', makes this clear. In it he demands:

The slain motherland called for your struggle
and my heart leapt with joy.
[. . .]
Would you sit still when your country begs for your help?
Would you back away from facing the enemy?
If so, then go hide in your mother's bedroom!
May your hesitation humiliate you!
The motherland needs mighty defenders
who meet aggression
but never complain;
true lions on the battlefield.
[. . .]
Redeemed by our young men too proud
to endure oppression,
what can we do but fight bravely
when the fire's kindled? (*AMPL* 210-11)

This poem is particularly interesting because a slippage occurs between the ideal of the feminine motherland, the symbolic mother calling on her sons for sacrifice, and the denigration of the feminised defects of cowardice and hesitation ('If so, then go hide in your mother's bedroom!'). This taunt infantilises any who do not conform to the

constructed norms of Palestinian masculinity. There is an unresolved tension between the mother who produces fighters and the mother who tempts them to take refuge behind her skirts. Whereas the feminine is idolised by Darwish in 'A lover from Palestine', here it is ultimately mistrusted and despised which, it could be argued, is a case of flip sides of the same coin. If feminine traits are despised and are used negatively to construct an ideal nationalist agent, then it follows that in this discourse there is no room for women in the nationalist project, except as symbols.

The trope of woman as motherland is joined by that of the land as a lover and the beloved. The woman as land in need of male protection is typified by al-Raheem Mahmoud's poetry, wherein the fighter/martyr can rhetorically reclaim an active masculinity, the chief expression of which was denied by his dispossession of actual land. In much poetry, the male lover and the female land are united in the imagination, as in 'Love Palestinian-style' by 'Abd al-Latif 'Aql.

In times of drought you are my figs and olives,
Your barrenness is my fragrant gown.

Of the rubble that was your eyes I erect my home,
I love you alive, I love you in death.
When hungry, I feed on thyme.

I feel your hair against my face and I pine,
My weary face turns red.

I am born in the palms of your hands, an embryo,
I grow and grow, and I reach maturity.

I drink the meaning of my life from your gaze,
Then my being is awakened and intoxicated.

[. . .]

And when I am led all alone
To be whipped and humiliated,
And lashed at every police station,
I feel we're lovers, who died from ecstasy,
A dark-skinned man and his woman.

You become me and I become you –
Luscious figs and shelled almonds.

[. . .] (*PW* 117-9)

Initially the female lover is connected to the symbols of the land's fertility, a connection that sustains the poet. In this poem, the images of the mother and lover merge, with the movement from the land giving birth to the poet ('I am born in the palms of your hand')

to the ending with the lovers dying in 'ecstasy', a state that is achieved – masochistically? - only after physical humiliation and suffering. Woman here stands for the celebration of life, but this celebration is destined to end in destruction. In the absence of the land on which to perform a normative masculinity, the land as symbolic woman becomes the ground upon which to re-inscribe male agency.

Abdelwahab Elmessiri's anthology of Palestinian poetry takes its title from one of Darwish's poems, 'Blessed by that which has not come!' (PW197-205), in which the poet describes the 'Palestinian wedding' as a 'wedding without an end'. The trope of the wedding between the man and the lover-as-land occurs frequently in Palestinian poetry, and in this poem it bears cosmic and religious imagery. The first stanza reads:

This is the wedding without an end,
In a boundless courtyard,
On an endless night.
This is the Palestinian wedding:
Never will lover reach lover
Except as martyr or fugitive.

As we saw in the previous poem, it appears that the union of man and woman can be achieved only in death, and the motif of the wedding further reinforces notions of masculine control and feminine submission. The following four stanzas start with the words 'Their blood is before me' and each one glorifies the shedding of blood by the male fighter. The sixth stanza begins with the lines 'Blessed be that obscure thing;/Blessed be that which has not yet come'; thus the Palestinian wedding is mythologised as a masculine creation, one that derives its value from the process rather than the outcome. This rhetorical shift to exaltation of a *future* (re)union of man and land/woman is significant in the light of the continued occupation of the actual land by the enemy. In her study of the imaginative projection of another wedding – the Michel Khelifi film, *Wedding In Galilee* (1987) – Mary Layoun traces the problematic implications posed by unfulfilled union. Whilst observing that the 'prosaic image of the conjugal union of man and woman [. . .] is at the heart of virtually all nationalist rhetoric', she is at pains to bring out what such an image 'silences or effaces'.⁵ She continues: 'Rather obviously, the fertile, virginal (if violated), and desirable woman/land that belongs to the virile (if exiled) male lover/citizen is otherwise

⁵ What is 'silenced or effaced' is put explicitly by Amal Amireh: 'This metaphor of the loss of Palestine as rape, which has been a constant in the Palestinian and wider Arab political nationalist discourse, signifies the loss of Palestine as loss of female virginity but also of male virility, since the virile actor now is the rapist/enemy. This male loss of virility is inscribed as Palestinian defeat'. (Amireh 751)

occupied'. In the light of the ongoing occupation, the film focuses on the impossibility of the conjugal union taking place, with the implication that the antithesis of absence/lack of fulfilment in the Palestinian context is not presence, but the 'continuation of desire itself' (Layoun *Wedded* 148). In 'Blessed be that which has not come!' it is the prolonged and impossible fulfilment of desire, not consummation, that is glorified, the repetition throughout the poem of 'Blessed be that which has not yet come' and the poem's ending where it began – 'This is the Palestinian wedding,/Never shall lover meet lover/Except as martyr or fugitive' – pointing to the circularity of desire.

Slyomovics sees 'the rhetorical and figurative creation and aggrandizement of a set of cultural images about women' as a 'response to exile and dispossession' (Slyomovics 200). It would also appear that the male poet projects onto the land those feminine qualities that help him with self-definition. When women appear in literature their roles are used to help define the man as brave, honourable, a protector and defender, and another important aspect of male subjectivity to emerge is that of man-as-impregnator. Nagel quotes David Gilmore's definition of the "ubiquitous male" based on certain criteria of performance, whereby "to be a man . . . one must impregnate women, protect dependents from danger, and provision kith and kin" (Nagel 245). In an essay entitled '*Adam and Adama, Ird and Ard*', Sheila Katz traces how both Palestinians and early Zionists constructed discourses of man the defender of the land, and, as an adjunct to an eroticised land, man the impregnator who would make the land bloom and bring it to life. Sometimes it is the blood of the martyr that will bring life back to the land, as in 'The Martyr' by Zuhair Abu Shayib:

They found him
 luminous, green in the field.
 When they raised his hands
 the grasses under them had turned to hearts.

It is said:
 Wheatstalks bloomed beneath his sleeves.

It is said:
 The birds carried his blood
 to his beloved cousins.
 He shall return
 blossoming with with volcanoes,
 and fill again his mother's breasts.

[. . .] (*AMPL* 100)

The spilling of the martyr's blood fertilises the land and, as the last line makes clear, impregnates the feminine. Katz quotes from a poem by Iskandar al-Khuri al-Baytjali in which the possession of the land is figured as a sexual possession:

Strength has spread through her body and penetrated deep into
her bosom.
She was petrified after being weak and thin.
This is Palestine, who until recently was at a loss and humiliated
by the Turks.
She has become languid, while she was bright at the time of the
Arabs. (Katz 90)

This gives rise to what Sharoni calls 'an eroticised nationalism' (Sharoni 38) which is apparent in a much later poem by Izziddin al-Manasara, 'At Night', the first stanza of which reads:

At night I come to you,
at night I tempt you,
and your memory wounds me.
I weep for you
travelling toward your vineyards in my dream,
towards your mountain paths.
I slide onto your sandy roads like a snake,
leaving my traces before I die. (*AMPL* 217)

The phallus as a 'snake' leaves 'traces' upon a passive entity that is both woman and land. Here there is no desire to die defending the land but instead a defeatism that translates into feminine failure, suggested by the lines 'and your memory wounds me./I weep for you'. It could be argued that what is in fact a failure of masculinity (to make fertile the land/woman, to protect dependents) is projected onto the feminine. In the second stanza the poet is again a man of action, claiming 'At night I speak, bringing the sea/to the mountain, reconciling thorns with lilies', but the land cannot be regained. The lines 'you never leave your exile/and I never enter it' reconfigure the failure of the man-as-defender as the country's exile, putting herself beyond reach. The woman/land is the one who has left and fails to respond to the efforts of the male lover.

The feminine ideal – of nurture, fecundity, purity, fidelity, inspiration – as embodied by the land is an object of men's desire that is created by the actions of men themselves. In the absence of control of the actual land, this symbolic ideal becomes something of a fetish. The initial loss of the land of Palestine and the subsequent inability of the Palestinians to regain control of it undoubtedly led to a crisis in male subjectivity. The contradictions that are apparent between intent and outcome are displaced onto an

object (a feminised symbolic land) that stands as a substitute for the real land. According to Anne McClintock, even though these may be social contradictions, they are 'lived with profound intensity in the imagination and in the flesh'. The fetish signifies a crisis in social meaning that it is impossible to resolve. McClintock goes on explain:

The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition. Hence the apparent power of the fetish to enchant the fetishist. By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities. (McClintock *Imperial* 184)

The construction of the feminine ideal of land as mother/lover allows a symbolic reclamation of what has been lost, and pushes the spectre of symbolic castration to the margins. However, the fetish is haunted by contradiction or failure and is therefore always already constituted on irresolution. As McClintock argues, fetishes 'do not resolve conflicts in value but rather embody in one object the *failure of resolution*' (my italics), and are structured by

[. . .] the displacement of the contradiction onto an object or person, which becomes the embodiment of the crisis in value; the investment of intense passion (erotic or otherwise) in the fetish object; and the repetitious, often ritualistic recurrence of the fetish object in the scene of personal or historical memory. (McClintock *Imperial* 184-5)

The feelings induced by the fetish object are therefore profoundly ambiguous: the object is a substitute for that which is beyond reach, but it is also a reminder of failure. In her analysis of *Wedding in Galilee*, Mary Layoun observes that (in the context of the film) 'such insistently political metaphorization of sexuality, consummation, and marriage ensures the *failure of consummation*, the impossibility of satisfaction' (Layoun *Wedded* 148, my italics). The compulsive return in Palestinian literature to the trope of land as woman can be understood in the light of this failure of resolution. The linguistic repetition involved in figuring the land as woman allows a gendered mastery traditionally granted by the patriarchal structure of society.⁶

⁶ In an interview, Azmy Bishara refers to the 'fetishism' of the Palestinian state in an interview where he is emphasising the need not only for a greater realism in deciding on the nature of a state but also for more 'equality and freedom'. He says: 'If Palestinian democratic forces want to have a political culture in the future, the fetishism of the Palestinian state should stop. [. . .] If a state does emerge it will be the achievement not only of the agreement but also of the struggle against the realities the agreement reflects and reinforces. We need to be for values, like equality and freedom and the right of people to have food

The theory of the fetish also helps explain the tendency to misogyny in poetry that figures the land as woman. The fetish displaces masculine failure by substituting an object that is rhetorically and symbolically constructed as an arena within which masculine agency has not been compromised. However, the fetish is constituted by failure and therefore its inherent instability constantly breaks through. In order that failure is not laid at the door of the male, it must be displaced onto the female.⁷ Such a rhetorical move is at work in the following two poems, the first one of which is 'A National Hymn' by Tawfiq Sayigh.

Is it true that you were young,
 And that your wavy hips
 Caused seduction among young men?
 Is it true that you presided over high society
 And that fashion magazines
 Devoted their numbers to your dresses?
 I do not believe.
 Is it true that you turned your husband into a leader and he led
 And built you hanging gardens,
 O my country?

Is it true that he who sang you with burning love
 Sang you with high esteem,
 Is it true that you led the horses,
 That your sons rode them to distant pastures
 And that they did not open their mouths to nibble
 But opened them to emit a neigh like hymns of minarets?
 I do not believe
 I do not believe, O my country.

Not because you have become old:
 For there is dignity in gray hair
 And wrinkles have an effect unequalled by soft skin.
 Not because you have become secluded:
 If only when limelights receded from you
 You sponsored institutions,
 Opened orphanages or collected donations.
 No, O my country:
 For then I would have loved you
 And sung for a beauty that gradually changes but does not die,
 And I would have visited you
 And would have done so in awe.

and the right of women to control their bodies. Somehow we have to start to educate the cadres of Fatah, of the Popular Front, of the Democratic Front.' (Stork 6)

⁷ Silverman discusses how male subjectivity appears 'to hinge not only upon a misrecognition, but upon a "failure to recognize"'. She states that '[t]he subject classically refuses to recognise an unwanted feature of the *self* by projecting it onto the other, i.e. by relocating it'. (Silverman 45, emphasis in the original)

But in old age you have been crowned with humiliation
 And you brushed off the memory of your husband and of youth
 As if they were dust on your soiled body;
 You have castrated your sons
 And I saw them droop their heads for your memory;
 You wallowed with this and that person of immoral character
 (How would I believe what is said about your past
 O my country
 I who saw your house and its dim lights?)
 If lovers turn away from you
 You have been prostituting your daughters
 O my country
 O my country. (*PW* 74-5)

The poet starts by praising the youthfulness, sensuousness and purity of the girl, who is at this stage one with the fertility of the land. Whilst in possession of these characteristics she inspired husbands and sons to heroic deeds in her defence, in which they took on the strength, freedom, nobility and physical perfection associated with horses. The memory of the younger woman softens feelings towards the woman grown old, so long as she performs – in place of the erotic – roles suited to her age and gender, such as caring for orphans or making charitable donations. The poet can bring himself to visit her as he would his grandmother. However, the repeated ‘I do not believe’ introduces the sense of betrayal that is made explicit in the last stanza. Because the country is occupied and has not responded to the actions of the husbands and sons, she is accused of castrating her sons. She is also accused of infidelity (‘you have brushed off the memory’) and the use of the verb ‘wallow’ suggests lax, immoral behaviour, even outright prostitution. Nagel makes a pertinent point when she argues that ‘while female fecundity is valued in the mothers of the nation, unruly female sexuality threatens to discredit the nation’ (Nagel 256). The passive verb in the first line of the last stanza (‘you have been crowned’), which emphasises the action of the man, changes to verbs of direct action by the woman/country (‘you have castrated’, ‘you wallowed’, ‘you have been prostituting your daughters’), all of which suggest not only a perverse wilfulness on the part of the feminine figure but also outrage that she is active rather than passive. This stanza, by using such words as ‘soiled’, ‘castrated’, ‘wallowed’, and ‘prostituting’, allocates the blame to the woman-as-land. Her seductiveness, which is praised in the first two stanzas because it is directed towards the poet and his fellow countrymen, becomes a soiled and prostituted sexuality when at the service of someone else.

Such poetry is clearly predicated on a notion of honour with which it is often increasingly difficult to empathise. In an 'Excursus' entitled 'On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honour' John Berger makes a distinction between the 'obsolescent' concept of honour and its substitution in the West, commencing at the time of the Enlightenment, with that of individual dignity. Honour is 'associated with a hierarchal order of society' and it would therefore be 'valid' to view a culture founded on the notion of honour as 'essentially pre-modern'. Berger points out that although the obligations of men and women to the code of honour may differ, both sexes exist 'within the same all-embracing system of honour', and that dishonour involves not only 'loss of face in the community, but also loss of self and separation from the basic norms that govern human life' (Berger *et al* 80-1). He also argues that such a schema means that:

In a world of honour, identity is firmly linked to the past through the reiterated performance of proto-typical acts. In a world of dignity, history is the succession of mystifications from which the individual must free himself to attain 'authenticity'. (Berger *et al* 84)

Honour which depends on 'reiterated performance of proto-typical acts' recalls McClintock's theories of the fetish and 'compulsive repetition'. In the light of the overwhelming importance for the Palestinians of constructing a unified and unifying discourse of nationalism, it is easier to understand the significance of honour if it is read from the perspective of Berger's assertions. At this formative stage, the national took precedence over the personal, and the idea that the individual had to free him/herself from socially-imposed roles would hardly have been contemplated. However, the fact remains that the social imposition of roles granted greater freedom of expression to men, and as we shall see, also positioned women as those who lost honour.

In an essay on rethinking honour and shame, Nancy Lindisfarne makes the interesting observation that 'the rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity depends heavily on stereotypes of women: as weak, emotional, both needing support and potentially treacherous. Female virginity and chastity are both *prized and precarious*' (Lindisfarne 85, my italics). Both the last poem and the following, 'To Jerusalem' by Yusuf Hamdan, demonstrate a mistrust of a 'treacherous' female sexuality which leads to the same inclination to lay the blame for occupation at the door of the woman/land.

You came to me, chained,
Carried forcibly.
You came

Flowing, like the tears of a wounded heart.
And yet, I will not meet you;
Forgive me,
For today, you are occupied!

Have you indeed come to me?
In my passion, I prayed often
Without a "Rock,"
And when I found no water,
I simulated the ritual ablution;
And when you finally came to me, I vowed:
I will not accept you occupied!

I want you to be a Kaaba for the people of the earth,
A spacious house,
Without guards;
I love you . . . a voice from a minaret,
The sound of horns
Mingled with church bells.
I love you, a jasmine in the open air,
But I have sworn, yes I have,
I will not accept you occupied! (*PW* 105)

Even though Jerusalem is figured as a woman in great distress, the poet will not comfort her. He portrays himself as a man of integrity: when there is no Rock (that is, the Dome of the Rock in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem) he simulates ablution; he wishes the city to regain the spiritual and religious significance of Mecca. His ritual cleanliness means he cannot accept the occupied, and therefore soiled, city. There is no suggestion of man-the-defender having failed to defend and rescue the city, and no promise of action. The failure of the male is translated to the culpability of the city/woman in allowing herself to be occupied. El-Solh and Mabro quote Santi Rozario on the connection between shame and honour and the ways in which each notion carries a gendered responsibility: "honour is seen more as men's responsibility and shame as women's. This division of honour and shame is related to the fact that honour is seen as actively achieved while shame is seen as passively defended [. . .]" (El-Sohl & Mabro 8). Or, to put it another way, women do wrong, men are wronged.

The failure of the man in his traditional hegemonic masculine role of defender-impregnator-provider (what Silverman calls 'the failure of the paternal function' (Silverman 52)), is, as we have seen, displaced onto feminine infidelity. Such a rhetorical move is necessary to maintain the fiction of masculine agency and to deny symbolic impotence, and it is significant in terms of the construction of a nationalism

that is a 'masculinist enterprise', one that always stops short of conferring nationalist agency onto the female. Instead, lack is projected as belonging to the feminine. In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe argues that 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope. Anger at being "emasculated" [. . .] has been presumed to be the natural fuel for igniting a nationalist movement' (Enloe 44). The taking away of the land, upon which normative masculinity had been demonstrated and which defined the masculine nation's relation to the symbolic order, and the failure of man-the-defender to safeguard and reclaim it, amounts to the ultimate humiliation that is castration. To entertain the possibility of symbolic castration would mean the collapse of the dominant fiction. There would no longer be a 'commensurability of penis and phallus, actual and symbolic father' (Silverman 42). The lack of commensurability is projected onto the female, just as the Freudian small boy consoles himself against possible castration by assuring himself that lack is defined as a female attribute. According to Silverman, Freud's essay 'Fetishism' 'implicitly indicates [disavowal and denial of castration] to be a defense against what is in the final analysis *male* lack' (Silverman 46, emphasis in the original). Silverman also argues that 'the normative male ego is necessarily fortified against any knowledge of the void upon which it rests' (Silverman 61), and the ability to subordinate women, and persuade them that this is part of a 'natural' process, is a fundamental fortification. For the illusion of penis/phallus commensurability to succeed, significantly women, as well as men, need to avert their gaze from any suggestion of 'impaired masculinity' (Silverman 42). Such a feminine denial of masculine impairment is crucial in a nationalist context when the very existence of the nation is under threat. The more secure the sense of nation-ness, the more it is possible for its members to question some of its assumptions and founding principles. If some of the misogyny can be explained as 'strategic' masculinity, then it is also important to acknowledge that with every averting of the female gaze, masculinist attitudes become more entrenched. As Enloe points out, 'every time women succumb to the pressures to hold their tongues [. . .] nationalism becomes that much more masculinized' (Enloe 60). If women's analyses of the nationalist movement are silenced for the sake of unity, it becomes increasingly difficult to reshape gender roles.

2.ii Ghassan Kanafani and the 'lost years'

The fragmentation of society caused by the *nakba* of 1948, the first landmark date in modern Palestinian history, made it imperative for the Palestinians to begin to articulate a national identity, and it also initiated a redefinition of normative masculinity. The second significant date for the nation was 1967, which saw the defeat of the Arab armies in the June war and Israel's subsequent occupation of the remainder of historic Palestine, that is, the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The events of 1967 (the *naksah*, or setback) sharpened the Palestinians' sense of uniqueness as a nation grievously wronged and it made them realise they could no longer rely on Arab intervention in their struggle for a homeland and national recognition. Not only did they realise they would have to fight for themselves, but the Occupation underscored their lack of autonomy and the extent of their dispossession. The events of 1967 and the taking over of the PLO in 1969 by Yasir Arafat's Fatah organisation can be seen as a spur to nationalist activity.⁸ Rashid Khalidi considers the time between 1948 and 1967 to be "lost years" [. . .] during which time the Palestinians seemed to many to have disappeared from the political map as an independent actor [*sic*], and indeed as a people' (Khalidi 178). Khalidi cites as causes for this trope of lost years the crushing military defeats leading up to 1967 and the consequent dispersal of the population, and additionally 'the power of the ideology of pan-Arabism' (Khalidi 181) during this time. Pan-Arabism stressed the unity of the Arabs as a single people and used this ideology in an attempt to withstand Western neo-imperialism. The main plank of this ideology was the liberation of Palestine, although, as was earlier argued, this had more to do with domestic politics and was often little more than a pragmatic gesture. Khalidi argues that the reliance on pan-Arabism as a solution to the Palestinians' problems hindered the emergence of a specific Palestinian identity. Whilst this may hold true for the political sphere, in the cultural sphere, as has already been argued, the articulation of what it meant to be Palestinian, largely predicated on strong attachment to the land, had been underway for many years.

These 'lost years' produced many significant writers, both inside Israel and in the diaspora. Of the latter one of the foremost was Ghassan Kanafani, a novelist, short

⁸ Rashid Khalidi writes: 'The PLO was founded in 1964 by the Arab League in response to pressures Arab states felt from burgeoning independent Palestinian organizations and from Palestinian popular sentiment, and was meant to contain and control these pressures. Although it was thus initially not an independent actor, the Arab states quickly lost control of it, as it was refashioned by these organizations into the primary vehicle of Palestinian nationalism, a process which was completed by 1968.' (Khalidi 260)

story writer and journalist, who lived in Beirut until his assassination in 1972. I will examine two of his novellas published during these years – *Men in the Sun* (1962) and *All That's Left to You* (1966). In them, Kanafani starts to explore new formulations of national identity that do not rely on an overtly masculinised discourse. For Joe Cleary, Kanafani's work manages to avoid the pitfalls of much resistance literature, and he argues that:

[. . .] literature that simply celebrates the will to resist, and that fails to ask whether the goals or strategies employed are sufficient, runs the risk of simply becoming "an official literature", of reifying the very idea of resistance itself and of commodifying the sacrifices expended in its name. (Cleary 196)

According to Cleary, Kanafani manifests a modernist sensibility, one that registers the ruptures, contradictions and disappointments of everyday life, and one that avoids the ultimate optimism associated with most polemical resistance literature. Instead, Kanafani attempts to make meaning of the disaster that befell the Palestinians and to work out a structure of values that takes cognisance of their reality.

Set in 1958,⁹ *Men in the Sun* tells of the fate of three Palestinian men, all driven by economic need, who left their homes to make the illegal, and therefore hazardous, journey across Jordan and Iraq to find work in Kuwait. Humiliation that they now had to rely on UNWRA rations and could no longer provide for their families drove many thousands of Palestinians to such a desperate enterprise. The motif of the journey underscores their statelessness and their difficulty in crossing borders, and the map of their route inserted by Kanafani at the beginning of the story contextualises the vastness and ultimate emptiness of the pan-Arabist ideology. Muhammad Siddiq considers that the 'cutting irony of *Men in the Sun* resides in the gaping distance between the rhetorical valorization of the Palestinian cause and the actual dehumanisation of the Palestinians at the hands of the Arab regimes' (Siddiq 'Ropes' 95). Their individual journeys converge in Basra as they each attempt to strike a deal with the greedy and exploitative middlemen who smuggle illegal migrants like them over the border. They agree to be transported by a fellow Palestinian who is driving an empty water tanker to Kuwait City. At the two border checkpoints the men must hide for several minutes in

⁹ The date is significant because it coincides with what Muhammad Siddiq describes as one of the 'highest watermarks in the tide of Arab nationalism: the Iraqi revolution and the unity between Egypt and Syria. The declared objective of that unity was to provide the nucleus for a pan-Arab state that would unite all the Arab countries into one homeland for all the Arabs. The event was heralded as a turning point in the history of the modern Middle East and a major step toward the liberation of Palestine.' (Siddiq *Man* 13)

the tanker while the driver has the paperwork stamped. At the second checkpoint the driver is delayed by the officials' teasing of him, and the men suffocate under the blazing midday sun. He drives on to Kuwait, dumps their bodies on a municipal rubbish heap and takes their valuables. The novella ends with him demanding over and over "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?" (56). Mary Layoun comments on how the novella's ending 'seemed ignominious if not heretical' in the light of the rhetoric on Palestine employed by the Arab states; better would be images of 'the Palestinians' triumphant return on the shoulders of their Arab brothers or at least of resistance until death' (Layoun *Travels* 187).

The men represent different generations (and the past, present and future of Palestinian national consciousness), and the first three chapters are devoted to each one in turn, with stream of consciousness and flashbacks telling the story of how they came to be in Basra. Abu Qais is an elderly peasant, driven off his land in 1948, still mourning the 'ten trees with twisted trunks which brought down olives and goodness every spring'; in the new order, without his land, he feels 'alien and insignificant' (13). The novella starts with him prostrate on the earth whose 'tired heartbeats [. . .] trembled through the grains of sand and penetrated the cells of his body'. He breathes in the smell of the earth, the merging of land and women obvious in the following lines:

Every time he breathed the scent of the earth, as he lay on it, he imagined that he was sniffing his wife's hair when she had just walked out of the bathroom, after washing with cold water. The very same smell, the smell of a woman who had washed with cold water and covered his face with her hair while it was still damp. (9)

Abu Qais clearly feels his loss of land equates to loss of honour, and he recalls the schoolteacher who died in battle and muses 'You saved yourself humiliation and wretchedness, and you preserved your old age from shame' (11).¹⁰ He is taunted by a neighbour for living like a 'beggar' (14) - Abu Qais has failed as the provider and

¹⁰ In *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*, Fawaz Turki describes how his father attempted to stay illegally in Saudi Arabia after performing the Hajj in order to work. The Saudi authorities rounded up Turki's father, and thousands of others like him, and he was sent back to Beirut 'crushed, humiliated, crazed by his failures and mortified by his inability to repay his many debts. He had always been an independent man who was proud of his accomplishments as a bread earner.' Turki also tells of how many men like those in Kanafani's story perished in their attempts to cross the desert to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, and how one young Egyptian peasant hid in a van being driven by 'a friendly fellow Egyptian' who was transporting spare parts to Kuwait. The Egyptian, locked inside the van for the whole of the trip, 'suffocated and died' (55-6). These stories become something of a motif of the friendless, desperate, exploited and humiliated Palestinians after the *nakba*.

protector of his large family, and his wife does not discourage him from making the dangerous journey to Kuwait. Kanafani causes Abu Qais's past and present to merge and become muddled, so that his surroundings 'began to swim behind a mist of tears, the horizon of the river and sky came together and everything around him became simply an endless white glow' (15). Kanafani, in his honest portrait of Abu Qais, avoids the valorisation of the peasant that became a hallmark of Palestinian official ideology.¹¹ The chapter ends with Abu Qais again throwing himself on the ground, 'on the damp earth which began to beat beneath him again' (15), the circularity suggesting a fixity in an agrarian past that prevents understanding of the present. Cleary sees the reliance on the discourse of the feminised land, tied as it is to the exhaustion of the elderly peasant, as 'ultimately an insufficient response to the exigencies of the Palestinian situation [. . .] what is lacking is any real sense of historical causality, any real analysis of the circumstances that contributed to the disaster' (Cleary 204). This sense of incomprehension, and of an inability to make connections, is underscored by the compartmentalised structure of the novella.¹² Each character is contained within his own chapter with no fellow feeling exhibited towards his travelling companions, and even when the four are driving together towards Kuwait, each is cocooned in his own thoughts.

The second chapter concerns Assad, a younger man who has been engaged in guerrilla activity and is wanted by the Jordanian police. His uncle has loaned him 50 dinars to make the journey to Kuwait so that Assad can become wealthy enough to marry his daughter. The arrangement, made between Assad's father and uncle 'just because his father had recited the Fatiha with his uncle when he and Nada were born on the same day', rubs his consciousness raw as if it were a wound. 'Who told him that he, Assad, wanted to marry her? Who told him that he ever wanted to get married?', Assad fumes, feeling as if he is being bought as one would 'buy a sack of manure for a field' (19-20). The simile combines the imagery of a fertile land with that of the woman, but here Assad in refusing the role of impregnator is refusing to become part of a discredited and failed patriarchal order based on outmoded clan loyalties and disregard

¹¹ See Ted Swendenburg's essay, 'The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier'.

¹² See Mary Layoun's chapter on *Men in the Sun* in *Travels of a Genre: The Modern Novel and Ideology*, 177-208. She writes: 'For by their individual attempts to escape from a powerless present rather than to collectively act in and on it, the narrative subjects of *Rijal fi al-shams* [*Men in the Sun*] begin and end as isolated and divided entities. The consequences of such isolation and division are the continuation of individual and national desperation and powerlessness until, in "The Grave," the four men are thrown onto a garbage dump' (204).

for the aspirations of the younger generation. However, this reluctance is not predicated on a desire for a better social structure, but rather is based on a need to avoid responsibility. Later, when talking to the unmarried Abul Khaizuran, the driver, Assad observes to Abul Khaizuran that he must 'have a splendid life. No one to drag you in any direction. You can fly off alone wherever you like . . . you can fly off alone' (37). Assad no longer believes in the dominant fiction yet his guerrilla activity has failed to create a satisfactory alternative masculine model against which to define himself.¹³ His reveries are entirely taken up with reliving scenes of coercion, betrayal and the desire to escape poverty, whatever the cost. He had been abandoned in the Jordanian desert by a smuggler who swore on his honour to get him safely to Iraq, so for Assad the concept of honour is no longer valid: 'Things go better when a man doesn't swear by his honour', he rebukes Abul Khaizuran (35).

The third chapter belongs to Marwan, a 16-year old whose family has fragmented and left him prematurely as head of the household. His older brother, Zakaria, had suddenly stopped sending remittances from Kuwait, and subsequently his father had left his mother and siblings to marry and live with another woman. She, Shafiqa, had lost a leg during the bombardment of Jaffa and had bought a three-bedroomed house with the charitable donations she had received. Marwan's father married her to escape poverty, as Marwan writes to his mother from Basra:

He told himself, in fact he told us all, that life is an extraordinary business, and that a man wants to be able to settle down in his old age, and not find himself obliged to feed half a dozen mouths. [. . .] He is penniless, you know that. His one and only ambition was to move from the mud house which he had occupied in the camp for ten years and live under a concrete roof, as he used to say (26).

In this letter, Marwan attempts to absolve his father of blame, and his inability to see the inequity and utter selfishness of his father's excuses can be read as an unwillingness to admit the failure of the paternal function. There is a telling sequence when Marwan visits his father and his new wife before his departure. Marwan is fascinated by Shafiqa's stunted leg and we are told, 'The stick was lying beside her, and he thought "I wonder where her thigh ends?"' (29). The failure of the father, that is, the failure of the dominant fiction, is projected onto feminine lack and, as Cleary observes, the disgust Marwan feels for his father is diverted to Shafiqa's deformity (Cleary 213). Let down

¹³ In 1958 guerrilla activity was sporadic and poorly co-ordinated, and had not yet been formed into the ideology of resistance that emerged from the mid-1960s onwards.

by both his father and his older brother, adrift without male role models to guide him, Marwan tries to perform a masculinity that is misplaced and doomed to failure. While trying to outwit a middleman, he remembers a friend saying 'he must be more than a man, and show more than courage' (22), whereupon he has his ears boxed and is thrown out in the street. There is a bitter realisation that 'any attempt to restore his honour was futile' and he would have to 'digest his humiliation' (23). Neither Marwan nor Assad has a link to the land, the rootedness and connectedness that prevents Abu Qais from complete despair. The younger generation know only life in the refugee camps and its degradations, the repeated snuffing out of hope, the sense of betrayal by the outside world. Assad is old enough to be embittered; Marwan, until being thrown in the dust, still clung to 'the last threads of hope which had held together everything inside him' (22). The histories of all three men are associated with a failure of the paternal function. The concept of honour is shown no longer to have validity in the modern world: Abu Qais lost his along with his land; Assad has a Falstaffian moment in which he realises how hypocritically the concept is still used; and Marwan, as representative of the emerging order, is powerless against the incursion of capitalism into what was a semi-feudal society. It is as if the past, the present and the future have all been corrupted, and their markers, absorbed by the desert sands, can no longer serve as templates for normative masculinity.

Abul Khaizuran's secret is revealed in the fourth chapter. When Assad asks him if he has ever been married, he is overwhelmed by a flood of unbearable associations: injured in a mine explosion in 1948, he had had to be surgically castrated. He recalls:

Now . . . ten years had passed since that horrible scene. Ten years had passed since they took his manhood from him, and he had lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour. He had swallowed it with his pride, and examined it every moment of those ten years. And still he hadn't yet got used to it, he hadn't accepted it. For ten long years he had been trying to accept the situation? But what situation? To confess quite simply that he had lost his manhood while fighting for his country? And what good had it done? He had lost his manhood and his country, and damn everything in this bloody world. (37-8)

Kanafani's use of the analogy of destroyed individual masculinity to stand for national self-esteem is a brutally unflinching assessment, one that the huge majority of Palestinians could or would not admit. Abul Khaizuran still could not accept the argument put forward by the hospital staff that 'it was better to lose one's manhood than one's life' (38). His inability to accept what had happened is then figured as flight: 'he

couldn't entirely picture what had happened, and so he had fled from the hospital instinctively and blindly [. . .] It was as though his flight could bring things back to normal again' (38). Kanafani clearly links the loss of the homeland to loss of normative masculinity. If the 'lost years' have a significance beyond merely acting as the prelude to the emergence of a more vocal Palestinian nationalism, it is that in this time writers like Kanafani were acknowledging the inadequacy of the old symbolic structures and trying to suggest that the past would have to be accepted, and its significance understood, before the nation could insert itself into history. Kanafani suggests that what Amy Zalman terms the 'cultural conventions of masculine behaviour' have broken down and 'are not necessarily useful guides to resurrecting a national identity' (Zalman 21). The modernism that Cleary admires in Kanafani's work does not provide comforting solutions, the ignominy of the end of the men's journey refusing misplaced optimism.

Embittered and unable to come to terms with his lack, Abul Khaizuran now desires 'money, more money' (47), even if that means profiting from and endangering his fellow countrymen. At the second checkpoint, he is detained by an Iraqi official who has heard rumours that Abul Khaizuran lingered in Basra because he was dallying with a prostitute. Unable to admit to his impotence, he endures the ribaldry and eventually concedes that the gossip may have some basis of truth. By the time he returns to the tanker, twenty minutes later instead of the promised seven, the men are dead. He puts the importance of affirming an (absent) manhood before any sense of national obligation; he did not have access to an alternative conceptual framework that would express a selfhood that was not predicated on performative masculinity. He had been one of the most skilful drivers in the fighting prior to 1948 and was recognised for his bravery, yet what fills him with the most shame is the memory that there was a woman present at his castration, a woman who didn't avert her eyes from the collapse of the dominant fiction. Abul Khaizuran still feels he must be able to perform a sexual masculinity, to possess a woman, not to prove his heroism but in order to feel that he is a man. As he remembers the female nurse, he fumes – 'And what good did patriotism do you? You spend your life in an adventure, and now you are incapable of sleeping with a woman!' (47).

If *Men in the Sun* is read purely as allegory, the figure of Abul Khaizuran (his name, significantly, means bamboo, or cane, and therefore carries an implication of hollowness), who leads his fellow Palestinians to a death unremarked by the world,

stands for the leadership of the nation: symbolically castrated after the loss of Palestine, full of hollow rhetoric, blindly leading the nation towards the rubbish tip of history. Amal Amireh, Joe Cleary, Mary Layoun, and Amy Zalman all provide detailed and thought-provoking analyses of the novella. However, I would like to consider what the breakdown in the paternal function signifies as far as the construction of gender roles is concerned. Zalman observes how 'the narrative is flooded with commentary about disruptions in the travelers' [*sic*] sexual, familial, and work lives – those places where gender makes itself most visible' (Zalman 21), areas that equate to the roles of impregnator, defender and provider. A familiar pattern emerges of the failure of the man being displaced onto the feminine, or domestic, sphere. Uum Qais is always pregnant, there are ever more mouths to feed. She acquiesces in Saad's persuading the old man to risk the journey, a choice preferable to continuing with 'this life here' (14). She agrees that it would enable them to send Qais to school, to buy some olive shoots, but remains silent when the old man talks of the dangers of the journey. Assad resists the whole idea of marriage. The fact that his uncle loaned him 50 dinars on the condition he return and marry Nada illustrates not only the younger man's lack of autonomy but also the way marriage has been reduced to financial expediency. Above all, he resents the restrictions to his freedom that domesticity would impose. Marwan's willingness to absolve his father of blame for deserting the family (in the passage already cited) takes no account of the suffering of his mother who, like his father, had lived in the squalor of the refugee camp for ten years. The legitimacy of his father's desire to escape the obligation 'to feed half a dozen mouths' does not seem to hold for his mother also. Shafiq's father had suggested the marriage because he too wished to escape the responsibility of caring for his daughter 'who had been turned down by everybody because of that leg' (26). Marwan explains his father's marriage to Shafiq as a desire to escape poverty, but the marriage to 'that deformed woman' (25) and Marwan's prurient fascination with her stump suggests a deviant sexuality that resides in the feminine. Kanafani's analysis of gender relations in *Men in the Sun* is far from the idealisation of the feminine that marks so much Palestinian poetry of this time; indeed, instead of blaming the women, this novella reveals the hypocrisy and misogyny that underpin the attitudes that drive masculinity.

However, the most telling observation comes from Abul Khaizuran. Marwan knows that Zakaria's remittances dried up shortly after he got married in Kuwait, knowledge he kept secret from his parents, and he is amazed when the driver guesses his reason for

migrating to Kuwait, the older man explaining: 'Ah! One doesn't have to be a genius to understand. Everyone stops sending money to their families when they get married or fall in love' (28). It is not only that marriage can be tainted by commercial expediency, but also that affection for a woman can deflect a man from his duty towards his family. In *Beyond The Veil*, the Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi argues that Islam requires that nothing come between a man and his devotion to God, and that loving a woman is the most dangerous of such temptations, and she also explains how there is a deep-rooted fear that women's sexuality can lead to chaos (*fitna*) within the social order (Mernissi 63-4, 4-5).¹⁴ Abul Khaizuran makes explicit the link between feminine desire and the breakdown of the social fabric, causing men's dereliction of their duties. Cleary argues that in *Men in the Sun* 'the moral and emotional failure to come to terms with the historical loss of Palestine and the consequent collapse of the traditional symbolic order is staged as a refusal to come to terms with the fact of male castration' (Cleary 216). It is also the case that although the catastrophe of 1948 is the foundational act of the story, the men are impelled by outdated notions of manly behaviour that are rooted in a mistrust of the feminine and the domestic. The metaphor of the men dying abandoned in a tanker in a vast desert suggests that their problems, and those of the nation, cannot be solved by fleeing family and community. The nation is often figured as a family, and this text therefore seems to point to the conclusion that a nation can be built only on trusting and mutual relations between all its members.

In Kanafani's *All That's Left To You* the narrative is centred on familial relations but the family concerned has been fragmented. The protagonists of the story are a sister and her younger brother, Hamid, whose father was killed in the defence of Jaffa in 1948, and whose mother fled to Jordan, leaving the two in the care of an aging aunt in a Gaza refugee camp. The action of the story unfolds during one night and culminates in Maryam's stabbing of her husband of a few hours, and the simultaneous stabbing by Hamid of an Israeli soldier he encounters in the desert he crosses in an attempt to reach Jordan and find his mother. There are three narrators: Hamid, Maryam, and the desert. Stream of consciousness, flashbacks, images used by one narrator sliding over to the voice of the next, and a compulsive linguistic return to the events of 1948, all leave the impression of a present that cannot be understood either in relation to the past or as a projection for the future. The only clear boundary in the story is the different typefaces

¹⁴ Such a mistrust of feminine sexuality and the defensive male attitude adopted towards it has already been noted in the poetry discussed earlier in this section.

used to designate each speaker. In his introduction to Halim Barakat's *Days of Dust* Edward Said argues that the Western European novelist over the past two and a half centuries has been able to draw upon the history and tradition of the form that enabled an articulation of the consciousness of his or her time. The intertextuality upon which the novelist inevitably drew served as a defence against what Said terms 'the unmediated urgency either of individual imagination or of the historical moment'. In this way, he continues, both historical actuality and the history of the novel form enable existential reality to be rendered verbally within a recognised structure: temporality is 'the novel's life; as historical moment and as history of the form, temporality makes the world's pressure amenable to verbal structure' (Said 'Introduction' xii-xiii). The Arab novelist of the twentieth century, writing during a time when Arab peoples were just emerging from centuries of Ottoman and then European domination, when ethnic and national identities were only just in the process of formation, had no established novelist tradition upon which to draw. Furthermore and most significantly, the events of 1948 produced such a profound rupture that it caused the Arab nations to doubt 'the very possibility of their historical continuity as a people'. Said goes on to argue that the *nakba* (already described as a 'serious deflection away from a forward path') becomes a crisis of the present: 'at the intersection of past and future stands the disaster, which on the one hand reveals the deviation from *what has yet to happen* (a unified, collective Arab identity) and on the other reveals the possibility of *what may happen* (Arab extinction as a cultural or national unit)' (Said 'Introduction' xvii).

In an informative essay entitled "'Postcolonial' Literature in a Neocolonial World" on what she terms 'modernist' texts in the Arabic world, Saree Makdisi makes a similar point about temporality. She traces the emergence of the impulse to modernise in the Arab political sphere to the late nineteenth century, based on a desire to catch up with the technological, military and perceived cultural superiority of the Europeans. To accept such a goal 'implied entering the flow of the river of evolutionary Time' whereas rejection of it 'implied trying to move "backward" against the powerful "forward" current of History' (89), a struggle that produced a polarisation between the forces of modernity and tradition. She points out that such 'modernity' is 'always already displaced and deferred' (90) given the transformed (from colonial to neo-colonial) yet continuing power relations in the region. Makdisi, like Said, uses the term 'rupture' to refer to the crises experienced by the Arab world (its relation of 'subalternity' (97) to the West, and the fragmentation caused by the formation of Arab states, as well as the

more obvious disasters of the loss of Palestine and disintegration of Lebanon). She argues that the modernist texts to which she refers¹⁵ were 'all produced during or after what these texts themselves helped to define and to understand as a series of calamitous ruptures or breaks with the past' (97). In refusing both a 'return to a mythic past' and the 'perpetually deferred great leap "forward"' such writing leaves only 'a highly unstable and contradictory present', what she also terms 'an uncompromising and inescapable present' (99).¹⁶ *All That's Left To You* appears to emerge from this crisis of temporality; indeed, Kanafani stated in his introduction to the story that there are five characters – Hamid, Maryam, Zakaria, Time and the Desert (xxi). The novella attempts to articulate this temporal crisis and in doing so, make its terms available to a wider audience.

The absence of parents underscores the sense of being trapped in a perilous present in which normal structures of authority are absent. Hamid and Maryam's thoughts are circuitous, each avenue ending with 'If only your mother was here', thereby inducing a compulsive return to 1948 and the birth of their existential crisis. The plot of the novel follows Hamid and Maryam during the night following Maryam's hastily arranged marriage to Zakaria, a man who is already married with five children, and who once betrayed a friend of Hamid's, Salim, because of his membership of the resistance. Unlike women in many of Kanafani's short stories of this period, who are representative of what a good wife should be, or who are symbols of a peasant integrity that Kanafani's Maoist's sympathies tended to idealise, Maryam is a fully realised character to whose thoughts and desires the reader has surprising access.¹⁷ At the age of 35, she embarks upon an affair with Zakaria and becomes pregnant by him. She thrills in the physicality of their relationship and suffers no guilt at the shame Hamid feels has been brought upon him by her pregnancy, declaring it is '[her] *only* shame in thirty-five virginal, repressed years!' (14). The passing of her years has been insistently tapped out by a clock on her bedroom wall, a clock in the shape of a bier. Its ticking, 'like the

¹⁵ Makdisi mentions Mahfouz's *Miramar*, Saleh's *Season of Migration*, Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, Khoury's *Little Mountain* and *Little Ghandi*, Munif's *Cities of Salt*, el-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns*, al-Sheikh's *Scent of the Gazelle*, Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessimist*, and Hetata's *The Net* (97).

¹⁶ As my present focus is on the crisis of masculinity in the 'lost years' it is not possible to précis more of Makdisi's arguments; however, her piece is invaluable in understanding both the causes of the failure of 'modernity' in the Arab world and the way this failure is figured in literary texts.

¹⁷ The figure of Umm Saud who appears in several of Kanafani's short stories is an emblem – a mother who is happy to sacrifice her sons to the struggle, who encourages other young men to take up arms, and who is given to making proto-Marxist speeches (see *Palestine's Children: 'Returning to Haifa' and Other Stories*.)



sound made by the tapping of a solitary cane' (7), punctuates all her thoughts. In the Jaffa days, Maryam had been expected to marry Fathi, the brother of a friend, but the crisis of 1948 brought forth a paternal injunction against marriage: "'Don't talk about marriage before our national cause has been decided'" their father ordered (19). Brother and sister are left in limbo, robbed of the guidance they still need from their parents yet prevented from moving forward into fully adult roles, from entering real time, a state of affairs that can be read as a national allegory. Maryam, however, by breaking free of the injunction and by repudiating socio-sexual taboos, is shown to be leaving the past behind.

Whilst there appears to be little authorial censure of Maryam's behaviour, the attitude of the two male protagonists is criticised. Zakaria variously views Maryam's body as 'a fertile land' (13), the slippage between land and woman serving to objectify the woman, and as an item that will be ruined for his pleasure by childbirth, as when he tells her: 'You'll turn into a flabby woman with a stretched belly that looks as though smallpox has been at it. [. . .] For a whole year you won't be a woman, you'll just be a walking milk bottle' (15). It can certainly be argued that such views are consistent with Zakaria's known treachery and adultery, but Hamid's reaction to Maryam's behaviour does not escape criticism. He can see Maryam's choices only as bringing dishonour on him, and he reacts peevishly to what he reads as her rejection of him in favour of marriage to Zakaria. 'Fired by his boiling rage' (3) he fantasises about killing her. His rage is the result of an impotence that is connected to his lack of action in the resistance, a lack of action that is figured as immaturity and conferring a degree of insignificance upon him (28-9). The sense that he is caught between childhood's hesitation and impotence and adulthood's sense of agency and purpose is reinforced by the paternal injunction that constantly hangs over him. The dowry that he promised at Maryam's wedding was to be 'all deferred . . . all deferred' (2), and these words reverberate in his thoughts throughout the action, indicating his inability to grasp the significance of his present. Maryam understands that their brother/sister relationship is both unhealthy in its intensity and impossible to sustain:

How can Hamid possibly understand? For all his wonderful manhood, he was my brother. He hadn't yet come to see how important the passing of time was; but to me it was death announcing itself at least twice daily. I was gradually turning day by day into his substitute mother, while day by day he was becoming for me a man who was just a brother. He'd never realized that for me a moment's encounter with a real man would lead to the dissolving of our bond, and the small, beautifully shallow

world we'd forced ourselves to chose, a trivial world unprepared to accommodate another spinster. (18)

Such unmediated access to Maryam's thoughts allows a sympathetic identification with her as a real woman, not as an idealised notion of womanhood. Whereas Maryam realises that they have to work out a future for themselves, Hamid can think only of returning to his mother, to a childhood that carried no responsibilities. In Lacanian terms, he is unable to enter the Symbolic Order and yearns to return to the Imaginary. His suspension between childhood and adulthood is figured as an immature sexuality, not only in relation to his sister but also to the desert which he regards as both maternal and eroticised. The narrative suggests that the desert is both space and time that must be crossed in order that Hamid reaches self-awareness. The desert is understanding of his plight but will do nothing to help him:

I was spread out beneath him; without hesitation I submitted to his youth as his steps beat into my flesh. But he was just like all the rest, afraid of the infinite expanse, of a horizon without hill, landmark or path. He stood there looking at the uniform blackness of the sand and sky, staring at a spot which lay directly at his feet. Then just as suddenly, he went on, youth that he was, bitter with the contradictions that raged inside him. (9)

This passage also grants an agency to the feminine voice that is normally strikingly lacking in texts written by Palestinian men. The above citation carries Biblical overtones of enforced wandering in the desert before a return to the homeland, and it also strongly suggests that fear of an unknown future and youthful rage have no place in negotiating that return. It is significant that Hamid is 'just like all the rest', which makes this immature and petulant youth representative of his generation. They lack landmarks and the way ahead is an 'infinite blackness'. Whereas Maryam takes positive action to escape the ticking away of her youth, Hamid throws away his watch as he crosses the desert, a desire to be outside time.

Hamid's thoughts of Maryam while he crosses the desert are of anger, frustration and bitterness. His perception of her as 'dishonoured, defiled', whilst he is 'deceived', is paradigmatic (2). Maryam, however, keeps a vigil, visualising him crossing the desert through the night, the ticking of the clock on the wall marking out his footsteps. As she feels the baby move inside her she resolves to name him Hamid. She kills Zakaria when he demands she abort the baby, her action eradicating the treacherous element in the narrative and, at the same time, granting life to the next generation. Hamid's killing of the Israeli soldier is more difficult to appraise. For Amy Zalman,

Hamid's action instigates a return to the land, a fictional rendering of Fatah's first armed incursion into Israeli territory in 1965. The concept of the return, present in Palestinian thought since 1948, is materialized, transforming 'male absence into male presence through force' (Zalman 31). Such a reading of *All That's Left To You* necessarily privileges male agency over female, and Zalman concludes that:

[. . .] while it is Maryam's militant decisiveness that ensures Hamid's return, she is not offered rebirth or the chance to toss away the clock that ticks out her waiting. Rather, her status, and her body, are yoked to the cyclical time of reproduction. (Zalman 34)

If Palestine and the female are linked as a 'fertile land', then Hamid's conquering of his fear of both the enemy and the desert (as the unknown future) figures as a reconquest of feminine agency and desire. In such a reading, as Zalman explains, feminine sexuality, variously depicted as threatening, uncontrollable, shaming and passive, must be brought under male control, and she continues:

Masculine return is instigated through an encounter with a dominating feminine presence, and achieved by fantasizing its subjugation to masculine desire. In the process of this narrative, masculine absence is exchanged for presence, and feminine presence commuted to feminine assistance in the task of masculine return. (Zalman 38)

However, I do not consider that the conclusion of the novel suggests Hamid has made the necessary progression into adulthood and decisiveness; his fantasies of subjugating feminine presence to male desire are just that – fantasies. The situation in which he finds himself when confronted by the enemy is farcical. We are told: 'I realized that he hadn't in fact succumbed to my superior strength, but he had offered no resistance because he believed himself to be the victim of a mistake or a practical joke by friends; he'd never reckoned on suddenly hearing Arabic spoken in this remote place' (33). Hamid's journey across the desert, which allowed his encounter with the enemy, is not a carving out of a new future but a wish to regress to maternal protection. His awareness of himself as 'an insignificant person' (29) because he did not, like his friend Salim, join the resistance points to Kanafani's belief in the necessity of assertive action, yet the purpose of Hamid's journey is to be reunited with his mother and to escape the responsibilities of adulthood. Maryam realises that Hamid 'made his distant mother a refuge for the future, and he's been so concerned with developing that fiction that he's forgotten to nurture himself, a man who'd grow up independent of the need for her' (23). The stabbing of Zakaria and of the soldier take place concurrently, one voice

slipping into the other, but there are differences. In Hamid's case, it is the knife that directs the action – 'With its long glowing blade, the knife flashed in front of me . . . [. . .] I felt it plunging into him as we collided together' (49). With Maryam, the act is deliberate; having stabbed Zakaria, Maryam makes sure she has killed him. We are told: 'I turned round, took him by the shoulders and pushed him against the wall [. . .] He pressed his forehead against the wall, trying to keep the handle from making contact with it, but I gripped him by the shoulders; and, placing my knee against his back, I pushed him with all my strength against the wall' (49-50). Hamid kills the soldier because he has to, out of self defence, and because there is no other way out of the impasse. At the end of the narrative, Hamid is aware only of a pounding in his head – 'Suddenly the silence reverberated, as dogs began to bark furiously and continuously [. . .] and hammering with cruel persistence into my head. Remorseless. Pounding over him, and the bulk of his death heaped there. Pounding. Pounding'. (50)

The narrative offers little indication that Hamid has attained a level of self-awareness that might help him come to terms with the present. Indeed, the ending reduces the contradictions of an intolerable present (Said's 'unmediated urgency of the historical moment' and Makdisi's 'uncompromising and inescapable present') to an internalised 'pounding'. Siddiq considers that 'Hamid's quest for identity proceeds on two simultaneous fronts: the political and the sexual' (Siddiq *Man* 29). If one reads this text against the grain of resistance literature, such a quest appears to remain in suspense. Hamid's act of self-defence might initiate a course of action that will regain national and masculine agency but there is as yet no suggestion that it has been contextualised or understood within a wider context. Hamid is left stranded in the space and time of the desert. Feminine agency has been reconfigured by Maryam's taking control of her body and reproductive power, and her continuing empathy with Hamid points to the desirability of a less gender-divided society. *All That's Left To You* occupies and articulates the temporal and spatial impasse that preceded more violent action in the Palestinians' campaign to return to their homeland. Hamid's action was driven by impotence and rage, and the killing of the soldier was unpremeditated and not planned as part of an overall strategy; so Kanafani in this novella is replaying the lack of a coherent Palestinian vision for the future, together with the continuing relegating of women to minor roles, despite the fundamental instrumental part they can play in building that future.

2.iii Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist* - The Palestinian Everyman

The crisis of masculinity, from which the Palestinians as a people appeared to avert their eyes, was addressed with surprising candour by Emile Habiby in his novel *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist* (1974). It was written after the *naksah* (setback) of 1967, and was published in instalments in the Arabic language journal of the Israeli Communist Party of which Habiby was editor. The first two parts were published in 1972, and the third in 1974, in which year it was also published as a book. The first part chronicles the years after 1948 when villages were demolished and families dispersed, the second book concentrating on the lives of those Palestinians who stayed in Israel. The third covers the years after the 1967 war and the increasing repression and injustices suffered by the Palestinians, together with the formulation of a co-ordinated national resistance and assertion. These three periods increasingly come to be seen as delineating the stages of the development of Palestinian nationalist consciousness, which was further redefined with the eruption of the *intifada* in 1987. The novel uses irony and black humour that, as many commentators have noted, were not devices commonly associated with the literary response of the Arab world to its problems.¹⁸ More surprisingly, Saeed is in his own words an ass, a coward and an informer for the Israelis, which is considered the cardinal sin for any Palestinian. Somehow, despite his stupidity and complicity, he manages not only to attain the sympathy of the reader but also to depict the surreal and almost impossible predicament of the Palestinian living in Israel. It can also be argued that, because of his stupidity and complicity, he exposes the arbitrary cruelty and hypocrisy of the modern state of Israel in a manner that is devastating in its naivety and candour, an exposé that more polemical texts would be unable to achieve.

The constructions of valiant masculinity commonly found in resistance literature and the poetry studied in this chapter create an undifferentiated ideal, an ideal that cannot accommodate those who fail to live up to its requirements. It also fails to

¹⁸ See Salma Khadra Jayyusi's introduction to the novel (Jayyusi x), and Akhram F Khater's essay 'Emile Habibi: The Mirror of Irony in Palestinian Literature'. Khater explains: 'It is rare to find laughter in the works of modern Arab poets or novelists. The reality of military and political defeat, social decay and dislocation – both physical and psychic – overwhelm and permeate modern Arabic literature to an oppressive extreme. It is as if laughter particularly from a sense of irony, has become an illegitimate or untenable response to the problems of the Arab world. Indeed, the literary response to these crises has generally been either bleak social realism or self-involved individual alienation from society and its problems and failures' (Khater 75).

articulate any way in which those who struggle to live every day in a state of which they are nominally members but which is discriminatory and hostile to them, may voice resistance that does not involve the usual images of bloodshed and martyrdom. The monolithic ideal of manhood fails, too, to interact with the Other, other than in idealised terms; indeed, when the Other is the possessor of overwhelming military and technological superiority, such a discourse is always already predicated upon defeat in real terms, even if heroism is portrayed as victory in the face of impossible odds. Habiby's use of the absurd to portray a hapless helpless fool, who is caught in the web of machinations of a modern colonial state, allows many layers of comment, and the text's defamiliarising and fragmentary strategies reject the more readily accessible tropes associated with 'resistance' writing. Benita Parry could be referring to *Saeed* when she explains how such texts are equally as effective in unsettling hegemonic narratives, arguing that:

The fantastic and the fabulous, the grotesque and the disorderly, the parodic reiteration or inversion of dominant codes, the deformation of master tropes, the estrangement of received usage, the fracture of authorised syntax: these are amongst the many textual procedures that can act as oppositional and subversive, and without directly illuminating the struggle or ostensibly articulating dissent and protest. (Parry 'Speculations' 15)

The critique is not confined to the likes of Saeed and to the State of Israel, but to all those who are complicit in the present impasse: the wealthy Arab nations; the elite of society in Mandate Palestine; the freedom fighter whose idealism does not convert to any real gain; and all those Palestinians within Israel who, although not collaborators like Saeed, accept their fate and await divine intervention to save them.

The desirability of action over inertia is made clear in the epigraph at the head of Book One, a poem by Samih al-Qasim:

So, you men!
And women!
You Sheikhs, Rabbis, Cardinals!
You, nurses, and girls in factories –
How long must you await
The postman with those letters
You so anticipate,
Across the dead-dry barriers?
And you, you men!
And you, women!
Don't wait still more, don't wait!
Now, off with your sleep-clothes

And to yourselves compose
Those letters you so anticipate!

The fact that Saeed's story is related in the form of his letters is therefore significant. The letters were written to a framing narrator who published them to what was clearly a mixed reception. No paraphrase of the plot of *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* can do justice to its narrative complexity. Its unreliable narrator and elaborately entitled chapters dart from past to future and back again. Many of the letters are digressions: there is a chapter comparing Saeed with Voltaire's *Candide*, another comparing the Israelis favourably to some of history's more bloodthirsty conquerors of the Holy Land, one where 'Saeed Takes Refuge in a Footnote', and another that is a piece of research 'on the Many Virtues of the Oriental Imagination'.¹⁹ Such intertextuality confidently situates the novel in history and within a wider cultural context, and therefore it would appear to overcome the crisis of temporality that Said discusses. The fantastic and improbable, as a means of indicating to the readers of these letters the one-dimensionality of their existence, are signalled from the very start, especially to those who can read the Arabic original. Roger Allen points out that the most literal translation of the title would be 'The strange occurrences concerning the disappearance of Sa'id, father of ill-fortune, the pessoptimist' (Allen *Arabic* 209). Arabic readers would know that Sa'id means happy or lucky, oxymoronic when followed by 'father of ill-fortune', the oxymoron encapsulated in the sobriquet 'pessoptimist'. Allen also explains the pun involved in Saeed's claim to be living, as he writes the letters, with 'creatures from outer space' (Habiby 4). The Arabic word for space is *fida*, and for people from outer space it is *fida'iyyin*. Changing the consonant from the emphatic *daad* to the unemphatic *daal*, Allen explains, produces the word for freedom fighters, *fida'iyyin* (Allen *Arabic* 214). The joke is that, given Saeed's lineage and character, he is as likely to have become a freedom fighter as he is to be living in outer space as he writes of his secret life.²⁰ The celebratory nature of the novel's verbal virtuosity is the formal realisation of a marginalized culture's rich traditions. Mahar Jarrar describes it

¹⁹ Akram Khater points out how Habiby's style of writing borrows from the medieval *maqamat*, 'with its motley collection of "quotations from the Qur'an . . . , choice metaphors, and Arab proverbs . . . , literary elegancies, and grammatical riddles, and decisions on ambiguous legal questions, and original improvisations, and highly-wrought orations, and plaintive discourses, as well as jocose witticisms"' (quoting Theodore Preston) (Khater 84). Rula Jurdi Abisaab also notes the similarities with the *maqamat*, pointing out one aspect of 'this intellectual genealogy is the notion of secrecy' (Abisaab 1-2)

²⁰ Ibrahim Taha in his chapter on *Saeed* in *The Palestinian Novel: A Communication Study*, explores all the complexities of Habiby's use of puns, slang words and his flouting of grammatical rules (Taha 55-86).

as 'full of pun, sarcasm, a mixture of colloquial and classical, creating new words and termini, and using cynical euphemisms when dealing with religious language and clichés' (Jarrar 22). Such a disregard for classical Arabic is a demythologising impulse. Akram Khater emphasises how knowledge of such a heritage can play a liberating role, explaining how Habiby 'employs words – old and new – to link that community to a rich Arabic heritage in a way that would not lock it into ossified traditions, but that would give it the impetus and strength to seek a new identity to break the boundaries of victimization and self-doubt' (Khater 76). From a novel full of word play, black humour, irony and understatement, I wish to focus on the role of the comic hero as an antidote to conventional heroism, and also to explore how mimicry (in Homi Bhabha's formulation) can expose the ambivalence of colonial discourse.

In her introduction to the novel, Salma Khadra Jayyusi comments that the 'figure of the traitor informer appears frequently in modern Arabic literature', a figure who is the antithesis of the hero, 'proud, self-sacrificing, stoic, valiant, and undefeated even in death' (Jayyusi 'Introduction' xvii). The traitor is a scapegoat, portrayed as the reason for the calamities befalling his people, whilst the hero is the redeemer-through-death who gains immortality. Habiby avoids such monolithic constructions of both (and indeed, if Saeed is to be believed, it is he who wins immortality) and undercuts all the tropes of noble lineage and purity of origin. Saeed sets off in conventional tones to describe his ancestry, telling us that 'The Pessoptimist family is truly noble and long established in our land', but it soon becomes clear that his lineage traces to a Cypriot courtesan who cuckolded the great Tamerlane. She then ran off with a Bedouin who subsequently divorced her, thus initiating the Pessoptimist practice of 'divorcing [their] wives right up until the state was founded' (8). As with Shammas in *Arabesques*, Habiby thus demystifies origins and rights to a particular piece of land. At one point Saeed is squashed in the front of a truck between the driver and the military governor and he reflects, as they cross the plain approaching Haifa that '[i]t was useless to search out the anemones that once filled the plain because, I realized, there was no room for the memories of childhood cramped in that narrow seat scarcely large enough for the three of us' (42). Saeed also describes his family's close links with the state in a way that mocks the more accustomed recall of the dead, informing the reader that 'My father, may he rest in peace, did many favors for the state before it was founded. These services of his are known in detail by his good friend Adon (Mr., that is) Safsarsheck, the retired police officer' (9). He adds further insult to the tradition when he describes

his father as a 'martyr' (9) – not only had he been working for the state, but he was hit by a stray bullet during the fighting of 1948 as the family was trying to flee. Habiby uses Saeed's family name, Pessoptimist, to represent the fluctuation between despair and being able to divine a glimmer of salvation in the most desperate of situations, an ability that characterises the lives of Palestinians living in Israel. Saeed explains: 'When I awake each morning I thank the Lord he did not take my soul during the night. If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was no worse. So which am I, a pessimist or an optimist?' (12). It is Saeed's candour and lack of awareness that enable the reader to laugh and, as we laugh, so the rigidity of the stereotypes of heroic lineage and martyrdom (unobtainable and unrealistic for the huge majority) are weakened.

The representation in the novel of more conventional heroes is marked by ambivalence. Saeed's son, Walaa,²¹ joins the *fida'yyin*, discovers his mother's family's secret hoard of treasure and uses it to buy weapons. Found out and cornered in a cave, Walaa refuses to give himself up, despite the pleas of his mother. The conversation between mother and son is revealing. Walaa petulantly lays the blame for the way his life has turned out at the door of his parents. He claims to feel free trapped inside the cave, but Baqiyya answers "If only we were free, my son, we wouldn't quarrel. You'd not bear arms and we'd not ask you to be 'careful'. We act this way because we do seek freedom" (110). Using imagery of nature's cyclical renewal, she argues that there is a time for everything; that to "stick it out some more" in this life is not the same as submissiveness. She tells her son:

"But there are some young men and women among us who have resisted. Be like them! They bore the burden of the longest night and carried the burning sun on their foreheads, and the only way the authorities could force them from the land was by putting them in jail. And the government couldn't demolish their houses over them without also destroying one of their very own myths. But you have given up hope, son." (111)

She asserts their ownership of their land, saying "Sinbad has ended his voyages and has begun seeking treasures in the soil of his own country" (111). Eventually, unable to persuade him, she grabs a gun and joins him, swearing to use her love to protect him. They disappear into the sea together and their bodies are never found. Nancy Coffin argues convincingly that, given Habiby's membership of the Communist Party of Israel, Baqiyya's attempts to persuade Walaa of the value of endurance in an ordinary life can

²¹ His mother had wanted to name him Fathi (which means victor) but the Big Man disapproved and they settled on Walaa (loyalty) (97).

be read in the light of the Party's policy of the late 1960s and early 1970s. She cites Lenin's pamphlet "*Left-Wing*" *Communism, An Infantile Disorder*, in which Lenin criticises 'the "childishness" of German communists who advocated violent and illegal tactics rather than parliamentary electioneering' (Coffin 41). At the end of the novel, when Saeed is perched on his stake, Baqiyya appears and tries to persuade him to descend by saying that Walaa has built him "a palace of seashells there at his side" (158). Walaa's brief attempt at resistance is thus figured as impulsive, adolescent and ultimately as fanciful as a 'palace of seashells', because it is not part of a coherent and planned policy, such a criticism recalling Kanafani's depiction of Hamid's killing of the Israeli soldier.

The encounter with the other freedom fighter portrayed in the novel (the first Yuaad's son, also called Saeed) is also coloured by images of impossible ideals and dreams. This is not to diminish the significance of the meeting in prison. The bloodied, bruised and barely conscious Saeed is mistaken for a fellow *fida'i* and, for the first time in his otherwise wretched life, is regarded as a true hero. Being addressed as 'man', 'brother' and 'father' by the man 'clad in the crimson cloak of kingship' causes him to shed tears of 'pride and gratitude' (131, 132). However, he continues his habit of dissembling in order not to spoil the moment. As the younger Saeed continues to show him respect, Saeed recalls:

He healed my wounds by talking about his own. He kept widening that single tiny window in the wall until it became a broad horizon that I had never seen before. Its netted bars became bridges to the moon, and between his bed and mine were hanging gardens (133)

Talk of 'bridges to the moon' and 'hanging gardens' echo with the imagery of a nurturing feminine landscape that remains forever unattainable. As Baqiyya knew, it was the actual land, however spoilt and transformed, that should be their inspiration. Coffin, rejecting readings of Walaa and the younger Saeed as embodying the way forward for Palestinians, comments on the continuing seductiveness of these visions of heroism, and she argues:

Significantly, the *fida'i* enchants Sa'id while in prison through his utopian words and his heroic appearance rather than through his actions; his dreams and his words do not break through the prison's bars but merely serve to camouflage them. The *fida'i*'s pleasant stories, in turn, inspire in Sa'id a desire to obscure his past rather than confront his awareness of his own imperfect reality. (Coffin 42)

It is also significant that we later learn that the younger Saeed had crossed into Israel from Lebanon – he therefore has little idea of the reality of life for Palestinians within Israel. His revolutionary ideals have instant appeal but he has ended up in jail and Saeed remains unable to break out of his own imprisonment.²² Such ideals, as well as resonating with a valorisation of the masculine and the accompanying denigration of the feminine, are implicitly criticised as relying too much on unrealistic notions of heroism rather than enabling concrete changes for ordinary Palestinians.

By taking the unconventional model of Saeed with all his flaws Habiby makes stock heroes appear one-dimensional. Such a move also opens up a discursive space for the normally unsung heroes and heroines. The significance of women is emphasised by structuring the novel around the three women to whom Saeed is devoted. The first part is named after Yuaad (his first love) which means ‘will return’, or in colloquial Arabic ‘again’ and ‘once more’. The second part is entitled Baqiyya, ‘the one who remains’, and the third is named after Yuaad’s daughter, also called Yuaad. She, of all the characters in the novel, appears to possess what might be termed a revolutionary consciousness. She can see through the excuses, procrastinations and unrealistic dreams that imprison most Israeli-Palestinians within a ‘beasts of captivity’ mentality that prevents them ‘emerg[ing] from their stupor’ (77).²³ When Saeed tells her to hide at a neighbour’s instead of being found and deported, she tries to persuade him of the selfishness that marks inaction. The three women – the two Yuaads and Baqiyya – are identified with action and resistance. To his wish to ‘return to the beginning’, a belief shared by Yuaad’s brother, the imprisoned freedom fighter, she responds sarcastically (addressing him as ‘uncle’):

“He [the younger Saeed] got that idea from his elders; of his beginning an old man remembers only the prime of youth and so thinks fondly of it. Do you really know how the beginning was, uncle? The beginning was not merely sweet memories of pines over Mount Carmel, or orange groves, or the songs of Jaffa’s sailors. And did they really

²² Saeed is aware that his existence is one of imprisonment. At one point he explains – ‘I lived in the outside world – outside the tunnels [where he meets the man from outer space], that is – for twenty years, unable to breath [*sic*] no matter how I tried, like a man who is drowning. But I did not die. I wanted to get free but could not; I was a prisoner unable to escape. But I did remain unchained’ (76).

²³ Saeed’s ‘outer-space friend’ initiates him into the ‘philosophic system of the mystical Ismaili sect’ by telling him this story. “Our forebears in the secret group of loyal friends known as the Brethren of Purity, the *Ikhwan al-Safa*, used to consider people like you to be like beasts of burden, tied together with heavy iron bridles and halters so that they could be led anywhere and could be kept from saying what they might want to say. Thus they would remain until God allowed them to emerge from their stupor, to rise up and resist. This would occur following the appearance of the Voice of God personified. He would set free these people chained like beasts of captivity, humiliated and enslaved by those ruling them. He would punish those who had abused them by placing them in chains in their stead” (77).

sing anyway?

“So you really want to return to the beginning, to mourn your brother torn to pieces by the crane as he carved his living from the rocks. You want to do it all again, from the beginning?” (154)

Through the voice of the younger Yuaad, Habiby critiques the mystification of sacred memories of pines and orange groves. As with Coffin’s argument that heroic stories ‘obscure [the] past’ and fail to confront an ‘imperfect reality’, Yuaad’s insistence on remembering the reality of a former life rather than a dream encourages an engagement with the present, not the past, as an impetus to action. This insistence, along with her determination that she will return, can be taken to represent the ‘real’ Palestine, one that does not admit defeat but that takes account of reality. Habiby could be seen to be redeploying the trope of woman-as-land but in this case Yuaad is not the usual idealisation of the feminine – she is shown sitting cross-legged in trousers, smoking, and talking as an equal with the men around her. It is also possible to read the novel intertextually, as Habiby’s acknowledgement, or mimicking, of concerns such as the ‘lost years’ raised by Kanafani, in which the backward look prevented the nation from entering real time. Saeed cannot return to his youth – that is, to the young Yuaad/Palestine – but Yuaad can return to a re-formed homeland. When Saeed asks her “‘Will you be leaving me?’” she responds, “‘Water cannot truly ever leave the sea, uncle. It evaporates, then returns in winter in the springs and rivers. It will always return’” (154). As well as the comparison with sea linking her to the friend from outer space,²⁴ it is interesting that permanence here is linked to fluidity – movement, appearance, reappearance – normally taken to be a mark of the feminine.

After telling Saeed of the ‘beasts of captivity’ story, his outer-space friend urges him to continue writing the letters, to “‘Tell it [Saeed’s secret] to the world’”, whatever the reception (78). Habiby makes clear throughout the novel that it is the ordinary Palestinian who must awake to consciousness and bring about change within the system that governs their lives. The trouble with the militarism of the armed resistance movement is that it entrenches essentialising and impossible ideals of masculinity. Habiby associates such unrealistic idealism with those on the outside. When Saeed and the younger Yuaad are with some villagers, they hear how the Communists ignore the cordons put up by the Israelis, breaking through them and encouraging the villagers to

²⁴ When Saeed first meets his outer-space friend he is by the sea. We are told: ‘He was wrapped in a blue cloak flecked with white foam, like the lighthouse itself. [. . .] His face was mostly hidden, but I did see wrinkles like those on the surface of the sea when the east wind blows’ (37).

resist. The village headman proclaims that ““they publish reports of our cordon in their newspapers and tell us that the press of free peoples in all parts of the world quotes from them””. Mention of newspapers enrages Yuaad as she remembers how all the talk of victories and heroism stifle the voices of ordinary people. She tells the villagers:

“The papers of the Arab world cordon us with news of ‘victories’, like haloes over the heads of saints; there’s no space for reports of your cordons. They’ve kept on encircling us with the cordons of their victories, until there’s nothing but chaos and we can no longer differentiate between them and the wreaths of flowers set on graves.” (142)

An unrealistic valorisation of the Palestinian fighting spirit becomes a memorial that serves the propaganda of the Arab states, but which effectively kills, or consigns to the grave, the smaller acts of resistance carried out by ordinary villagers. Through his use of humour, Habiby makes it clear that Saeed is proud of his ordinariness – he is the Palestinian Everyman. He relates the Israeli joke about a lion that found its way into the offices of the *Histadrut* (the Labour Union Confederation):

First day it [the lion] ate the director of union organization, but not one of his colleagues noticed. Next day it devoured the director of Arab affairs, but the rest didn’t miss him. So the lion went on roving happily about, munching contentedly. Finally it ate the office boy, and then they caught it right away.

Yep, I’m that office boy, honoured friend. (3-4)

In the second chapter entitled ‘Saeed Reports How His Life in Israel Was All Due to the Munificence of an Ass’, he contends that he considers himself ‘quite remarkable’ because he is the only man he knows who has been saved by a donkey getting in the line of fire. Saeed asks, ‘Tell me, please do, what makes one truly remarkable? Must one be different from all the rest or, indeed, be very much one of them?’ (6-7). He goes on to describe how the newspapers publish the names of ‘everyone notable’ who had been thrown in jail, but the papers ‘merely gave general reference to the rest’. Triumphant, he explains:

The rest – yes, that’s me! The papers haven’t ignored me. How can you claim not to have heard of me? I truly am remarkable. For no paper with wide coverage, having sources, resources, advertisements, celebrity writers, and a reputation, can ignore me. Those like me are everywhere – towns, villages, bars, everywhere. I am “the rest”. I am remarkable indeed! (7)

His naivety in thus describing his sense of importance functions to include all those who are ignored on a daily basis but with whom, as the novel emphasises, the real potential for change resides.

Given the stigma that attaches to collaborators in Palestinian society, it might appear that Habiby took a considerable risk in creating an antihero who proclaims himself to be a 'Leader in the Union of Palestinian Workers' (41) but who is in reality a stooge. However, the proximity to the workings of a brutal and discriminatory authority that Saeed's position offers, along with his eagerness to please his masters at every opportunity,²⁵ an eagerness that is emphasised by his innocence of delivery, provide a perspective on power that strips away pretences of justice and invincibility. It exposes what Bhabha calls the ambivalence of colonial discourse. As their stooge Saeed is, for the Israelis, endlessly knowable, the stereotype that is reassuring but that has to be continually reasserted - he is called 'dim-witted', a 'mule' and an 'ass', and a 'cretin' (43, 121, 127). In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha explains how the stereotype, that which must be 'anxiously repeated', is something 'that needs no proof, [yet] can never really, in discourse, be proved' (66), and is therefore marked by ambivalence. The Israelis with whom Saeed deals are his immediate boss Jacob, a Sephardic Jew, and the 'big man', an Ashkenazi Jew.²⁶ This working relationship not only serves to expose another layer of discrimination within Israeli society, with the 'white' Ashkenazi bullying and frequently humiliating Jacob,²⁷ it also contributes to the dismantling of the construction of a monolithic Other. To them Saeed is their knowable, tame (if exasperating) Palestinian who encapsulates the characteristics of a simple-minded adult, or a child, his representative dim-wittedness justifying their control of him. Yet their brutal methods also require justification, so while Saeed-as-representative Palestinian is docile, he and the rest of his colonised people also have to be figured as savage, uncivilised, dangerous and untrustworthy. Bhabha argues that the 'objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of

²⁵ Jacob promises to find and return Yuaad to Saeed if he serves the state faithfully. Such is Saeed's devotion to Yuaad, that the possibility of her return ensures he 'therefore never rested, never slept, in order to continue [his] pursuit of the Communists'. His incompetence means that while everyone else is rewarded, he and Jacob are not. 'I became his [Jacob's] reward', Saeed remarks innocently (65).

²⁶ The big man is never named, and is also referred by Saeed as 'the big man of small stature'. Habiby uses irony and understatement to cut the 'big man' down to size: at their first meeting, Saeed is told he will meet the 'big man', but when Saeed sees him get up from his chair he notices that 'his height scarcely increased by a hand's breadth' (51).

²⁷ See Smadar Lavie's essay, 'Blowups in the Borderzones: Third World Israeli Authors' Gropings for Home' in Lavie & Swedenburg (eds.), 55-59, for more on the situation of the Ashkenazi in Israeli society.

racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction' (Bhabha *Location* 70). He also explains how 'racist stereotypical discourse' knows the native in such a way that 'discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonized population is then deemed to be both the cause and the effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation' (Bhabha 83). Bhabha's use of the metaphor of imprisonment is echoed throughout *Saeed*: the outer-space friend's picture of the people being enchained in 'heavy iron bridles' which prevents their speaking out; Saeed's awareness of the imprisoning nature of his existence; Walaa's claim that he went to the cave where he is cornered "to breathe free [. . .] to breathe in freedom just once"; and ultimately Saeed finding himself perched 'on the top of a blunt stake', petrified into inaction, unable to decide whether to jump off or not, whether it was real or a nightmare (77, 76, 109, 117).

Early on in their working relationship, when Saeed has paid unauthorised visits to his relatives, the big man explains the Israeli's system of surveillance: "You should realise that we have the latest equipment with which to monitor your every movement, including what you whisper in your dreams. With our modern apparatus we know all that happens, both within the state and outside it" (52). Bhabha argues that colonial discourse's 'predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a "subject people" through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited' (Bhabha 70). The pleasure derived is one of presumed intimate knowledge, yet the Otherness of the Other always produces an excess, a slippage, that escapes knowledge. This is illustrated in the same episode when, in order to halt the big man's questioning, Saeed reveals to the reader: 'I collapsed onto a chair, my head between my hands, shaking violently to and fro, just as my mother had taught us'. The big man gives him a 'fatherly' pat on the shoulder, convinced he has thoroughly frightened him, and Saeed 'refrained from giving the big man [his] opinion of all his ultramodern equipment' (52).

The ambivalence that marks the colonial stereotype leads Jacob and the big man to suspect Saeed's motives whenever he appears over-loyal - that is, whenever he is at his most tame and knowable as the 'most obedient and dignified of servants' (Bhabha 82). His over-eagerness to please leads to his taking his orders to extremes in such a way as to make a mockery of Israeli intentions. Such is the un/knowability of the stereotype that the big man suffers from paranoia (106). Saeed and Baqiyya have only one child because, he explains, '[he] realized that birth control was a proof of loyalty' (97).

Whilst dishonourable motives are difficult to prove, such over-egging of the case is difficult for Saeed's superiors to interpret. Jacob informs him of the big man's suspicions, explaining that "The big man has come to believe that the extravagance of your loyalty is only a way of concealing your disloyalty. He recalls your parentage and character and regards them as proof that you only pretend to be a fool". Saeed responds with a question that encapsulates his predicament (and proves he is no fool), asking "Has the big man ever stopped to ask why I was born only an Arab and could have only this as my country?" (122). It is necessary here to point out that in illustrating Bhabha's theories of the stereotype and mimicry with reference to Saeed I am not suggesting that such linguistic sleights of hand in any way empower the colonised. Habiby's constant use of irony precludes at the outset such an interpretation. Rather, in Saeed's case, the act of appearing to conform is a result of and underscores his position of powerlessness. As he says, he 'was born only an Arab and could have only this as [his] country'.

The incident that leads to the big man's conclusion of disloyalty occurs during the June 1967 war. Saeed is listening to the Arabic-speaking service on Radio Israel when he hears 'the announcer calling upon the "defeated Arabs" to raise white flags on the roofs of their homes'. As 'an extravagant symbol of [his] loyalty to the state', Saeed hoists a sheet on a broomstick on his roof in Haifa. In no time Jacob appears and curses him for his action. The ensuing conversation is worth citing in full as it reveals how Saeed's logic in following the letter of the law makes an 'ass' of that law.

He began to weep, saying "You're finished, old friend of a lifetime; you're finished and so am I along with you."

I tried to explain: "But I raised the sheet on the broomstick in response to the Radio Israel announcer".

"Ass! Ass!" he responded.

"How is it my fault if he's an ass?" I asked. "And why do you only employ asses as announcers?"

He then made it clear that I was the ass to whom he had referred. He also pointed out that all Radio Israel's announcers are Arabs; they must have worded the request badly, he commented, but I must still be a fool to have misunderstood it.

In defense of my own people, the Arabs who worked at the radio station, I said, "The duty of a messenger is to deliver the message. They say only what is dictated to them. If raising a white flag on a broomstick is an insult to the dignity of surrender, it's only because broomsticks are the only weapons you permit us.

"However," I continued, "if, since the outbreak of this war, they too have become some kind of deadly white weapon we are not permitted to carry without a permit, like the shotguns only village chiefs and old men

who've spent all their lives serving the state are permitted to carry, then I'm with you as always, all the way. You know full well, old friend of a lifetime, of my extravagant loyalty to the state, to its security and its laws, whether promulgated or still to be so".

[. . .]

"That announcer," he [Jacob] emphasized, "was telling the West Bank Arabs to raise white flags in surrender to the Israeli occupation. What did you think you were up to, doing that in the very heart of the state of Israel, in Haifa, which no one regards as a city under occupation?"

"But you can't have too much of a good thing" I pointed out.

"No," he insisted, "it's an indication that you do regard Haifa as an occupied city and are therefore advocating its separation from the state." (121-2)

Saeed's actions amount to a form of what Bhabha calls 'mimicry'. In *The Location of Culture* he starts his chapter 'Of Mimicry and Man' with a citation from Jacques Lacan.

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage . . . It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. (85)

Bhabha's interpretation of the ambivalence of colonial mimicry is that it is 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*'; that 'in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference' (86). Bhabha goes on to describe the disturbing effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse: 'For in "normalizing" the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms' (86). As in the incident with the white flag, Saeed, the Other who is 'almost the same, but not quite', constantly produces this effect of excess and slippage that 'alienates' the Israeli mission. Childs and Williams summarise the effect produced by Saeed's proximity to and inside knowledge of colonial authority. It amounts to a crisis that :

[. . .] can be contrasted to, and triggered by, the mimicry that stems from the colonized subject's peculiar awareness of cultural, political, and social inauthenticity, of being ideologically constructed and fixed in representation. A sudden awareness of inauthenticity, of authority's constructed and assumed guise, is the menace of mimicry. (Childs & Williams 130)

As the 'mimic man' *par excellence*, Saeed's narrative is replete with opportunities to expose 'cultural, political, and social inauthenticity'. As we have seen, his mimicking

of the role of loyal member of the state carries overtones of mockery, an area 'between mimicry and mockery' that Bhabha identifies as one where 'the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double' (Bhabha 86).

It is worth citing one more example at length from *Saeed* of how colonial discourse 'repeatedly exercises its authority through figures of farce' (Bhabha 85) and how mimicry 'produces another knowledge of its norms'. Whilst on his way to prison, Saeed is inducted by the big man into the behaviour expected of him on the inside, prompting Saeed to muse: 'I became very more certain that what is required of us inside prison is no different from what is required of us on the outside'. Such is Saeed's accurate anticipation of what is required that the big man suspects he must have been in prison before. The two of them then have a conversation about the humane treatment of Arabs by the state, Saeed starting with the observation that:

"I have merely noticed according to your account of prison rules etiquette and behaviour that your prisons treat inmates with great humanitarianism and compassion – just as you treat us on the outside. And we behave the same, too. But how do you punish Arabs who are criminals, sir?"

"This bothers us considerably. That's why our minister general has said that our occupation has been the most compassionate known on earth ever since Paradise was liberated from its occupation by Adam and Eve.

"Among our leadership there are some who believe that we treat Arabs inside prisons even better than we treat them outside, though this latter treatment is, as you know, excellent. These same leaders are convinced that we thus encourage them to continue to resist our civilizational mission in the new territories, just like those ungrateful African cannibals who eat their benefactors."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, take for example our policy of punishing people with exile. This we award them without their going to jail. If they once entered jail, they would become as firmly established there as the British occupation once was."

"Yes, God bless you indeed, sir!"

"And we demolish their homes when they're outside, but when they're inside prison we let them occupy themselves building."

"That's really great! God bless you! But what do they build?"

"New prisons and new cells in old jails; and they plant shade trees around them too."

"God bless you again! But why do you demolish their homes outside the prison?"

"To exterminate the rats that build their nests in them. This way we save them from the plague."

"God bless and save you! But could you explain that?"

"This was the justification, pure and humanitarian, made by the

Ministry of Health, and quoted by the minister of defense when he explained the reasons compelling us to demolish the houses in the Jiftlick villages in the lowlands. That was the response he gave to the accusations thrown in our faces in the Knesset by that Jewish Communist congressman, that stooge of Nasser, King Husain, the Emir of Kuwait, and Shaik Qabus!”²⁸
(124-5)

But Israeli democracy, ‘not mere chaos, my boy’ solved the problem by forcibly ejecting the trouble-maker from the parliament. An heroic stock figure would be unable to gain such access to the machinations of Israeli colonial reasoning. Mimicry here is enabled by Saeed’s pretence of sympathy, which at first reading appears anything but heroic. However, on closer reading one is forced to question easy assumptions about Saeed’s cowardice: his close proximity to the Israelis constantly unsettles their ‘language of liberty’ and requires a fine balancing act on Saeed’s part in order for him to survive. What makes him a hero is his devotion and loyalty to his women, something that requires all his resourcefulness and artifice to maintain.

Saeed is the antithesis of all that Palestinian manhood should be, yet Habiby’s remarkable novel undermines Israeli moral and cultural superiority in complex ways. Saeed’s engagement with power is not confrontational, but it works from within to produce a menace that cannot be controlled by the usual military means. The effect of mimicry on colonial discourse is more instrumental in exposing the true nature of its self-justification, and its inconsistencies, than a belligerent restatement of entrenched positions. Mimicry is a strategy that works from the inside; it functions as a deconstruction. Habiby was a Palestinian living inside Israel, a member of the Israeli Communist Party who sat in the Knesset, so his use of mimicry, and the ambivalence that accompanies it, could be viewed as obvious. Except that the obvious implies recognisability, and *Saeed* consistently employs strategies of defamiliarisation and fragmentation in order to deny any teleology to the history of Palestinians and Israelis alike. The novel’s deconstruction of the essence of manhood marks *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* as an intervention in the discourse of Palestinian nationalism, an intervention that attempts to accommodate dissimilarity. Its celebration of the absurd is also its way of acknowledging the tragic.

In choosing such an anti-heroic figure, Habiby is writing what Deleuze and Guattari consider a ‘minor literature’, that which ‘doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language [. . .] in its language is

²⁸ Obviously a reference to Habiby himself.

affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization' (Deleuze & Guattari 59). Not only are the Palestinians within Israel a minority but Saeed is also a minority figure within the discourse of masculinist norms of behaviour. To see Habiby's novel through the prism of 'deterritorialization' is additionally instructive given the traditional yoking of ownership of land with normative masculinity. However, the ending of Saeed's story is ambiguous and hardly triumphant. Khater has remarked that 'the absurdities that punctuate the daily lives and histories of Palestinians living in Israel' can be rendered only in literature of an equal absurdity (Khater 77). This absurdity borders on the impossible, an impossibility of both political and literary closure that is, in the end, figured as madness as the hunt for Saeed leads to an insane asylum. The tragicomic nature of Habiby's text refuses closure, yet what it achieves is a demythologising exposure both of the biblically-inspired Zionist enterprise and the stance of the Arab nations encapsulated in the brief history of Palestinian nationalism, a stance that regularly turns defeat into victory.²⁹ Mahar Jarrar argues that the Arabs 'still perceive their history as a series of victories, stuck with the empty jargon of their slogans, language and ideology, and now waiting for an extraterrestrial redeemer, a *mahdi*' (Jarrar 22). However, despite the text's thorough demythologising, Saeed gains self respect only when mis/recognised by his bloodied fellow prisoner who has engaged in heroic physical resistance, however immediately futile his actions may appear. The ordinary Palestinian is exhorted by Habiby to bear witness, to write his story. Both are acts of resistance, one inscribed on the body, the other in letters, both, the novel suggests, capable of fulfilling the third characteristic of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature in which because

[. . .] everything takes on a collective value, because collective or national consciousness is often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down, literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. (Deleuze & Guattari 60)

As might be expected from such a Kafkaesque text, nothing is certain, nothing denied, and the very act of bearing witness, of writing, seems to produce an awareness of history that is ultimately intolerable.

²⁹ See Khalidi 195, and also pages 76-7 of this chapter.

2.iv The politics of a gendered Palestinian nationalism

As the introduction to this chapter argued, the discourse of nationalism is permeated by specifically gendered constructions of the roles citizens are expected to play in the national polity. Joseph Massad has contended that the 'respective responsibilities of men and women to the nation emerged as epistemic cornerstones of nation-building' (Massad 468). As recent studies by Ilham Abu Ghazaleh of the poetry of the *intifada*, and by Massad of the rhetoric of PLO communiqués indicate, the prevalence of the tropes of men as liberators, protectors, heroes, martyrs, and of women as passive, in need of protection, defined by their biological role as birth-givers, continues unabated.³⁰ It might be expected that women's prominent role in the *intifada* – both on the streets protecting the stone-throwers, and in organising committees providing shelter, food and advice to those whose lives had been shattered – would have prompted a change in the way women are perceived and portrayed. That this did not happen is, Ghazaleh argues, significant insofar as 'the way women are portrayed in literature and in anecdotes will lead either to positions of leadership and to involvement in decision making, or as has been the case in history, back to point zero, where the gains of the women's movement will be lost' (Ghazaleh 92). The centrality of the role played by literature in the formation of Palestinian nationalism means that the idealisation/idolisation of masculinity and femininity has profound consequences.

Ghazaleh's study is based on seven books of poetry by seven poets, in addition to 110 poems taken from literary journals, all of which were written by 'mainstream' poets, nearly all of them men. Her analysis indicates that the 'poets of the *intifada*, who are also the intellectuals of the culture, continue to perceive women in terms of reactionary ideologies and pre-*intifada* ideas', and that they (women) are chiefly 'perceived as entities whose primary role is to give birth' (Ghazaleh 93). She breaks down her analysis by categorising the images of women presented in the poetry, listing them in the order of their 'predominance'. Her first four categories are 'Women as Biological Entities' (sub-divided into 'The Biological Functions of Women' and 'The Sociobiological Characterization of Women'), 'Women as Static Entities' ('Women and Passivity' and 'Women as Recipients of Action'), 'Women as Emotionally Tortured

³⁰ In 'Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine: Engendering the Intifada', Leila Hudson conducts a similar survey of gender imagery in *intifada* songs (Hudson 125-28).

Entities', and 'Women and Housework'.³¹ Such ways of perceiving women places them in marginal and relatively powerless positions.

The predominance of images of women as biological entities emphasises their reproductive capacity at the expense of their intellectual ability and their participation in *intifada* political and social action.³² Pregnancy and birth are placed under the banner of revolutionary struggle, as is made clear in a poem by Abdul-latif Barghouti, one line of which reads "The women in the heart of Arabism, in the beloved Palestine, today give birth to stones" (Ghazaleh 94). Women's biological function is thus co-opted to the masculine sphere of nationalist agency. In addition, Ghazaleh discovered a continuing emphasis on the importance to the nation of women's chastity and virginity, a rhetoric that places further constraints on women adopting an effective public role, and on the poetic practice of using miscarriage as a symbol for the suffering of the nation – again a feminine and personal experience co-opted to stand for a national catastrophe. Women are prized not only for their chastity but also for physical features such as long flowing hair and a small waist. Ghazaleh explains that in a society where there was strict segregation of the sexes, a glimpse of such features would have occasioned an erotic poem. That these features continue to inflect the poetry of the *intifada* indicates a lack of recognition of the changing and increasingly public role of women in the nationalist project. Ghazaleh writes:

Instead, many poets describe women who participated in the intifada as brides – with all the symbolism of male domination that this image reflects – when they could have described them as heroines and full participants in the struggle to loosen the grip of occupation. (Ghazaleh 96)

Instead, women are still overwhelmingly portrayed as passive entities, as these lines from a poem by Yousef Hamed show: "She awaits the knight . . . he takes her . . . the sea passed her by . . . she awakened in delirium, crying like a child worn out by massacres . . . defeated by time . . . gazing" (Ghazaleh 97). Apart from the common

³¹ The remaining categories are 'Women and the Act of Speaking', 'Women and Gender Relations' ('The Nullification of Women', 'Women as Nonactualized Entities', 'Women as Semiactualized Entities', 'Women through Blood Relations', 'Women and Sadistic/Masochistic Relationships', 'Women and Uneven Relationships', and 'Women as Targets of the Imperative Verb'), 'Positive Attitudes toward Women', 'The Portrayal of Women in the Work of Female Poets', 'The Annulment of Women in Women's Poetry', 'The Annulment of the Personal', 'Alienation', 'Women as Dependent Entities', 'Women's Pain and Sadness in Other Literary Canons', and 'Women's Time'. (Ghazaleh 94-108)

³² R.W. Connell asserts that gender practices are founded on bodily performance. He writes: 'Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. [. . .] Gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body.' (Connell 71)

conflation of land and woman, the poem emphasises the active and vital role of the man as 'knight', whereas the woman is, in effect, hysterical and helpless, and in need of rescue by a man. Sharoni comments that, despite some changes in attitude towards Palestinian women prisoners, the 'nation is still depicted as a woman's body whose violation by the enemy forces its men to rush to her defence' (Sharoni 39). Such an emphasis on women as 'recipients of action' can be read, Ghazaleh contends, as 'an unconscious desire to deny women credit for their work'. Taking this observation a step further means that 'the glorification of passive women could also mask certain male fears that these women might some day demand total equality' (Ghazaleh 98). Connell argues that such a rhetorical rendition amounts to 'cultural disarmament' when he claims that '[p]atriarchal definitions of femininity (dependence, fearfulness) amount to a cultural disarmament that may be quite as effective as the physical kind' (Connell 83). Such a tendency, which Ghazaleh terms the 'nullification of women', is most obvious in lines such as "'My country, oh mountains of manhood . . . Men in these times are my wealth'" (Muhammad Hneihen), and "'We won . . . All victories and glory are for the men'" (Yusif Shhadeh) (Ghazaleh 101). The poetry also emphasises women's traditional domestic roles and their value as supporters and cheerleaders, and despite being idolized and placed on a pedestal, they are nevertheless considered subordinate to men. Frequently, if women's actions are acknowledged, the women are referred to as mother, sister, or daughter. This makes them 'an appendage to men' (Ghazaleh 102), and it allows men to bask in reflected glory.³³

Ghazaleh concludes that the concepts of masculinity and femininity embedded in the poetic canon prevent men from acknowledging the changing role of women, and, significantly, she also sees such concepts as being embedded within the system of patriarchy and the power it invests in men. She explains:

The inability of poets to question fossilized images of women and poetic canons has its roots in the inability of the same male poets to consider as individuals a challenge to the patriarchal system, to their authority and autonomy, in the text. The ability of poets to question literary norms is a reflection of their ability to challenge and question the superstructures of the culture, including the patriarchal paradigm and the semitribal institutions that reflect this paradigm. (Ghazaleh 108)

³³ Enloe observes that 'frequently [nationalists] have urged women to take active roles in nationalist movements, but confined them to the roles of ego-stroking girlfriend, stoic wife or nurturing mother'. (Enloe 62)

Yuval-Davis reminds us that although distinct from power relations, the discourse of religion and culture is 'always embedded in them' (Yuval-Davis 42-3). The positioning of women in literary and political discourse is therefore intimately connected with both tradition and patriarchal structures of power. As was seen in earlier poetry, there is a distinct 'othering' of the feminine, which places women in what Yuval-Davis terms an 'ambivalent position within the collectivity'. She explains:

On the one hand [. . .] they often symbolize the collectivity unity, honour and the *raison d'être* of specific national and ethnic projects, like going to war. On the other hand, however, they are often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic, and retain an object rather than a subject position. [. . .] In this sense the construction of womanhood has a property of 'otherness'. Strict cultural codes of what it is to be a 'proper woman' are often developed to keep women in this inferior power position. (Yuval-Davis 47)

From the evidence presented by Ghazaleh it seems that women continue to be seen by many as national symbols rather than being treated as active participants in the national struggle; Ghazaleh, Connell and Yuval-Davis all read such a portrayal as being embedded in patriarchal power structures.

As any challenge to the 'dominant fiction' of patriarchal power is constantly deferred, so the masculinist attitudes expressed in earlier poetry and in the poetry of the *intifada* also permeate political discourse. Massad analyses the communiqués of the PLO and the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) for their gender bias. One of the two founding documents produced by the PLO, the Palestinian Nationalist Charter,³⁴ presents the Zionist conquest of Palestine as a 'rape of the land' (Massad 470). In anti-colonial discourse, such a trope is by no means unusual, but Massad shows how such gendering then constitutes the very nature of 'Palestinianness'. The Palestinian National Charter (the other founding charter of the nation) states that Palestinian identity is conferred on "Arab citizens" who resided within historic Palestine prior to 1947 and on "everyone who is born of an Arab Palestinian father after this date". It states that Palestinian identity is a "genuine, inherent and eternal trait and is transmitted from fathers to sons" (Massad 472).³⁵ Massad interprets these statements as meaning that after the 'rape' it is necessary to be born to a Palestinian father (whose Palestinianness was established by virtue of his residence in the

³⁴ Massad explains: 'These charters functioned as a sort of constitution, defining Palestinian political goals, Palestinian rights, indeed "Palestinianness" itself. They were the founding documents of the new generation of Palestinian nationalists.' (Massad 470)

³⁵ All citations from Massad's article retain Massad's original emphases.

motherland prior to 1947) in order to acquire Palestinian identity, so that 'it is the sons of these fathers who will continue the reproduction of the Palestinian people'. He continues:

In sum, while the land as mother was responsible for the reproduction of Palestinians until 1947, the rape disqualified her from this role. It is now fathers who reproduce the nation. *Territory was replaced by paternity.*

The disqualification of the land as mother in her national reproductive role, in the Charter, does not deny that the land, as mother, can produce children, but rather that, since the rape, it can no longer be relied upon to reproduce *legitimate* Palestinian children. (Massad 472)

Not only do such rhetorical moves place women outside the sphere of nationalist agency, they also denigrate the land/woman. It/she becomes impure, contaminated, and somehow responsible for the 'rape'. What Massad calls 'this metaphoric schema' was seen at work in poems such as Sayigh's 'A National Hymn' and Hamdan's 'To Jerusalem' (both discussed earlier), and it illustrates El-Sohl and Mabro's contention that 'honour is seen more as men's responsibility and shame as women's'. Men are absolved of responsibility for allowing the 'rape' to happen and, at the same, only they, not women, are invested with the power to confer true (uncontaminated) Palestinianness. The discrepancy that was seen to occur in some poetry, between the idealised figure of woman/land and her burden of dishonour, would appear to crop up again in political discourse.

Such a slippage carries over to UNLU communiqués where there is an emphasis on women's biological and sociobiological roles as birth-givers and nurturers. Communiqué No. 5 refers to Palestinian women as *manabit*, which Massad translates as 'the soil on which "manhood, respect and dignity" grow' (Massad 474). Another salutes "the *mother of the martyr* and her celebratory ululations, for she has ululated twice, the day her *son* went to fight and was martyred, and the day the state was declared" (Massad 474). The description of woman in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence as "courageous [. . .] the *guardian* of our survival and our lives, the *guardian* of our perennial flame" (Massad 476) can be seen as an attempt to negotiate between women's changing roles by acknowledging their participation in the national struggle, and at the same time reinforcing images associated with traditional ideas of femininity. Whilst women are considered to be the guardians of Palestinian survival, another communiqué describes the Palestinian people as the "makers [conceived of in the masculine] of glory, respect and dignity". Massad adds that '[w]hile men actively

create glory, respect, and dignity, women are merely the soil on which these attributes, along with manhood, grow' (Massad 474).

Massad also analyses the communiqués in terms of gender specificity where more general appellations such as 'individuals' are used. At times the call to Palestinians embraces both men and women; at others it addresses only men where pronouns such as it, you and your are masculine. Examples of where the pronouns are masculine are "“You are the stronger body, you are the continuously pulsating artery among our people”"; "“your strong arms which shake the foundations of the Zionist occupation are the same arms which will build the independent Palestinian state”"; and where the Palestinian people's body is described, in images that do not need elucidation, as a "“giant [which] has *erected* itself and will not *bow*”" (Massad 479). The significance of the rhetoric and grammar of the communiqués is not only that women are marginalized as nationalist agents (they can only reproduce future agents), but also that they conceive the masculine in terms of physical prowess (only the able-bodied, those capable of fighting and resisting). If, as Massad contends, 'the mobilizing metaphors of nationalist movements [. . .] reflect the fundamental assumptions of nationalist thought' (Massad 469), then such metaphors produce a clear division with little space being permitted to women in performing anything other than traditional roles. He reasons that:

[. . .] struggling against Israeli occupiers and colonizers is not only an affirmation of Palestinian nationalist agency, it is also a masculinizing act enabling the concrete pairing of nationalist agency and masculinity (the two always already paired conceptually) and their logical inseparability within discourse of nationalism. *Resisting occupation therefore can be used to stage masculine acts as it performs nationalist ones.* (Massad 480)

Such a discourse allows no self-expression or agency to any (not only women) who cannot perform Palestinian nationalism. In this context, the significance of a text like *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessimist* becomes abundantly clear.

It is also necessary, however, to be aware of the value of the masculinizing act. In an essay entitled 'Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence', Julie Peteet examines the way in which Palestinian youths have appropriated the significance of the beatings regularly handed out to them. For the Israelis, the policy of what Yitzhak Rabin termed "“might, power and beatings”" (Peteet 'Male' 105) to quell the uprising was designed to impress upon the Palestinian population their lack of autonomy and the hopelessness of military struggle. However, Palestinian male youths used the beatings as a rite of passage to manhood and

masculinity. Peteet explains that ‘rather than being mute repositories or sites on which the occupier exhibited and constructed power and affirmed its civilization and identity, the meaning of the beating has been appropriated by the subject in a dialectical and agential manner’ (Peteet ‘Male’ 106). The Israeli occupation has severely curtailed Palestinian males’ opportunities for demonstrating a fully realised masculinity; not only has the traditional marker of manhood (ownership of the land) long since been removed, but also, as Peteet points out, children regularly witness their fathers being beaten and humiliated by Israeli forces.³⁶ Leila Hudson makes a similar point when she argues that stone-throwing is seen as a ‘rite of passage in a society for which premarital sexual exploits within the community are taboo, and economic opportunities [. . .] are extremely limited’. She goes on to quote a journalist who points out that: “‘To throw a stone is to be ‘one of the guys’; to hit an Israeli car is to become a hero; to be arrested and not confess to having done anything is to be a man’” (Hudson 131). The beaten body becomes a text on which are inscribed signs of resistance, a symbol of nationhood that cannot be erased. In addition, the beaten bodies of so many Palestinian youths are signifiers of the brutality of Israeli occupation, and of the honour, bravery and sacrifice needed to resist and bear witness, and, by extension, of the moral superiority of the victims. Instead of being the intended lesson in disempowerment, the beating enables an empowerment of self that refuses to submit to the signifying practice of the dominating party.

What remains unchanged, however, is the gender imbalance in the politics of representation: the men have the authority and power to shape meaning, whereas the women have their symbolism thrust upon them. Joanne Nagel concedes that women do have ‘roles to play in the making and unmaking of states’, but she makes the important point that ‘the scripts in which these roles are embedded are written primarily by men, for men, and about men, and [. . .] women are by design supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women’s “proper place”’ (Nagel 243). If one uses literature as a cultural barometer then the conclusion is drawn that an impasse has been reached. On the one hand, the continuing setbacks (1967, the failure of the doomed Oslo Accords to produce peace, the brutal suppression of the Al-Aqsa *intifada*, the continuing appropriation of Palestinian land on the West Bank by Israeli

³⁶ Peteet explains that ‘Arab masculinity (*rujulah*) is acquired, verified and played out in the brave deed, in risk-taking, and in expressions of fearlessness and assertiveness. It is attained by constant vigilance and willingness to defend honour (*sharaf*), face (*qajh*), kin and community from external aggression and to uphold and protect cultural definitions of gender-specific propriety’. (Peteet ‘Male’ 107)

settlements) can be read against Said's description of existential rupture pointing to the precariousness of the Palestinians' 'historical continuity as a people'. Within such a schema, the maintenance of belief in the dominant fiction ('the commensurability of penis and phallus') is vital to the cultural survival of the group. On the other hand, it could be argued that such an impasse is the result of the failure of the model of Palestinian nationalism to represent itself in terms other than those predicated on a traditional conceptualisation of gender roles. Ghazaleh's point that individual male writers' inability to question poetic tradition mirrors a wider inability to question outmoded and constraining cultural social models is therefore important here. McClintock argues that if 'nationalism is not deeply informed, and transformed, by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege' (McClintock 'No Longer' 122). The concern for many Palestinian citizens (not only women) is that the interval between loss of the land and the regaining of territorial sovereignty (however limited) will have failed to produce a model of masculinity that is not predicated on domination (of land and women). The importance of literature as a realm in which a construction of alternative societal models can be imagined is therefore paramount.

3. 'SHARON AND MY MOTHER-IN-LAW': PALESTINIAN WOMEN FIGHT AND WRITE ON TWO FRONTS¹

*You do not know how hard it is,
transfiguring blood into ink –
emerging from one's secret dream
to voicing the dream.*

(Laila al-Sa'ih, 'Intimations of Anxiety', *AMPL* 272-3)

Record:

I am a strong woman.

Discrimination does not crush me and racism does not weaken me.

I demand my equality to you in the name of justice and freedom,

Because I have proven myself in every field of life,

*And when I emerged into the world, I decided to change the basis of my
education.*

(Najat Aqari, 'Record: I am a Woman', *Roded* 263-4))

If, as the previous chapter argued, the discourse of Palestinian nationalism is, in Massad's words, 'masculine based' and 'conceives of nationalist agency in masculine terms', how do women position themselves in relation to this ideology that posits men as active agents and women as recipients of action? For the past century, Palestinian existence has been rendered largely in metaphors of war and battle; if not actively involved in militarised conflict, the nation has felt itself besieged and embattled, fighting for its very survival. And the narrative of war overwhelmingly belongs to men. In her study of the formation of both Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms, Sheila Katz observes that:

National narratives are, in fact, gendered texts at a number of different levels: (1) in the centrality of notions of manhood and masculinity to nationalism, (2) in the feminization of the land as the central symbol of survival, (3) in the ways nationalists imagined women, (4) in the ways modernization co-opted gender to shape nationalism, and (5) in the ways women colluded with or contested these constructions. (Katz 86-7)

In such narratives, women do not speak for themselves but are represented by men. As Katz remarks, '[r]eading nationalist texts is a lesson in the power of silence' (Katz 86), that is, the silencing of women. In 'Arab Women Arab Wars' Miriam Cooke makes a

¹ *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* is the title of a memoir by Suad Amiry of living through the siege of Ramallah from November 2001 to September 2002. Sharon represents the oppression of the Israeli occupation. The mother-in-law represents the power of the fading but still present family structure. Women accrue power through being the mothers of sons and often, though not in this case, are tyrannical mothers-in-law.

similar point. She notes the collaboration demanded by the war myth as it seeks to become 'the ultimate ordering principle' (Cooke 'Women' 10), what Silverman would describe as the necessity of maintaining belief in the dominant fiction. Cooke adds that men, in shaping these war myths, 'remember the components that add to the notion that war is an arena for the display of men's manliness and heroism' (Cooke 'Women' 10). However, in recent years Palestinian women, particularly the poorer women and those in refugee camps both inside the Occupied Territories and in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, have been in the front line of the battle for survival as, increasingly, what was formerly considered a private and domestic domain has become a target in the military struggle against the Palestinians. Speaking of the Algerian war of independence, Cooke points out that the masculine myth of war can be unsettled by 'ill-shaped components, e.g. the heroic women combatants' (Cooke 'Women' 10). In the Palestinian situation, so many women have had the role of 'heroic woman combatant' forced upon them, not just those few who join the *fida'yyin*. The rendering of daily lives that have become swamped by the battle for survival needs to be heard.

Indeed, Palestinian women's writing appears to be structured around sets of dichotomies in a way that men's writing is not. When men write about themselves there is an underlying assumption that they represent the whole nation; their discourse revolves around the self, taken to be both individual and collective.² Palestinian women's discourse addresses the Other, not the self, yet this Other has two faces, that of the colonial oppressor, and the entity that has traditionally dominated their lives - a societal structure in which they are positioned as secondary. In an essay entitled 'Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature' Sabry Hafez explains some of the reasons why women have been reticent in expressing their personal views and why their speech and writing have not been accorded the same status as that of male writers. He comments on 'the male belief that the silent woman is by definition chaste, for verbal intercourse leads inevitably to sexual intercourse' (Hafez 163). It is not difficult to see how in a society that not only accords female honour such paramountcy but also is structured in such a way as to enforce the maintenance of honour, that the ideal of the

² Boaz Shoshan comments on how in both Judaism and Islam religious fundamentalism and 'the apparently secular discourse of nationalism' draw on the metaphor of nation as family to construct women's 'natural' place as belonging in the private sphere of the home. 'As a result,' argues Shoshan, 'whereas the young male's experience could stand for the entire national experience and serve as a symbol for national drama par excellence, the young woman's experience has been considered to be personal experience tout court'. (Shoshan xiii)

silent woman has been internalised.³ In her introduction to Arabic women's autobiography, Fadia Faqir speaks of a 'kind of censorship' that applies only to women. It is, she continues, 'being accused of having no *sharaf* (honour) [. . .] A good Muslim woman must be *mastura*, a word meaning "chaste", with connotations of "hidden" and "silent"' (Faqir 12). For a woman to cross such a cultural dividing line risks accusations of whoredom. Faqir also comments on how the strict division of public and private spheres in many Arab countries means that for women to 'expose the inner self publicly, is to risk losing the respect of the family, immediate community and society at large' (Faqir 14). According to Hafez, there is also a religious ramification concerning women's writing of the self.

In a patriarchal society the literary discourse reflects a social structure whose dynamics are based on a power relationship in which women's interests are subordinated to those of men. Patriarchy in general is a social order which structures norms of behaviour, patterns of expectations and modes of expression, but in Arabic culture it has acquired a divine dimension through the religious ratification of the supremacy of men enshrined in the Qur'an. (Hafez 155)

By extension, the private domain of women and their ordinary lives does not deserve such religious ratification and, furthermore, the language of official male discourse is opposed to the colloquial and everyday speech through which women know and express themselves. According to Faqir, '[t]he Arabic language is misogynist and whenever the gender is not clear the masculine overpowers the feminine' (Faqir 18). In addition, Faqir comments on the 'radical dichotomy between everyday colloquial and formal language', adding that the latter, with its 'rigid structure and religious roots', is unsuitable for women's self-expression. Instead, she argues, women have to 'search for a new language free of the religious and dominant' (Faqir 21-2).

If, as these writers argue, 'woman' is expected to be largely silent and spoken for, so it follows that there is likely to be a dichotomy between how they are perceived within their culture and how they perceive themselves. Such a phenomenon is not unique to Arabic culture (although perhaps more intensely experienced). Susan Stanford Freidman (drawing on the work Sheila Rowbotham) contends that a woman cannot

³ Julie Peteet writes: 'Kandiyoti (1987) argues that continuities in Middle East women's experiences are embedded in the culturally defined systems of control over women's sexuality that crosscut class and sect and are expressed in an honour/shame complex that constrains women's public and sexual behaviour and the norms and structures of segregation that govern male-female interaction. Corporate control of female sexuality and reproductive potential was expressed in the practice of early and arranged marriages and a sexual double standard' (Peteet *Gender* 21).

‘experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined *as woman*, that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture’ (Freidman 75). Rowbotham argues that the ‘prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirrors’ and that therefore the reflection of herself that a woman sees is the cultural representation of the category ‘woman’ (Rowbotham 27). Commenting on these theories, Friedman says that ‘alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech’ (Freidman 76).

Whilst being wary of generalising across cultures, especially given the specificity of the Palestinian situation, these arguments about the nature of women’s writing are useful to bear in mind. The daily reality of life for Palestinians is that their nation is still fighting for an acceptable degree of sovereignty and that they are living under an oppressive occupation of their homeland. Parallels are frequently drawn between the situation of Palestinian women and that of Algerian women during the war of independence, but there are important differences. On the whole, in the Algerian case women returned to the home once independence was gained and writers such as Assia Djebar have sought to retrieve their stories. Palestinian women, however, are taking on increasingly public roles, and statistics show that Palestinian girls are outstripping their male counterparts in terms of educational achievement.⁴ It is these two facets – the national struggle and an increasing sense of empowerment – that both inflect the writing of Palestinian women and make it unique. It is undeniable that the national struggle has afforded opportunities for women to adopt a more public and independent role, and a freedom from many of the restraints traditionally imposed on their behaviour, but it is debatable whether such empowerment has changed their status to the same extent. Amal Jamal argues that the ‘Palestinian women’s movement grew up within the confines of the national movement’ and that therefore ‘the national struggle has conditioned the way in which women were involved in political struggle’. She cautions that in order fully to understand ‘the Palestinian women’s movement’s inability to overcome social barriers and become influential at the level of state-building’ we need

⁴ Therese Saliba and Jeanne Kattan quote, using a 1995 report, *Requirements for Gender Development in Palestinian Society*, that ‘on average, the illiteracy rate among females in Palestinian society is twice that of males; however, literacy among younger women has increased so rapidly as to exceed male literacy rates. [. . .] Statistics from a 1993 report show that females ages [*sic*] sixteen to nineteen enjoy a higher literacy rate than males the same age’. (Saliba & Kattan 87)

to take into account 'the structures of domination in which women's identities and differences are produced', and the fact that they were expected to leave 'the main battlefield – military or political – to "real soldiers"' (Jamal 258-9). However, resisting occupation has undoubtedly led to a questioning of traditional 'structures of domination' to the extent that Rita Giacaman declares: 'What we have, in effect, is a revolution of rising expectations amongst Palestinian women; precisely a consciousness change' (quoted in Usher 40). On the other hand, in an interview given in 1995, the novelist Liana Badr asks 'Why go to war or engage in conflict to liberate Palestine if I will come here and be a slave again? [. . .] And all of us today, Palestinian women know, that we have many restrictions and they don't accept us as equal persons' (Saliba & Kattan 91-2). The national cause can be seen as a mixed blessing: on the one hand creating opportunities to break with the pattern of a gendered division of labour; on the other hand, its primacy acts to postpone any radical restructuring of gendered hierarchies of power and dominance. In addition, debates concerning the modernity or traditionalism of nationalist movements are concentrated in constructions of gender: women are either shown to be 'liberated' as a sign of modernity, or are expected to be carriers of traditional values. As Kandiyoti remarks, nationalism 'presents itself both as a modernist project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities and as a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past' (Kandiyoti 'Identity' 378). While men think about self-liberation in nationalist terms, women are concerned with the liberation of men (the nation), an imperative that tends to dilute expressions of a desire for a liberation of the feminine. Joseph Zeidan says of Palestinian women novelists that 'the search for personal identity became absorbed in the search for national identity, even to the extent of sacrificing the former for the sake of the latter' (Zeidan 170). Radhakrishnan asks: 'Why is that the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics?' (Radhakrishnan 185). He also wants to know:

Why is it that nationalism achieves the ideological effect of an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse, whereas the women's question [. . .] remains ghettoized within its specific and regional space? In other words, by what natural or ideological imperative or historical exigency does the politics of nationalism become the binding and overarching umbrella that subsumes other and different political temporalities? (186)

These comments were made principally with the Indian context in mind, but they sum up the predicament in which Palestinian women find themselves, the double bind of gender inequality and the national imperative.

One of the most striking features of Palestinian women writers and their writing is the way in which they negotiate a space for themselves as women as well as members of an embattled collective. In her discussion of women's writing on the Lebanese civil war, Cooke makes the point that: 'Women wrote out of an unexpressed assumption of the commonality of their experience. Their concern was not to gain acceptance into a predominantly male preserve but rather to register a voice' (Cooke *Voices* 87). The same observations can be applied to Palestinian women writers. They do not wish to write as men,⁵ perpetuating the myth-making of war writing, but to register a different voice, one that will represent an alternative vision of a normally unsung heroism and one that is necessary to achieve an inclusive national vision.⁶ In deciding to divide this chapter into sections relating to 'Women and Voice', 'Women and Nation', and 'Women Write War', I am aware there is a certain unavoidable overlap, but I believe the three sections each highlight major concerns of Palestinian women writers.

3.i 'I have learned to live in my voice': rewor(l)ding the feminine⁷

I will start this section with a detailed examination of Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography, *A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography*, first published serially in 1978. She was born into the notoriously conservative, upper-class society of Nablus in 1917.⁸ Given the various restraints on women's self-expression, it is a remarkably frank, brave and iconoclastic work, and it articulates a tension between the personal and the political

⁵ Sahar Khalifeh, whose novel *Wild Thorns* will be discussed in this chapter, raises the matter of women feeling that in order to be accepted they should write as men. She admits: 'When I first started writing, I started imitating men. I just wanted to be successful as a writer like men.' When an Egyptian publisher pointed out to her that nobody would know that *Wild Thorns* had been written by a woman, she concedes: 'That was true to a certain extent; to a *big extent* that was true. I wanted to be successful in portraying the suffering of my people like a man, because women usually have portrayed their own suffering as women, and I wanted to prove that as a woman, I can do better than men.' (quoted in Saliba & Kattan 90)

⁶ In *After the Last Sky*, Edward Said recognises 'a fundamental problem – the crucial absence of women'. He continues: 'With few exceptions, women seem to have played little more than the role of hyphen, connective, transition, mere incident. Unless we are able to perceive at the interior of our life the statements women make – concrete, watchful, compassionate, immensely poignant, strangely invulnerable – we will never fully understand our experience of dispossession.' (Said *After* 77)

⁷ The idea of putting the 'I' into brackets I took from the title of Anette Mansson's *Passage to a new wor(l)d: Exile and Restoration in Mahmoud Darwish's writings 1960-19995*

⁸ In her introduction to *A Mountainous Journey*, Salma Khadra Jayyusi describes the social atmosphere of Nablus, and 'its vigilant watchfulness over the slightest deviation from traditional norms (in both personal and political experience), its jealous gossip and harsh expectations' (Jayyusi 'Introduction' *MJxi*).

that takes on the dimensions of a battle marked by dogged determination. Just as for centuries in the Western canon autobiography was a male preserve in which only 'the great and the good' had a right to claim a place, so too in the Arabic literary tradition it was the male voice that dominated. The drive towards wholeness; towards an uncomplicated meshing of the 'I' doing the writing and the 'I' being spoken about; the sense of representing the norm; the sense of an organic self on a teleological progression from past to future – all these features were assumed naturally to belong to the male autobiographer. Such a construction of autobiography, argues Shari Benstock, rests upon assumptions of conscious artistic and personal control and upon authority, authority to 'represent the phallic power that drives inexorably toward unity, destiny sameness' (Benstock 19). Faqir makes similar points concerning autobiography within Arabic literary culture. Whereas for men, she writes, 'the "I" created in the narrative is considered to be that of the author, and the self created in the medium of language, not to be erased but to be immortalised', for women it is not as straightforward. For women, '[t]his confidence and certitude about the self and its position in history and language is lacking'. Commenting on the contributors to her volume of Arab women's autobiographical writing, she observes that most of them 'wrote their texts to negotiate a textual, sexual, linguistic space for themselves within a culture which is predominantly male-dominated' (Faqir 6). For Fadwa Tuqan, her writing became not an exemplar of that male-inflected authority of the universal 'I', but a rebuttal of that authority. In *A Mountainous Journey* she writes:

The man dominated family life, as in all homes of our society. The woman had to forget that the word 'no' existed in the language, except when she repeated, 'There is no God but God', in her ablutions and prayers. 'Yes' was the parroted word instilled in her from infancy, to become embedded in her consciousness for the rest of her life.

The right to express her feelings or views was prohibited. Laughing and singing were also taboo and could be indulged in only secretly, after the men, the lords and masters, left for work. Personal independence was a concept foreign to a woman all her life. (36)

Tuqan shows how the negative, that 'no' that a woman is not permitted to utter, in her case eventually emerges from a pit of non-identity that is intended to socialise girls to produce the parroted 'yes'.

Tuqan's autobiography frequently revolves around an opposition of a dark void of nothingness and an alternative world, symbolised by light and life, of the written word. From the beginning she is aware of being unwanted, unloved, and unrecognised as a

unique individual, but her willingness to confront and analyse such feelings enables her to understand the nature of the patriarchy that would keep her silenced. She was an unwanted child, a seventh pregnancy (of an eventual ten) that her mother attempted to abort. For her father, 'wealth and sons were life's status symbols' so another daughter was a disappointment. Her mother, 'overcome with the burden of pregnancy', fulfilled her assigned cultural role to produce children: 'This fertile soil – just like the soil of Palestine – continued to present Father regularly with sons and daughters' (13). The reality of this ideology of glorious motherhood is thus shown to depersonalise the mother and is rendered as her lack of control over her own body and sexuality, and her helplessness to decide her destiny. To her mother, Fadwa seemed something of a nonentity. She didn't know her daughter's date of birth and was able to compute it only because it coincided with the death of a male cousin. Whilst her mother told amusing anecdotes about her brothers' and sisters' childhoods, she told not 'one simple anecdote' about Fadwa's, despite her pleadings, making her daughter feel that she had 'no place in [her mother's] memory' (19). Her father 'never showed any sort of concern or affection for [her]', a neglect that hurt her deeply (112). When her sister excitedly told their father that Fadwa was learning to write poetry, the small details of the response are scored on her memory:

With a flick of his wrist, he resumed drinking his black coffee. This wave of the hand conveyed his complete contempt, making me cringe and recoil within myself. He doesn't believe I am good for anything, I said to myself. He has no feelings for me except indifference, as though I'm nothing, as though I'm a nonentity, a vacuum, as if there is absolutely no need for me to exist (59).

The psychological disempowerment of this feeling of being a 'nonentity', a 'vacuum', assume a motif in *A Mountainous Journey* of the writer being in a 'well' or an 'abyss' (54, 81). It is as if the disjuncture between the role prescribed for her and how she feels herself to be is more than just a gap. It is a void which has the power of sucking her down, a vacuum which will be filled either with 'love and goodness, or hate and evil' and which has the power to destroy the self (53).

Such symbols, redolent with violence and coercion, find their apogee in the sense of the home as prison. Such is its overwhelming significance, that it is set out in the second page of her story.

The iron mould the family cast us in and would not allow us to break, the time-worn rules difficult to overturn, the mindless traditions imprisoning the girl in a life of trivialities . . . I yearned continually to escape

from my time and place. The time was an age of subjection, repression and dissolution into nothingness; the place was the prison of the house. (12)

The consequences of such confinement are described in imagery that recall her sense of being cast into a pit, such as that into which Joseph's brothers might have thrown him, with 'poisonous reptiles lurking in the corners or slithering along the sides here and there' (54). Life in the house is likened to that of chickens in a coop, 'filled with domesticated birds, content to peck the feed thrown to them, without argument. That was their be-all and end-all' (110). But just as chickens deprived of light and freedom can viciously turn on each other, so the atmosphere between the women was frequently one of jealousy, pettiness and suspicion. The poems Tuqan wrote at this time express her fear and despair, but there is no sense she has been defeated. The same imagery occurs in her poetry of her life as a barren and treacherous road, where the best that can be hoped for is to avoid the pits that represent a crushing of the spirit. This poem, given along with others at the end of her memoir, is entitled simply 'From the early poetry', and it reads:

She looked with trepidation
at all the pits behind her.
Could she see in them any rays of sunshine?
Perhaps the terrible present
might find consolation in the past,
from the cruelty of the present
yet she saw nothing but hope's wreckage
cast up on the rocks,
and a few torn remnants of dreamy love
tangled with sarcasm.

She looked ahead
to a future wrapped in clouds.
What did she see?
untrammelled desert, bewildering paths
with landmarks confused and scattered
no signs of the road,
and herself wandering tremulously
companied by loneliness,
and harsh unquenchable thirst,
in a heart swirling after mirage. (209)⁹

The only positive in the poem is that of 'dreamy love', but even if it is only a dream it is not allowed to exist. 'Sarcasm' distorts what should be natural and becomes a plant with vicious thorns that tear the dream apart. Her sense of alienation from all life

⁹ The poems of Tuqan's cited in this section are taken from the Appendix to *A Mountainous Journey*.

around her is strongly conveyed. In another poem, 'The Rock', her subjectivity in this barren landscape struggles to express itself in metaphors of nature's freedom and renewal, a subjectivity that is constantly threatened by the 'black rock' of authority.

See here
The black rock is tied to my chest
with oppressive chains
See how they grind my flowers and fruits
My life has been removed, crushed
[. . .]
I struggle in vain to budge its weight
by forgetting myself
I swim joyously in the sea of life
paddling in all directions
I sing, filling my cup, gulping wildly
almost until I expire
How I deceive my pain and misery
with a life of joy
running away from my sorrows
and dancing with birds
But soon, from the depths of despair
a trembling voice thunders:
'You'll never run away!
I'm here, and you'll never escape!'
The shadow of the black rock
rises, with its ugly face.
In vain I try to push it away
In vain seek escape
There's no way out! (211).

The motifs from nature are all associated with the feminine, but an uninhibited femininity is crushed by the black rock, its 'ugly face' distorted by envy and the will to dominate. However, there is also a suggestion that repression and shame have been internalised as the voice arises 'from the depths of despair'; the struggle is not only against an external force but also against her own disbelief that she can ever be as free as the birds.

The motif of house-as-prison became reality for Fadwa when one of her older brothers, Yusuf, decreed 'compulsory confinement to the house till the day of [her] death' (48).¹⁰ Her crime was that, aged 16, she was followed home from school by a boy who sent her a jasmine flower. School had been the one place where she felt appreciated, her difference and intellectual energy praised instead of repressed. Her

¹⁰ Fathers and brothers customarily had absolute control over the movements of women in a Palestinian household.

incarceration made her suicidal, but she was saved by her brother, Ibrahim, who took it upon himself to teach her poetry. Poetry became the light that showed her the way out of the darkness of imprisonment. In contrast to a pit of serpents, or a chicken coop, the use of images from nature are now positive; instead of an early death a new life. She writes that she 'began living the future in the present that Ibrahim had turned into green meadows and promising fields of ripe grain' (62). Her yearning to be a poet was like a 'small seed [which] wanted to become something different, refusing to lie dormant. I could feel this seed stirring within me with a perpetual dynamism' (80). Recalling Friedman's argument that 'alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing', so through poetry Fadwa felt she was creating her own subjectivity, her own image of herself. 'I was immersed in the act of creating myself, building myself up anew, in an eager search for the potentialities and abilities that constituted my life's capital', she writes (63).

Refusing to conform was not without its cost. Tuqan talks about how the dual psyche of 'submission and rebellion' (28) that was fostered in the young girl led to her becoming 'a peculiar anti-social creature' (95). Her feelings of contempt for the female community were based upon their general acquiescing in their culturally prescribed roles. Tuqan exhibits ambivalence towards her mother. On the one hand, memories of unfair treatment by her mother led to nightmares in which she was 'filled with feelings of suppressed defeat and a bitter sense of anger at the injustice' (20-1). On the other hand, she feels sympathy for her mother and recognises 'a hidden thread of unhappiness running through her', the product of 'the social restraint and subjugation imposed on the women in our household' (22). It is significant that her mother appears to her to be most beautiful when she sees her undressed in the public baths. Here she is stripped of the constraining, concealing and disfiguring social garb that can be seen as a metaphor for the social restraint that enforces female deportment.¹¹ Apart from this one instance, Tuqan was aware of a 'breach between [her] and the female community'. 'It had', she writes, 'nothing to offer me and was incapable of taking anything from me' (95). Such

¹¹ Tuqan describes how the required dress code for women had gradually relaxed. 'In the twenties they got rid of the full black flowing skirt, substituting a black or brown coat or one of some other sombre colour. At the beginning of the forties they got rid of the triangular bolero-like cover that was worn on the head and came down over the shoulders to the waist, concealing the shape of the upper half of the body, and behind which the woman would fold her hands over her breast, so that men could not see her fingers. In the middle forties the transparent black kerchief became more transparent, revealing the face under it, and in the middle fifties the black veil was finally lifted, allowing the God-given beauty of their faces to speak modestly for itself.' (MJ113-4)

sentiments appear to be in contrast to paradigms of female relational ego development promoted by theorists such as Nancy Chodorow.¹² It could be argued that her feelings of differentiation were more typical of a boy's ego development, and that the feelings of separation that at the time were experienced as psychologically crippling enabled her to remain single-minded in her determination to pursue a career as a poet. She observes: 'As the misery of repression and subjugation increased, my feelings of individuality and identity also increased' (111).

For Tuqan the personal is most certainly political. The inability of women to participate in national concerns is directly linked to their subjugation at home. She records the political unrest of the uprising years (1935-36) yet feels detached from it all, news reaching her by means of other people's, mostly men's, interpretations. Her brother, Ibrahim, had become Palestine's foremost poet and upon his death in 1941, her father instructed her to take up Ibrahim's mantle and write political poetry. She records her reaction.

A voice from within would rise up in silent protest. *How and with what right or logic does Father ask me to compose political poetry, when I am shut up inside these walls? I don't sit with the men, I don't listen to their heated discussions, nor do I participate in the turmoil of life on the outside. I'm still not even acquainted with the face of my own country, since I am not allowed to travel.* (107, emphasis in the original)

The inner voice that Tuqan describes here is remarkable given the 'parroting' that is expected of women of her time, and her feminist awareness could be described, in the total absence of role models, as an experiential determinist consciousness. Her rebellion against authority meant she also felt alienated from a world in which she knew she should be involved, but which took on all the characteristics of everything she hated. 'Since I was not socially emancipated,' she asks, 'how could I wage war with my pen for political, ideological or national freedom? I still lacked political maturity, just as I had no social dimension' (110). Linking the social and personal with the political in this way has repercussions for the men also, and by extension for the nation as a whole. It is noticeable that her interpretation of the political situation is overlaid by criticism of

¹² Chodorow writes that 'in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does. (In psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated than men; they have more flexible ego boundaries.) Moreover, issues of dependency are handled and experienced differently by men and women. For boys and men, both individuation and dependency issues become tied up with the sense of masculinity, or masculine identity. For girls and women, by contrast, issues of femininity, or feminine identity, are not problematic in the same way.' (Chodorow 45-6).

the masculine role in society. The hypocrisy of the men lay in their forbidding their women participation in any outside activity whilst they (the men)

[. . .] lay jealously in wait whenever one of us girls aspired to better things or tried to assert herself in quite natural ways. They represented, in the most flagrant manner possible, the rigidity of the Arab male and his absolute inability to maintain a personality that was healthy and whole. They represented, now as ever, the dual personality of the Arab: one half going along with development, conforming to the spirit of the times [. . .] the other half paralysed, informed by an age-old egoism rooted in the Arab man's soul, with all the eastern haughtiness that has dictated how the male should treat his female relatives. (8-9)

In this passage, Tuqan strongly suggests that men's absolute control over their womenfolk contributes to the paralysis of which she accuses them, an attitude that is to the detriment of the nation as a whole. It was significant for Tuqan that her father died during the 1948 upheavals, after which, she writes, 'my tongue was freed' (113) and only then did she feel able to write the patriotic poetry her father had demanded of her. The changed political situation brought about by the events of 1948 seriously threatened the illusion of control men had enjoyed, but it liberated women in many ways. It was only in the early 1950s that Nablusi women were freed from 'the traditional wrap and thick black veil' (113) that had been such a powerful symbol of their repression. For Tuqan, this was the time of her 'emergence from the harem' (117), a time to experience love for the first time. 'Our eastern Arab society suppressed the sentiment of love,' she writes, 'just as it continually oppressed women.' She continues, 'In Arab society, this beautiful human emotion is a casualty of the split nature of our society and still carries connotations of disgrace and shame' (114-5). She was then able to love without shame, 'merging with the "other", discovering [herself] through the compass of reality.' She describes how: 'During moments of love we feel our humanity intensifying. We leave the far distant icy pole to travel to radiant sunshine' (116). One can imagine such feelings of 'liberation' (116) giving rise to the poem 'I Found It'.

I found it on a radiant day
after a long drifting.
It was green and blossoming
as the sun over palm trees
scattered golden bouquets;
April was generous that season
with loving and sun.

I found it
after a long wandering.

It was a tender evergreen bough
where birds took shelter,
a bough bending gently under storms
which later was straight again,
rich with sap,
never snapping in the wind's hand.
It stayed supple
as if there were no bad weather,
echoing the brightness of stars,
the gentle breeze,
the dew and the clouds.
[. . .]
Everything that shadowed my life
wrapping it with night after night
has disappeared, laid down
in memory's grave,
since the day
my soul found
my soul. (213-4)

Where before there was barrenness, loneliness, broken dreams and the dessicating rigidity of the 'black rock', this poem contains only images of greenery, safety, pliability and mutuality. The 'it' of the title could be her own voice or her freedom, or love, but it turns out to be all these things. All constitute what she can now claim as her 'soul'.

After spending two years in England, an experience she describes as 'erasing from [her] heart all traces of other people's crudeness, harshness and cruelty and imbuing [her] with a sense of confidence and inner peace' (140), Tuqan returned to Nablus and lived alone. The last section of her autobiography consists of fragments from her diary written between 1966 and 1967. Tuqan confounds generic expectations as her life story does not end on a note of closure nor with a sense of a life's work being done. She is filled with fear and confusion by the events leading up to the 1967 war, writing: 'I sense the absurdity and aimlessness of life as I stand bewildered, lost and weak before the tide of overpowering death' (176). The defeat stuns everyone: Nablus is now under Israeli control. 1967 was the final humiliation not just for Palestinian national honour, but for Arab pride as a whole – and particularly for male pride. As men's power is seen to be weakened and as the catastrophe of the political deepens, so Tuqan begins to find a space for her own voice. After months of numbed silence, she starts writing poetry again and says: 'I feel I have been for some time living moment by moment in a drama,

moved by every act in it. All of a sudden I, myself, am a poem, burning with anguish, dejected, hopeful, looking beyond the horizon!’ (191).

It is interesting how a loss of belief in the dominant fiction led to the vacuum of what Khalidi termed ‘the lost years’. For Tuqan, in contrast, it was always the silencing or death of the male voice that enabled her to find her own. Her acquisition of a passport, the document establishing her status as an individual, was enabled by the death of a male cousin.¹³ Her early instruction in poetry consisted of learning by heart the work of classical (male) Arabic writers and imitating their style, but she soon felt constrained by the rigid requirements of that heritage.¹⁴ She describes the effect in a passage that has echoes of the imagery she uses when contrasting the dark world of social constraint with the light of the written word.

I could sense an artificiality creeping into my poetry, giving it a dryness and rigidity. I was unable to breathe life into my poem and furnish it with the vital sap that could flow through it and give it life. I was, in fact, hewing away at a rock; there was something stifling the emotional truth inside me, and checking the smooth easy flow of the current of feeling running through my poem. (74)

Increasingly influenced by the Arab poets of North America and ‘the avant-garde poetess, Nazil al-Mala’ika’, Tuqan aimed to write poetry ‘deriving its beauty from simplicity, flexibility, truthfulness, and poetical expression free of affectation’(74-5). The parallels between the personal and the aesthetic are clear. Her final poetic liberation occurred only after the 1967 war when she could, at last, feel herself to belong to a wider community. Recalling how as a secluded teenager she used to watch political demonstrations with tears in her eyes (tears prompted by her inability to take any part in that outside life), she realises that the Israeli occupation brought back her ‘sense of being a social entity’. Poetry then became a communal activity. ‘It was only under the shadow of the occupation’, she writes, ‘when I began meeting large audiences through my poetry readings, that I realised the value and true meaning of a poetry that ferments and ages in the earthen wine jugs of the people’ (88). Monuments to the literal or metaphorical death of the male – the death of her mother’s cousin and of her father,

¹³ Fedwa Malti-Douglas explains that in the Arabic there is a play on words here. “‘I will extract my birth certificate (*shahada*) from the tombstone (*shahida*) of your cousin’”, Tuqan informs her mother (Malti-Douglas *Woman’s* 166). (In the translation I am using, the passage reads, “‘Than [*sic*] all I have to do is obtain my birth certificate from your cousin’s gravestone.” (MJ15) Tuqan and her mother both laugh over the irony.

¹⁴ Fedwa Malti-Douglas’s chapter on Fadwa Tuqan in *Woman’s Body, Woman’s World: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* gives a fascinating account of Tuqan’s literary heritage, and the ways in which she both used and subverted the tradition for her own ends. (Malti-Douglas 161-178)

rejection of the masculine poetic heritage, defeat in war – enable Tuqan to come alive. In her case, she cannot be a national agent until she has personal freedom. Jayyusi comments on ‘something pure and innocent’ about Tuqan’s work, ‘something captivating in its natural approach to major existential problems as she tried to find, in an era of search for national liberation, the meaning of individual freedom which must be the foundation of any collective freedom’ (Jayyusi, ‘Introduction’ x). As Tuqan herself acknowledges, in the years of her youth social constraint was greater in Nablus than in other Palestinian towns, and since then women have come to enjoy many freedoms. Despite this, it would be wrong to see her story, exceptional as it is, as atypical. In Tuqan’s opinion, ‘at the present time, the Palestinian woman faces a double struggle: the struggle to assert her liberation as a woman and the struggle to assert her and everybody else’s national liberation’ (204). Tuqan’s determination in her personal struggle makes her story not only the *sine qua non* of Palestinian feminist writing but also an inspiration for other women fighting for their freedoms.

In their poetry many women address the difficulty of finding their own voice in a manner more oblique than Tuqan’s. The problems these writers face of finding a language appropriate to their own experience, of feeling unashamed to write of their emotions, of positioning themselves as part of the national struggle, are all encapsulated in Laila al-Sa’ih’s ‘Intimations of Anxiety’ (AMPL272-3), the first lines of which stand as an epigraph to this chapter. The tentativeness suggested is intimately tied up with exploring the nature of her love for an unnamed other, an emerging into language of a ‘dream’, the word ‘blood’ both suggesting the personal wounding involved in transforming her feelings into words that will be read by others, and indicating the background of struggle that informs Palestinian existence. ‘Blood’ and ‘ink’ stand out in the first stanza from the undifferentiated movement and uncertainty of the rest of the poem. It continues:

Perhaps I need years to understand
 what swirls within me when we meet.
 Do you know that constellations of cities and paths tangle
 restlessly in the sand?
 I do not know the name
 for such sweet incandescence.
 Even now I have not discovered all the stars
 fanning out in the soul and body
 like eloquent shining symbols.

The more feminine aspects of the writer's consciousness – suggested by such words as 'swirls', 'tangle/restlessly', 'I do not know' – are contrasted with the ink that will inscribe, and thus tie down, this fluidity and sense of impermanence. The opening lines of the second stanza use images of flowers to suggest that the writer's flowering into subjectivity is inevitable, despite her uncertainty: 'Under a mass of snow/a violet is patiently waiting./Each opening rose partakes of/the patience of ages'. A liberation of the erotic is part of the process of emergence, but equally important is finding a voice in which to express the 'sweet incandescence'. The poem ends:

The moment will come
in which I discover language,
voice of the sun's fruits,
dialect of waves engulfing my heart.
Maybe then I will be able to add
a single syllable to this existence –
this arduous impossible task.

Only when the poet's own language is discovered and is transfigured into writing will she be able to make a difference to 'this existence' that is the reality of Palestinian life. We see yet again, as with Tuqan and other women writers, how important it is for them to find a language that fits their own subjectivity and experience, a common thread that amounts to a discursive unity.

The title of Siham Da'oud's 'I Love in White Ink' (*PAW* 91-2) might also suggest that her love remain invisible, but the tone of this poem is more assured than that of 'Intimations of Anxiety'. Throughout the poem there is a tension between the need to voice a collective memory and the difficulty of putting this into words, words that seem to become frozen, as the repetition of 'throat' would indicate, just before the moment of utterance. She suggests other forms of communication less privileged than the spoken or written word, such as folksong, drawing, and embroidery. Such activities would be considered unofficial in terms of the dominant discourse of nationalism, but Da'oud's use of them in this poem creates a community of understanding that is beyond the control of masculine discourse, a move that retains what Miriam Cooke terms 'a freedom of [women's] marginalization' (Cooke *Voices* 31).

I Love in White Ink
at evening, who knows what day or time
from my brow bursts a memory
smuggled from jail to jail
scattered like my land's windwisps
my breath under my embroidered scarf

fleeing in white ink
in smuggled folksongs
of his color – don't ask – like grapes, like wine
and when snow fell from my face
I wanted to tell him good-bye
I searched, aspired to his height
took a walk to dry the storm in my throat
all my words have been detained
maybe written in white ink.

I reviewed Arab history
found no dream to borrow
again shook myself all over:
how do you keep turning into a lie
so that my throat remains detained
in the airports of the universe
I long for my land's windwisps –
always departing, I leave love at addresses
that can't even be looked for
and in your beautiful eyes
and again
I wanted to draw the disfigured faces
you bear
the tortured homeland infiltrated me
between wisps
and birdwings
but I – I have only my skin
and a dream in white ink
and eyes as big as Mt. Carmel

all that was between us –
my full height
and days passing
on Palestine time –
maybe in your true form you are beautiful
maybe
but I'm just a tear, wet
on my mother's scarf, fed up with its color
its noncolor
a dried tear on the scarf
so I'm telling you all
I'm giving myself up to fruiting and multiplying
I know the truth
and love the words stitched on my old scarf
ready to pounce day and night
and love my land's windwisps
and babies in Beirut and Sakhnin
and I love my storm birthing
and the pomegranate bursting

Here again, love and the reality of Palestinian existence are intertwined, and Da'oud draws a distinct parallel between her voice and collective memory when she writes: 'from my brow bursts a memory/smuggled from jail to jail/scattered like my land's windwisps'. The 'windwisps', breaths of life, are both hers and the land's. In the second stanza, explicitly rejecting the outworn myths of 'Arab history' (a discourse that is created by men), she links her voice to those who have no secure place in history, to refugees 'detained/in the airports of the universe'. She suggests that Palestinian experience cannot be rendered in metaphors that indicate certainty; instead 'the tortured homeland' lies 'between wisps/and birdwings'. Her 'dream in white ink', shifting and invisible, torn between love and longing, is reality. The nebulousness she inhabits means she could be just another note of sadness – 'a tear, wet/on my mother's scarf' – but her confidence that her voice represents the nation is expressed again in the closing lines, 'I know the truth/and love the words stitched on my old scarf'. In the first stanza her 'embroidered scarf' acted to obscure her words, but now it bears the inscription of veracity. Although she claims to 'know the truth' her voice does not impose itself on others. This is a personal vision, one that eschews certainties ('always departing, I leave love at addresses/that can't even be looked for'), yet draws on a subdued belief in her instincts. It ends with motifs of the feminine ('birthing/and the pomegranate bursting') symbolising an explosion of female creativity.

Da'oud's entitling of her poem 'I Love in White Ink' creates a link with Hélène Cixous and women's writing, many of Cixous's reflections seeming to reverberate through the poem. When Cixous writes in her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 'We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths' (248), we can detect an echo in Da'oud's sense that her words have been 'detained' and in her use of 'windwisps' to indicate a sense of her consciousness blowing over the whole land. What Cixous says about the feminine practice of writing emerges strongly in the context of Palestinian women's writing. As I hope the present examination of their writing will demonstrate, there is a need and desire to create a community of women and their understanding of the nature of their struggle in order to counter the dominant male voice. Cixous's image of mother's milk being the 'white ink' in which women write (251) stresses the significance of the maternal (which I discuss shortly in 'Women Write War'). Palestinian women are determined to make their voices heard because they believe they can transform the consciousness of the nation, believing along with Cixous that 'writing

is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures' (249, emphasis in the original).

In 'First Light' Lisa Suhair Majaj describes a constant search for an identity that will fit her subjectivity, her 'name'.

Between dreams and day an immense distance
fills my throat. Who could speak across such space?

Who could imagine their lives are real,
wear shoes?

Words flow through my fingers like stars,
pattern the sea. Vowels swim like fish.

Each day I cast my net,
reel in silver coils,

rinse the brine from my name. (PAW 174-5)

Situating the poem at dawn might imply that the new day will bring fresh hope, but at the same time the dailiness of the action means the task has constantly to be repeated. Her 'dreams' – the unvoiced imaginings – are juxtaposed with the reality represented by day-time. The importance of bringing herself into language is resisted by a fluidity that women writers appear reluctant to relinquish. The sea is a motif frequently associated with the feminine and also with homelessness, both facets contributing to the elusiveness of the connection between dreams and reality. The imagery of the writer having to rinse the brine from her name suggests both that her name has to be retrieved daily from the sea of forgetfulness and that she has to wipe her tears from it, but nevertheless it is an action imbued with a consciousness that indicates its significance.

The lines 'but I have learned/to live/in my voice' close a long poem by Rawia Morra entitled '*Ghurba*' (PAW219-24) (*ghurba* means exile). The poem starts:

Powerless

what we are guarding
has been violated
again and again
in front of our eyes.

The spiders
are weaving their web
behind our ribs.

Morra is not afraid to admit the fragility of memories and the vulnerability of exile. The word 'Powerless', standing on its own, acts like a subtitle, and the poem juxtaposes this sense of powerlessness - 'Can we learn/to be quiet/during the chase?/Are we allowed to groan/while we suffocate?' - with the importance of the voice in continuing to assert a unique identity. She writes: 'Poetry survives/obstinately/amid the burned branches/in the churchyards/on those thirsty/lips/that have forgotten/long ago/what it means to forget'. Putting the words 'obstinately' and 'lips' on their own serves to emphasise their importance, an antidote to forgetting. At one point she describes memories as a 'rubbish heap/of paper/years/visions/words/and truths', the haphazard nature of the way in which they accumulate only serving to emphasise the importance of speaking out. She goes on:

We must not fall asleep now

On this heap of rubbish we have
our own paper
our own years
visions
words
and truths

In the small hours
every word
is a rope
which once was
our own place in time.

The condition of exile, marginal and transitory, lends urgency to the sifting and ordering memory. It could be argued that exile robs the individual of the certainty that underpins much masculine writing of the self. When Benstock and Faqir talk of the authority 'that drives inexorably toward unity' and of the 'confidence and certitude about the self and its position in history and language' that characterise masculine discourse, women's writing, while rejecting such absolutes, nevertheless recognises the necessity of trusting their own voices. The poem ends:

I have learned
to wander
on the border between
me and myself
without being a stranger
or tired.

I have not found my home

but I have learned
to live
in my voice.

The border, so often a barrier to freedom for refugees, becomes for Morra a space in which she can discover the different aspects of selfhood, the distance/coalescence between 'me' and 'myself' dissolving feelings of 'being a stranger'. Whereas al-Sa'ih's and Da'oud's poems are concerned with writing, Morra emphasises the voice, indicating her wish to retain a certain fluidity as the metaphors of wandering and borders might suggest. It is her voice that gives her identity and refuge.

3.ii 'In this world of/men and molotovs': women and nation

In her introduction to *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, Jayyusi declares that '[m]odern Palestinian experience is harsh, unrelenting, and all-penetrating [. . .] For the writer to contemplate an orientation completely divorced from political life is to belie reality' (AMPL2-3). As we have just seen, the achievement of women in inscribing a feminine voice is coloured by the national and political, but if women have been largely marginalized in political discourse, it is important to examine how they attempt to insert themselves within this framework. Given its 'all-penetrating' nature, the national cause creates obligations for writers that would not pertain were the nation less threatened. In particular in these circumstances it is misleading to apply Western feminist paradigms *tout court*. For instance, Kandiyoti comments that an emphasis on individual rights and gratification, along with a blanket condemnation of men as the enemy, is inappropriate 'in societies where both men and women are tightly enmeshed in familistic networks of mutual rights and obligations, where both sexes may be labouring under much harsher forms of economic and political oppression' (Kandiyoti *Gendering* 15). Given the patriarchal privileges that structure it, the family is often seen (certainly by Western feminists) as restricting women's freedoms but many Palestinian women believe that to dismantle traditional values would put at risk the cohesion of a society already under severe stress. 'The Palestinian family is both the site of oppression *and* a source of support and resistance', observes Samira Haj (Haj 772). Few Palestinians would disagree with the sentiments expressed in Darwish's 'Identity Card' (see Chapter 1), but his defiant lines 'Record!/I am an Arab/ [. . .] I have eight children/And the ninth is coming after a summer' obscure the fact that the burden of producing and raising these children falls on their mother. Nahla Abdo argues that 'the

state-nation uses nationalism to construct an ideology of motherhood which relegates women to the home' and she goes to make the point that whilst there is nothing essentially oppressive about women having children, it is imperative that women 'assert their gender rights not as mothers but as equal human beings, as nationals' (Abdo 23, 27). Najat Aqari's response to 'Identity Card', the first stanza of which is given at the head of this chapter, demonstrates that she will fight for 'justice and freedom' in 'every field of life' (the personal and the political) and that she identifies herself primarily as a 'strong woman' not as a Palestinian (the Arab of Darwish's poem). However, it becomes clear when reading Palestinian women's literature that they always situate themselves within their communities, so whilst Joseph Zeidan regards an Arab woman's writing of her own experiences as an 'individualistic' act (Zeidan 3), Palestinian women view the relationship of individual to community in a different light. In Orayb Aref Najjar's *Portraits of Palestinian Women*, Najah Manasrah, a resident of the Dheisheh refugee camp who is a nurse and a teacher and who has twice studied at universities in the United States (and who would therefore be considered to be 'liberated'), emphasises the sense of community that exists: 'we are social beings, not simply a collection of individuals each doing his or her own thing', she says. She observes that '[p]erhaps it is easier to be individualistic if you were raised in a society that values individualism like the United States, but we are a society of groups' (Najjar 63).

A similar caution should be exercised over deciding what is political/nationalist literature as opposed to what is feminist literature. Therese Saliba and Jeanne Kattan point out that 'the term *feminism* does not exist in the Arabic language' and that applying it in the Palestinian situation can be unhelpful because of its close association with Western ideas. They quote Rita Giacaman's remark that 'if we are going to frighten off a single woman because of a word, then it is better to ditch the word' (Saliba & Kattan 86-7). Fiction written by women that might appear to be dedicated to national political ends can also carry muted criticisms of gender hierarchies, even if those criticisms are not the core of the work. Conversely, works can be interpreted as feminist at the expense of the political.¹⁵ Julie Peteet makes a useful distinction between what she terms female consciousness and feminist consciousness. The former

¹⁵ In an essay entitled 'The Political Agendas and Textual Strategies of Levantine Woman Writers', Elizabeth McKee takes issue with Miriam Cooke's interpretation of the writings of Levantine women. According to McKee, Cooke's 'constant affirmation that women's works are first and foremost works of polemic feminist protest about the inequality between genders' means that Cooke 'overlook[s] the intensely political resonance of a great many works written by women' (McKee 119).

comprises an 'awareness of their [women's] rights within the prevailing division of labour and dominant ideology', usually 'accompanied by a demand by women for what they perceive to be their due rights in the prevailing system'. Feminist consciousness on the other hand, argues Peteet, is 'women's awareness of their subordinate position within a cultural and power system and the articulation of a specifically female perspective of the social process' (Peteet *Gender* 71). One could say it is a consciousness aware of how women are 'othered' within that system. In Fadwa Tuqan's case, the writing of her autobiography was an intensely personal, if politically motivated, act: personal freedom had to come before political liberation. The work of the writers I examine here, despite exhibiting a considerable variation within the personal/political relationship, could all be said to be possible sites of resistance to dominant discourses, but all continue Tuqan's search for the liberation of the 'potentialities and abilities' of women as national participants.

Sahar Khalifeh has written a number of novels, only one of which, *Wild Thorns* (1976) has so far been translated into and published in English. Suha Sabbagh reports that in an interview Khalifeh 'stated that at the time of writing *Wild Thorns* she was pre-feminist' (Sabbagh *Writers* 71). The novel does not explore feminist issues and instead concentrates on the economic and psychological effects on poorer Palestinian men of living under Israeli occupation.¹⁶ The chief characters are men, three of them workers on the 'inside' (that is, they are bussed daily from Nablus to work inside Israel, often building settlements on land that was originally Palestinian), and the fourth a young idealist, Usama, returning from the Gulf on a mission to blow up the buses that transport workers such as his cousin, Adil, and his friends. By means of the internal monologues of the three workers, Khalifeh shows how the economic pressures of having families for which to provide clash with nationalist desires for independence from Israel. She uses the three generations of the al-Karmi family at the centre of the narrative to represent the different stages of national consciousness, the social realism of the text acting as Jameson's 'national allegory'. The patriarch is ailing and is kept alive by a dialysis machine. He believes the time he spends talking to foreign journalists will achieve recognition of the Palestinian plight and draw help from outside. He represents the older generation's self-delusion (that many believed contributed to the loss of

¹⁶ Both Sabbagh and Mary Layoun give detailed information about living conditions and employment trends since 1967 for Palestinians within Israel and the Occupied Territories (Sabbagh 71-6; Layoun 'Telling' 414-16)

Palestine) and also the drain on the younger generation that the demands of patriarchy still exact. His physical sickness is symbolic of a cultural and psychological malaise. Adil, the eldest son, having worked for years on the family's few remaining acres, eventually has to join the workers on the 'inside'. Too ashamed to admit this to his parents, the burden of feeding nine mouths and the kidney machine falls entirely on his shoulders. Between them, the ossified patriarchal social structure and the occupation's destruction of indigenous industry crush him. His sister, Nuwar, is secretly in love with an imprisoned resistance fighter but she lacks the will to oppose an arranged marriage. Only Basil, the youngest, is portrayed as having the necessary fire actively to resist both traditional familial pressures and the Israeli occupation. His involvement with a resistance group leads to the demolition of the family home. However, this disaster is presented in such a way as to indicate that the breaking up of the family will grant its younger members more freedom. Adil decides not to save his father's dialysis machine before the demolition, thus rejecting the drain on him that it represents, its destruction symbolising the possibility of a new order arising from the ruins of the old.

The novel opens with Usama's return to Nablus from the Gulf. He despises the weakness of the men who work on the 'inside' and what he sees as their collusion with Israel. Roger Allen describes Usama as the 'hero' of Khalifeh's novel (Allen 'Mature' 202) but there is evidence that the author undercuts such an assumption. In the opening chapters Usama's idealism is shown to be derived from stereotypes. He imagines he is returning to a 'promised land [of] pine trees, prickly pears, almonds, grapes, figs, olives' (5), and he sees the early morning's sun's rays spread ribbons of light over the mountainside, reminding him of the 'stretch marks left on women's bodies after they've given birth' (6). Given the usual romantic idealisation, Khalifeh appears to be injecting a note of irony into the trope of land/woman by choosing the unromantic image of 'stretch marks'. Yet Usama's essentialising of the feminine also means it is, by his definition, weak. He ponders how his military training has cured him of romantic tendencies, musing:

Training. Bullets. Crawling on all fours. Pulling in your stomach. Such things make you unromantic in thought and deed. Personal dreams evaporate, the individual becomes a single shot in a fusillade. You can be honed by experience to become a rocket, a guided missile. (5-6)

A feminine romantic is thus opposed to a 'honed' masculine singularity of purpose that in the process, the language suggests, loses its humanity. More explicit condemnation

of Usama's uncompromising stance comes from those men whose actions he opposes. The destruction of indigenous industry and agriculture means that men with large families to support have little choice, apart from emigrating, but to take jobs inside Israel. There, Palestinian workers suffer humiliation, discrimination and racial abuse. After hearing Usama rail against their 'corruption', Zuhdi, one of Adil's co-workers, puts the other side of the argument.

'Here we are, burying our own shit all the time, and along comes Mr Usama to tell us we've got to rely on ourselves. Tell him, Adil, by your father's life, tell him! Tell him how the people inside are suffering. Tell him how Israel's blown up twenty thousand homes and four whole villages. Tell him how the detention camps are as full of young men as a cheap public bath's full of cockroaches. Tell him what happened to al-Bahsh's son and to al-Shakhshir and al-Huwari's daughters. But the worst thing is that all of us, every last one of us, are forced to work in their brothels just in order to live!' (84).

However, Usama refuses to listen. 'He just doesn't want to hear it', observes Abu Sabir (84).

It could be argued that such a complicating of the ideal of male action and heroism comes more readily from a woman writer. Khalifeh is at pains to make clear the daily hardships faced by the families of the workers, and she also stresses the humanity of Adil and his constant concern for other people. Adil al-Karmi is contrasted to the leader of the prisoners, another Adil, whom Zuhdi encounters whilst in prison for striking an Israeli worker. Adil, the prisoner, is well-read and can spout political theory, but Zuhdi realises he lacks his friend's humanity:

This Adil wasn't like the other Adil, though both talked about the same things. This Adil was too divorced from people, too busy with his books. How could any heart stir with emotion without knowing the warmth of life? The other Adil didn't speak very much, but even his silence was eloquent; other people spoke only they opened their mouths. (137)

Although, as Babara Harlow points out, five chapters are devoted to Zuhdi's and Basil's spells in prison, 'a monumental textual space testifying to its decisive place in [classic resistance narratives]' (Harlow 'Partitions' 119-20), Khalifeh nonetheless uses this narrative space to underline the complexities faced by Palestinians within Israel who, with their determination to remain in their homeland whatever the cost, do not have recourse to apparently simplistic ideologies.¹⁷ Adil, the prisoner, and Usama represent

¹⁷ In *The Third Way* Raja Shehadeh describes a conversation with a young man, Khalil, recently released from Israeli prison. Khalil claims that everyone in the Occupied Territories is 'frightened' and scared

the young men without families who are free to pursue a purely nationalist agenda, one inflected by ideals of masculinity and heroism based on individualism rather than community. For the majority of men the uncomplicated heroism of their heritage is no longer available. When Abu Sabir has his fingers cut off by a saw and is in danger of bleeding to death, he begs Adil to tell him stories 'about our Arab folk heroes like Abu Zayd al-Hlali or Antar Ibn Shaddad', but Adil 'couldn't remember any heroic tales' (52). Furthermore, Khalifeh appears to situate the heroic in the quotidian struggle of men like Abu Sabir. At the end of the novel, after news of the attack on the buses has reached Nablus and after the al-Karmi home has been dynamited by the Israelis, Adil wanders the streets, observing how life goes on as usual: 'He stood on the pavement watching the people on their way home, on their way to work. They lived their everyday lives stoically, silently. Nothing had changed' (207). Khalifeh thus problematises the uncomplicated solutions based only on a masculinist paradigm. Suha Sabbagh makes an interesting point that Khalifeh, as a woman, better understands the mechanism of subalternity by arguing that 'the author's lived experience as a woman exposed to mechanisms of social control has greatly enhanced her ability to explain the mechanisms of political control and the psychology of oppression in the context of occupation' (Sabbagh 'Writers' 71). She contends that women, who have often internalised traditional norms of feminine subservience, can relate to the compliance expected under colonial domination. The traditional financial dependence of women upon men leaves them trapped in the same way that the 'inside' workers are.

In *Wild Thorns* Khalifeh also suggests possibilities for reconciliation. She uses an incident in prison, in which a Palestinian meets his five-year-old son for the first time, an event that brings tears to the eyes of the guards, to humanise the other. In another scene, Um Sabir shows compassion towards the wife and daughter of an Israeli officer who has just been shot by Usama by consoling the wife and covering the daughter's legs when she falls to the ground. Adil also helps the two Israeli women, and afterwards reflects: 'My cousin kills a man and I carry off his daughter. Tragedy or farce? Still, the memory of the Israeli women's head on his shoulder, despite all the boundaries that divided people, seemed to open the horizons of this narrow world' (171-

they will end up in jail. He goes on: 'At least in prison you are not afraid. You have nothing to lose. It is there that you find the brave men. And it is they who are really free.' Shehadeh says he had heard such talk many times and the accusations that 'we samidin [those Palestinians determined to stay put in the Occupied Territories] had become scared of our own shadows; that we had lost our pride', but he claims that he usually detects a 'bitter, distorted arrogance in such accusations' (Shehadeh *Third* 25).

2). This is a powerful statement of belief in the need to co-exist with the Other in such a tiny yet intensely contested strip of land. Mary Layoun points out that although it is Adil who takes control of the situation and to whose thoughts we are permitted access, it is Um Sabir 'who seizes the initiative in a moment of crisis and finds a way across walls and boundaries' (Layoun 'Telling' 419). However, Khalifeh ultimately appears to accept the impossibility of resolution. When Usama carries out his mission to blow up the workers' buses, Zuhdi joins the guerrillas and kills an Israeli soldier by stabbing him with a screwdriver. This typically heroic act, enshrined in war narratives, grants him a pride in resistance that he had not felt before. He tells himself:

You've killed a man, Zuhdi! So what? You'd let Usama and the guerrillas be attacked over your head and you do nothing? You're a *shawka* now, a 'thorn'. Yes, a *shawka* in spite of yourself and everything. Well then. Pick up the machine-gun and fire! Fire! (182)

He dies in this heroic yet always doomed action, leaving his wife to bear the burden of raising the next generation.¹⁸ The novel leaves in balance the question: Which policy will bring about the necessary change? Adil's humanism and his efforts on behalf of his fellow workers, or Usama's violent military actions?

Wild Thorns, Khalifeh's 'pre-feminist' novel, was well received and quickly translated into many other languages, including Hebrew. She believes this reception was due to 'the timelessness of the topic and because it is about a problem facing men rather than women'. However, it was, tellingly, not published in the Arab world for some time because, she says 'I criticize those who would prevent the laborers [*sic*] from working for the benefit of the Israeli economy without offering them an alternative for feeding the many mouths that depend on them' (Sabbagh *Women* 138). This opinion is reflected in the novel in the debate about the imposition of ideas from the outside on those on the inside, a debate encapsulated in the figure of Usama.¹⁹ It suggests the

¹⁸ The story of Zuhdi's widow, Saadiyya, is the subject of Khalifeh's sequel to *Wild Thorns*, *Abad El Shams* (*Sunflower*). Khalifeh describes *Sunflower* as her 'first feminist novel' (Sabbagh *Women* 138).

¹⁹ Yezid Sayigh provides a helpful summary of the inside-outside dichotomy that produced different ideologies of struggle. He writes: 'For the outside, military action was an essential means to assert a distinct Palestinian identity and demarcate the boundaries with the wider Arab identity. [. . .] Armed struggle was the most effective means of mobilizing the scattered Palestinian diaspora and enabling it to make a material contribution to changing the balance of power with Arab host governments or with Israel. The reverse side of the coin was that the PLO was slow to pay serious attention to the inner workings of Israeli society and politics, or to appreciate the implications for its own military, political, and diplomatic strategies. Similarly, it tended to overlook or belittle non-military forms of struggle waged by Palestinians in the occupied territories.' (Sayigh 676)

impracticability of much nationalist ideology and the distance between the agendas and interests of the two different groups. Harlow detects a battle between:

[. . .] two dominant narratives – the teleology of Palestinian nationalism on the one hand and the imposed imperatives of developmentalism on the other [. . .] Khalifeh's novel both vestiges the scenario of liberation and armed struggle scripted by the resistance movement's leadership in exile and critiques the atavistic structures of traditionalism that continue to resist social changes from within. (Harlow 'Partitions' 116)

Caught in the middle of these competing narratives is Adil, who places himself firmly with those Usama accuses of collaborating with the enemy. When Usama accuses him of having forgotten his country, Adil claims as his proof that he has not forgotten it the fact he never left it (98).²⁰ For Usama, the country is the one of history and myth, for Adil the one he struggles to live in at the present time. *Wild Thorns* can be seen as the beginning of a trajectory (developed in Khalifeh's later novels) that emphasises individual, and especially women's freedoms, an approach that recognises the imperatives of both the national and the personal.

It is regrettable, especially from the point of view of women's writing and nationalism, that Khalifeh's other novels have not been translated into English. In an interview with Saliba and Kattan, she maintained that when she wrote *Sunflower* 'leftist men were really angry at [her] and many critics wrote very biased and negative reviews, saying that [she's] a male-hater', and that publishers boycotted her work as 'punishment for [her] becoming a feminist' (Saliba & Kattan 90). She has stated that in her writing her 'primary task is to liberate women from the confines of an image imposed on them by male writers' (Sabbagh *Women* 139). She also explains that in much literature 'written by men, women are a symbol for the land; for procreation; for endless and unconditional loving and giving [. . .] these symbols are gilded frames that help preserve the old female roles while making them seem more acceptable' (Sabbagh *Women* 139). *Wild Thorns* concerns itself predominantly with national debates but what emerges from it is a concern for the individual and an interrogation of some of the more masculinist myths – be they derived from tradition or from nationalist ideology - that

²⁰ In *Strangers in the House*, Shehadeh argues that those who stay can also be heroes. He writes: 'How could I tell them that we were heroic not because of the great risks that we were taking but because of our perseverance in the face of small, daily, persistent harassments and obstructions to our life [that were] part of a policy to make the life of Palestinians so difficult that it would seem better to leave than to stay and suffer. In our determination to stay put lay our heroism, not in our acts of daring or even in military operations taken in resistance to the occupation. There were carried out by the smallest minority. The majority was resisting through staying put.' (Shehadeh *Strangers* 144)

trap individuals as effectively as occupation does. The novel attempts to reconcile some of the oppositions that produce confrontation among Palestinians themselves. Khalifeh has stated her belief that '[a] society that oppresses the individual, including women, will not be able to produce a people capable of resisting occupation. The subaltern who has accepted diminished status is incapable of revolt' (Sabbagh *Women* 141). She also makes clear her belief that 'in Arab culture it is the system of values that should be blamed for being unfair to both men and women', and she warns that in the present situation an outright confrontation between men and women would 'destroy the very fiber [*sic*] of society' (Sabbagh *Women* 143). Such are the dilemmas faced by women when the national takes precedence over the personal.

The sense of empowerment and 'consciousness change' that many women have experienced has freed them to be more critical of national politics. No longer do they feel the need to cut their teeth writing nationalist texts, to show that they can write as men. Many women are openly critical of both men and of the political situation, a situation whose dynamics still benefit men at the expense of women. It is noticeable how women's criticism of masculine attitudes is directly linked to the problems of the nation as a whole. Salma Khadra Jayyusi's 'A Tale' (*WFC* 129) opposes men's traditional privileges, protected by 'God's law and the Prophet's' to the burden women bear, a burden significantly increased when the nation is embattled.

My father-in-law goes to bed,
sleeps with his wife, gets up,
takes a bath and prays God for Paradise.

That's God's law and the Prophet's:
an unquenchable river of kisses,
houri dreams like a snake
wriggling between his thighs,
a neatly drained putz
his idea of fun in bed,
plowing woman to harvest children.
[. . .]

As for me I wear a scar
on my buccaneer's brow
while I sail the wind everywhere,
wife to exile,
my people dead or dying,
my children lamps in the windows
of my storm-moved house.
My country? My country!
sliver [*sic*] moon of sorrow,

my mother's dead body
wandering in the hills,
wind stands frozen by her grave.

The first ten lines put religion and lust in blasphemous proximity, allowing Jayyusi to suggest that men manipulate religious and patriarchal traditions in order to exploit women, and that male lasciviousness blinds them to the true plight of their country. Women, who are there to be ploughed like a piece of earth, are shown to be the ones paying the price for men's privileges, the country and the speaker being linked through sorrowful images (the moon, the mother's dead body and cold grave). Hanan Ashrawi's 'Economics' (*WFC* 143) is a dig at male acquisitiveness and stupidity, but it also highlights the psychological and economic entrapment of Palestinians within the Israeli economy.

My name is Kamel
Last week I bought
A television set.
Next week I'll buy
A fridge –
and, who knows,
Maybe next month
I'll make enough to buy
a washing machine
(fully automatic).
There's no end to my ambition.

Perhaps I should have signed
that petition the camp had sent
the military governor
for the hundredth time
begging for electricity.
Still I was too busy
hauling gravel for that
superhighway
connecting East Jerusalem with Tel Aviv.
Besides, I would have been fired.
Ahmad signed –
and he was.
He never bought a television set.

What started as a joke becomes a lament for the loss of dignity that accompanies a dependent consciousness. A small act of defiance (the signing of the petition) gets Ahmad sacked, the consequences of which can mean genuine hardship, as we saw in *Wild Thorns*, and makes his powerlessness even more acutely felt. However, Kamel is apparently oblivious to the fact that the highway he is building will link Tel Aviv and

East Jerusalem, the latter bearing enormous cultural and religious significance for the Palestinians. This poem, too, is a contribution to the debate between what Harlow terms the ‘teleology of Palestinian nationalism’ and the ‘imposed imperatives of developmentalism’. Ashrawi clearly criticises Kamel’s capitulation to the latter, but the difficulty of following a nationalist agenda in such circumstances is also lamented.

Suheir Hammad’s ‘of woman torn’ and Donia el-Amal Ismail’s ‘A Moment of Mourning’ are two poems that are openly and unequivocally critical of traditional attitudes and the moral and economic corruption to which they lead. In ‘of woman torn’ (PAW114-7) Hammad imagines what happens during an ‘honour killing’ and she explicitly aligns herself with the girl against the barbarity of traditional attitudes that dictate a man’s ownership of feminine honour. Hammad reminds us during the poem that ‘this is 1997’.²¹ The poem starts:

did her skin smell
of *zaatar* her hair of
exploded almonds
between the olive trees
her father lit the match brothers poured the flammable
the women they watched the women they tucked
their sex away under
skirts under secrets

in this world of
men and molotovs

family pride laid
between her thighs
honor in her panties
and no oslo accord
or camp david signing
could free her
sex from its binding

Hammad uses the most evocative symbols of Palestine – *zaatar* (thyme), almonds, olive trees – as a background to the setting alight of a young girl. These symbols encapsulate the beauty and scent of an unchanging landscape, at the same time both everlasting and representing an outworn romanticism that posits the land as feminine and owned. The way these symbols have been degraded and misused is made explicit by references to the discredited political alliances of Oslo and Camp David. At the same time, this

²¹ Barbara Harlow prefaces her essay on *Wild Thorns* with details of an ‘honour killing’ that was reported in the *Al-Quds* newspaper in December 1994. The bridegroom, a former prisoner, shot and killed his bride on their wedding night when he discovered she was not a virgin. (Harlow ‘Partition’ 114)

corruption is linked to the way in which men still believe they can maintain their honour,²² and it is not just the patriarchs who are implicated – the brothers pour the petrol, and the women deny their sexuality and subsume it under the actions of the men. The poet feels powerless before such brutality, and she can only ‘pray light/a candle and hope/you were not raped’, the lighting of the candle, an act of love, in contrast to the lighting of the girl. She continues: ‘i can only hope you were/loved once in his/arms that he touched you right/where you needed’. This unspoken, almost secret, pact of love links the poet, the girl and her imagined lover against the violence of the killing.

where was he when they stuck fists up
inside you to prove you loose
when they beat you blue
ripped each hair out your head
each one by one in the name
of god and land spit on you and
cursed the evil that is
woman

As in Jayyusi’s ‘A Tale’, men claim they act in the name of god and country – the defence of national honour is entwined with the concept of women’s dishonour. In the present reality that is Palestine love has become degraded and shameful, the killing and fighting leaving no room for innocent love, the poet warning: ‘palestine’s daughter/love making can be as dangerous/as curfews broken/guerrillas hidden’. In a situation where men’s display of heroic masculinity has been rendered impossible by the crushing of the nation, a father parades his daughter’s head ‘through/cairo to prove his/manhood this is 1997’. The poem ends:

and i can only hope
you had a special song a
poem memorized a secret
that made you smile

this is a love
poem cause i love
you now woman
who lived tried to
love in this world of
machetes and sin

i smell your ashes
of *zaatar* and almonds

²² Samira Haj explains that ‘Female sexuality is defined and controlled by the *hamula* [clan]; women’s sexuality does not belong to them. Sexual purity and lineage honor are seen as inseparable’. (Haj 764)

under my skin
i carry your bones

Imagining and conjuring love out of this horror creates a 'song', a 'poem', that will survive and triumph over the inhumanity Palestinians wreak upon themselves. The murdered girl then comes to embody the symbols of Palestine, the girl who dared to love in a brutal world. This a poem that examines and criticises the link between women's dis/honour and the nation's concept of itself which, Hammad suggests, is still rooted in discredited notions of masculinity.

'A Moment of Mourning' (*PAW*124-6) takes as its subject the post-Oslo Palestinian state and the corruption of revolutionary ideals, with the poet choosing Gaza to symbolise all that she feels has gone wrong. Ismail has lived in Gaza since 1994, a year that saw the return of many Palestinian exiles, particularly those with PLO affiliation who subsequently took up employment with the Palestinian Authority, a situation that, to some extent, reopened the old conflict between those on the inside and 'outsiders'.²³ Her disillusion with life in the new state is depicted as a creeping chill of realisation: 'Gaza, creeps/with cold hands and feet/like my life in this hot-city/of sins'. She uses Gaza to represent the political expediency of the new Palestine, accusing it of 'professionally practicing [*sic*] whoredom/over traditions of Revolution', and she uses images of Gaza as a fallen woman to convey the degradation and betrayal of so many dreams. She writes:

The city which I dreamed in her love,
[. . .]
now sinks in her blood
licking the past that will never return
trying to believe herself
the lovely belly dancer . . .
too proud, too deceived by this praise.

For two years the sky has never rained,
the Griffin²⁴ has sold its immortality
for whoever grants her a temporary lust,

a lust that has evaporated
with a time

²³ Juliane Hammer explains some of the intricacies of the situation of the 'returnees': 'The term "returnees," or Aideen, needs explanation [. . .] The Arabic term '*Aidin* (colloquial Arabic for returnees) is, in the Palestinian context, applied only to people who returned to work for the PA. The connotation of the term is rather negative, or at least critical. Returnees as well as locals use the term either to convey this pejorative meaning or to debate it.' (Hammer 4)

²⁴ The Griffin is the Canaanite symbol of Gaza City (*PAW* 126)

of organised crime.
Now she is enjoying her luxurious pains
like an old woman complaining about her teeth falling . . .

It is perhaps surprising to find a woman writer feminising the city and accusing her of 'whoredom', and we should ask if such a rhetorical move is any different from similar accusations made in poems such as 'To Jerusalem' and 'A National Hymn' (discussed in the previous chapter). I would argue that in the latter the basis of the accusations of whoredom and infidelity arise from misogyny and the instability of the masculine fetishisation of the land. One can detect a certain irony in Ismail's poem, however, because it is the return of the *men* of the PLO and the subsequent nepotism and corruption (the 'organised crime') within the Palestinian Authority that have led to Gaza's degradation.²⁵ The criticism levelled at occupied Palestine (for instance in 'To Jerusalem') is that 'she' had allowed herself to be conquered by the enemy, but 'A Moment of Mourning' suggests that Gaza's occupation by the new political authority has a far more corrupting effect. The sea, which forms one of the long borders of this strip of land and which separated the exiles from the land, 'kept its color/through years of sadness and sufferings', but now 'it has been polluted by capturing/the dreams of the exhausted in exile'. The poem is also a lament, one that is anchored in the present and does not attempt to retrieve a lost Eden, the ending reading:

More sad
more tired
more pale, more and more
more defeated, more and more and more
witnessing its death, that will never be beautiful,
while an old OLIVE TREE insists on the change
and gambles on its FACT.

The olive tree, the most enduring and widely acknowledged symbol of the old Palestine, is still there, now completely divorced from its agrarian associations. It does not look

²⁵ Yezid Sayigh discusses what he terms 'neopatrimonialism' in the Palestinian context, characterised by 'rentier politics' and patronage, and he shows how Palestinian structural failures were a result of a long history of 'populism, nationalism and neopatrimonialism' (Sayigh 680, 687). He quotes a Fateh member who described 'Palestinian disorganization acerbically as "a genius for failure"'. The same member is quoted as believing that the 'Palestinians leaned towards "monopoly, arrogance, suspicion, and accusation, and so towards chaos, confusion, ignorance, failure, defeats, and further repression, jails, and intellectual and mental blockage"' (Sayigh 687). In *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*, her brilliant and illuminating account of the time she spent as the Gaza correspondent for *Ha'aretz*, the Israeli daily newspaper, Amira Hass describes not only the repressive and obstructionist policies of the Israelis but also the corruption of the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the last section of the book, 'Gaza Prison'.

back to a lost Eden but ‘insists on the change’. It still endures but the poet demands that how Palestinians see themselves will have to change, to take account of ‘FACT’.

3.iii ‘A song of love of life and human beings’: women write war

From the refugee camps of Lebanon to those in occupied Gaza and the West Bank, life for the Palestinians increasingly comes to resemble living in a war zone. As has already been noted, it is men who write war and assign women supporting roles that tend to add to the masculine aura of heroism, but for the true nature of war and siege to be understood the voice of all its participants needs to be heard. In war, a woman’s priorities are usually at variance with those of men. Women seek to preserve life, to be able to continue with their caring and nurturing roles. Sara Ruddick points out that this does not make them helpless victims, and she states that: ‘It is possible to act powerfully while standing with those who are hurt. It is neither weak nor passive to reveal one’s suffering while refusing to damage or mutilate in return’ (Ruddick 233). In *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Ruddick theorises that the characteristics of maternal love, when brought to bear upon war and the way in which it is conducted, can transform a society’s perception of war. What she terms ‘the symbols of motherhood’, that is, ‘preservative love, singularity in connection, the promise of birth and the resilience of hope, the irreplaceable treasure of vulnerable bodily being’, when enacted in public become a powerful counterweight to the abstractness of war (Ruddick 227). Ruddick argues that for mothers, whose connection with the physical needs of others so often grounds their existence, bodies and the damage inflicted on them are never abstract. So-called ‘just-war theories’ (150) have distorted thinking about war, deflecting attention away from actual bodies and their mutilation towards abstract causes and the techno-speak that refers to targets and positions. She argues that:

In militarist thinking, human bodies are subordinated to abstract causes, different bodies are organized around abstract labels of civilian or soldier, “the enemy” or ally, us or them. Weapons, positions, and targets have always been the primary referents of military strategy. (Ruddick 146)

Miriam Cooke makes a similar point in *War’s other voices: Women writers on the Lebanese civil war*, her examination of fiction and poetry produced by women during that period of madness. Stressing the importance of women writing their experiences,

she claims in the following passage that once a different perspective on war has been articulated, the myths of war can be rewritten.

Only women's literature which focuses on the dailiness of survival can capture and develop the subtleness of an irrationality that becomes categorized as madness if it is presented in black and white. Only feminine literature documents details that seem too trivial and personal to note. Yet these same details suggest transformations of feeling that finally weave, for each individual, the fabric of war experience. (Cooke *Voices* 27)

Both Ruddick and Cooke attribute men's and women's different attitudes to war to a child's early socialisation. Ruddick, drawing on the work of Harstock, maintains that 'boys fortify themselves against the needs and pleasures of care that they depended on as infants and will rely on more or less intensely throughout their lives'. As they develop a fear of intimacy and physicality, they 'develop a fantasy of transcendence based on a "tradition of freeing the thinking brain from the depths of the most pressing situations and sending it off to some (fictive) summit for a panoramic overview"' (Ruddick 131-2). Cooke refers to Carol Gilligan's theories of men's and women's concepts of responsibility²⁶ and the importance of understanding how these concepts produce the radically different tone in war writing between the two sexes. She explains:

Where men were ideological, women were practical. Men had a clear sense of their rights as individuals; they situated themselves either as revolutionaries vis-à-vis an enemy, or as innocents vis-à-vis a malevolent other. With a clear sense of their duties as individuals, women did not attempt to identify an enemy. Instead they identified those who could be touched. They created a circle, however small, that cohered and made survival possible. (Cooke *Voices* 118)

Palestinian women's writing of war confirms many of these arguments. Women acknowledge the pervasiveness of war in their lives but have not been dehumanised by it. In choosing to write about it they accept a responsibility to truth and to the importance their experiences play in the wider national narrative.²⁷

²⁶ Cooke, quoting Gilligan, writes that boys 'conceive of themselves as separate individuals. Girls, on the other hand, do not experience such a shock [. . .] Nor are they threatened by intimacy. Rather they seek it out. Having learnt early to separate himself, the boy's first loyalty and responsibility is "to himself . . . he then considers the extent to which he is responsible to others as well . . . he seeks rules to limit interference and thus to minimize hurt. Responsibility in his construction pertains to a limitation of action. . . . To her, responsibility signifies response, an extension rather than a limitation of action. Thus it connotes an act of care rather than the restraint of aggression"' (Cooke *Voices* 88)

²⁷ There is one example that is an exception to the women's writing on war that I discuss in this section and that is Leila Khaled's *My People Shall Live* (1975). Khaled became famous by taking part in two attempted hijackings of civilian aeroplanes. Her autobiography is told to George Hajjar, a prominent member of the Palestinian revolutionary movement, who then re-presents it. Rajeswari Mohan has

Liana Badr lived in Jericho until 1967 and was then in exile until the terms of Oslo Accords meant she could return to the West Bank in 1994. If women were largely peripheral in *Wild Thorns*, in *The Eye of the Mirror* (1991) Badr makes their lives the centre of her narrative. The novel tells the story of the siege in 1975 and 1976 of Tal el-Zaatar, a Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut, and the subsequent massacre of fleeing civilians and fighters by the Christian Phalangist militias. Badr was a journalist and a PLO activist in Beirut at the time of the siege, and after the forced flight of the PLO and many Palestinians from Beirut and the massacres in the Sabra and Shatilla camps in 1984, she felt that Palestinian history was repeating itself in a vacuum sealed off from the rest of the world. In her reflections on the creation of the novel, she asked herself how, in the face of the continuing atrocities to which her people were subjected and with their 'lives a succession of absences', they could 'prove [their] existence when the only means [they] possessed were transitory and illusory' (Badr 'Story' 30). Realising that it was up to the Palestinians themselves to tell their history, she demands: 'Is it not time for us to begin the war of memory to fight to preserve what happened to us after the dispersal from the homeland? Is not up to us to build everything that was lost or fragmented?' ('Story' 30-1). *The Eye of the Mirror* is a weaving together of the stories of the survivors,²⁸ and Badr's own detailed journalistic research of the events of that year, but it became more than merely a reconstruction of events. It became, says Badr,

[. . .] a song of love of life and human beings, a passionate hymn to living, enabling us as humans to learn the secret of survival on Earth despite the initial predatory monsters, and the now continual and devastating wars. [. . .] In the story of Tal el-Zaatar I found another face, one contrasting with the horrors of war, one radiating spontaneity, solidarity and steadfastness, the roots of the collective sentiments with which the Palestinians held on to their memory and identity ('Story' 31).

In this most brutal and dehumanising siege, the outcome of which could never have been in doubt, women are as much the front-line fighters, the 'heroic combatants', as

written a substantial and illuminating piece on *My People Shall Live* that discusses the important aspects of Khaled's writing and self-positioning.

²⁸ The survivors of the Tal el-Zaatar siege were women, and the very old and very young. During the evacuation of the camp male children as young as ten were dragged from their mothers' arms and never seen again. Any women suspected of involvement with the PLO were also killed. In her introduction to the novel Fadia Faqir quotes figures from David Gordon's *The Republic of Lebanon: A Nation in Jeopardy* that "'there were about 4,000 casualties and some 12,000 Palestinians fled to other parts of Lebanon. What remained of the camp was razed'" (Faqir 'Introduction' v).

the young men of the *fedayeen*,²⁹ yet the women's particular brand of heroism is not usually celebrated in the narratives of war. The women's battle for survival (no longer a metaphor but a daily reality) is predicated on nationalist imperatives – the cultural and political survival of the Palestinians in exile – yet Badr succeeds in portraying a nationalism that does not rely on the tropes of possession (of land and women) and dominance. Instead of being marginalized and their voices silenced, the women's stories show how the lone male hero, the usual subject of celebration in narratives of war, cannot survive without the sustaining network of care and succour provided by the women of the community. Brinda Mehta warns that:

[. . .] the celebration of the male soldier in isolation without the necessary complement of the women who sustain and create him leads to the elaboration of an incomplete uni-centered narrative that undermines the integrity of the total war effort as a symbol of collective identity in the fight for self-determination. (Mehta 811)

It is therefore unsurprising that in the process of describing the women's activities, activities that undermine the centrality of the masculine war myth, the gendered suppositions on which the myth rests are also interrogated.

The title of the novel refers to a fragment of a mirror that the teenage girl, Aisha, finds whilst searching with her siblings for cigarette butts to satisfy her father's nicotine craving. Hers is the primary focalising consciousness but we also have access to the thoughts of other women and men, young and old. The narrator herself at times enters the action in the first person. 'That was a sight I shall never forget' (125), Badr reflects when she recalls one of the few days she managed to enter the camp, and she then describes meeting some of the characters of the novel. Such an inclusive narrative technique emphasises the collective nature of participation in the struggle and it declines to elevate the official (male) voice above that of the women. At the same time the fragmentation of viewpoint reminds the reader that this is a story without resolution; such a device refuses the teleology so often associated with national narratives. The absence of a land they can call their own removes all existential certainty, yet the women's narratives create another Palestine. In the novel memories of a rural idyll prior to 1948 are often invoked but it is the sense of equality shaped by the women's participation in resisting the siege that suggests an alternative nationalist paradigm.

²⁹ I have used the transcription from the Arabic that is given in *The Eye of the Mirror*.

Two of the older mothers embody the traits of steadfastness, determination and selflessness that the women of the refugee camps have displayed since 1948. One could almost say that Um Jalal and Um Hassan symbolise the resistance of women, except that they are not symbols. Um Hassan, into whose family Aisha marries, was already the mother of a martyr and during the siege her other son, Hassan, Aisha's husband, is also killed. Her kindness and strength draw Aisha to her, despite Aisha's awareness that '[t]radition called for disliking one's mother-in-law' (107). She tells Aisha stories of village life in Palestine before the *nakba*, of the way women worked in the fields alongside the men, of music, and weddings, and of fleeing their homes. In the refugee camps, memories of Palestine are kept alive for the younger generations by mothers and grandmothers,³⁰ and Badr gives Um Hassan the additional role of baking bread for the young men of the *fedayeen*, young men who fight for those memories to have a place in the world. In a time of such crisis, all the women, young and old, work for the cause, work that frequently releases them from the confines of the home, a measure of liberation even in such dire circumstances. Khazneh, one of Um Hassan's daughters, is lame as the result of having contracted polio as a young girl. Such a handicap would have made her virtually unmarriageable, and therefore without prospects, at normal times, but her job as a nurse at the Red Crescent hospital offers her opportunities beyond the cycle of domesticity. She recalls how '[h]er body had felt heavy as far back as she could remember', yet as she walks to administer first aid at forward positions she 'felt that she was light enough to fly, [. . .] filled with confidence and enthusiasm as she walked' (121-2). The sense of liberation, which she clearly feels physically as well as psychologically, prompts her to ponder:

Perhaps her confidence matched that of able-bodied people and perhaps it even outstripped it. It was better that things should be this way than letting everybody believe that her only role was to serve her family, since she was not ever expected to get married. (122)

Conflict with an external enemy is here shown to break down the barriers confining women, especially the expectation that as an unmarriageable woman she should have no life of her own. It is significant that one of her duties as a daughter is to provide an audience for her father's ramblings, a buffer against his realisation of their irrelevance.

³⁰ Julie Peteet, whose book is based on interviews with refugee camp women in Lebanon, describes how women keep memories of Palestine alive – 'Women relate anecdotes of life in Palestine, painting vivid descriptions of social life there and what they had. Today young people often can discuss how much land their families owned and what was grown on it. They know many of the families of their former villages [. . .] and are aware of village history'. (Peteet *Gender* 26)

Khazneh, whose handicap would normally have precluded close physical contact with men in a sexual context, is released by the exigencies of war to mix with the fighters and experience a measure of physicality with them.

The other mother who plays a prominent role in the novel is Um Jalal, Aisha's mother, and she is something of a contrast to Um Hassan. The reader's initial impressions of her are given by means of other characters and are, on the whole, negative. When her mother embraces her affectionately, Aisha notices only 'the plump woman's perspiration', 'this slow-moving, stolid woman' (4, 14). Um Jalal's husband, Assayed (as he is referred to in the novel, instead of the more usual Abu Jalal), refers to her as a 'goat' (71), and he observes how her smiles 'highlighted the deep wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, revealing even more the blackness on her teeth, and bringing out the veins in her neck' (29). Hassan notices as she walks away from him 'large masses of fat protruding from her back beneath her shapeless dress' (161). Her resourcefulness and unstinting energy in securing what she can for her family are viewed critically by Badr during one of her visits to the camp as 'opportunism' (126). These views of Um Jalal are refracted through the lens of a cultural ideal of women's demeanour and physical appearance, an ideal that appears to judge on these criteria rather than on capability, yet it is her 'opportunism' that ensures the survival of her three children. At the height of the siege, the fighters somehow managed to kill and cook a calf, and when they were about throw away the offal, Um Jalal appeared. 'None of them [the fighters] knew how the news had reached her before all the other women', Badr remarks, but because of her intuition 'Um Jalal became the richest woman in the camp' on that day, her family enjoying the first feast they had had for a long time (154). As the siege tightened and travel outside the camp became impossible, Um Jalal was no longer able to continue her work as a cleaner, so she started making and selling candles 'of an unmatched quality' to supplement her income. George, one of the fighters she takes under her wing, is 'amazed at the delicate creativity of this fat woman with the thick voice. It would never have occurred to anyone that there was anything delicate about her' (145). When the medical centre could no longer afford to pay her cleaner's wages, she turned the situation to the best advantage she could, '[staying] on as a volunteer, cooking and making bread and rendering every possible service in exchange for a few supplies of flour, dried beans and tinned foods' (144).

Um Jalal's role as the provider for and sustainer of the family follows a trajectory diametrically opposed to that of her husband. Assayed was a respected shopkeeper in

Jaffa until the *nakba*, 'the son of a family that did not fear its tomorrows because it owned tens of *dunums* of orange groves each a thousand square metres' (69-70). The feeling of potency and invincibility granted by the land, upon which a sense of masculinity was predicated, linked to the nostalgia evoked by the sweet smell and lusciousness of the oranges, is in pitiable contrast to his situation in Tal el-Zaatar. No longer able to work because of the Lebanese denial of work permits to Palestinian men, he now relies on his wife's earnings, a fact he is too ashamed to admit to his Christian friends. He demands money from her that he then spends on *arak* and cigarettes. Violent towards both his wife and Aisha, he clings to outmoded ideas of honour that revolve around the control of his womenfolk, ideas that are shown to retard the national cause. Aisha would like to teach literacy at the PLO centre but fear of Assayed's reaction causes Um Jalal to rule out the possibility as she points out: 'Assayed is very strict and jealous over his daughters. He barely accepts that she should walk on the street! [. . .] One can't go near anything he disapproves of . . . Just think of it . . . he wouldn't even let her stay at school' (63). When Aisha asks her mother why she gives him her earnings, Um Jalal explains: 'To avoid an unholy row, my child. What else can I do. It's a choice between him beating me up and me giving him the money. Giving it to him is better' (15). Whilst Assayed, 'whose abuse and addiction are symptomatic both of patriarchal practices and his own personal and military defeat as a Palestinian male' (Saliba 157), clings to his few remaining scraps of power, Um Jalal is shown having to negotiate a way to survive both her husband's tyranny and his sense of humiliation, and the catastrophe that faces the residents. Brinda Mehta makes a similar point about the twin oppressions experienced by women when she argues that:

The ideology of female resistance is located within the politics of survival in the male-dominated camp where women face the double burden of statelessness, exemplified by the refugee status of Tal Ezza'tar as well as the correlative symptom of patriarchal oppression in light of the male's own emasculation as a displaced and dispossessed Arab man who has been stripped of his rights of ownership. (Mehta 811).

Women constantly lament why such a fate should have befallen their nation but do not seem incapacitated by it, but men like Assayed experience an unbearable humiliation. Only the activities of the *fedayeen* 'obliterated his internal humiliation, the misery buried deep within him and all the deprivations of his present life' (29). He and other men, such as Abu Hassan, wither and weaken both physically and mentally, while their womenfolk appear to grow in strength and resilience.

Badr tells a story of national survival against impossible odds, a testament to bravery and determination, and embeds within it a critique of the masculinist myths upon which the national narrative normally rests. Resistance, as exemplified by the older women, emphasises life-giving, not life-taking (the male need to subdue or kill the Other). They preserve both life and culture, baking bread and passing on their memories. These women would be demonstrating a female consciousness, 'compelled to act by a community-shattering crisis that impeded their ability to carry out the tasks associated with domesticity' (Peteet *Gender* 71). Apart from one young woman, Hana, who is a radio operator and who learns to swear as expressively as any man, it might seem that the women in Badr's story are doing little more than extending their usual sustaining roles. However, Peteet contends:

[. . .] that female consciousness can achieve a revolutionary momentum under certain circumstances, as when civil violence transcends domestic boundaries and undermines the survival of the community. Among some sectors of Palestinian women, political actions motivated by female consciousness confronted a system of external domination and in doing so led to a confrontation with and ultimately a questioning of internal forms of domination. (Peteet *Gender* 71-2)

In *The Eye of the Mirror* Badr appears to emphasise how these 'internal forms of domination' are open to contestation by selecting Aisha as the novel's pivot. She is unworldly, a daydreamer, fearful and confused; as a teenage girl, she possesses no agency and is particularly vulnerable to the abuses of power vested in the patriarchal control of women.³¹ At the beginning of the novel, her parents remove her from the convent where she lived and acted as a cleaner in return for a basic education. Her return to the camp coincides with her developing adolescence, the onset of her first period signalling the 'catastrophe' of womanhood; it was '[s]omething she did not want.' (16). Powerless to protest in any other way, Aisha attempts to halt her progress towards physical maturity by starving, so becoming increasingly listless and weak. Unaware that she is secretly and passionately in love with Hassan's friend, George, her parents arrange her marriage. "'Marriage is a girl's destiny'" (84) states her mother, a destiny Aisha is powerless to resist, especially in the face of her father's threats of a beating. She contemplates escaping from the camp as a last resort, and here the voice of the novelist takes over:

³¹ In my interview with her, Badr says she invented the character of Aisha because she 'wanted an anti-heroine', adding that she was 'sick of all the hero stuff.' (See Appendix II, p.253)

She is neither able to go on with her secret love story, nor can she find salvation in a career or a job. As she confronts her clear feminine destiny, the same eternal treatment meted out to millions of women like her awaits her. Even qualified women with careers and means of their own are no different to Aisha in our part of the world. They do not know how to enjoy the independence of taking their own decisions, however much society may appear to appreciate them. (90)

Badr uses the metaphor of literal imprisonment to describe the lack both of choice and agency for girls like Aisha: 'From then on, everything proceeded in a circular movement like a cord around her neck. Everything went round coiling like a rope, surrounding her and tying her down' (84). At the end of the novel, Aisha, a widow and pregnant, not only survives the massacres of the camp's inhabitants but also starts to make decisions about her future. She decides to stay with her mother after the child is born, rejecting the custom of grandchildren staying in the husband's family in the event of his death. She touches her belly and proclaims to her mother: "'That is my responsibility . . . I don't want anyone else to take it instead of me'" (264). The fact that these words end the novel privileges the voice of the young and the nurturers of the next generation and indicates that they will have to map out their own futures. Badr's intervention, cited above, indicates she is aware that women's participation in the resistance does not guarantee significant improvement in their rights as individuals. It is therefore important to record the events of Palestinian history, not only so that the world will know what is happening to them, but also to reveal how the ossified structures of tradition impede national progress, and obscure the contribution women make to the cause. Mehta sees these narratives both confirming women's predominantly domestic roles but also contesting the social assumptions that underpin this positioning. They 'simultaneously contest and conform to dominant gender paradigms wherein the women use conventional gender roles such as care-giving and nurturing to subvert patriarchal authority and political repression', she writes (Mehta 811). In *The Eye of the Mirror*, Badr makes clear her belief that 'the dominant gender paradigms', around which the concepts of nationalism are constructed, need to be revised given the Palestinians' drastically changed circumstances and the need for all members of the community to be equally involved in the nation's survival and future.

For women living in refugee camps the luxury of having the time to write a novel is unimaginable, but the compulsion to tell their stories remains as strong as ever. Palestinian writers, both men and women, are increasingly turning to memoirs and

personal account literature, the main features of which are, according to Salma Khadra Jayyusi an expression of collective identity 'within the chaos of communal tragedy' and the need to speak out to the world (*AMPL* 67). The two examples of personal account literature I examine here were written during the second *intifada* which started in September 2000. Both address the outside world and convey the reality of life under siege, and both attempt to make clear the gap between that reality and the rhetoric of conflict that relies on abstracting the siege of the refugee camps in the Occupied Territories from what Ruddick terms 'vulnerable bodily being'.

Lena Jayyusi's 'Letters from the Palestinian Ghetto: 8-13 March 2002' (an account of life under siege in Ramallah) starts by highlighting what she calls 'the principle of non-simultaneity' which juxtaposes rarely-heard children's laughter in the refugee camps against a background of heavy artillery fire and helicopters overhead, with that of children's laughter on the other side of the Atlantic 'where the weapons are manufactured, where the master decisions and policies are made, where the new regime of domination is being secured and perfected' (L Jayyusi 47). It is as if the usual meaning conveyed by language cannot match the madness of what is being lived through. She writes:

Down there in the refugee camps they will receive the fury that inhabits the fear – and animates the will to crush – that the colonizer always vents. [. . .] The refugee camps are the very mark of our condition. They are the sign of the original deed which catapulted us all into this unending journey, the embodiment of what might have been, what was, what could be, the body which must be dismembered for so many to breathe lightly, rest back in comfort (50).

Such passages are intersected by unembellished descriptions of fear, and she stresses the cost to actual bodies of what she calls the coloniser's 'will to crush' when she describes how: 'They shoot at will. They kill civilians and say they are terrorists planning to carry out operations' (48). The tanks, embodying the military might of the Israelis, are contrasted to the existential fragility of Palestinian lives: 'Their tanks storm the small corridors of the camps, shattering the frail rooms of the already dispossessed, destroying lives, gutting neighborhoods, intending to terrorize a new generation' (49). There is also great anger directed at the rest of the world for its connivance in, or disinclination to see through, the rhetoric used by the powerful. Jayyusi attempts to use language to state the bare facts and, just as importantly, she reveals how language is used by the powerful to distort the truth. As the shooting intensifies and the residents of the camp

are pinned in their homes, Jayyusi hears Kofi Anan talking of “the necessary use of lethal force”. She retorts: ‘There is then a necessary measure of lethal force that the Israeli war machine can wreak on us in our land?’ Such phrases as that and ‘the cycle of violence’ (which implies equivalence) become the ‘deeds of denial’ (50). This power to shape discourse, to shape perceptions through language, removes from the weakest (those without armies or missiles) one of their last forms of resistance. Jayyusi concludes: ‘It is difficult to speak in the face of the consummate lie, trumpeted and reproduced in various small details across the spectrum of the institutional means of discourse, media and politicians and academics’ (52). The realities she wishes to register are not only the stomach-turning fear, the injuries, the deaths. The silencing of the weak is an essential plank in colonial policy which means that ‘[t]he witness, the dispossessed, must be dissuaded from demanding restitution; must be broken so that the world is not reminded or prodded to rehabilitate’ (49). What, then, is left to those at the mercy of such power? Speech itself seems contaminated. Jayyusi asks:

What register does one speak in when every register is contaminated?
The concrete, the historical, the moral, the political, the quotidian, the
existential? All these are inflected with the performance of power, and
the cruelty that attached to it (50).

What is left is survival and a determination to keep on writing, to create a new register which is not inflected with the cruelty of power, one that produces a counternarrative that arises out of the dialectic of oppression and resistance. Cooke makes an important point about women and their writing of war, arguing that:

To write is to assert responsibility, for in their expression despair and
and pessimism are mitigated. To write is also to shape one’s life, and
to render it relevant as a myth whose reality transcends the particularity
of the author. (Cooke *Voices* 38)

Jayyusi cannot forget the people of the camps, insisting that she carries ‘their gestures, reaching out to beckon, their proclamations, their stories, their puzzlement, and their resolution. Their will to be’ (52). Writing such as this takes on itself the responsibility of presenting another view of war and in doing so it creates an individual agency that also speaks for the whole community.

Muna Hamzeh’s *Ordinary Days in Dheisheh*³² is the publication in book form of her diary, kept between October and December 2000, and it describes the Israeli assault on the refugee camp during the repression of the second *intifada*. It was published on the

³² Dheisheh is a large refugee camp on the outskirts of Bethlehem.

worldwide web, and Hamzeh set up the 'Across Borders Project' that linked all fifty-nine refugee camps on the internet, giving Palestinians within Israel and in the diaspora an easy means of communicating with each other, despite the Kafkaesque laws that restrict movement in the West Bank between zones A, B and C. The project especially allowed Palestinians to tell the world directly of their daily lives under siege. This was the story Hamzeh was determined the world should hear, and she is honest about the psychological burden of such a struggle to survive. Jayyusi and Hamzeh write primarily as Palestinians and as women second, but Hamzeh's account as a woman in a refugee camp concentrates on quotidian activities to an extent that it would be difficult to imagine a man's doing. She is also unafraid to admit to weakness, to a psychological fragmentation – to forgetting to hang out the washing for days, and to using washing-up liquid instead of oil to fry eggs. Some of the most moving passages are when Hamzeh imagines the grief of the mothers of martyrs, of the breaking of the news of an only son's wounding. Her feelings of helplessness, her inability to stem her tears, are shot through with a rage against the journalistic jargon of war. Hamzeh, too, is aware of the reality gap. As the refugee camps are being bombarded, life in Israel goes on as usual, a world apart from what is happening within their own state. She describes how:

The Israelis get up every morning and go to work, while their kids go to school. They go to their restaurants and theatres. All this does not affect them. It is as if their husbands, fathers and sons who are killing, wounding and maiming us were some mercenary soldiers from a far away land. This has always been the problem of the Israeli public at large: their silence in the face of their army's and government's aggression. (Hamzeh 19)

Hamzeh, too, reproduces examples of the manipulation of language. She points out how a reporter's account of clashes in Bethlehem describe how '*Israeli bullets penetrated Palestinian homes*' whereas '*Palestinians fired shots at an Israeli bus. Driver wounded*' (23, emphases in the original). She demands of the outside world: 'Where are you world from this hypocrisy?' She accuses people of turning a blind eye to the reality of life under bombardment in the refugee camps, asking: 'Hasn't the world been watching the ugly death of nearly a hundred Palestinians and the wounding of nearly three thousand in just twelve days, so many of them school-age children: our children' (46). For Hamzeh, as for Jayyusi, it is the determination of the people to continue as much as possible with their ordinary lives (their 'ordinary days') that stands out. She writes: 'Bombing or no bombing, it is olive-picking season in Palestine. Soon

we will dip our bread in fresh olive oil. Life goes on. The determination to live is unwavering' (92).

Ordinary Days in Dheisheh is a fragmented, polemic, despairing, challenging and tragic account of two months spent under conditions of extreme duress. Its changes of voice, of audience, its rawness, all speak of the dislocation that marks Palestinian existence. Said comments on the 'formal instability' of Palestinian prose and how it 'is the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent'. He goes on to say that the Palestinian 'characteristic mode' is 'broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, its limitations' (Said *After* 38). Hamzeh's and Jayyusi's memoirs use such an unstable form to convey the precariousness of individual and collective Palestinian lives.

Women writing war in a time of war tell the unheard stories of heroism, the daily triumph of survival and hope over destruction; they tell the truth to the outside world. Writing itself is a way for women to forge some measure of control over their lives. The discipline of writing, the fact that one can still write under such circumstances, becomes a victory in itself. Claire Gebeyli, a poet writing during the Lebanese civil war, has said that "Poetry has the discipline and control that contains the daily explosions, so that beyond subjectivity will be found a universal unity" (quoted in Cooke *Voices* 61). In the first stanza of 'broken and beirut' (PAW113-4), Suheir Hammad describes the reality of life in Beirut under siege: 'no mistakes made here/these murders are precise/mathematical/ these people blown apart burned alive/flesh and blood all mixed together/a sight no human being can take'. She is not afraid of admitting to human fragility and failings – 'don't know what to with visions/of blown up babies so we/lamé nails' – and she concedes a weariness that saps the strength to continue the daily battle for survival, writing how she is 'tired of taking fear and calling it life/being strong and getting/over shit to prepare for more shit'. She writes of the danger that she will forget that life can be wholesome:

i want to go home
not only to mama and baba
i want to go home to before me and
pain bombs and war before
loveless sex poetry and chocolate
i want to remember what i've never lived
a home within me within us
where honey is offered from my belly

to sweeten babies' breath make boys moral
and girls strong

The form of the poem adds to the sense of personal and collective fragmentation: the frequent absence of the subject of a sentence, and the gaps on the page between words make this a halting delivery that turns back on itself in search of meaning. The last two stanzas read:

come back and make no mistake
be precise get back to work
shifting through the rubble mathematically
building a new day
with offerings of honey and memory

never forgetting
where we come from
where we've been
and how sweet honey
on the lips of survivors

The penultimate stanza is a response to the first: where the murderous bombs were 'precise' and 'mathematical', people have also to be precise and mathematical in 'building a new day', a corrective to the image of women weeping and wringing their hands. The final stanza, in losing the gaps between phrases, indicates a sureness of vision achieved through the action of writing itself. These last two stanzas juxtapose the necessity of building a future with an assertion of collective memories, the 'sweet honey' that is the antidote to destruction around them. Survival, rebuilding and remembering all become acts of resistance, an example of Ruddick's assertion of the possibility of acting powerfully 'while standing with those who are hurt'.

One reason for the sense of vulnerability expressed in women's poetry is the arbitrary nature of war in selecting its victims as well as the random injustices to which the Palestinians have been exposed since the *nakba*. On the whole, women are not fighters on the front line where the narrative of heroism can be acted out. Instead, they and their children have become targets; their role in preserving life is threatened and they have little protection. Poems on these themes therefore become both a particular and a universal condemnation of the masculine nature of resolving conflict. In the 'destabilized context' that is war, Cooke contends that women 'are the ones to take the initiative in the struggle and to forge a new relationship between the individual and the collective' (Cooke 'Women' 21). Similarly, Cixous writes that 'In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world

history' (Cixous 253). Hanan Ashrawi's 'From the Diary of an Almost-Four-Year-Old' takes as its speaker a Palestinian girl called Rasha Houshiyye who, according to the introduction to the poem, 'lost an eye in March 1988 when she was hit by a rubber bullet shot by an Israeli soldier. At the time, Rasha was standing on the balcony of her grandmother's house in Al-Bireh, near Ramallah' (AMPL340). This poem was written in June 1988 at the height of the *intifada*, and these are the second, third and last stanzas.

I did not see the bullet
but felt its pain
exploding in my head.
His image did not
vanish, the soldier
with a big gun, unsteady
hands, and a look in
his eyes
I could not understand.

If I can see him so clearly
with my eyes closed,
it could be that inside our heads
we each have one spare set
of eyes
to make up for the ones we lose.

I hear a nine-month-old
has also lost an eye,
I wonder if my soldier
shot her too – a soldier
looking for little girls who
look him in the eye –
I'm old enough, almost four,
I've seen enough of life,
but she's just a baby
who didn't know any better. (AMPL340-1)

By using the girl as her speaker, Ashrawi demonstrates how even the very young become targets and how such young lives are forever marked by the effects of war. The poem's emphasis on sight makes it a statement of a witness rather than of a victim. The girl's one eye becomes an internal eye with heightened perception. In the lines 'the soldier/with the big gun, unsteady/hands, and a look in/his eyes/I could not understand', the line break after 'unsteady' leaves the word suspended without its referent so that 'unsteady' becomes the opposite of the girl's unflinching look. By placing 'his eyes' in isolation, the poet emphasises the estrangement of the soldier's vision from the rest of

humanity. Ashrawi manages to avoid sentimentality by ensuring no self-pity inflects the speaker's voice; instead, the girl's words accuse simply by giving her child's understanding of what happened. The matter-of-fact tone of the little girl's voice places such horrific injuries in the realm of the everyday. Naomi Shihab Nye directs her poem, 'For Mohammed Zeid, Age 15' (*Banipal* 15/16, 41) at the Israeli authorities, and she also acts as a prosecutor of the excuses that are made for the arbitrariness of war.

There is no stray bullet, sirs.

No bullet like a worried cat
crouching under a bush,
no half-hairless puppy bullet
dodging midnight streets.
The bullet could not be a pecan
plunking the tin roof,
not hardly, no fluff of pollen
on October's breath,
no humble pebble in the street.

So don't gentle it, please.
[. . .]

But this bullet had no innocence, did not
wish anyone well, you can't tell us otherwise
by naming it mildly, this bullet was never the friend
of life, should not be granted immunity
by soft saying – friendly fire, straying death-eye,
why have we given the wrong weight to what we do?
[. . .]

Nye makes clear that bullets are shot with the intent to wound or kill, and no 'soft-saying' will make it otherwise. She, along with so many women writers, asks why military conflict (and the abstraction that accompanies it) pushes aside humanitarian concerns, so that we end up with an imbalance, the 'wrong weight'. In Cooke's words, 'traditional organized, armed conflict, however suicidal and unsuccessful it may have proved itself to be' (Cooke 'Women' 21) grinds relentlessly on. As with so many poems by women, the domestic and the familiar (the crouching cat, the new-born puppy, the 'fluff of pollen') are contrasted with the estrangement that is a result of military conflict and its need to destroy. In such a context, even words are no longer innocent. In 'Arguments', Lisa Suhair Majaj draws this contrast to give particular emphasis to the fragility of life – 'the infinite fragility of an infant's skull' – against which the words that attempt to excuse seem even more obscene. She asks us to:

consider the infinite fragility of an infant's skull,
how the bones lie soft and open
only time knitting them shut

consider a delicate porcelain bowl
how it crushes under a single blow –
in one moment whole years disappear

consider: beneath the din of explosions
no voice can be heard
no cry

consider your own sky on fire
your name erased
your children's lives "a price worth paying"

consider the faces you do not see
the eyes you refuse to meet
"collateral damage"

how in these words
the world
cracks open (PAW175)

The tenderness with which the poem starts, and the appreciation of the 'softness' of innocence, seem to put a feminine perspective on the nature of the man's world of war and their lack of appreciation of the delicacy of life. This poem provides a vision of the bereaved mother that contrasts with the image, so favoured by masculinist nationalism, of the mother of the martyr ululating with joy over the body of her son. In these poems the true cost of war is the damage done to children, which women refuse to render in the abstract phrases that Ruddick considers to be part of militaristic discourse.

In writing of the familial and domestic in a time of war, women insist above all on the importance of caring rituals that seek to preserve life. The 'trivial and personal' (Cooke 'Women' 27) details enshrine a commonality of experience that, once given voice, unites women in rewriting the myths of war. War is then understood not merely as a man's arena for demonstrating heroism but as an activity that deliberately seeks to disrupt the life-sustaining roles of caregivers. The following two poems show how women extend their domestic activities into what Ruddick terms a 'politics of resistance' (Ruddick 223). Naomi Shihab Nye dedicates her 'The Words under the Words' (AMPL359-60) to her grandmother, and the poem begins: 'My grandmother's hands recognize grapes/the damp shine of a goat's new skin./When I was sick they followed me,/I woke from the long fever to find them/covering my head like cool

prayers'. This first stanza roots the grandmother in an agrarian past and conveys familiar images of the comfort so often associated with grandmothers, but the following lines show how her life has been transformed by occupation: 'my grandmother's voice says nothing can surprise her./Take her the shotgun wound and the crippled baby'. She will have to say 'Farewell to the husband's coat,/the ones she has loved and nourished,/who fly from her like seeds into a deep sky'. With the last stanza emphasising the grandmother's belief in Allah, this portrait of a woman implies unchanging values and a permanence that nevertheless accommodate and partake in a changed reality. In a similar way, Ashrawi's 'Women and Things' (*AMPL*335-7) contrasts comforting domestic rituals ('Women make things grow', 'Women make things light', 'Women make things smooth') with the everyday deprivations and challenges of living life under occupation.

Women make things smooth
to the touch
like the kneading of
leavened bread at the dawn of hunger;
And coarse
like the brush of a
homespun coat on
careworn shoulders and bare
arms barely touching on the night of deportation.

Women make things cold
sharp and hard
like a legal argument thrust
before the threat of search and detention;
Or warm
and gentle like
justice in a poem,
like the suggestion of
the image of freedom
as a warm bath and
a long soak, in an undemolished home.

The brutality of occupation – the deportations that break up families, house searches and demolitions – intrude into the domestic realm, but these women are not passive in the face of such violations; they know their legal rights, they will argue with soldiers, they keep the family together when a husband, brother or father is deported. It is the knowledge and rendering of the tiny details of the women's activities that make such poems feminist statements, and not an idealised image of 'woman'. The poem ends

with an articulation of the conviction that women share these experiences, a sharing that links them across their 'separate/worlds'.

And as we, in separate
worlds, braid
our daughters' hair
in the morning, you and
I, each
humming to herself, suddenly
stops
and hears the
tune of the other.

The 'tune' that appears to unite Palestinian women writers is a philosophy that addresses gender, class and national issues, and does not focus solely on nationalist imperatives as the impetus for action. Ashrawi has described what she believes women can achieve in bringing their own solutions to the national crisis. She has said:

And if we lose sight of the human substance then we lose sight of the basic essence of all our work. . . . Men always choose the politics of domination and destruction . . . It is time to transcend the pain of the moment and to impose a woman's solution on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the women's solution is based on equality, on non-discrimination, on the preservation of life and rights and on addressing the core issues of justice, freedom, with candor and with courage, not with weapons and power.
(quoted in Cooke 'Women' 26).

As we have seen with the novels of Khalifeh and Badr, those for whom the heroics of so much nationalist discourse are unavailable – the poor of the Occupied Territories, the women of refugee camps who use whatever means are available to keep their children fed and safe – contribute to the idea of the nation in ways that are inclusive rather than exclusive. They are the 'ill-shaped components' that can nevertheless shape the history of war if their voices are heard. Women's insistence on 'the preservation of life and rights' supplies a vital counterbalance to masculine war myths, myths that are inclined to overlook the damage war inflicts on vulnerable bodies and to subsume individual rights under national imperatives.

4. LIVING HERE AND REMEMBERING THERE: THE DIALECTIC OF ABSENCE AND PRESENCE IN PALESTINIAN EXILIC WRITING

*You awaken in cities you don't know
Beneath a sky you don't know.
Ghost and event split your loyalty
You are the hour and the transient cloud.*
(Muhammad al-As'ad, 'Personal Account', *AMPL* 119)

*We have become weightless,
as light as our dwellings in distant winds.
We have, both of us, befriended the strange beings in the clouds.
We have both been freed from the gravity of the land of identity.
What shall we do?
What shall we do without exile
and long nights of gazing at the water?*
(Mahmoud Darwish, 'Who Am I, without Exile?' *UIWP* 113-4)

A sense of exile has been the universal condition of being Palestinian. Experiences of exile have varied widely, but all would seem to fit Hans Wehr's definition of *al-ghurba* in his Arabic-English dictionary: 'absence from the homeland, separation from one's native country, banishment, exile; life, or place, away from home' (quoted in Schulz 20). What this definition does not mention is the fact of statelessness. Madan Sarup describes the exile as 'an eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere. The nightmare is to be uprooted, to be without papers, stateless, alone, alienated and adrift in a world of organized others' (Sarup 102). Edward Said contends that exile is 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted' (Said 'Reflections' 358). He is adamant that we should think not only of a few famous exiled writers, such as Joyce and Nabokov, but must remember 'the refugee-peasants with no prospect of ever returning home, armed only with a ration card and an agency number.' He, like Sarup, emphasises the void into which exiles disappear, the 'awful forlorn waste [of] hopelessly large numbers, the compounded misery of "undocumented" people suddenly lost, without a tellable history' (Said 'Reflections' 359). On a personal level, becoming a stranger leaves an indelible mark. Mourid Barghouti comments that 'the stranger can never go back to what he was. Even if he returns. It is over. A person gets "displacement" as he gets asthma, and there is no cure for either' (Barghouti *Ramallah* 4). The Palestinians are also frequently referred to as a diaspora. The word derives

from the Greek, *diaspeirein*, where *dia* means apart, and *speirein* to scatter. Drawing on William Safran's discussion of diasporic communities, James Clifford gives the following as the main features of diaspora: 'a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship' (Clifford 305). Thus diaspora implies a certain sense of community, a projection of collective values and shared culture, within exile. According to Clifford, the sense of belonging to a prior home 'must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing' (Clifford 310). The sense of rootlessness felt, according to Sarup, 'like some phantom ache in an amputated limb' (Sarup 96) is thus in a dialectical tension with remembering, with assertion of presence once and presence projected into the future. 'Diasporic consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension', argues Clifford (312).

It is worth noting that although the terms exile, émigré, expatriate, and immigrant, are often used interchangeably, there are important etymological differences. The *Chambers Dictionary* defines exile as 'enforced or regretted absence from one's country or home; banishment [. . .] someone who is in exile; a banished person' and the Latin root is given as *exsilium*, banishment, from *ex* out of, root of *salire* to leap' (590). Emigrate is defined as 'to move from one country or state to another as a place of abode', from the Latin *emigrare*, from *e* from, and *migrare* to remove' (548). A significant difference is that the term exile carries with it an emphasis on banishment, on forced removal from one's homeland, with no promise of return. To emigrate does not encompass the notion of force but rather of voluntary movement. Sophia McClennen similarly argues that the terms exile, refugee, and diaspora are related to 'forced dislocations', whereas the émigré or immigrant moves 'by choice'; additionally she points out that although the roots of these words refer to the land or growth, their Greek prefixes are negative (McClennen 18-21). Said also delineates between the notion of banishment as associated with pre-modern society, when an individual was cast out of society, and refugees, who are a recent phenomena implying large numbers forced to flee from their place of origin because of political upheaval or natural disasters (Said 'Reflections' 362-3). The exile or refugee is usually a victim of politics, whereas the movement of émigrés and immigrants is often economically motivated

The state of exile (and attempts to conceptualise and make sense of it) is fraught with contradictions. There is an awareness that exile is a universal state that has been

experienced since recorded history began, but on an everyday level it is peculiarly isolating and individual. The exile necessarily looks back to what has been lost but in order to make life bearable, loss and anguish cannot be allowed to dominate. There is a feeling of suspension between the past and the anticipated restoration to wholeness that involves both place and time. Exile has frequently been claimed as the representative motif of our times. An alienated, fragmented existence, deterritorialised and allegedly free from the constraints of nationalism, the exile lives in liminal spaces, or border zones, the model of transculturism and the exemplar of the age's globalising forces: the very model of postmodern consciousness. Poststructuralism's elevation of the signifier, a free-floating entity along an endless chain of deferred meaning, comes at the expense of any reassurance of solidity and fixity. Such a state of being is intended by the theorists to be liberating, but few exiles manage to float above their material reality. Their state of deterritorialisation makes them long for territory. In the instance of the Palestinians, their experience contradicts many of the theories of poststructuralism. Sophia McClennen was prompted to write her invaluable study, *The Dialectics of Exile*, because, she writes in her preface, "I knew then that I wanted to confront the playful way that exiles had been appropriated by theory and stripped of their tragic edge". She later makes the point that although 'theories of the postmodern resonate with exiles, their experience of displacement, decentring and disempowerment is grounded in the particularities of their experience and cannot be categorized as merely symbolic of the condition of outsider or as representative of linguistic *différance*' (McClennen ix, 25). Exiles also have a complicated relationship with the idea of nationalism. People find themselves in exile because over-zealous nationalist ideologies become exclusive rather than inclusive in their drive to homogeneity. The exile is constantly made aware of her marginality and outsider status and of the fact that she was pushed to the margin or outside by exclusive nationalism, but at the same time she feels the need to belong to a national grouping. Said asks, pertinently:

How, then, does one surmount the loneliness of exile without falling into the encompassing and thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions? What is there worth saving and holding on to between the extremes of exile on the one hand, and the often bloody-minded affirmations of nationalism on the other? (Said 'Reflections' 359-60)

Despite the tropes of loss and absence upon which exile is predicated, the Palestinians have asserted their connection with the land in a way that emphasises presence. Amy Kaminsky puts the point eloquently: 'The departure into absence of exile contains and

will foster a will to return to presence. The exile's writing aims to win back the land; its longed-for destination is that one place where it can never be' (Kaminsky 32). The longed-for land is at once both physical, a geographical point of return, and symbolic, representing an alternative to the humiliations and misery of the present. These paradoxes appear both within and between many literary works, vehicles that, as was argued earlier, were essential as a means of imagining a Palestinian nation when no state institutions existed to fulfil the role.

This chapter will attempt to explore, through an examination of Palestinian exilic writing, most of these irreconcilables and antimonies. Whilst my decision to structure this discussion around the dialectic of absence and presence was taken before I read McClennen's *The Dialectics of Exile*, I have been influenced and greatly helped by her proposition that the many contradictions of exilic existentialism and writing can be held together in a dialectical tension rather than having to be seen as a series of binary oppositions. The first section covers a wide range, from poetry of anguish and affirmation, and the writing of second-generation exiles, to the nightmare of exilic alienation taken to its extreme. I have decided to devote a section to Edward Said's memoir, *Out of Place*, for the way in which it attempts to hold in balance many of the contradictions faced by the exile. The section on Mahmoud Darwish examines some of his later poetry in which exile is treated as a metaphysical, and not just physical, state, and in which he attempts to create a community of exile, drawing on myth and vestiges of destroyed cultures, such as those of Moorish Spain and Canaanite times.

4.i 'A phantom ache in an amputated limb': dealing with the pain of exile

Exile is psychological as well as physical; a physical displacement from 'home' also entails a mental displacement, a sense of disconnection, of insecurity, of the impossibility of being the person you were. Besides the nostalgia for the physically absent land (discussed in the first chapter), Palestinian literature of exile exhibits a longing for an ontological wholeness that dispersal ruptured. The sense of collective identity fostered by remembrance of the land is opposed by the essential loneliness of the exile and by an existential uncertainty. Muhammad al-As'ad's poem 'The Earth Also Dies' (*AMPL* 123-4) expresses both personal and collective loneliness and ontological doubt, the first stanza reading:

With what faith
Can stars

Sparkle?
 And naked trees
 Cast shade?
 With what faith
 Can our echoes
 Reverberate
 In alleys after we leave
 For home
 And shut the door, saying
 That those who bear witness to us
 speak for our times?
 With what faith
 Can we deposit ourselves
 In language
 In talk
 As though we were not alone
 As though
 Others
 Newspapers
 Television
 And airline schedules
 Share our coffee with us?

The repeated line 'With what faith' implies loss of faith and questions the belief systems that can lend coherence to a confusing life. It could be a religious faith that is being challenged to supply an answer, especially given the absence of a promised land, a land that for the exile constantly recedes as the years pass. The references to witnesses and to the hope that the exiles are not alone, that others empathise with their plight, could speak of a loss of faith in a common humanity. The poem also suggests that the exile's universe is so disrupted that physical quotidian details are no longer assured. The sparkle of the stars and the welcoming shade, which represent the intertwining of light and shadows, and the echoes that are testament to a previous existence, all blur and threaten to disappear. The form of the poem suggests fragmentation, especially in the brevity of its lines and in the way in which a thought is left suspended without being taken to a conclusion. Nouns are separated from their verbs, so that that which was known by its actions is now divorced from them. Telling one's story is no longer a consolation because the invisibility and statelessness of Palestinian exiles mean a hearing is not guaranteed and their words might reverberate in a deserted alley. The motif of finding oneself in language, so often a trope of exile, is

recognised in this poem as pointless if a sympathetic audience is not available.¹ This in turn points to a need to feel a sense of community, but the poem continues by doubting even the ‘unruffled calm’ of domestic life indicated by ‘desks/Home furniture/Coffee spoons and/The quiet cradle of the little one/In the corner of the room’. The moment of calm must be mistrusted because it can so easily vanish. The poet asks: ‘Why are we suddenly left/Without seasons/Without skies/Without mothers?’ There is no answer but instead the profound sense of insecurity is deepened when ‘museum gates/Shopping malls’ – environments that usually buzz with activity – become reminders to the exile of the emptiness and aridity of life when one no longer has a country of one’s own, turning instead into ‘Closed harbours/Deserted pavements/And withering grass at the end of summer’. The last stanza reads:

The earth also dies
Cannot take us
As martyrs
Or prophets
We who are deleted
Without a sign of identification
To mark our absence,
Who are spread
Like untranslatable tenderness,
We wanderers
Like nights astray
Over otherworldly deserts.

Here the poet speaks of the possibility of the disappearance of the Palestinians as a nation, and he also is aware that the roles they might assume in exile – of suffering (the martyr) or of inhabiting an interstitial space of special knowledge (the prophet) – will not be recognised by the rest of the world. The lines ‘We wanderers/Like nights astray/Over otherworldly deserts’ suggest that, without a home on this earth, the exile is the eternal wanderer in a world that is ‘otherworldly’ in its unknowability.

In *After The Last Sky*, Said describes how whenever he makes even the shortest journey he packs an unnecessarily large number of items because, he concludes, he fears he may never return (Said *After* 60, *Out* 17). In two poems, Waleed Khazindar describes the constant sense of insecurity that is induced by the awareness of

¹ In ‘Reflections on Exile’, Said writes: ‘Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists,, and intellectuals. Each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill’ (363).

impermanence. 'Belonging' (*AMPL* 198) evokes the fear that the exile can never be master even of his most intimate environment:

Who was it fractionally moved the vase
and was here in the room in my absence?
And the picture of the slain knight on the wall
someone has tampered with it.
My papers show disorderly edges
from a hurried reading.
I never leave my pillow this way
nor the abandon of a soiled shirt.

Who was it visited my room with me
away, who can it be?
What new assertion of calm will restore the vase to its place?
What reconciliation impose on the dead knight
his old demeanor, his symmetry on the blank wall.

What will restore to my pillow and shirt
the aroma of the citizen?

The lack of control over life felt by the exile translates into paranoia – does he imagine he is being searched as a 'security hazard', or is it the host country's paranoia of outsiders that is referred to? In 'Reflections on Exile' Said observes that for the exile 'nothing is secure' and that exiles are often prone to 'wilfulness, exaggeration, overstatement' (360, 363). The items in this poem can be read as symbols redolent with meaning for the Palestinian refugee. The vase of flowers suggests the possibility of organic renewal; the picture of the slain knight represents the pathos of a defeated nation; the pillow becomes the marker of dreams; and the shirt is the identity worn for the outside world. Even these symbols have been undermined and cannot restore wholeness. In 'Houses' (*AMPL* 199), Khazindar again resists the comfort of familiar objects, the second half of the poem reading:

He closed his eyes, lay back against the shoulder of familiar habits.
He will not make friends with another vase,
he will not confess to a bed that will blow up in the next war,
he will not make tea or sing.
He will pace back and forth for a long time between the porch and
the kitchen
and he will listen hard for a sound coming from the garden gate.
But there is only the crunching of leaves under feet
passing
then
going on;
there is nothing but the hum of talk in the houses next door.

The subject of the poem lives in a house like any other, with a garden gate that would normally admit friends, but its very existence emphasises his lack of company and his essential loneliness. When you are an exile the city is as lonely as the desert, and the 'hum of talk' from neighbours intensifies his own feelings of isolation. In their emphasis on the undependability of homely items, these poems stress the impossibility of the exile being at home anywhere.

The motif of perpetual wandering appears frequently in diasporic Palestinian poetry. Abd al-Raheem 'Umar's poem 'Plea' ends with the lines 'Will this caravan ever settle?/ Will our trek ever end?' (*AMPL* 321). In 'Departure', 'Ali Al-Khalili asks 'When will the exiles sit/around one table/and a family rejoice/knowing/that despite sorrow/it is our homeland!!' (*AMPL* 196). The use of exclamation marks instead of the expected question mark indicates a statement of belief. The sea is often used as a symbol of constant movement. Mu'een Bseiso's 'Sailor Returning from Occupied Shores' ends:

But I've been fated to perpetual travel!
A wave arrives from the sea,
clutches at my sails,
and will not let them go,
The winds clutch
at my thirsty heart,
and the blood of my wounds
remains fresh for each new morning. (*AMPL* 135)

The motion of the tide advancing and receding is metaphoric of the exile's hope and despair, one moment believing a safe haven has been reached, the next to be swept away from it. The poem makes clear the fresh wounding to which the exile awakes with each new day. Naji 'Allush begins his poem 'On the Shore' (*AMPL* 109-113) with the lines:

The ocean pauses at the shore,
grows quiet,
quiet,
releases its abundant dreams . . .
Fields of wheat and palm trees
flow out like a field of cornstalks
and quietness reigns . . .

The ocean's 'abundant dreams' speak of its antithesis, the land, and promise the land of wheat and palm trees, yet the speaker imagines this in a dreamlike state, feeling 'It is/the ocean/coming . . . /It is the ocean coming'. Waking reality for the speaker is that he is neither on land nor of the ocean, as stanzas 4, 6 and 8 make clear.

And I
where sea and sand are joined
am walking towards my thirst,
am searching for threshing floors
that will accept me,
for grapes that will not mock my hunger . . .

And I
where sand and sea are joined
call out to the sea on behalf of the sand,
implore mercy for the thirsty
houses
and the sorrowing trees . . .

Then it is the sand
and eternal thirst
that call to me . . .
I leap seething
with imagination
back to my country

These stanzas contain religious/mythical symbolism of bread and wine, and mercy for the thirsty and sorrowing; trees and houses often act as metonyms for the nation. There is also a religious tension between clinging to life on this earth and being willing to give oneself to a higher power or deity. But to give oneself over to the sea means relinquishing longing for the land, something the speaker admits he cannot do:

It is the ocean . . .
It stretches out
 and out
 and out
embraces the sand on Jaffa's coast,
frolics with the houses in Asqalan . . .
And here I am
standing stock-still.
I do not give my heart up to the sea.
I do not brave the water and its proud eddies.
Here I am
chained by the city . . .

The ocean is able to embrace the beloved cities of Jaffa and Asqalan whereas the exile is denied movement towards them yet is psychologically chained to them by memory and longing. This poem powerfully expresses the lived tension of loss and hope, mentioned by Clifford, and in using the sea as the metaphor for this tension, the poet also conveys the sense of lack of agency felt by so many refugees and exiles when he writes: 'Here I stand/for centuries/pursued by sand and drought/and by eternal

Come, desolation overwhelms me.
A crown of events divides me.
I am the machined hour and the transient cloud.

The motif of light (the sun and gleaming sea-shells) that promises happiness is counterbalanced by the possibility of never reaching the end of the road. Talk of the future eventually brings only insecurity, with the roads that might lead to new dawns instead becoming the endless road of wandering exile, extending forever towards the horizon. The 'other cities' that seemed to offer new hope now become 'A thousand stony cities', and the moments of optimism become a realisation that 'Once more you live in estrangement./Once again/Snares are snatching at your hands.' The poem ends with the lines 'What will come next/Will be even darker' as the pendulum swings back towards the pole of loss and absence.

Using the sun as a symbol of possibility illustrates Guillen's proposition that exile writing veers between the poles of a solar image, which 'develops towards universal dimensions', and its opposite which 'denounces a loss, an impoverishment' (quoted in McClennen 41).² McClennen goes on to suggest that, according to this dialectical theory of exile writing, 'the exile can either look up towards the sun for inspiration, recognizing his shared humanity, or gaze down at the ground, contemplating his material existence far from his native land [. . .] exile identity is the unity of these opposite tendencies' (McClennen 42). 'Personal Account' holds these two poles in tension: the writer is *both* the 'machined hour' (the terrestrial pole of the constraining present) *and* the 'transient cloud', which suggests an ability to transcend temporal limitations and reach towards 'universal dimensions'. A similar tension is explored in a poem by Sa'adeh Sudah, 'Your Hands'.

Your hands,
two clouds shading
the arid desolation that stretches
between my immense affection for this life
and the longing that bids me search among tombstones
for the secrets of the tides. (*AMPL* 306)

² Guillen also proposes the binary of exile and 'counter-exile' literature. In exile literature, "exile becomes its own subject matter" and becomes the "direct expression of sorrow" whereas the writers of counter-exile literature "incorporate the separation from place, class, language or native community, insofar as they triumph over the separation and thus offer wide dimensions of meaning and transcend the earlier attachments to place or native origin" (quoted in McClennen 40). McClennen has reservations about this theory because 'if the literature of counter-exile exemplifies the complete transcendence of place or native origin, then such literature would have to be empty of history, of its material reality' (McClennen 40-1).

His 'immense affection for this life' is countered by the inescapability of the knowledge of what has been lost, where the past acts like the dead weight of a tombstone. The hands (of a lover, or friend?) can relieve some of the harshness of this desolation but cannot expunge it from the soul. Exile clearly disturbs the temporal dimension of existence. Clifford's argument applies here, that a linear concept of time (which is the time of nationalism and modernity, a teleology of progression) is disrupted by the dynamics of exilic or diasporic existence. He writes:

Experiences of unsettlement, loss, and recurring terror produce discrepant temporalities – broken histories that trouble the linear, progressivist narratives of nation-states and global modernization. [. . .] In diaspora experience, the copresence of 'here' and 'there' is articulated with an anti-teleological (sometimes messianic) temporality. Linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future, a renewed, painful yearning. (Clifford 317, 318)

In 'Your Hands', the 'past that is desired' is constantly combed for 'the secrets of the tides', a metaphor that combines a cyclical movement involving time and place, and an understanding of how the past might no longer obstruct the future. In 'Personal Account' and 'Your Hands', the motif of distance works simultaneously on the level of the psychological, the temporal – the gulf between the self in the present and the past – and the literal, as the exile ponders a lifetime of wandering.

'My relationship with place is in truth a relationship with time', contends Mourid Barghouti in *I Saw Ramallah*. He goes on:

I move in patches of time, some I have lost and some I possess for a while and then I lose because I am always without a place. I try to regain a personal time that has passed. Nothing that is absent ever comes back complete. Nothing is recaptured as it was. (87)

In this exploration of exile and return he seems particularly concerned with how the exile, having been deprived of the physical and psychological anchorage provided by place, exists largely in a temporal dimension.³ Barghouti explains how even Dar Ra'd, the house in which he grew up, 'is not a place, it too is a time. A time of waking up with early prayers to taste the figs picked by the light of dawn' (88). Such is the rupture of exile that even returning to one's childhood home, and standing in it, cannot bring

³ Barghouti lived in Deir Ghassanah, a village near Ramallah, from his birth in 1944 until he left to study in Cairo in 1966. He was still in that city when the 1967 war broke out, and thereafter he was unable to return to Palestine until 1996 after the signing of the Oslo Accords. In between he was expelled from Egypt for thirteen years, having to leave his wife and baby son behind. *I Saw Ramallah* is his account of his return to Ramallah and it is interspersed with thoughts on the nature of exile and with remembering his personal history.

back the sense of at-homeness and security for which the exile constantly longs. Instead, the displaced person lives in an infinitely suspended present; not only is he 'a stranger *in* [his] places and *to* [his] places', he also 'becomes a stranger to his memories and so he tries to cling to them' (131). A future is hard to imagine, especially when the exile returns and finds the country stuck in the past. For this, Barghouti blames the Occupation. It 'forced us to remain with the old', he writes and continues: 'That is its crime. It did not deprive us the clay ovens of yesterday, but of the mystery of what we would invent tomorrow' (69). He returns to the matter of a 'deliberately impeded' future towards the end of the book, and explains: 'We do not weep for the mill of the village but for the bookshop and the library. We do not want to regain the past but to regain the future and to push tomorrow into the day after' (147). Barghouti returned to Ramallah hoping that the part of him that had been absent for thirty years would be restored to presence, hoping for the suturing of the past and present in order to liberate the future. As he approaches Deir Ghassanah he reflects that the village 'is about to leave its place on the documents and become real' (66). He needs her, the village, to recognise him so that he can become whole again: 'Soon [. . .] she will know me. She is about to open the huge parentheses [*sic*] in which thirty years of life will be placed; my displacement will be contained in parenthesis' (66). An indefinite article on the documents that denote wandering, the village becomes a welcoming female figure who will embrace his exile and fold it in her arms, when he finally returns there. Rather than the interminable present representing the whole of his life, he hopes his displacement can be bracketed off from his past and his future. But the metaphor is a telling one; even if his displacement can be shielded from him this way, the parenthesis still performs a dual role, both linking past and future but also rupturing them and coming between them. A little later Barghouti muses: 'It is always the same problem: the problem of stitching two times together. It cannot be done. Time is not a length of calico. Time is a mist that never stops moving' (76). The homeland, the sure anchor, is after all, 'the shape of the time we spent in it', he writes (41).

The disruption to the time and space of the exile affects every aspect of life, '[f]or all displacement is a semi-sentence, a semi-everything' (74), and is particularly isolating. The stranger 'lives essentially in that hidden, silent spot within himself'; he does not 'live in a place. [He lives] in a time, in the components of [his] psyche' (4, 91). Barghouti describes in a long passage how transience has taught him detachment, yet ironically he details almost lovingly everyday activities, such as how he arranged his

houseplants and how he washes their leaves in 'beer (which is better and cheaper than chemicals)' (91). A similar ambivalence emerges with regard to hotels. Aware that he should hate hotel life, he writes that nevertheless: 'in airports and at borders and in the temporary rooms of hotels I forget everything that lies behind and ask about the shape of the days to come. The shape of time, not the shape of place' (92). Airports, borders, hotel rooms: how can these markers of Palestinian statelessness, these symbols of rootlessness, allow for the shape of the future to emerge?⁴ One answer is that hotels 'taught [him] not to hold on to a place, to accept the idea of leaving', but perhaps more important still is that they 'absolve [him] from immortalizing the moment' (92). Once uprooted, a person becomes 'uprooted forever' but, continues Barghouti, 'the paradox is that strange cities are then never completely strange. Life dictates that the stranger acclimatize every day' (131). Life bribes the strangers 'with different degrees of contentment and of acceptance of exceptional circumstances' (131-2). So, on the one hand, an exile's life teaches impermanence and the idea of leaving, but on the other it seems s/he can quickly acclimatize to the strangeness of new cities, new places of dwelling. Barghouti here echoes many of Edward Said's sentiments (as we shall see shortly), echoes that become stronger when he goes on to discuss how writing itself 'is a displacement, a displacement from the normal social contract' (132). Writing is not only a displacement from 'the believing nature of the political party [. . .] from the idea of unconditional support', but the poet also 'strives to escape from the dominant used language, to a language that speaks itself for the first time'. Another paradox emerges: 'if he [the poet] succeeds in escaping and becomes free, he becomes a stranger at the same time. It is as though the poet is a stranger in the same degree as he is free' (132).

I Saw Ramallah is also a reflection on writing and memory, and the three strands of Barghouti's identity – Palestine, exile, writing – are constantly interlaced. Despite what he says about the poet being a 'stranger in the same degree as he is free', he cannot be free of his need for memories at the same time as he is aware of the fallibility of recall. He asks: 'How did I sing for my homeland when I did not know it? Should I be praised or blamed for my songs? Did I lie a little? A lot? Did I lie to myself? To others?' (61). The problematics of knowing that afflict the exile recur throughout this memoir.

⁴ Khalidi opens *Palestinian Identity* with the following observations: 'The quintessential Palestinian experience [. . .] takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. What happens to Palestinians at these crossing points brings home to them how much they share in common as a people. For it is at these borders and barriers that the six million Palestinians are singled out for "special treatment," and are forcefully reminded of their identity: of who they are, and of why they are different from others' (Khalidi 1).

It is not only that he needs the village to know him, but there is also his uncertainty over whether he knows his homeland. 'What love is it that does not know the beloved?' he ponders (61). The footloose existence which he appears to have mastered, linguistically at least, cannot obscure the need to know the shape of the homeland, but he has to concede that it is only a temporal dimension that can be known, that the 'homeland is the shape of the time [he] spends in it' (41). His return is an attempt to gain assurance that he knows the place but, as Said observes in his introduction to the book, 'despite its joys and moments of exuberance this narrative return at bottom enacts exile rather than repatriation' (xi). Similarly, the writing of the memoir is an attempt to stitch together the strands of his life, to overcome displacement, but as he realises, writing itself is a displacement. In the end, Barghouti is forced to admit that: 'The calm of the place of exile and its wished-for safety is never completely realized. The homeland does not leave the body until the last moment, the moment of death' (151).

The writers discussed so far were all born in the Middle East, but what of the children of this generation of exiles?⁵ Strictly speaking, they are not exiles, as birth in their host countries would, in most cases, have granted them citizenship. Suheir Hammad, who was a child when her family fled Beirut in 1982 and settled in New York, has written a memoir of growing up in Brooklyn entitled *Drops of This Story*. As one of the reviewers of the book says on the back cover, 'She walks the walk, and talks the talk' of the hip-hop generation to which she belonged,⁶ but her awareness of her Palestinian heritage constantly seeps into her consciousness and her body. Hammad's oblique and suggestive story reveals how experience of diaspora is conditioned by class and gender as well as by race or ethnicity. The family faces discrimination as immigrants of colour, and their reliance on state handouts makes them especially vulnerable. The protection their class may have afforded them in the Middle East is unavailable to them in New York. Hammad witness the self-hate of immigrant women who try to change their appearance by bleaching their skins and straightening their hair, and the teenage pregnancies and crack addiction that blight the lives of kids at her school.

The 'drops' of the title represent the fragments of her memories and observations of growing up a girl in a deprived inner-city ghetto, of being both American and

⁵ Juliane Hammer's book, *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland*, is a study of Palestinian returnees following the Oslo Accords of 1993. The focus of the book is the experiences of the younger generation of Palestinian exiles, who knew Palestine only through the memories of their parents.

⁶ Elmaz Abinader

Palestinian, of being and feeling herself to be 'other'. She writes of how to her Jordanian cousins she 'was just another American tourist who couldn't handle the heat', whilst to Americans she 'was just another immigrant; a waste of food stamps' (33). She complains that the family had to eat falafel and hummus and fava beans all the time but she wants to eat 'pancakes and bacon like everybody else' (51). She is torn between wanting to be American and the inescapable pull of her heritage. Her story, she writes, is not huge drops of rain, like a thunderstorm, nor a refreshing summer shower, but rather it is 'the annoying, frustrating wet that barely manages to layer the concrete yet somehow frizzes my hair into one big bush. [. . .] It makes you look stupid to hold an umbrella' (3). This is the sort of rain against which there is no protection, and the drops accumulate until she feels forced to tell her story, which is the story of Palestine. She writes, she says:

[. . .] of longing for a land I have yet to feel under my feet. This tale is part of them all, and it never whispers it's [*sic*] urgency; it shouts it in song. The call to and from Palestine and her love, that is the command that automatically straightens my back and refuses any more of my tears. But this story needs to be told right. It'll be told by my anger and love. I have to tell it in such a way that I can let you, make you, force you to feel the loss of a land you have never felt under your feet. (11-13)

What moves her most is the story of her uncle Hammad, who was killed, aged 18, by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration. Her parents are distant to her: her father, with his 'heart of gold and mouth of bile', who kills her with 'his loneliness, his power, his liquor, his hate and his love'; and her mother who puts up with what her daughter thinks is a 'bad marriage' because, given that 'life sucks anyway', you might as well be 'stuck with someone for the ride' (5, 35). The thought of her uncle, her age when he died, will not leave her. The drops and the wetness keep building up: '[t]his wetness was with me in Jordan, wetting my cheeks, as I sat on a mountaintop where my uncle used to sit. Where he used to sit to get a good view of Palestine over the sea' (33). Although their circumstances are barely comparable, the fact that he was one of those '[y]oung men who preferred to die in the name of freedom than live a denied existence' forces her to appreciate that she can no longer deny her Palestinian identity and that she must proclaim it. Unlike some exilic writers whose past remains a 'phantom ache' that cannot be incorporated into their present, Suheir's awareness of her history and her connection to Palestinians like her uncle is part of her consciousness, colouring her life in New York.

The drops sometimes join together to flood my head with memories of people I never knew. Young people who died needless, ugly deaths, like kids in the Brooklyn streets. This story has too many names. Too many to remember them all. Palestinian kids massacred while dreaming. Young men detained for three-quarters of their lives only to be tortured to death. Palestinian girls who were raped and killed before they gave up names, or Palestine. This part of the story is made up of too many tears. It waters the anonymous graves of those kids who lived under occupation and died in the name of freedom. The drops of this story are carried on the wind to Brooklyn, where they douse me with strength. (33-4).

Hammad accepts New York as home, and the Brooklyn of immigrants reliant on food stamps and Medicaid is as much part of her identity as her family's history. By accepting this synthesis, she can also learn to be strong as a woman, a Palestinian and a New Yorker. It is, she writes: 'The story of self-acceptance. Of finally not minding my skin, my hair, or even my mustache [*sic*]' (53), a self-acceptance that converts the 'annoying, frustrating rain' to 'a pleasing kind of kissing rain', creating a story that 'washes [her] body in the love of a far away nation and the lust of a caressing city' (92).

It is often said that our present age is one of exile, that exile is the defining condition of postmodernity. The poststructural debate on the nature of identity, which tends to conclude that all identities are constructions based on pragmatism and that they do not possess a fixed or essential core, chimes with the idea of the rootless exile, who has to negotiate a route through overlapping and contested subject positions. Clifford makes this point when he argues that 'because the signifier *diasporic* denotes a predicament of multiple locations, it slips easily into theoretical discourses informed by poststructuralism and notions of the multi-positioned subject' (Clifford 319). Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson summarise the articulation between movement in the modern world and postmodern consciousness:

Exile, emigration, banishment, labour migrancy, tourism, urbanization and counter-urbanization are the central motifs of modern culture, while being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present, are perhaps the most fitting metaphors for the journeying, modern consciousness. (Rapport & Dawson 23)

The motif of the exile, torn between an irrecoverable past of wholeness and an unstable present, here slips too readily into a generalisation of 'modern consciousness' without attention to the crippling sadness, hardship and deprivation of the stateless millions, those 'undocumented' people lost to history, in Said's words. As we have just seen, Palestinian exiles cling to memories of the past, and to a belief in the possibility of

‘sharing cups of coffee’ with friends, as a way of creating a sense of origin in a hostile and alienating world, however insecure such connections are acknowledged to be. They are statements of presence, but what would happen if both past and future were to disappear and leave only an unfixed and undefined present?

This is the premise of an indisputably postmodern novel, *Prairies of Fever* (1985) written by Ibrahim Nasrallah. It concerns a teacher, Ustadt Muhammad Hammad, who takes up a post in a remote desert region of Saudi Arabia, al-Qunfudhah, which is some 400 miles south of the Red Sea city of Jeddah. The common use of the desert as a metaphor for alienation and loneliness reaches its apogee in this novel: it is used both literally as a setting and metaphorically, to indicate a world that has lost its outlines, a place where the protagonist has no fixed point of reference, no point of orientation. Outside Muhammad’s miserable rented room, which is invested with bats and ants, spreads the endless expanse of the desert with its ‘consecutive sandhills, impenetrable to sight’ (18), a phrasing that emphasises the lack of perspective confronting the teacher. The narration continues:

And like a fisherman on the open sea, you scanned the emptiness,
searching for a movement, a sign of life, a hint of green.

Nothing on that blank skyline indicated the presence of a world in motion. Al-Qunfudhah stood alone, with its barren mountains, and its cracked stony hide. It was like carrion scavenged by wolves, foxes, hyenas and snakes, a place eroded by bitter nights. (18)

The desert is unreadable, both alive with its cracked ‘hide’, and dead, a carcass picked bare by those who prey on the defenceless; it is impossible not to read the fate of the exile into such a description. In this hostile, featureless landscape, usual points of reference, both temporal and physical, disappear. Morning, noon and night blur into one (126), and a similar phenomenon deprives you of a sense of direction, so that you no longer know which way you face, nor which is north, south, east or west (136). Even sexual difference disappears (134). The other characters in the novel are unpredictable and indifferent to the protagonist’s fate, and such is the oneiric quality of the text that the reader, too, is disoriented, unable to decide whether they are real or the result of a fevered imagination. The following passage is one of many describing how reality and hallucination become interchangeable:

For a long time you relied on dream to acquaint you with reality and the ground beneath your feet, and now this tangible foundation seemed empty of everything, including you: it had become a thorny wilderness, an internalized landscape of nightmare. (59).

In a reversal of normal modes of apprehension, it is dream that now defines reality, but again there is the suggestion that it is all in the mind, that the nightmare of featurelessness has been internalised.

The page of poetry with which the novel commences hints at the hellish existence Muhammad will face in the desert: 'Southward, southward/where sticky swarms of flies/blacken the coffee-bar tables/and the city's main streets/terminate in the void' (11). The action opens with him facing five intruders who demand a thousand *riyals* as payment for his own funeral because, they claim, he is dead, ignoring his protests that he is very much alive. He feels defenceless and he recalls: 'I was naked, except for my fear, and exposed to the eye of the infinite' (14). The first chapter is narrated by Mohammad, but thereafter most of the novel is in second person narration. This produces the sense that he does not know what is happening and is being told his experiences as if he had no control over them. The lack of control voiced in many of the poems just examined becomes, in this text, its very structure. The second person voice is unidentified and remains indifferent to Muhammad's existential agonies, the detachment of the narrator reinforcing the sense of abandonment. Muhammad is convinced he has a room-mate, who is also called Muhammad Hammad, and is physically identical to him. This room-mate disappears and the plot (if it can be called that) concerns the protagonist's search for him. The fact that we doubt the existence of the second Muhammad adds to the surrealism of this world. He is told:

The phenomenon of forgetting faces, of time seeming to fly, had become a part of your identity. It's like being one of the living dead; a revenant who exists between a nightmare and an even crueller awakening. You're the propounder of the kingdom of non-existence, a narrator of anticipated stories, the occupant of a life about to be extinguished, and of a death about to generate life to everything here from the white ant to the summits of Aseer. (69)

Here the past becomes a 'nightmare' and the future 'an even crueller awakening', with no comfort to be drawn from either, only the certainty of one's own death. In such an emptiness, Muhammad has to invent a double for companionship and for a reason to live. This Jungian double both betrays psychological fragility and, at the same time, gives the subject his one (illusory) point of certainty. Nasrallah's use of postmodern devices – a fragmented narrative, multiple unreliable narrators, multiple 'truths', and problematic identities – takes to extremes the deracinated nature of exilic (and modern)

existence, and indicates the importance of having a focus outside the self in which one can believe. Towards the end of the novel, Muhammad is told:

In these days and seasons which undifferentiatedly intermesh one with the other, united by a thread of flame, and in the chaos induced by self-disintegration and dissociation, your search was for a reality that would let your feet tread the ground, or a dream that projected beyond the continuous nightmare. (145).

As the last two citations suggest, it is 'non-existence', and 'disintegration and dissociation' that are most terrifying. In order to dream, you need to have your feet firmly on the ground.

Nasrallah had himself worked as a teacher in the al-Qunfudhah region of Saudi Arabia. In her introduction to the novel, Fedwa Malti-Douglas quotes the author's memories of that time:

"I caught malaria more than once and the disease almost took my life. I believe that I lived an experience close to death, rather I touched its edges . . . Malaria is native there, as are monkeys and tigers. Vipers are lavishly abundant, as are spiders and white ants, as well as harsh exile (*ghurba*)."

 (4)

The desert is populated with animals associated with nightmares, and the nightmare is 'harsh exile'. The fever of malaria is both physical and mental, threatening the annihilation of the mind as well as of the body. The feeling of being at the very edge of existence that Nasrallah mentions permeates the novel, and the motif of fever that induces loss of self is described in the following passage, where Muhammad has a brief episode of understanding, textually reinforced by a return to first person narration.

There's no place here for dream or reality; it's fever that dominates. It harvests the spirit. It lives in the dry tree and the corn fields, it inhabits the water and the air. And fever here is one's absence, not the bite of a mosquito. Nor does the problem lie with al-Qunfudhah; even the most modern city would be plague-ridden in this desert. One place is much like any other, fever operates on a level of dissociation. It drives you to the edge of the world, to a concourse with wolves and jackals. (PF135)

This passage makes clear that it is not just the desert that leads to feelings of 'dissociation'; the problem lies within the individual's mind and a lack of grounding in an existence that has meaning. The real nightmare is 'absence', a feeling that you no longer exist, hence Muhammad's invention of his double. The metafictional nature of this novel takes us into a world where entities relate only to themselves, where a lack of reference points leads to a vortex of non-being and the 'dissociation' that threatens self-

annihilation. McClennen's distinction between poststructuralist and postmodern positions is helpful, albeit reductive, here. The former, she argues, are 'fundamentally sceptical, relativist, and unsystematic, which leads them to a state of hopelessness', focusing on the 'disintegration of signification [. . .] the nihilistic, ludic, and hollow aspects of postmodern theory'. On the other hand, '[p]ostmodern positions, in some cases, retain the hope of political agency even if that agency has been shown to be extraordinarily fragile' (McClennen 60). However pessimistic the outlook of Palestinian poetry of exile, the past is an anchor of *association*, and it also acts as a 'moral destination' (Malkki quoted in Schulz 10), a utopia that is a counterweight to the dystopic present. The past therefore has significance not only as the source of nostalgia but it is a blueprint for a better future.

The novel ends with the reappearance of the five men, now demanding Muhammad's corpse as he had already paid the thousand *riyals* towards the cost of his funeral. He flees, but whether towards the mountains or the sea it is impossible to tell.

You both turned back towards the mountains, then once again made for the sea. The sun was climbing the sky, the mountains grew more distinct, the sea dashed on the foreshore. Blood was streaming from veins. [. . .]

You looked behind you. The five were returning towards Thuraiban, dragging one of the teachers with them. He looked like you, almost identical, so that you couldn't know if it was really you, or another, or even one of them. (154)

Additionally, looking back and seeing his double could presage death as 'the double who catches sight of himself must die within a year', according to Otto Rank's study of the double (Rank 50). Rank also associates the double with paranoia and persecution complexes, so the degree of paranoia that was detectable in Waleed Khazinder's two poems is here taken several stages further (Rank 74-5). In this final paragraph, identity has been erased so that it becomes interchangeable, no longer enabling you to 'know' who you are. Here the impersonality of the second person narration achieves its full force – the 'you' addressed is not necessarily Muhammad, but it could be anyone, including 'you', the reader. *Prairies of Fever* addresses, in an unsparing manner, the crisis of identity that is a result of exile. The theory of the exile as a metaphor for the postmodern individual – deterritorialised, free from the constraints of cultural nationalism and determination, a free-floating signifier – is shown to lead in practice to a nightmare of alienation and deracination when taken to its logical conclusion.

4.ii 'Out of place': the case of Edward Said and the intellectual exile

The sense of dislocation and of being out of sync with oneself is the most predominant motif in Palestinian exilic writing. Said's experiences are by no means typical but his writing on exile – his memoir *Out of Place* (1999), the essay 'Reflections on Exile', and one of his 1993 Reith lectures, 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals' – are worth examining for the light they shed on the dialectics of loss and hope, denial and freedom, collective and personal experience, that colour much exilic writing. These texts are also interesting for the way in which they debate poststructuralist theories of identity, yet insist on the historicity of writing, of grounding human activity in history.

Said wrote *Out of Place: A Memoir* when his leukaemia and the treatment for it were dominating his life (he started the book in 1994). 'This record of a life', he writes, 'and ongoing course of a disease (for which I have known from the beginning no cure exists) are one and the same, it could be said, but deliberately different' (216). Is this connection between life as an exile and the disease, for neither of which is there a cure, deliberate? As his life fades, so he becomes more determined not to allow his memory to fade, yet he is aware that memory not only has to be created but that he is writing about a time that cannot be recovered, thus indulging in a 'concentrated reflection on and archaeological prying into a very distant and essentially irrecoverable past' (216). In this case, memory is individual, not collective, an intimate relationship with his sleepless nights when he is alone. The first 213 pages of his memoir are finely drawn, abounding with detail on his first fifteen years, his family, schoolmates and friends, life in Cairo and holidays in Lebanon. The final eighty or so pages encompass his life from the time he was sent to the United States to attend university up to the present, including the reflections on his illness. This textual disproportion is further emphasised by the way awareness of his illness breaks into the narrative just as he is about to relate his expulsion from the family home into the 'harsh alienation' (217) of his time in New York. It is as if his illness originated in that moment of rupture when he was 16 years old, as if it had been lying in wait and feeding off his subsequent feelings of abandonment and 'out-of-placeness' until he could no longer ignore their combined power.

A sense of rupture defines his life from his earliest recollections, and this rupture manifests itself both in his name – "'Edward", a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said' (3) – and in language. He finds it impossible to tell, even with hindsight, which one, English or Arabic was really 'his'.

Then French was added, and he sums up their uses thus: ‘Arabic was forbidden and “wog”; French was always “theirs”, not mine, English was authorized but unacceptable as the language of the hated British’ (198). His parents’ genealogy, too, was complicated. The fact that he attended British and American schools further added to a sense of multiple identities, of not really belonging anywhere. He reflects:

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. (5)

At this stage, the Palestinian component of his identity is noticeably absent. His awareness of being put together arbitrarily out of bits and pieces is suggested in the opening sentences of his memoir: ‘All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in [. . .]’ (3). He was ‘invented’, given a role as if acting in someone’s play; there is no possibility that he has an identity he can call his own. The problematising of these issues – language, identity, belonging – frames his life story, and produces a pervading lack of fixity, both geographical and ontological. A sense of inauthenticity dominates, creating an absence at what should be the centre of his being. Culture and identity are here shown to be constructions, constantly being modified, and such an awareness seems to have undermined Said’s sense of himself from his earliest memories.

The other absence from his childhood was Palestine. It was only through his Aunt Nabiha, who devoted her life in Cairo to helping refugees, that he learnt of the ‘misery of Palestine’, a topic his parents had suppressed as ‘part of a larger depoliticization’ (117). He remembers that:

It was through Aunt Nabiha that I first experienced Palestine as history and cause in the anger and consternation I felt over the suffering of the refugees, those Others, whom she brought into my life. It was also she who communicated to me the desolations of being without a country or a place to return to, of being unprotected by any national authority or institutions, of no longer being able to make sense of the past except as bitter, helpless regret nor of the present with its daily queuing, anxiety-filled searches for jobs, and poverty, hunger, and humiliations. (119)

The loss of Palestine seems compounded by the way in which that part of his identity was also lost to him for so many years. It is as if the misery of ‘those Others’ inflected the timbre of his life without his knowledge, seeping into his subconscious and adding

to his uncertainties over who he really was. In a revealing paragraph concerning his early days in America, Said writes that he 'resolved to live as if [he] were a simple, transparent soul [. . .] To become, in other words, like the others [students], anonymous as possible'. Feeling himself to be a 'shameful outsider', he recalls – 'Nationality, background, real origins, and past actions all seemed to be sources of my problem; I could not in any convenient way lay the ghosts that continued to haunt me from school to school, group to group, situation to situation' (137). It was not until the 1967 war that Palestine ceased to be that place of 'remote history, unresolved sorrow, and uncomprehending anger' (141), and became central to his life and work. He writes that '[he] was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove [him] back to where it has all started, the struggle over Palestine' (293). However, there remains a sense that his suppressed Palestinian identity can never be wholly restored despite the rituals in which Palestinians like to indulge. In *After The Last Sky*, Said writes about how Palestinian exiles construct their identities by means of a network of recognised codes:

Intimate mementoes of a past irrevocably lost circulate among us, like the genealogies and fables severed from their original locale, the rituals of speech and custom. Much reproduced, enlarged, thematized, embroidered and passed around, they are strands in the web of affiliations we Palestinians use to tie ourselves to our identity and to each other. (*After*14).

The mementoes, like the exiles, are 'severed' from their origins. The language of this citation – 'irrevocably lost', 'severed', 'fables', 'enlarged', 'thematized' – betrays a desperation that leads to a fetishization of objects and customs, a dynamic similar to the fetishization of the absent country. In 'Reflections on Exile', Said acknowledges that 'the exile can make a fetish of exile' (364). The compulsion to repetition is part of the ceremony of recall and hints at the paradox of an identity at once fragile and tenacious. According to Breyten Breytenbach, such re-enacting of codes is compensatory at best. He argues:

To be away from your natural environment is to be deprived of ever again functioning completely and fitting in instinctively. No other surroundings can replace the shared and unquestioned and thereby indigenous feeling of belonging made up of smells, sounds, gestures, and natural mimicry. (Breytenbach 74).

Breytenbach also talks of a maiming that goes along with exile, and it would seem that it is impossible to recover from a wounding that is so profound. In exile Palestinian identity has to be acted, repeated, 'embroidered'.

Said reiterates throughout his writing that the sadness of exile cannot be overcome, and that it should always be borne in mind that the vagaries and injustices of exile fall most heavily on the poor. He opens the Reith Lecture on 'Intellectual Exile' with a reminder that in pre-modern times banishment meant not only 'years of aimless wandering away from family and familiar places' but also carried with it the stigma of being a 'permanent outcast', 'a leper, a social and moral untouchable'. In the twentieth century exile has become 'the cruel punishment of whole communities and peoples' ('Intellectual' 369-70). He never neglects the misery of exile nor does he dismiss it as a part of modern life; his insistence in his aesthetic theory on the link between textuality and the world, what he calls the importance of worldliness, means he can forget neither the suffering of all exiles nor the politics and human choices that caused that suffering. In 'Reflections on Exile' he asks:

Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion, obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography? (358)

It is interesting to re-read 'The Earth Also Dies', with its insistent 'With what faith', against the assertion of the above passage that both religion and secular nationalisms play a part both in creating and obscuring the causes of the miseries of exile. Retaining an acute awareness of the origins and material reality of exile prevents its playful appropriation by poststructuralist theorists. Exile is a 'median state' ('Intellectual' 370) in which you are never completely cut off from your place of origin, neither can you ever forget it. However, as an intellectual, he appreciates that exile can grant a 'double perspective' (378) unavailable to those 'who have always been at home', who have not experienced the 'torturing memory of a life to which they cannot return' (379). It is in this Reith Lecture that Said elaborates on such a proposition. Exile can be a metaphorical condition in which the sense of being an outsider, a nay-sayer rather than a yea-sayer can lead to a mental restlessness and questioning of accepted knowledge (373). He takes Theodor Adorno as the 'quintessential intellectual exile' (375), who hated all systems and certainties. Adorno's intellectual restlessness leads him to believe

that: “‘Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. The traditional residences we have grown up in have grown intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge, each vestige of shelter with the musty pact of family interests’” (376). It is paradoxical that Said is so drawn to Adorno’s theories; those things that the exile and refugee lack (a safe dwelling, ‘comfort’, ‘shelter’) are rejected by him. (It could be that Said’s stance is in part a reaction to Zionist fundamentalism, with its insistence on an exclusive homeland carrying echoes of Nazism’s valorisation of the fatherland.) Yet Adorno, like Said, recognises that such a frame of mind could be destructive in its impersonality, and that “‘the thesis of this paradox leads to destruction, a loveless disregard for things which necessarily turns against people too’” (376-7).

Out of this epistemological bind, Said can still find some ‘pleasures’ and ‘rewards’ in exile, ‘those different arrangements of living and eccentric angles of vision’ (377). It appears difficult to reconcile the two interpretations, that, in spite of all its anguish and loss, exile can still offer ‘pleasures’. Trinh T. Minh-ha has voiced her discomfort at attempts to elevate the pain of exile into something celebratory or redemptive. She argues that:

For people who have been dispossessed and forced to leave for an uncertain destiny, rejected time and again, returned to the sea or to the no man’s land of border zones; for these unwanted expatriated, it seems that all attempts at exalting the achievements of exile are but desperate efforts to quell the crippling sorrow of homelessness and estrangement. (Minh-ha ‘Other’ 12)

However, as McClennen argues, it does not have to be one to the exclusion of the other: the two poles of exilic experience can coexist in a dialectical tension. McClennen is unhappy with the way scholars ‘suggest that exile is either a creative and liberating state, which enables the writer to function freely [*sic*] of the limitations of the local or the national, or they argue that exile literature is profoundly nostalgic and yearns for the lost nation’ (McClennen 2). Said would lay claim to the former whilst never denying the latter. His writing is equally informed by his identity as a Palestinian – deracinated and insecure – and the intellectual stance he has adopted which insists that exile is an opportunity, not an ending. As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia contend, he refuses ‘to valorise the past by inventing some essential and incorruptible Palestinian cultural reality’ (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia *Paradox* 7-8). At the same time, one has to acknowledge that Said’s positioning in the cosmopolitan world of travelling intellectuals and the recognition accorded to him highlight the determining factor of class in exilic

experience. *Out of Place* demonstrates that Said believes identity and culture are processes, and the refusal of essences means he avoids the stridency of nationalist theory that, in most cases, has created the 'hopelessly large numbers' of people lost to history. He believes exile allows a 'plurality of vision' unavailable to people who know only 'one culture, one setting, one home', which 'gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions', something he terms a *contrapuntal* awareness ('Reflections' 366). Such a philosophy disrupts the complacency associated with a certainty of belonging.

Views on Said's stance as a postcolonial exilic intellectual vary, and it is surprising to find that two materialist, if not Marxist, critics can fundamentally disagree on the implications of Said's self-positioning. Neil Lazarus is struck by the 'incalculable importance' of 'Said's formulation of the role played by intellectuals in the struggle against imperialism'. Lazarus believes that their contributions – 'the opening up of horizons, the crystallizing of memories and experiences as legitimate aspects of a cultural heritage, the discursive contestation of dominating paradigms of knowledge, the production of counter-truths, etc.' - are unique and could not have been provided by any other activity. He also argues that Said 'allows us to recognize that in its essential gesture, such intellectual practice is fundamentally *universalistic*, directed through and beyond the nodal point of the nation to a proleptic space of *internationalism*' (Lazarus *Nationalism* 141, emphases in the original). Aijaz Ahmad, on the other hand, considers Said's 'privileging of the migrant intellectual' in terms of class rather than any projected internationalism. Commenting on Said's distinction between "colonial" and "post-colonial" intellectuals', he goes on to argue that 'the ideological ambiguity in these rhetorics of migrancy resides in the key fact that the migrant in question comes from a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from the *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation' (Ahmad 12-13, emphases in the original). Ahmad's argument is that Said's ability to fit effortlessly into the 'professional middle strata' (13) of the host nation not only obscures class as one of the foundational bases of exile but that it also serves to make him, falsely, representative. The views given above are variations on the argument between, on the one hand by Minh-ha's suspicion of 'attempts at exalting the achievements of exile' and on the other by Said's and Lazarus's theories of intellectual exile.

In an interview with Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, Said expands on what an exilic intellectual restlessness might achieve. He says he has become increasingly interested in 'the inconsistencies and irreconcilabilities of historical experience' (Bayoumi & Rubin 423). He believes such irreconcilabilities and 'antinomies' have to be accepted and worked with and through: instead of seeing one point of view only, the exilic intellectual's 'plurality of vision' allows him a broader perspective.⁷ Said also considers it vital for the intellectual to demythologise ruling ideologies, and to contest the hegemony of ruling powers, particularly in the case of the United States and the manner in which he sees it 'spread[ing] an ideological blanket over discourse everywhere'. The antidote to this is memory 'since hegemony effectively effaces memory [. . .] There has to be an act of resistance by recollection' (440-1). Such a belief brings us back to what Said has to say about memory in *Out of Place*, and how that very personal memoir connects to his stance as committed to the Palestinian cause. For so many years the Palestinians' foremost spokesperson in the West, he articulated Palestinian collective memory as an act of 'resistance by recollection'. Writing his memoir was a similar act of resistance, as he explains how:

[collective, resistance memory and personal memory are] connected in an attempt not to just resist the amnesia induced on the public level by the official narratives and the official systems of knowledge, which are growing more and more powerful, through the media, through standardization, and through the insistence on ethnic loyalty, but also on the private level [. . .] I've tried to remain within the collective experience, hoping that my personal predicament might be helpful in the public realm. (Bayoumi & Rubin 443)

His own suppression of his Palestinian history and the way in which he for so long decided 'not to speak about [his] family or origins' (*Out*137) thus parallels the denial in official discourse of the Palestinian cause. His involvement in the Palestinian movement (starting in 1967) was an experience, he writes,

that drew on the agitated, largely hidden side of my prior life – the anti-authoritarianism, the need to break through an imposed and enforced silence, above all the need to draw back to a sort of original state of what was irreconcilable, thereby shattering and dispelling an unjust Establishment order. (*Out*293)

⁷ Said explains how for him 'the concept of irreconcilability has always been essential as a way of characterizing the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.' He continues – 'No matter what you say or what you do, you're dealing with two totally irreconcilable experiences: one premised on the non-existence of the other, in the case of the Israelis; and in the case of the Palestinians, they are unable to forget, or to let go of what was destroyed. That's one of the reasons why I've taken such a dim view of the whole question of peace as it is being negotiated, which for me seems to negate a quintessential and irreconcilable opposition at the very core of it' (Bayoumi & Rubin 427)

The personal and the public, the collective and the individual, are inextricably linked. Towards the end of *Out of Place*, as he reflects on these twin strands that have shaped his life, he identifies two turning points that changed his life. The first was the rupture of his departure for the States, which he realises was an essential step in his 'search for freedom, for the self beneath or obscured by "Edward"' (294). The second was the 'dislocation' in his life brought about by the events of 1967: 'the dislocation that subsumed all the other losses, the disappeared worlds of my youth and upbringing, the unpolitical years of my education, the assumption of disengaged teaching and scholarship at Columbia, and so on' (293). In both cases 'Edward' represents the part that tries to conform, to be 'normal', that part of him shaped by the imperialism that not only ruptured the world of his childhood but also dictated the way he was educated and made him feel always an outsider. 'Said' comes later and represents all that had been suppressed.

Towards the end of his memoir, he accepts a certain 'at-homeness' in never feeling at home. He reflects: 'Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be "right" and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die' (294). In the interview with Bayoumi and Rubin (recorded in 1999), he likewise finds fulfilment in increasing the scope of his interests to encompass the experience and literature of many other parts of the world, something that allows 'a much vaster collective experience and memory that turns into a kind of anti-provincialism, anti-isolationism, and anti-exclusivism that is almost automatically imposed on you if you are very involved in a local struggle' (Bayoumi & Rubin 443). What he has termed the 'rewards' of exile thus colour both the private and public strands of his life, the restlessness accommodated and embraced in order to avoid the pitfalls of provincialism, yet always held in balance by an awareness of the hellish deprivations of exile. At the end of his life he sometimes experiences himself as 'a cluster of flowing currents', an idea he prefers to 'the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance'. These currents 'are "off" and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion', and this he believes, grants him a 'form of freedom [. . .] even if [he is] far from being totally convinced that it is' (*Out*295). The paradoxes remain: his mistrust of the 'insistence on ethnic loyalty' along with his realisation that it was the Palestinian cause that made him the person he is and that

motivates his work; his agreement with Adorno on the pitfalls of dwelling and feeling settled alongside his awareness of the unending misery of the ‘undocumented’ millions who have no home; his sense of ‘at-homeness’ when you are ‘out of place’. Said could be said to demonstrate ‘a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it’ (Brennan 63). As with all the exilic writing examined here, a split consciousness emerges. Peter Hallward notes how the thrust of Said’s work ‘has moved away from the more “grounded” or territorial basis of his earlier polemics toward a dismissal of all divisive, exclusive claims to territory as such’, a movement that rehabilitates ‘the obviously negative features of Palestinian experience, including “discontinuity”, “dispossession”, and “exile”, [. . .] as positive aspects of a new “travelling” order’ (Hallward 57-8). The fact that he can embrace the ambiguities and paradoxes mentioned (he would call them ‘antimonies’), without one obliterating the other, arguably makes him the quintessential postmodern postcolonial subject, but it has to be remembered that it is a position unavailable to the mass of Palestinian exiles.

4.iii ‘The further we move away, the closer we come/to our reality and the boundaries of exile’: Mahmoud Darwish and the meaning of exile

Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry, like his life, is saturated with exile. He has said that exile exists ‘not only in geographical terms’ but as part of his ‘inner being’ (Shatz 77). The poems of *Fewer Roses* (1986) deal obsessively with the sense of perpetual journeying, of being constantly squeezed into an ever smaller physical space, of being denied the ability to enjoy even the smallest quotidian activities, such as making coffee or enjoying the aroma of freshly baked bread. In ‘Earth Presses Against Us’ (*UIWP* 9) Darwish famously asks ‘Where should we go after the last border? Where should birds fly after the last sky?’ It is arguable that Darwish’s later poetry, written after he fled Beirut in 1982, reflects the possibility of the Palestinians’ annihilation as a people that the brutality and relentlessness of that siege seem designed to reinforce. In *Memory for Forgetfulness* he writes how he doesn’t ‘want anyone and [has] no feeling for anything or anyone’, continuing: ‘No past and no future. No roots and no branches. Alone, like a tree deserted in the storm on an open plain’ (152). However, despite the despair after Beirut, or because of it, a reawakened sense of belief and a new existentialism emerge. The poetry he published from the late 1980s onwards moves increasingly away from the specific realities of Palestinian experience, and takes on a more universal perspective. It becomes thematically more complex and formally more sophisticated, and he now

situates the Palestinians in a far wider historical context. He particularly links their experience to the civilisations of the past and, in doing so, attempts to create a community of threatened cultures linked across history by poetry. His idea of what constitutes 'resistance' also develops. *Why Have You Left the Horse Alone* (1995) is a poetic autobiography, a series of poems describing the events of his childhood. It is a document of resistance and defence, and with it Darwish stated:

[. . .] I had to defend a forgotten history; or to put it more clearly, I'd say I had to defend the land of the past and the past of the land, the land of language and the language of the land. [. . .] I believe that the unwavering commitment to resistance and defence is not some sort of nostalgia, but the saturation of the present and the future with the past, without which neither present nor future will come to be. (Mosbahi 8)

In this later poetry, Darwish explores previously unimagined realms of experience, of permanent exile where the possibility of return has been removed, realms that, though they might imply the exiles will be lost to history, are nevertheless saturated with the past, to the extent that the past returns to the present and moulds the future.

Of Darwish's later poetry, comparatively little is available in English, with selections from various volumes contained in two collections, *The Adam of Two Edens* (2000) and *Unfortunately It Was Paradise* (2003). Many of these later poems are long, convoluted and undulatory, and present limitations of space entail a rigorous selection. I am going to concentrate on 'The Hoopoe' and 'The Tragedy of Narcissus, The Comedy of Silver', both from *I See What I Want to See* (1990), and also on *Eleven Planets* (1992). With this latter volume Darwish explores the Palestinians' connection to other threatened and destroyed cultures, notably the Native Americans and the Moorish empire in Andalusia. The date of publication coincided with the 500th anniversary celebrations of Columbus's discovery of America, celebrations that overshadowed the anniversary of the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in the same year, and in this volume Darwish attempts an epic reclamation of what was lost. These lost cultures, which are also 'lost realms' (Akash 27) – American Indian, Moorish, and, increasingly, Palestinian – become metaphors for the loss of Eden both as a physical location and a state of innocence and wholeness; at the same time, Darwish explores their importance as symbolic realms and the possibility of relocating them to the present. In his introduction to *The Adam of Two Edens*, Munir Akash states that Darwish's poetry 'elevates the intensification of local tragedy to the level of the universal' (Akash 25). Not only does Darwish's work resonate with a sense of exile as

a spiritual experience it also seeks to preserve what is becoming ever more fragile: a belief in the possibility of justice, of resistance, of survival, and, above all, of a humanity that can transcend the divisiveness of self/other boundaries. He declared that 'Against barbarity, poetry can resist only by confirming its attachment to human fragility like a blade of grass growing on a wall while armies march by' (Handal 1).

'The Hoopoe' (UIWP 31-51) probes what might be the meaning of permanent exile, a state of being in which everything that 'fixes' the individual to a certain physical and symbolic place in the world has been removed. It is a long poem, running to some twenty pages, and it is undivided by stanza breaks. One thought, one image, spills into the next – the constant movement of the exiles reflected in the restlessness of the verse that never allows space to draw breath, a feeling captured in the lines "How many times have we told the fragrance of the place/to be still so we can rest and sleep?" (42). The flamboyant hoopoe of the poem is both messenger and guide, in line with its roles in both the Qur'an and Sufi texts, carrying and returning letters, and acting as advisor and guide to the wanderers.⁸ Darwish's poem is clearly based on *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid ud-Din Attar. Attar was a Persian poet and Sufi mystic of the twelfth century, and his allegorical text concerns a group of birds who gather to seek a new king (the Simorgh) with the hoopoe as their guide and teacher. The birds become despondent at the difficulty and unending nature of their quest, but the hoopoe answers their questions and encourages them with anecdotes and fables that expound Sufi doctrines. When they finally arrive at the court of the Simorgh they find there is no king and that the object of their quest is in fact themselves. In their introduction to the poem, the translators explain that the hoopoe is to the other birds what the poet is to his readers, and that Attar 'very frequently gives the impression of merging his personality with that of the hoopoe; this is aided in Persian by the absence of punctuation, in particular quotation marks' (Darbandi & Davis 17). The obvious intertextual reference in 'The Hoopoe' thus underwrites the significance of the poet as prophet. The poem opens with the lines 'We have not yet come to the land of our distant star./The poem threads us through the needle's eye/to weave the *aba* [cloak] of a new horizon' (31). The use of the verb 'come' implies that the exiles will travel to a new place of dwelling

⁸ The editors of *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* explain the significance of the hoopoe: 'Strikingly crested bird found from southern Europe and Africa to southeastern Asia. About eleven inches long, it is pinkish brown on the head and shoulders, with a long, black-tipped erectile crest and black-and-white barred wings and tail. What is special about it is that, according to the Qur'an, the hoopoe was the bird that told Solomon about the Queen of Sheba and was the messenger between them; see the Qur'an 27:20-46. It is also the central Guide (*murshid*) in many Sufi works'. (UIWP 186-7)

rather than return to a familiar homeland, and the poem, which is a freshly crafted work, will weave the cloak of a new understanding; so the significance both of creating new homelands and of the poetic voice in this task is emphasised at the outset. The sense of forging new symbols continues as, we are told, the hoopoe ‘dictates/his letters to the olive tree of exile./And our letters are returned for us to rewrite/what the rain has written – wild flowers on distant rocks’ (31). The olive tree, so long a symbol of rootedness in the homeland, is transplanted to the ground of wandering and impermanence. It still carries its old associations but now signifies dignity and steadfastness in exile. *Sumud*, so important in the ideology of what it means to be Palestinian, in the reworked symbol of the olive tree signifies the will to carry forward what is worthwhile from the past, and a belief in the future. The significance and power of language is a thread running throughout ‘The Hoopoe’. Early on in the poem Darwish writes: ‘This path – our path – is a tapestry of words./With it we mend the hem of the *aba* stretched between our solitude/and the vagrant land sleeping in our saffron dusk’ (32), lines that recall the words of an earlier poem, ‘Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me see an end to this journey’ (‘We Travel Like All People’ *UIWP*11). However, there is a change of emphasis wherein the certainty of a country, even if it is only of words, gives way to ‘our path’, a process of weaving that, instead of creating a country, creates distance and takes the exiles towards the unknown. The meaning of the exiles’ lives will have to be rewritten and it is something that cannot yet be grasped – it can be washed away by the rain.

The wanderers of the poem attempt to understand what their exile signifies, now that there is no longer any certainty of a return to what they know. Simply meandering across the desert is not enough; they need to define, or have defined, a goal, an end, because ‘those who travel to nowhere have no chance of return,/to become lost again in loss’ (36). These lines imply that you have to know where you are going (that is, what you are journeying *towards*) in order to go *back* or ‘return’, the lines carrying the suggestion that ‘to return’ means to become ‘lost again’. The return to presence promised by a reconfigured return is thus converted to the absence of loss. The importance of the concept of the path is again emphasised in the line that immediately follows – ‘They know that the real path leads to the beginning of the impossible path’ (36). The path towards the unknown is a quest where significance lies in the process of gaining new knowledge or understanding, even though this may seem impossible, rather than in attaining a fixed end. I came across an extract from Ernest Bloch’s

‘Something’s Missing’ in Mary Layoun’s *Wedded to the Land?* and I believe it helps explain what Darwish is formulating with his ideas of journeying and the impossibility of return (which is the topic of the next poem I will examine, ‘The tragedy of Narcissus, the comedy of silver’). Bloch writes:

With Thomas More the wishland was still ready, on a distant island, but I am not there. On the other hand, when it is transposed into the future, not only am I not there, but utopia itself is also not with itself. This island does not even exist. But it is not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not *yet* in the sense of a possibility; *that* it could be there if we could only do something for it. Not only if we travel there, but *in that* we travel there the island utopia arises out of the sea of the possible – utopia, but with new contents. (quoted in Layoun *Wedded* 163-4, emphases in the original)

It is only *because* they travel that the possibility of a utopia holds itself open, the ‘not yet’ of a promised future is, as Darwish writes, ‘the horizon of this expanse’ (45). An act of faith is required in order to follow such a path, as the hoopoe suggests when it patterns the poem with the exhortation ‘To fly you should fly’, and the exiles ask for guidance:

So, if you would take us to You, guide us to the ungraspable land.
Take us before we whirl into deep nothingness.
Guide us one day to the trees we were
clandestinely born under so they might hide our shadows.
Guide us to the realm of our childhood,
and to doves soaring for the first time, to humble us. (36)

The ‘impossible path’, the ‘ungraspable land’, both speak of a belief that there are realms beyond understanding that are yet unknown. The exiles are not asking for a literal return to the places of childhood but to a present or future that will embody what they had known there. When they insist that they cannot escape the longings that they share with all people, the hoopoe replies: ‘*Be united on all paths and become breath/so that you may reach Him who is beyond the senses./ Every heart is a cosmos of mysteries*’ (42).⁹ They are told they have to go beyond what they know in order to enter a new apprehension that transcends the local.

The poem takes on the task of describing exile in metaphysical terms, rather than relying on the usual definitions predicated on geographical terms, as in the following lines: ‘Longing is the place of exile. Our love is a place of exile./Our wine is a place of exile/and a place of exile is the history of this heart’ (42). Instead of a statement such as ‘We are far from our land’, which would emphasise isolation, these lines suggest that

⁹ All emphases are in the original.

emotions familiar to everyone – longing and love – can also describe that sense of isolation that is exile. Thus ‘the history of this heart’, an act of individual recollection, follows the communal act of sharing wine. True isolation, ‘nowhere’, is described as ‘the place/that distances its soul from its history’ (43). Here, as in so much exilic writing, spatial dislocation leads also to temporal dislocation, and in order to heal that rupture the past must be brought into the present, as suggested by the lines: ‘A place of exile is the soul/that distances us from our soul and takes us to the stranger’ (43). The theme of the future being formed by the past is taken up again a few lines further on when Darwish writes:

Thought is a place of exile:
 we saw our future just behind our windows.
 To reach it, we broke through the walls of our present,
 and it became a past in the shield of an ancient soldier.
 Poetry is a place of exile.
 We dream and forget where we were when we wake. (43).

Instead of feeling cut off from the past, the exiles break through their isolation, their ‘present’, to unite future with past, the time of presence and wholeness. Poetry is also ‘a place of exile’, and it is a space where the exiles can ‘dream’ and briefly forge a new vision for the future. Darwish also seeks to diminish the sense of the exiles’ isolation by placing them, the forgotten ones, into a new mythological universality. He writes:

Here the ruins of Babylon are a birthmark
 On the flesh of our legacy.
 [. . .]
 Our mother is our mother, mother of the Athenians,
 mother of the ancient Persians,
 Mother of Plato, Zarathustra, Plotinus, mother of Suhrawardi.
 She is the cosmic mother.
 Each child is a master in his mother’s lap. (46-7)

Darwish situates the wanderers of his poem within a legacy of past civilisations, and he indicates a clear cosmological dimension to their quest for meaning, suggesting that, rather than dwelling on the edge, they may reach a mythological status. Such a move towards the universal is reinforced in the poem by the many references to Biblical, Koranic and Sufi heritages.

Darwish’s use of myth and his idea of the past being one with the present and the future contain echoes of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi sought to reformulate the modernist developmental concept of history (which was the coloniser’s) so that Indian history would not be relegated to an increasingly irrelevant status, and to resist the

tendency to see pre-modern cultures as mere stepping-stones to a modern, scientific and rational future. Gandhi's beliefs were particularly valuable to a culture that wished to resist colonisation of the mind using tools that were not those of the coloniser. He rejected the western notion of history as linear progress, instead conceptualising the past as, in Ashis Nandy's words, 'a possible means of reaffirming or altering the present' (Nandy 57). Speaking of the Indian context, Nandy observes that the 'Indian's past is always open, whereas his future is so only to the extent that it is a rediscovery or renewal', and that therefore 'there can be no real disjunction between the past and the present' (58). Myth also plays an important part in this philosophy, as it provides an antidote to the strait-jacket of history which limits choices and 'pre-empt[s] human futures'. Nandy goes on to explain that:

Myths, on the other hand, allow one access to the processes which constitute history at the level of the here-and-now. Consciously acknowledged as the core of a culture, they widen instead of restricting human choices. They allow one to remember in an anticipatory fashion and to concentrate on undoing aspects of the present rather than avenging the past. (59)

Gandhi's development of such a view of history counteracted the model of historical (i.e. modern) societies as the 'true representatives of mature human self-consciousness' (60), the model upon which the colonial 'civilising' mission was based. Instead of history being a causal series of actions, with disjunctions in time producing leaps in development, Gandhi emphasised how continuities across time can also contain revolutionary potential. The full significance of such a philosophy is that the meaning of the past is not fixed, but is decided over time. Nandy thus argues that:

Indian culture emphasized continuities so much that even major breaks with the past passed as minor reforms, till the full implications of the break became evident after decades or centuries, when the metaphors of continuity and permanence could no longer hide the fundamental changes that had already taken place in the culture. (61)

Read in this light, instead of 'restricting human choices' Darwish's use of myth widens the possibilities for the future. Munir Akash points out that Darwish 'uses the dimension of myth as a field to indicate life's unlimited possibilities'. He goes on to observe that Darwish's poetry 'is the first poetry in Arabic to deal with myth in the original spirit of myth-making, viewing myth as an imaginative space for our deepest emotional experiences, rather than as classically recognizable figures fitting into some preconceived historical pattern' (Akash 33-4). The major break (for the Palestinians, the *nakba*) can be retrieved from the spectre of disaster and annihilation and held over

as an important event whose significance may take decades to become clear. In writing 'The further we move away, the closer we come/to our reality' (34), Darwish is suggesting that the travellers of the poem, in seeking but not finding answers, keep open the possibility of multiple interpretations of the present and future.

Darwish is often criticised for 'abandoning the cause' and retreating from politics in his later poetry. Lines such as the following could be read as promoting quietism and resignation:

To fly, you should fly higher than flying . . . above your sky,
higher than the perennial love,
than holiness and divinity and passion.
Free yourselves of questions about the beginning and destiny. (44)

The Sufism apparently espoused by these lines urges the travellers to forget the historical circumstances of their plight, to become spirit rather than body. However, such lines where the tendency towards the metaphysical might suggest disengagement, or where a transcendental impulse loses sight of material reality, are balanced by passages where the movement of the poem is back to the local and the specific. It is impossible not to read Palestine in the following lines.

And we are forced to return to the inhospitable myths
where we have no place.
We couldn't milk the ewes near our houses, or fill the days with our hymn.
Our temples are there. [. . .]
Here we have wheat and olive oil.
We haven't cut our tent out of willows.
We haven't made gods out of sulphur to be worshipped by invaders.
Everything was prepared: our names, broken in a clay jar . . .
Our women's tears, old mulberry stains on their clothes.
[. . .]
Wilderness is teeming with the relics of human absence
as if we were here.
Here are enough tools to pitch a tent above the winds. (50)

The exiles have been deprived of both place and time, and of their history. The poet insists that their existence on earth is not at the cost of the suffering of others (their 'tent' is not built on others' tears), nor do they worship technological power; their sorrow (their 'women's tears') is one with the desolation of nature. He reminds his audience that although Palestinian villages were razed to the ground, relics (heaps of stones, cactus hedges, fruit trees) remind the visitor of who is absent, relics that still mark Palestinian presence. The exiles have sufficient belief in their cause ('enough tools') to be sure of their place in history, above the buffeting of the winds. The poem

ends with a recognition that their time has not yet come but that the journey will reveal new truths, and that they 'still have steps no one before [them] has ever walked' (51).

The complexity of this poem (and of 'The Tragedy of Narcissus') make it difficult to distil a final message, and it is certainly not a message that asserts victory in any established sense of the word. Indeed, if this poetry is read as allegory, it seems to turn on its head the belief in and drive towards the restoration of Palestinian wholeness; a line such as 'Our ruins lie ahead of us, and behind is our absurd objective' (32) appears to question the validity and desirability of the 'dominant fiction' of eventual return. The use of elaborate, extended metaphors, and the mix of the transcendental and the political, add to the difficulty of interpretation. Said has remarked on this poetry's 'strained and deliberately unresolved quality', adding that this 'makes it an instance of what Adorno called *late style*, in which the conventional and the ethereal, the historical and the transcendently aesthetic combine to provide an astonishingly concrete sense of going beyond what anyone has ever lived through in reality' ('On Mahmoud Darwish' 115). Adorno uses Beethoven's late work as his exemplars of 'lateness': 'His late work still remains process, but not as development; rather as a catching fire between extremes, which no longer allow for any secure middle ground or harmony of spontaneity' (Adorno 126). He comments on how the unfinished nature and 'splintered off' moments in the works give a sense of 'breaking free', turning their 'hollowness outward' (Adorno 126). 'The Hoopoe' is an extended exploration of the meaning of destination, of what happens if there is no destination, as when Darwish writes 'Our destination is the horizon of this expanse' (45). The horizon can never be reached, and when the travellers ask the hoopoe what is beyond this expanse, they are told '*An expanse after an expanse after an expanse*' (45). The poem also asks what happens after the end of all the certainties that sustain us in life, if 'hollowness', that is absence, is turned outward rather than denied or clothed in rhetoric. Said makes the following observations on Beethoven's late works, observations it is interesting to apply to Darwish's late poetry. They remain, he writes, 'unco-opted: they do not fit any scheme, and they cannot be reconciled or resolved, since their irresolution and unsynthesized fragmentariness are not constitutive, nor ornamental or symbolic of something else. Beethoven's late compositions are about, are in fact "lost totality," and therefore catastrophic' (Said 'Adorno' 200). Poems such as 'The Hoopoe' and 'The Tragedy of Narcissus' try to describe living with such a 'lost totality' yet, importantly, they do not accept that everything is lost. Just as Said says of lateness that it 'therefore is coming

after, and surviving beyond what is generally acceptable' (Said 'Adorno' 202), so Darwish attempts to imagine an alternative reality for the Palestinians. If he were able to set out in clearly understandable terms what exactly such a reality looked like, his poetry would lose the edginess that the dialectic of abandonment and hope creates, the edginess and lack of resolution that give it its quality of 'lateness'. The willingness to explore such issues, and the value of the process, save this poetry from nihilism. Darwish writes:

Love transforms us. We become an ode opening
its windows to be recited and finished by doves.
We become a meaning that returns sap
to invisible trees on our souls' embankments. (48)

Many of the motifs of the poem reappear here: poetry as the mode of apprehension of the new realism; the doves that represent the meaning of home; the exiles' experience that can reinvigorate life; the embankments, suggesting Babylon, that link the present-day refugees to exiles throughout time.

If 'The Hoopoe' concerns itself with destination as 'the horizon of this expanse' and movement, 'The Tragedy of Narcissus, the Comedy of Silver' (*ATE* 171-203) speaks relentlessly of return. At first it may seem that the return referred to is a literal one, to the homeland or place of birth, but that assumption is difficult to square with Darwish's awareness in his later poetry that return is impossible. He has stated 'Nobody crosses the same river twice. There is no return, because history goes on. Return is just a visit to a place of memory, or to the memory of the place' (Shatz 77). The poem is punctuated by stanzas which are a litany of return, many repeating elements of others. This formal patterning of return creates within the poem a home, or base, that anchors the wandering of the exiles. Some stanzas speak of return to a way of life that has been lost, while in others it is a return to a 'place of memory' that is suggested. The poem begins:

They returned from a tunnel's farthest end
to the closeness of mirrors.
[. . .]
They returned [. . .]
to hang okra, garlic, and onions from their ceilings
to dry for the winter,
to milk the breasts of their goats
as well as the clouds seeping
from the feathers of doves.

They returned with trepidation

to a map of divine enchantment,
to a carpet of banana trees in a land of ancient vistas:
to a mountain overlooking the sea,
to two lakes nestled behind memory,
to a seashore for prophets,
to a street for the scent of lemons. (173)

The reference to the tunnel's end contains echoes of the first line of 'Earth Presses Against Us' – 'Earth is pressing against us, trapping us in the final passage' (*UIWP* 9) – but here there is none of the sense of desperation of the earlier poem. The 'closeness of mirrors' points to a return to self-knowledge, the homely minutiae of planning for the winter reinforcing the sense of security for the returnees. Birds are often used in Darwish's poetry as symbols: crows represent the dangers and cruelty of exile; migratory birds the sense of cyclical wandering; but the homing doves of this poem represent an almost inevitable return. The idea of home has become one of 'divine enchantment', 'ancient vistas' and the sea designating a landscape created by memory and poets and prophets, the lemon trees so often found in gardens summoning up the scent of a shared history. Two intertwining, yet distinct, threads run throughout the poem, one asserting the importance of memory, the other insisting that exile must be a transformative experience. The poem is punctuated with the single line 'Land, like language, is inherited': the land, and the words used to describe what it means, are in the blood and will not be forgotten. However, while the exiles remember, they must also be prepared to '[shatter] their legend in order to break out of it,/in order to free themselves to think with their hearts' (178). History, the story we tell to make sense of ourselves, must be enabling and not constraining; legends should not freeze the nation in time and space.

Darwish does not let the reader forget the reality of exile, the endless longing. 'Their hell was Hell itself', he writes, and then continues: 'They got used to planting mint in their shirts,/growing ivy by their tent flaps,/storing violets in their songs and in the sarcophagi of their dead' (177-8). The transient nature of exile reinforces the sense that they have been torn from their place in history as it is settled civilisations that leave records of their existence. The travellers thus plead 'O song,/take all the elements of our being and lead us back, age by age,/to find what may bring us from such a/tedious journey in human history back to *our* place' (182).¹⁰ Darwish has said that his poetry comes from 'a country where the relation between time and place has been ruptured,

¹⁰ All emphases are in the original.

from a fatherland whose children have been turned into ghosts' ('The Place of the Universal' 26). Recalling Clifford's argument that the experiences of exile produce 'discrepant temporalities' wherein '[l]inear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed future, a renewed painful yearning', it would appear that in order for this disruption to linear time to be reversed, a return to the home is necessary, but, as we have seen, Darwish no longer believes in the possibility of actual return. It is possible that what he is attempting to do with this poetry is to create another, quite new space in which exiles can belong, thus returning them to history. In attempting to heal what he calls the rupture between time and place, he uses the trope of return, patterned and repeated throughout the poem, to create a point of fixity within fluidity, frequently using the motion of the sea returning to the shore as a metaphor for the longing of the exiles to be tied to the land, as when he writes, 'Take me to the string that ties/the sea to the receding shore' (183). These lines accept that movement is inevitable but the plea is that they are not cut adrift completely: '*There must be a shore for us to land on/to reach our own garden's hazel tree*' (190), the poet asserts.

As we have seen in 'The Hoopoe' Darwish, particularly in his late poetry, uses myth and antiquity to place Palestinians within a far wider historical context. The fragmented structure of the poem and the constant allusions to myth are reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and indicate a desire to reconstruct reality from the shards of the past. The relics of their absence/presence mentioned in 'The Hoopoe' are here reinscribed to produce another history. Thus Darwish writes:

They returned to houses inside themselves
and regained silken steps at luminous lakes.
They recovered what was lost from their lexicon:
Rome's olive trees imagined by soldiers,
Canaan's sacred book buried under
ruins of temples between Tyre and Jerusalem,
a trail of incense blowing from
rose-filled Damascus
to the land of Quraysh.
And the deer of eternity in her wedding procession
to the northward-flowing Nile and the Tigris
wild in manliness, conducting
Sumer to immortality. (184)

This passage situates the Palestinians alongside the civilisations of the past who left their mark on the region, civilisations of incredible learning and refinement as well as of

power, and making this connection allows the recovery of lost realms of knowledge. He takes as exemplars both Gilgamesh, the warrior, and Athena, the goddess of wisdom, protector of civilised life, justice and agriculture. The travellers ask '*Can we transplant the power to create/from Gilgamesh who was denied immortality's flower,/and thereafter, from Athena?*' (185). They reject the philosophy associated with Gilgamesh, the fighter who did not achieve immortality, and instead align themselves with all that Athena stands for. In using myth as an imaginative space, it is as if Darwish is seeking to forge a new myth, that of the Palestinians: instead of being dismissed as never having existed, he is writing them into a wider mythological framework, one upon which future generations will draw for inspiration.

In these later poems, exile is no longer seen as a waiting, a hiatus that will be healed once the actual homeland is regained. The possibility that exile will not end, and that the meaning of return has to be redefined, leads to a reshaping of exile as a way of being in the world that offers an experience and wisdom of its own. The poet asserts '*As I defend my journey to my fate,/I defend my song*' (193), and the exiles maintain '*Our place of exile have not been in vain*' (191). As with Said and his theory of intellectual exile, this can be read as a compensatory gesture, a need to create some sort of a reward or purpose for exile in order to endure its overwhelming sense of loss and absence. It is up to the poet to articulate an existentialism that can transcend the absence of exile. As in 'The Hoopoe' there is a strong moral dimension, a sense that the exiles, having learnt to curb the desire to dominate, have a lesson for the rest of humanity. The poet writes:

The garden will expand when they arrive,
 shortly before the singing,
 and they will glance behind them saying:
*"We are what we are, so who will
 drive us back to the desert?
 We will teach our enemies a lesson in agriculture:
 how to make water burst from a rock.
 We will plant peppers in the soldiers' helmets,
 we will plant wheat on every slope
 because wheat extends beyond the confines of
 silly empires."* (197)

The garden carries the suggestion of regaining Eden, but it is a symbolic space that will expand, that is be enriched, by their presence. The experience of exile teaches the desirability of sustaining life (finding water and planting wheat) in place of the desire to conquer. Having once understood that they occupy this space of knowledge and morality, they cannot be driven back to the desert of hopelessness.

Darwish not only questions the possibility of return but also appears to warn against the dangers of becoming too settled. In line with the desire to 'go beyond what any one has known in reality', the old ideas of what constitutes 'home' (in the wider sense of 'home' being who we are) are no longer available. Hence towards the end of the poem Darwish writes:

Within them was still a limpid narcissus
afraid of dehydration,
within them was still what would change them forever
if they returned and couldn't find
the same anemones blooming,
the same hardy quince,
the same daisies,
the same persimmons,
the same long ears of corn,
the same elder,
the same bundles of dry garlic,
the same oak,
the same alphabet. (201)

The exiles wish for an uncomplicated return to exactly what was, but 'what would change them forever' would be negated by such a return. All the domestic items, reassuring in their familiarity, are listed as enticement to an end of wandering, but at the same time the exiles are told they cannot repossess these symbols if they are to be enriched by the experience of their exile. In a subtle review of *The Adam of Two Edens*, Taline Voskeritchian has made an interesting point that recalls the words of Ernest Bloch. Commenting on how the 'metaphor of migration wanders the entire universe of Darwish's poetry', she argues that after an abundance of 'ironic twists', it finally 'returns home to the most bitter and prophetic irony of all: Home is another form of occupation, which robs people of their ability to dream of paradise' (Voskeritchian 30). At the end of the poem, Darwish writes 'They dreamt of the struggle of their narcissus with Paradise/if it becomes their place of exile'. The narcissus, which replaced the mythical Narcissus's love of himself, will not be able to dwell in Paradise, because that would imply contentment and therefore an end to the restlessness that made exile a new way of being. Said has said of this poetry that it is 'an epic effort to transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return' (quoted in Jaggi 2). It is possible that such a desire to postpone return reflects the anxiety that home as the nation-state, obsessed with boundaries, will restrict choices and expect a conformity from all its constituents. I earlier quoted Amy Kaminsky's summing up of the paradox

of much exilic writing, that '[t]he exile's writing aims to win back the land; its longed-for destination is that one place where it can never be'. Return has to be 'indefinitely postponed' for exile to retain its meaning. The poem ends with three single lines: 'They knew and dreamt and returned and dreamt./They knew and returned and returned and dreamt./They dreamt and returned.' So, in the end, the return to an Edenic homeland is put beyond reach and its desirability questioned. It appears that it is something that can be dreamt of and the question remains - what exactly is the ideal to which these exiles seek to return?

The poetry of *Eleven Planets*, published in 1992, marks important historical dates for Darwish. Firstly, that year saw the quincentennial celebrations of Columbus's 'discovery' of the New World. The celebrations of course looked away from the date as the anniversary of the beginning of the end for so many native American cultures, the wholesale destruction of their peoples and their unique knowledge of their worlds, their landscapes, their cities and villages. Secondly, that year marked the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Moors from Andalusia – al-Andalus, which represented not only the golden age of Islamic learning and refinement, but also the ideal of a pluralistic and surprisingly secular society. Darwish visited southern Spain for the first time in 1992. But 1992 was not just an occasion for looking back. At that time negotiations were well under way that would result in the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Darwish was opposed to nearly all of the principles of the Accord, and took issue with Arafat personally on the negotiating stance adopted by the Palestinians. The day after the Accords were signed, he resigned from the executive committee of the PLO, saying that that day the Palestinians had woken up 'to find they had no past' (Jaggi 6). One of the odes of 'Eleven Stars over Andalusia' (Darwish 'Eleven') is a criticism of the Oslo Accords and others make reference to the selling out of the weak by the relatively powerful. There is a sense that history is repeating itself – the lost realms of the past, and the fast-disappearing hopes of the Palestinians, now seem to run parallel. Hence, Darwish writes 'I am the Adam of the two Edens, I who lost paradise twice./So expel me slowly,/and kill me slowly,/under my olive tree,/along with Lorca . . .' ('Eleven Stars' III).¹¹ Darwish situates the poet at the centre of these events, past and present, and he appears to argue that only poetry can encapsulate truth and preserve that past that is being stolen. One commentator remarked of *The Adam of Two Edens* that 'what

¹¹ I preferred the translation of 'Eleven Stars' that appears in *Grand Street* (no. 48) to that in *The Adam of Two Edens*.

remains, what is permanent and real, is something as fleeting as a night of poetry whose fragile shoulders must carry not only the poet's longing for return but also the load of history, the long trail of expulsion and migration' (Voskeritchian 31). Nights in Granada, scented with lemons and jasmine, are these pools of poetic time that evoke an unbearable nostalgia and a longing for return. In this volume, Darwish again attempts to imagine what happens after the end, beyond knowledge, beyond the impossible return. 'Who am I after this exodus?' he asks. 'I have a rock/with my name on it, on a hill from which I see what's long gone . . .' (VIII).

There are two aspects of the poetry of *Eleven Planets* on which I would like to concentrate: the importance of preserving lost realms of knowledge, and the role of the poet as prophet. One looks to the past, the other imagines the future, both reading the present and future through the prism of the past. 'Speech of the Red Indian' (ATE 129-145) is directed at the white man who is told: 'Our pastures are sacred, our spirits inspired/the stars are luminous words where our fable is legible from beginning to end/if only you'll lift up your eyes' (129). The speech is intended to teach the newcomers the wisdom of a people who live in harmony with a benevolent, nurturing, feminine nature, not a nature that must be tamed and subjugated. But 'the white man will never understand the ancient words/here in spirits roaming free/between sky and trees' (130), nor open his mind to alternative realms of knowledge. Whereas the Native Americans believe in the existence of a Mother Nature from whom all wisdom and knowledge flow, the white man makes a fetish of the products of his mind. In the case of Columbus, it is the compass, gold and maps (but the compass is 'fiddled with' to keep correcting course, a privilege of the powerful (130)), and for the present-day 'white master' it is 'bulldozers', 'hospitals', 'radar screens/to observe the dead', 'aircraft carriers and jets' (143). The animism of the Indian is juxtaposed with the icons of modernity that all speak of death and destruction ('the dead who feed the beast of civilization on death' (143)), the roar of machines despoiling nature and drowning out quieter voices. 'We still hear our ancestors' voices on the wind,/we listen to their pulse in the flowering trees./This earth is our grandmother, each stone sacred' (137) says the Red Indian. Despite the subdued assurance of the Red Indian's words, a thread of despair and inevitability runs through the poem, the only answer to his words the roar of jets.

'Speech of the Red Indian' contains many echoes of Darwish's views on the present conflict. He has said:

I don't monopolise history and memory and God, as Israelis want to do.
They put the past on the battlefield. We shouldn't fight about the past.
Let each one tell his narrative as he wants. Let the two narratives make
a dialogue, and history will smile. (Jaggi 7)

The Red Indian asks that the two people should live side by side without one seeking to destroy the other: 'We have what is ours and/we have what is yours of the sky. [. . .] Take what you need of the sea/but leave us a few waves in which to catch our fish./Take all the gold of the earth and sun/but leave the land of our names to us.' (131-2). Just as the Israelis seek to deny Palestinian presence on the land before 1948, and to deny them their history, so the Red Indian reminds the white man of their past before the arrival of Columbus.

We lived and flourished before the onslaught of
English guns, French wine and influenza,
living in harmony side by side with the Deer People,
learning our oral history by heart.
We brought you tidings of innocence and daisies.
But you have your god and we have ours.
You have your past and we have ours.
Time is a river
blurred by the tears we gaze through. (139)

The uneven struggle of one voice, the maintenance of 'oral history', to make itself heard amidst the din of modern technological power – 'a technological Sparta' (143) – is one that must go on. With so much physical destruction of one people's past, the poet has to keep alive what once flourished. So the Red Indian/Palestinian asks, 'Who will raise our voices to the rainless clouds? [. . .] Who will tend our temples,/who will safeguard our traditions/from the clash of steel?'. The answer of the powerful is without compassion:

*"We bring you civilization," said the stranger,
"We're the masters of time
come to inherit this land of yours.
March in Indian file so we can tally you
on the face of the lake, corpse by corpse.
Keep marching, so the Gospels may thrive!
We want God all to ourselves
Because the best Indians are dead Indians
in the eyes of our Lord."*¹²

The allusions in this passage to modern Middle Eastern experience are startling: Herzl's mission to push back the frontiers of barbarity;¹³ the concept of 'a land without a people

¹² All emphases are in the original.

for a people without a land'; the forced march of hundreds of Palestinians from their homes; and the saying 'the only good Arab is a dead Arab'. The plea of the Red Indian is that world, Mother Nature, is not completely destroyed. Destruction of all trace of the Other - an 'ideology for the insane' (144) – leads to degradation of environment, both physical and cultural, and carries the powerful, as well as the weak, towards the 'abyss'. The Red Indian asks:

O white master, where are you taking my people
and yours?

Into what abyss
is this robot bristling with aircraft carriers and jets
consigning the earth?

To what fathomless pit
will you descend? (143)

These lines recall Laila 'Allush's 'The Path of Affection' (see Chapter 1) and, as with so much of Darwish's later poetry, the marginalized and dispossessed are granted a wisdom forgotten in the 'technological Sparta' of the modern world.

'Eleven Stars over Andalusia' is a sequence of eleven odes that lament the loss of Granada and the Moorish empire in Southern Spain. The Moorish culture of al-Andalus represented the co-operation of two different worlds – the Occident and the Orient – a co-operation that led to the establishment of a culture of learning and experimentation in the arts and sciences. Remembering Granada, the poet observes: 'I was not a passerby in the words of singers . . . I was the words/of the singers, the reconciliation of Athens and Persia, and East embracing a West/embarked on one essence' (V). This lost realm, like that of the Red Indian, represents an ideal for the future, and there is a sense of the past continuing into the present when Darwish writes: 'Five hundred years have passed, but our breakup wasn't final,/ and the messages between us never stopped. The wars/did not change the gardens of my Granada' (V). If 'Speech of the Red Indian' rehearses the destruction of a people and their symbolic order, the poems of 'Eleven Stars' recreate an Arab paradise-on-earth. As in all this late poetry, Darwish is moving towards the idea that the exile, from his/her position of marginality, is best placed to extrapolate from these lost realms truths and lessons for the whole of humanity. This widening of the universe, away from just the local, places the Palestinians within a far

¹³ Herzl wrote in *The Jewish State: an Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question*: 'We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarity' (quoted in Cleary 151).

wider framework and gives their history relevance by likening it to other significant periods in history. However, using the idea of Granada and al-Andalus in this way is not without its problems. The Moorish presence in Spain was an occupation and, although it was a tolerant society compared to what was to follow, it remained nevertheless an imposition of one culture upon another. It could be that Darwish is acknowledging this paradox when he writes in 'On our last evening on this land', 'Here, on our last evening,/we look closely at the mountains besieging the clouds: a conquest . . ./and a counter-conquest,/and an old time handing this new time the keys to our doors.' (I). They leave their riches behind to be enjoyed by the conqueror – wine, songs, tea, pistachios, their crisp sheets, their perfumes – but with the knowledge that they, those who are departing, will soon be forgotten, their history rewritten by those who replace them – 'Soon we will search/in the margins of your history, in distant countries,/for what was once *our* history. And in the end we will ask ourselves:/Was Andalusia here or there? On the land . . . or in the poem?' (I).

These poems are a pressing amalgam of love, nostalgia, and prescience, and together they create a certain tentativeness, a reluctance to give oneself over completely to the seduction of that golden time. So in 'How can I write above the clouds?' the poet writes 'But Granada is made of gold,/of silken words woven with almonds, of silver tears/in the string of a lute. Granada is a law unto herself:/it befits her to be whatever she wants to be: nostalgia for/anything long past or which will pass' (II). As a symbol, therefore, Granada can be what you want her to be: is Granada this beautiful city, a pearl in the history of the Arabs, or is she the perfectly crafted creation of the poetic imagination? The indulgence in sensuousness and the feminising of the city can be read both as an orientalisising impulse and a fetishisation of what has been lost; such a move again leaves Darwish open to the charge of political irrelevance. It is possible that he seeks to balance his idealisation of the past when in the next ode, 'There is a sky beyond the sky for me', he acknowledges the inevitability of departure, as if it is impossible to dwell in such a place as Granada for ever, that such beauty and perfection can only be transient. He writes: 'I know that time/cannot twice be on my side, and I know that I will leave – [. . .] Some of my words of love will fall into/Lorca's poems; he'll live in my bedroom/and see what I have seen of the Bedouin moon' (III). In these lines Darwish situates himself as one who came before Lorca and expanded Lorca's vision to encompass 'the Bedouin moon', the horizon of the poet in the Middle East. The voice of the poet is thus one that exists from age to age and from place to place; the

wisdom of exiled poets inhabits all times and places, but along with that wisdom come pain and despair for the future.

The romanticising of the past, reinforced by the idealisation of al-Andalus and the many references to Lorca, are set against those odes that make reference to the plight of the Palestinians at the time of the Oslo Accords, odes that can be lain as a template over those that lament the loss of Granada. 'I am one of the kings of the end' can be replayed from Boabdil's surrender in 1492 to the relinquishing of so many Palestinian dreams. This ode, and 'Truth has two faces and the snow is black', were written a year before the actual signing of the Accords, and the truth the poet foresees is so painful he has to avert his eyes:

I do not look behind me, so I won't remember
I've passed over this land, there is no land in this land
since time broke around me shard by shard.
I was not a lover believing that water is a mirror,
as I told my old friends, and no love can redeem me,
for I've accepted the "peace accord" and there is no longer a present left
to let me pass, tomorrow, close to yesterday. (IV)

If anything less than the ideals of those lost realms is accepted it means the past has been betrayed, leaving no present and no future. 'Farewell to our history!' he writes at the end of the poem. What Granada was in the past was turned by poetic imagination into the ideal for the future, but that ideal lies in 'shards', betrayed by the Palestinians themselves. The poet asks: 'Who will bring down our flags: we or they? And who/will recite the "peace accord," O king of dying?/Everything's prepared for us in advance; who will tear our names/from our identity: you or they?' (IV) The identity forged in exile will be sacrificed in settlement. Although what the Palestinians gained through the Oslo Accords could never be described as paradise, there is a sense in this poetry that an end, any end, to questing after perfection is compromise, that, recalling Voskeritchian's observation, home 'robs people of their ability to dream of paradise'. Darwish also makes explicit the danger of power corrupting when he writes: 'Carry then the coffin to save the throne, O king of waiting,/this exodus will leave us only a handful of dust' (VI). In making such explicit political criticisms and juxtaposing the odes in which they appear with those recalling al-Andalus, it could be argued that Darwish is making the 'lost' past of Al-Andalus a reality that has more relevance to the present than contemporary politics. In a move that recalls Gandhian philosophy, he is

reassessing the past from his viewpoint in the present; that is, the time of the past is no longer fixed as a 'lost' epoch but evolves in significance.

The role of the poet presented by Darwish in 'Eleven Stars' is an important statement of his philosophy.¹⁴ The poet reads the lessons of Andalusia's fall into the disaster of the Palestinians that will be sealed with the signing of the Accords. The burden and the agony that the role of prophet brings is set out in 'Who am I after the night of the estranged?', which I give here in full.

Who am I after the night of the estranged? I wake from my dream
frightened of the obscure daylight on the marble of the house, of
the sun's darkness in the roses, of the water of my fountain;
frightened of milk on the lip of the fig, of my language;
frightened of wind that – frightened – combs a willow; frightened
of the clarity of petrified time, of a present no longer
a present; frightened, passing a world that is no longer
my world. Despair, be merciful. Death, be
a blessing on the stranger who sees the unseen more clearly than
a reality that is no longer real. I'll fall from a star
in the sky into a tent on the road to . . . where?
Where is the road to anything? I see the unseen more clearly than
a street that is no longer my street. Who am I after the night of the estranged?
Through others I once walked toward myself, and here I am,
losing that self, those others. My horse disappeared by the Atlantic,
and by the Mediterranean I bleed, stabbed with a spear.
Who am I after the night of the estranged? I cannot return to
my brothers under the palm tree of my old house, and I cannot descend to
the bottom of my abyss. You, the unseen! Love has no heart . . .
no heart in which I can dwell after the night of the estranged . . . (VII)

Poetic symbols – daylight, darkness, roses, the water in the fountain, language, the wind – now become sources of fear instead of inspiration. The poet has awoken from his 'dream' that the past can mould the future and sees the nightmare of the present. Darwish here seems uncertain of what the poet's role should now be, frightened of what his powers might reveal. The 'night of the estranged', a metaphor for the darkness of recent years, has not been a passage towards light. After all the suffering and unrewarded hope, there is despair for the future. Return to the old dwelling is impossible, but neither can the poet allow himself to descend into the 'abyss'. Modern political manoeuvring threatens to destroy the basis for hope, the belief that the past can

¹⁴ Edward Said explains the significance of the title 'Eleven Stars over Andalusia'. It is derived from the Sura of Joseph in the Qu'ran: "'So Joseph told his father, 'My father, I saw eleven stars, and the sun and moon' I saw them bowing down before me". His father warns him not to say any of this to his brothers, since they may do him harm because of his gifts as a seer; Joseph is then informed that the Lord has chosen him to interpret events, which of course means that he has been endowed with the divine power of prophecy'. ('On Mahmoud Darwish' 114)

help shape the future. They awoke and found they had no past, said Darwish of the Palestinians after Oslo. As I quoted earlier, Darwish is adamant that resistance amounts to the saturation of the present and the future with the past, and that without the past there is neither present nor future. In 'O water, be a string to my guitar', he writes 'In which Andalusia do I end? Here/or there? I will know I've perished and that here I've left/the best part of me: my past' (VIII). In 'In the exodus I love you more' he addresses the 'you' he loves more than anything, a 'you' that is not just the lost homeland but the ideals embodied in all these lost realms.

My heart alone is heavy,
so let it remain here, around your house,
barking, howling for a golden time.
It alone is my homeland. In the exodus I love you more,
I empty my soul of words: I love you more.
We depart. Butterflies lead our shadows. (IX)

The mythical 'golden time' is the homeland. Another exodus: history repeats itself. The 'going beyond what anyone has ever lived through in reality' encompasses the almost unbearable pain of all these departures and those to come. Even with that knowledge, the poet will not relinquish the dream, the 'golden time' to which the exiles will return some time in the future.

I am content to have the golden dagger that makes my murdered heart
dance –
kill me then, slowly, so I may say: I love you more than
I had said before the exodus. I love you. Nothing hurts me,
neither air nor water . . . neither basil in your morning nor
iris in your evening, nothing hurts me after this departure. (IX)

The 'golden dagger' acts as a symbol for all that emerges as important in this late poetry: the past, the homeland as future, nostalgia, poetry, prophecy – all make his 'murdered heart' dance. But it is exodus, or exile, the sense of constantly having to move on, the questing and the refusal to accept second best, that makes the longed-for Eden what it is. Despite the hurt and fear, there is always a sense that this future Eden, which is saturated with the past, does exist. As Darwish writes in 'Tragedy of Narcissus', 'A place of exile must exist/where pearls of memory/reduce eternity/and all time shrinks to a moment' (188).

CONCLUSION

There are two main strands on which I wish to reflect in this conclusion. The first is what I feel this thesis has achieved, and the second is the themes and concerns that emerge from the writing of Palestinians in the past sixty years.

Palestinian literature is a relatively under-explored area and a wide-ranging study of it, as I believe this undertaking to be, is therefore rare and groundbreaking. There were no paradigms to follow in terms of structure, selection and themes, and there was also concern around language and the limitations imposed by using translated material. Notwithstanding these obstacles, I consider it is possible both to engage with the writing on its own terms, to empathise with the Palestinian position despite cultural and linguistic differences, and to examine it within the broader scope of postcolonial studies. I believe this has been achieved through a direct engagement with the texts themselves and listening to the concerns apparent in them without imposing *a priori* theoretical assumptions, whilst at the same time bearing in mind how such writing relates to the wider discourses of liberation struggle literature. The interviews I conducted in Palestine six months before completion of this thesis back up the conclusions I had drawn but, more importantly, give an up-to-date assessment of the importance of Palestinian literature and its relationship to politics.

It should come as no surprise that much Palestinian writing concerns itself with the need for, and indispensability of, land, sovereignty, and an independent state; in this respect it conforms to other narratives of the struggle for liberation. The role literature can play in the formation of a national culture and consciousness has already been discussed in the introduction to this thesis, as have the dangers of an exclusive, coercive nationalism that so often leads to those 'egregious failures' mentioned by Parry that follow many decolonising projects (Parry 'Resistance' 178). The more strident and masculinist texts are counterbalanced by a larger number that emphasise discourses of justice and humanity, where justice and liberation not only include but must start with the individual. Whilst it is in many respects paradigmatic of liberation struggles, the Palestinian cause is also exceptional in that the settler state it opposes has enormous sympathy in the outside world. Being the victims of those who are popularly perceived as history's greatest victims poses unique challenges to Palestinian writers; indeed, Ghassan Zaqtan argues that the mentality of victimhood can be limiting and dangerous (see interview p.258). Attention to the discourse of justice for all – what Said terms an

‘integrative view of human community and human liberation’ (Said *Culture* 261) - helps avoid this pitfall. For Said, the struggle for Palestinian sovereignty is unique in that it is a ‘nationalist movement for democratic rights [. . .] in a part of the world where there is no democracy’ (Said ‘People’s Rights’ 249-50). There appears to be an awareness and a desire that the Palestinian national liberation movement, coming after all the ‘egregious failures’, can be different: democratic and secular. The historically secular nature of Palestinian society is emphasised by Liana Badr, Samih al-Qasim, Hassan Khadar and Ghassan Zaqtan in my interviews with them. Such an emphasis on heterogeneity stands in contrast to nationalism’s tendency to rely on fixed essences, a tendency that is deconstructed to great effect by *Arabesques* and *Saeed the Pessimist*, and that is shown at base to be not only violent but also self-defeating by many women writers.

The indispensability of a nationalist project is accepted, however suspiciously, by the huge majority of Palestinians, but despite literature being seen as part of the nation-building project (see interview with Khader p.247), the writers who have produced what may be regarded as canonical texts (Shammas, Habiby, Kanafani, Darwish, al-Qasim, Said, to mention the most prominent) emphasise the importance of the individual. In my interview with him, Samih al-Qasim makes this point eloquently, explaining that his poetry is ‘only personal’, and that before any ‘cause’ there has to be a ‘very individual, a deep personal experience’ (243). As for political poetry, he insists that not only do you have to be ‘right’ but you also have to be beautiful and humane. If a writer is able to achieve this, ‘great art [. . .] can create this impossible communication between the individual and the community and the world’ (243). All my interviewees are aware that good literature can achieve this bridge between a much-misrepresented people and the rest of the world, and also that it has to be ‘beautiful’ and not only ‘right’. Salim Tamari considers that literature ‘uncovers the human’ whereas politics deals ‘in stereotypes’ (254-5). He also states that ‘the struggle of Palestinian literature is to free itself of clichés and from political stereotypes’ but he points to the dilemma of artists ‘who write or paint in a “normal” way’ being seen as betraying the cause’ (255). Ghassan Zaqtan makes a similar point. Whilst admitting that it is impossible to avoid writing about politics, he points to the emergence of a different aesthetic sensibility. Instead of the ‘big ideas, big speeches’, he prefers to concentrate on ‘reflections of the occupation’ and to ‘walk or march behind the demonstration, not in front of it’ (263).

He, too, wants to get away from stereotypes and symbols, especially Palestine as a symbol (268) and concentrate on the small details.¹

Now that the Palestinians have a measure of sovereignty, albeit tenuous and curtailed, what their literature means to the nation will change. Nationhood is important for there to be a recognised national literature; not only does this help with the formation of a canon and the possibility of subsequent self-criticism, but until the Palestinians ran their own schools and universities they had no control over the curriculum. Even now, as my interview with Zaqtan revealed, much literature taught in Palestinian schools is from the classical Arabic canon, rather than from a recognised body of indigenous writers (269). The Palestinians are now able to debate what should be national literature, a debate touched on by Zaqtan in the same interview where he discusses women writers. Both he and Hassan Khader (in an unrecorded conversation) mention the quality of the work emerging from the younger generation of women writers, and both stress the challenge to the quality and scope of literature posed by Islamic fundamentalism.

The importance of Palestinian literature is thus seen to be manifold. Not only in its early years did it help forge a sense of belonging to a collectivity and present the Palestinians' point of view to the outside world, it also helps keep open possibilities for the future. This is seen most prominently in the work of Mahmoud Darwish, and the relationship between past and present and future is discussed by al-Qasim in his interview. Almost without exception, those works that retain an evolving and fluid sense of national consciousness are envisioning an ideal for the future even if they are primarily concerned with the present. On this matter of the future, it is interesting to return to the influence in postcolonial studies of poststructuralist theory (raised in the introduction to this thesis). In 'Travelling Theory' Said refers to a debate that took place between Foucault and Chomsky in which the latter insisted that the 'sociopolitical battle' had to attend to the future as well as to the present, "to imagine a future society that conforms to the exigencies of human nature as best we understand them."² Foucault could not accept this because, as Said explains:

¹ What Zaqtan says about Palestine being a symbol for the rest of the Arab world is tackled by Habiby in *Saeed the Pessoptimist* through the voice of the younger Yu'aad.

² Noam Chomsky, *Language and Responsibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1979, p.80). A transcript of the debate between Foucault and Chomsky can be found in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* (ed. Fons Elders, London: Souvenir Press, 1974).

[. . .] any future societies that we might imagine now “are only inventions of our civilization and result from our class system.” Not only would imagining a future society ruled according to justice be limited by false consciousness, it would also be too utopian a project for anyone like Foucault who believes that “the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power.” (215)

A belief in ‘the idea of justice’ based on equal rights and a credible humanism underpins much Palestinian writing. Recalling Anthony Appiah’s comments on the necessity of appealing to an ‘ethical universal’, I would argue that even in the more postmodern texts (such as *Arabesques*, *Saeed the Pessimist*, and Darwish’s later poetry) the ideal of a future based on justice is more than merely an invention and instrument of the powerful.

The idealism apparent in texts that complicate and contest the notions of fixed identities exists despite the harsh reality of politics. Such writing holds in balance the political (which is inescapable) and the aesthetic and the ideal. Another dialectic that holds cadences similar to the ideal and real is that of absence and presence. This thesis is book-ended by the narrative of the land and by the narrative of exile, representing these poles of presence and absence, both of which are definitive of Palestinian national consciousness. The land – its meaning as the geographical space which is necessary for the nation’s sovereignty; its significance to a dispersed community as a basis for a return to wholeness; its loss which initiated the whole process – and its apparent antithesis: exile. It was in exile that the idea of the nation was moulded, yet exile speaks of the nation’s absence, of what the nation is not. Both these poles – the groundedness of wished-for territorial sovereignty and the groundlessness of exile – inflect much of the literature I have examined here, and any vision of a present or future Palestinian state will have to incorporate and be determined by both poles. The quest for statehood has been evolving for sixty years, a time span that has enabled the participation in the debate of different generations, varying constituencies, and emergence of women’s voices, all employing a variety of genres, producing a surprisingly (given the primacy of the struggle) heteroglossic body of national writing. This thesis engages with that which is in constant process. It is by holding in balance many dialectical interplays – across generations and genders, time and space, absence and presence, idealism and realism – that Palestinian literature emerges as a vital

resource and rewarding field of study for a deeper understanding of our postcolonial world.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

‘The Trench’ by Ghassan Zaqtan

[This translation of ‘The Trench’ was given to me by the poet.]

How strange are the days of salt
It is as if they belong to others
And like a well-plotted tragedy
Just brought to a close
They begin to breathe as we remember them

The hills forgotten in the boredom of the slopes
The mountains that aspire towards the west
The wandering caravans of death
The faith of the dead, complete.

The hands that emerge from the darkness
To tell you everything
The deep fraternity that does not lead to wisdom
The words no longer suitable for high places

Strange are the days of salt,
Now alone in the abyss
Disparaged like rotten seed

And while we ascend,
Because that’s all we can do
The days roll away into the distance behind us,
Abandoned, and can never return

Our dark complexions
Our attempts at sleep

. Names, endlessly long titles

Dialects also

Proclaiming a countryside

No longer necessary.

How strange are the days of salt

They are not even worthy to be remembered.

Appendix II

Interviews conducted in Palestine, 24 April – 2 May 2006

Interview with Samih al-Qasim, 24/04/06, Narazeth

Samih al-Qasim is one of Palestine's foremost poets. Born in 1939, he has never lived in exile.

[Recording started after I had asked about the role literature can play in Palestinian affairs.]

S.Q. It is very important for us to be studied, not only in England but all over the world, because we believe that literature and art and human activity is very important to bring our even [*sic*] political and national problems to the whole world. It is not enough to be right, it is not enough to have a good political argument. Among human beings, sometimes you have to try to be beautiful also, not only right. To be beautiful I mean to be humane, and this, I speak about myself, this I have tried to do since the very beginning of my poetic and political and social activity. Very little of Palestinian poetry was translated into other languages. Some of my poems were translated into thirty languages, but not enough. In English you can find a few old poems that do not give a good idea about my work.

C.S. When you write, do you have a particular audience in mind?

S.Q. I confess – it is a real confession – I never have anybody in mind when I write. I write to keep myself from – not to be insane, in order not to be mad. Once an Arab journalist asked me 'If you weren't a poet, what would you be?' I say maybe I could be a martyr, professional killer. Poetry is for me to get rid of violence, of spiritual violence, anger, sadness, madness, no hope – all these things I express through poetry. In my poetry, love and trees and women and soldiers, blood and flowers, go together. So I write myself, about myself. Since, if it seems that myself is similar to herself and yourself, when you read me you find yourself there. Don't believe anybody who says 'I write for the poor people, for liberty, for freedom'.

C.S. Adunis [the Syrian poet] once said that the Arab poet is a worker producing for the group. Does the Palestinian poet feel he or she has to write for the cause?

S.Q. I know Adunis well, he is a good friend, but about poetry we are completely different. What he says here is not true. Adunis suffered from the Ba'ath party and he has not forgotten his torture; this makes him not rational. I understand him but I don't

agree with him. Adunis is not the model of an Arab poet, he is a fashion. When I go to Damascus, his capital, to read my poetry I have huge crowds, he has twenty persons. My poetry is only personal. I lived the tragedy since I was a little boy. In 1948 I was nine years old. I lived those days – I don't imagine them, I lived them, and I am not ready to argue with anyone about what did or didn't happen. Adunis calls it the cause; for me it is my personal life, my childhood, my family, my tree, the grave of my grandfather, my dreaming, my girlfriend. Talking of a political cause is a very cold personal expression. For me it is not a political cause only – of course it is a political cause – but before being a political cause, it is very individual, a deep personal experience. There seems to be amongst Arab critics what seems to them to be a cold, tough, political matter; for me it is a very personal matter which deals with my childhood, my family, my girlfriend. The Palestinian cause for me is not only political.

C.S. Your poetry is a collective experience although it comes from you personally.

S.Q. I am very proud that my deep individual experience was so strong that it became collective.

C.S. I think the danger arises if you start out writing for the collective. For you, it starts with the personal and goes out to the collective.

S.Q. Victor Hugo was asked why he always wrote about the people, they wanted to know about his individual personal experience. He replied 'Who told you that people is a bad rhyme?' For me, any art that is completely closed around the individual is bad art. I think that good art and great art is that which can create this impossible communication between the individual and the community and the world. For me, it is a great respect that critics call me the poet of Arabism, of the Arab nation, of resistance, of Palestine. It adds to me, it makes me respect myself more. If someone says I have no connection with the political cause, I feel humiliated. The poet is a normal man, not an angel or a devil, a normal man who lives in an abnormal world. You fight, you mix, love and hate – it is very individualist. What is individualism? What is yourself? What is the individual? How was it created, where did it come from? Some people think love poems are individual but it's rubbish. In my love poems I couldn't say I couldn't come to Gaza, my love, because the Israelis blocked the road. I can't see the flowers of nature without seeing the bulldozers pulling them up by their roots. I can't. Politically, some people want me to forget all that, forget blood, victims, poverty, human suffering, and to write only for dreams. Even in my dreams I can't dream about a beautiful naked woman without hearing the bombs of war next door. I can't see things separate from

nature, from the world. And I shouldn't – if I do I lose my humanity. I don't want to lose my humanity. Lorca was once asked why he wrote poetry that provoked the authorities. He said he wrote to protect his smile. Let me protect my tear. And I have lots of tears – what I see every day in Palestine, in Iraq, in Afghanistan and Chechnya – it does shock me.

C.S. Resistance poetry is often taken to be resistance against a particular political system, but for you it seems that it is resistance against inhumanity. So now that the political situation has changed for the Palestinians – and it is still far from a perfect situation – it doesn't change the focus of your poetry because you are resisting whatever is unjust and inhumane. So how far has the change in the political situation changed your poetry?

S.Q. I understand. What they call poetry of Palestinian resistance. According to some critics, the first poem inside Israel since 1948 with the word 'resistance' was a poem I wrote in 1965. I was a teacher and they fired me because I didn't teach what they – the Israeli Ministry of Culture – wanted me to teach. I published a poem in 1965, 'A Letter from the Unemployed Market', and the main idea was that I may soil my clothes, do dirty work, I may search for greens in the turds of cattle, I may die starving, but I shall resist. The poem became known not as 'A Letter' but as 'I shall resist'. And that is when they started talking about resistance poetry in Palestine. The same thing with the *intifada*. [Describes taking part in a demonstration in Jerusalem, and being subjected to tear gas.] I wrote a poem about the experience called 'Letter to the Invaders Who Cannot Read'. It became known all over the Arab world as the poem of the *intifada*, but my poem was written through very personal experience. I was about to die there, not Adunis, or Mahmoud Darwish, or anyone else. My poem was a very individual experience. I have no luxury of pure sadness for sadness. This is my life, I write my life. Now, if my personal, individual expression could express millions of people, this should make me proud, not ashamed. You say 'of course', but some Arab intellectuals say 'No, it's not good, it's politics and politics shouldn't be mixed with poetry.' George Orwell said of the twentieth century 'We live in a political century'. Politics is not something far from you – the Americans say 'Take it or leave it' – but no, you have no choice to take it or leave it, it is inside you. I could if I preferred write only about beautiful things. I could travel to the English countryside, to Italy, I could travel on the seas, but it is not my life, it is not my choice. I didn't chose the tragedy of my people in

order to be a poet of resistance. It is not true that the Palestinian poets are happy about the tragedy of their people so that they have something to write about.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi wrote that she didn't find modernism or postmodernism in any Arab poet but me. She is not my friend but she is right. I don't like cloning poetic experience. Some Arab intellectuals say to be a good poet you must look like T.S. Eliot. Rubbish. I don't want to be Shakespeare the Second, I want to be Samih al-Qasim the First and Only. I want to be myself. Why should my modernism be exactly like yours? I have my own modernism; therefore I say I represent the Arab poetry of modernism.

C.S. Could you tell me about your literary education, how you started writing poetry?

S.Q. It is not only a matter of education. The most important thing is what your family give. There I learned not to have a feeling of inferiority towards any creature upon earth. The British tank may be superior to the one built in Djibouti; the computer built in Germany is superior to the one made in Mauritania, but why should I believe that the poem made in Britain is superior to anywhere else.

C.S. Do you think that poetry is important for preserving the past, for what has been lost, or do you think it is more important now to talk about the present?

S.Q. Talking dialectically, you cannot keep the past without imagining the future, and you can't imagine the future without keeping the past. They are connected. For me it's very important.

C.S. So it is not a matter of returning to the past?

S.Q. To push people for the future, you have to go to the past. I want to protect my understanding of modernism and the past. I use the past not as a holy thing you can't touch – holy is life, holy is poetry, nothing else. I wrote a long poem called 'My God, My God, Why Have You Killed Me?' I took the words of Jesus on the Cross and made him a modern Palestinian Jesus. This was published only in Haifa – no other place in the Arab world wanted to publish it. Why? They say 'How dare you argue with God?' I say 'With whom should I argue?' So the past for me is very important in order to reorganise the present and dream the future. You can't dream your future without reorganising your present and without reviving your past.

C.S. So literature also keeps safe the good things from the past?

S.Q. Of course.

Interview with Hassan Khader, 25/04/06, Ramallah

Hassan Khader is a literary critic, and is co-editor (with Mahmoud Darwish) of the Arabic literary journal, *Al-Karmel*, published in Ramallah.

C.S. How would you describe the various stages of development in Palestinian literature?

H.K. The period from 1948 to the mid-sixties was characterised by a deep sense of loss. The Palestinians lost their stability, their social and cultural roots, and then they found themselves in refugee camps. This was reflected in poetry, mainly in poetry, as poetry is usually more expressive. The image or metaphor that was used was the lost paradise, although Palestine was not a paradise pre-1948 and was not lost. You can lose your handbag, but a country is still there. There was still Gaza and the West Bank, so in these two parts the Palestinians could still be in Palestine. So Palestine was not 100% lost. And the pre-1948 Palestine was not the paradise reflected in poetry, of oranges and perfumes and almonds; it was a country where people were very poor, they were peasants and they were oppressed. Of course they had ambitions but it was not paradise – no place can be this sort of paradise. But the need is a psychological need because total loss needs total reconstruction of the lost entity, as something unique. This is the logic for this generation's metaphor of the lost paradise. The Palestinians lost everything, and they wanted to think that everything belonged to the lost entity that became Israel. This is mainly reflected in poetry. But starting from the late 1960s a sense of optimism emerged.

C.S. Did the nostalgia change to resistance at this time?

H.K. This started in the mid-sixties. Between 1948 and the mid-sixties there was a sense of loss and a lot of crying, but the resistance started much later. Even the resistance could be traced to 1954. You know Mu'een Bseiso, he is one of the most well-known and important poets. He published his first book of poetry in 1954 and at that time you could hear that resistance was there. But the main thing is to talk about the main characteristics of the period – in any period you can find everything if you want. The sense of optimism started in the mid-sixties. Palestinian radical groups were established in Syria, in Iraq, in Egypt and in the Gaza Strip, and there was a different generation. Edward Said was trying to understand why the Palestinians did not write memoirs and that was because the generation of '48 was completely destroyed. They could even [*sic*] remember what happened, make sense of what happened in writing. So one generation later, the generation of the sixties, had more optimism politically

speaking, and many organisations were established in different Arab countries. And there was ideology. There was Arab nationalism, the Ba'athist ideology, Marxist ideology – that was the time of ideology all over the world and in the Arab world it was also the time of ideology. In that time, literature was seen as part of the nation-building project, and this project was, politically speaking, based on (1) armed struggle, (2) recognition of the Palestinians as an independent people, (3) establishing a kind of social perspective about the self, about others. This is important for political movements and it's always reflected in literature. You define yourself, who you are, what the others are – even the Israelis, what the Israelis are. For the generation of '48 the Israelis were the invaders, but in the mid-sixties you find that the Israelis are colonialists, and there is a big difference between a colonialist and an invader. And later, some of them were human beings and some part of the colonization project, others they just found themselves in the middle. So we come to the struggle. The Palestinians in the camps were seen as the source of revolutionary feeling. In fact, when we look at it retrospectively, that was very negative and very bad because the camp is something to be ashamed of, not to be proud of.

C.S. But I think the spirit of the camps was and still is something to be proud of.

H.K. But of course. I was born in a camp, I was a refugee, my parents were refugees. I was born in Gaza – it is the camp of the camps – so this is not the point. You will find many people who are glorifying this, but in retrospect that was negative because you can't build or base a system or value system on camps life. And you can't establish a perspective of what you are and what you want based only on facts such as being a refugee. A refugee is something very handy, very poetic, but it also can be a very destructive force.

C.S. Fawaz Turki in *Return of the Exile* says he thinks that the Palestinians in the camps are the authentic Palestinians. He thinks they are less compromised, less influenced, by the occupation. He seems to think the essential spirit of the Palestinian nation resides in the camps. That is his opinion.

H.K. I am not impressed. When we talk about others we in fact talk about ourselves. There are different points of view but personally I don't think the camps represented that at that time. It had a negative effect.

C.S. Much Palestinian poetry glorifies the idea of martyrdom, of bloodshed, dying for the cause. Do you think that was part of an essentialist description of masculinity in order to restore pride to the Palestinian nation?

H.K. That came from the towns, because poetry, because the idea of Palestine as material – I mean Palestine was created and invented in the camps as a kind of abstract idea, and masculinity also was invented in this context, martyrs and sacrifice. The other Palestine, the more effective Palestine, was created by Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim and others, and this Palestine was not very fond of blood and martyrdom. It became something material, it became a woman, a metaphor of woman. It became a question of a relationship of love, desire, but not exactly a destructive relationship; a sense of alienation, they live in their homeland but they are strangers. So the idea of Palestine as a country was born in Palestine, or what remained of Palestine.

C.S. It's very interesting, the difference between the two.

H.K. Of course – this is the basic argument. So who created modern Palestine in a more material way? It was the Palestinians who stayed. Mahmoud Darwish was living in Haifa, Samih al-Qasim was living in Rama – these and other people, they stayed and they created the metaphor of the land as woman. If you look at the literature and poetry of the camps, you will not find the land, the land is not there. You will find martyrs and self-sacrifice, but not the idea of the land. So this was the difference.

C.S. Do you think a sense of guilt influenced the poetry of the exile towards heroism and martyrdom?

H.K. Of course. There was a deep sense of shame. You always project something different.

C.S. I have read that many Palestinian women writers take exception to the way in which woman and land are conflated, and the way in which it needs the man to save the land and save the woman. Do you think they are right to object to that?

H.K. You have reminded me of something very important about the camps. There was a woman writer, a refugee, but not connected to the radical movement of Palestinian politics, and this was Samira 'Azzam. She is the founder of women's short story writing. She was writing about the camps but from a completely different perspective. It was more humane, more down to earth, more material, something you could feel. Not an abstract idea about the homeland and the machos liberating it.

C.S. In *Wild Thorns* Sahar Khalifeh compares the situation of Palestinians in Nablus who have to go over to the Israeli side to work in order to support their families, and then someone is sent in order to blow up the buses that transport the workers. The novel is trying to find some middle way whereby you can support your family yet not collaborate with and aid the Israeli state. Do you think that's ever possible?

H.K. Here you are talking about the mid-seventies. The sense of optimism started in the mid-sixties, and in the sixties more voices became, let's say, visible, and women's voices, that did not exist before the mid-sixties. The other thing is the social content of what you are and what you want. And that was also not reflected until the mid-seventies. It became clear that there is also a social content. A complex reality and it is growing up. They were inventing something, but the thing they were inventing was being tested daily in real life.

C.S. Their idea of what it was to be Palestinian and what you stood for was being tested. What do you think of the portrayal of the Palestinian as victim?

H.K. The camps phenomenon did not try to see the victim in the Palestinian, they tried to see the hero in the Palestinian. Some contributions, most of them from women – this is a very important aspect – was that they were victims. They were victimized in different ways. This should be reflected in reality, and they did that, without a lot of emotional blackmailing of the reader, manipulating the reader because you are writing about victims. Of course they were victims. There was a woman who wrote an autobiography, Serene, it's in English [Serene Husseini Shahid, *Jerusalem Memoirs*]. She is a Palestinian who was living in Jerusalem and she became a refugee. She writes about before and after 1948. Now when we read it, we realise how important these contributions were, are now, but at the time they were not seen in a more positive way.

C.S. Do you think it has been more difficult for Palestinian women as women to write of themselves, than for men?

H.K. Yes, it is always difficult for women to be writers, to make themselves public. Of course. For the Palestinian woman, with the PLO many obstacles were overcome because ideologically speaking – I'm not talking about reality – in the general discourse women were always accepted as equals and were having the same rights as anyone else, being writers or whatever you want, because they were also members of a radical organisation.

C.S. One thing that always strikes me when I'm looking at Palestinian writing is that the constituencies are so different – the people who went into exile in Europe or the States or in other Arab countries, those who ended up in the refugee camps, and those who stayed. Do you think that literature can unite these different constituencies, or do you think they are destined to be different?

H.K. Whenever groups are exposed to different realities they are different in a certain way, but they still have an idea that they belong to an entity or to the same thing, but

they are not exactly the same thing. The Palestinian diaspora is all over, and I don't think that the Palestinians you meet in London are the same as the Palestinians you meet in Ain al-Hilweh [a refugee camp]. This is not exclusively Palestinian.

C.S. Do you think their writing, their literature, helps them to understand each other, to make a connection between groups?

H.K. In fact, it helps them to devolve a sense of belonging to a collectivity. So this collectivity is diverse and multi-layered, and this collectivity is being called Palestinianism, or whatever you want to call it. So we belong to a collectivity but as different people. Now there is another real challenge. The challenge is to the secular Palestinian movement in which our own culture was born and evolved, with Islamic fundamentalism in Palestine, and with the disintegration of the secular. This is a new challenge, how the Palestinians will recreate and reinvent themselves anew, because this is very decisive with Hamas winning the elections and forming the government.

C.S. And religion can be more difficult to counter than the occupation.

H.K. Yes. In my generation, religion did not play any role at all, and we did not know ourselves as Muslims, Christians, or whatever. That was meaningless; we did not define ourselves like this. But now it's a completely different story. This is the challenge, how to react to fundamentalism, and how fundamentalism will be able to create Palestine from a literary point of view. I think it's impossible but this is the conflict. I think it's impossible to be a fundamentalist and a good poet or a good film maker.

Interview with Liana Badr, 29/04/06, Ramallah

Liana Badr is a journalist, novelist and short story writer. She works at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.

[Liana said she would tell me her history.]

L.B. I was born in Jerusalem, a very cosmopolitan city with all religions, and people living in a very tolerant atmosphere, secular and tolerant. Because my neighbours were Christian I spent a lot of my childhood with them, so I feel I belong to all churches in Jerusalem, and all mythologies, the same for Christians as for Muslims. We lived the religions joyously because, as children, we shared each other's feasts and celebrations. So it was a joyful atmosphere, not related to any hatred; on the contrary it was a healthy atmosphere for children. Our lives were mixed with each other. Then my father went to live in Jericho. Jericho, by contrast, is a wild place, it's like tropical places, full of

trees and flowers, very colourful. Now it is abandoned, nobody is there. In my childhood, in the past, it was like a big paradise. Many people worked in the gardens and on the land. In Jericho there were the three biggest refugee camps for the refugees from '48, with something around 450,000 people. They used all their experience in agriculture and it became fantastic land, full of everything you can think about, even exotic flowers, which you couldn't find anywhere else. I was raised in Jericho. I was always running between the channels of water, swimming in them, going under the trees. You could walk in the orange groves for one hour in the same direction and not come to the end. But I had many things that are not common in Palestinian life. In places like Jerusalem, the people are more arranged, traditional and sophisticated, but in Jericho life was simple and wild and full of colours and flowers, and there were very warm connections with other people.

C.S. This is in complete contrast to Fadwa Tuqan's upbringing in Nablus.

L.B. In Nablus they came from very rich merchants who came from Lebanon and Syria, because Nablus was on the old trade routes. In Jericho it was unique. It is the oldest city in the world, and at the same time it was making a new formation of the Palestinians coming from all over Palestine, to form another kind of Palestinian feeling which is connected in this place to the warmth. Most of the refugees lost everything in '48, their lands, their homes, so it was a generous land for them – it was warm, they could live even eating plants and vegetables, very affordable.

My father, who worked in the clinic, was leftist. He didn't join the party but he had intimate relations with the Communists in Palestine. My mother was an official member. My father was very liberal, and he had many ideas about nationalism. He didn't always agree with the Communists but he liked the idea of socialism and equality between people. And my mother later joined the Communists because she was struggling to free my father who was often in jail. She was working with other women, and they were the only women at that time who worked to free the prisoners. She was very intelligent, she had a charisma, she was headmistress of a school, and she was very progressive at that time. She was headmistress of a school in one of the camps. I used to go with her to the schools before I was school age, and I began to read when I was four years old. My parents were astonished because they found me reading things alone.

Since I was young, there was a concept about land which for me wasn't related just to the land itself, but it was more sophisticated. It was connected for me to the political

struggle. It wasn't a static kind of belonging, just romantically, because I saw everyone around me struggling to make liberalism for people, to have some kind of independence for Palestinians and to improve things for women. At the same time, I knew if you were patriotic you could go to prison because my father was in prison for a very long time. With all the stories from the Palestinians who visited my father's clinic, all the stories of '48, everyone had this rich memory, telling stories. It was something with many dimensions. I was living with refugees, with Communists, with Christians, with Muslims, and I always tried to find the essence of people themselves, connected to the place. And what I felt, this nostalgia to the land, was because we were refugees by chance. We became refugees after 1967.

[Liana then described at length the Israeli attack on Jericho, and how they were forced to flee. There were echoes of 1948, with Israeli-induced panic, and people leaving only with their nightclothes, believing they would be back home in a few days. They found themselves refugees in Amman, with absolutely nothing. Many people tried to get back by swimming the Jordan river; some were drowned, others shot.]

L.B. I eventually got back to Palestine after 27 years, after the Oslo Agreement, but all the time I was outside I was very connected to the place. It wasn't like an image. I lived enough years to know a lot of things, to have the concept of the land.

C.S. You had lived in secular Jerusalem, in the paradise of Jericho, you knew the refugee camps, so you felt you knew the material reality of Palestine.

L.B. Yes, but the difference is more complete. I was born after the *nakba*, and in school there were girls born in the camps, so they had the memory of the past from their parents. But for me it was concrete. I always felt that this land, Palestine, was open to all cultures, to everything, a mixture between the west and the east, where you can find harmony. So it is not a kind of very special land, related to a small minority – always it is open. This is the first thing. The second thing is that always in my work there is a feeling of colours and places, that is not always present in other writings, because in the time of the raising of the resistance movement, Palestinian literature began to have very general ideas about things. For example, everyone makes a story about the oranges and the flowers, this generalisation. They have some symbols, everybody rotated the symbols and they made literature. For me, I write in great detail, and I think because I am sensual I don't like to speak in slogans, and I think that's because I am a woman. My writing is related to me as a woman because I was raised to treat everything directly. In our house, I was making food, working, touching fruits, squeezing them,

cutting them, so everything was concrete. It wasn't like speaking in slogans or in mythologies. This is the problem with a lot of Palestinian literature – many writers write about big things.

C.S. There was a change between the earlier literature of nostalgia, and the emergence of the militarism of the camps. The tendency was to glorify martyrdom and heroism, and the emphasis was that only the man could liberate this land/woman figure, which meant that the woman was helpless and had to wait for the man to come along. In *The Eye of the Mirror* you write against this, because the story is about the women in the camp, and how the men cannot survive without the women.

L.B. For me, I hated all that stuff, even when I wrote my first novel, *A Compass for the Sunflower*.

C.S. Was it autobiographical?

L.B. Yes, it was about me and my generation, and the compass suggests you have to find a way. I was working in Beirut with women in the camps, in Sabra and Shatila. I belonged to a Marxist group, but we were against the DFLP because they were hijacking aeroplanes, and I was against all operations directed at civilians. I was working as an editor in al-Hourriya magazine, established by Ghassan Kanafani. He was killed before I arrived in Beirut. It was a very important magazine at that time. It was Palestinian and Lebanese, it was revolutionary.

C.S. Was it attempting to establish a Palestinian culture that the Israelis wanted to deny?

L.B. Yes, it was establishing a Palestinian culture with the co-operation of and against a background of Lebanese and Arabic culture. It was between two partners, Lebanese and Palestinian, so it wasn't very closed in, like al-Khada for the DFLP, or even el-Thrawa Filastin for the PLO. We were taking a broad perspective. At that time I was a journalist and I was working voluntarily with women in the camps. So my material for *The Eye of the Mirror* was from real life, not from slogans.

C.S. Did you invent the character of Aisha, or did you find her in real life?

L.B. She was my invention because I wanted an anti-heroine. I was sick of all the hero stuff. She is weak, helpless, can't make decisions, has her life decided for her, but at the end of the novel she is starting to take charge of her life. And about her father, Assayad. He is a bully the way he treats his wife and Aisha, he cannot forget the past, yet he is also a good man. He helps his friend, the Lebanese bar owner, he stays loyal to him even when the other betrays him. Assayad was a composite made up of all

Palestinian men, he has all their characters. In any place, you will find the good and the bad.

C.S. I remember the part when the crippled girl, Khazneh, becomes a nurse, and she is walking to her station one morning, and because she is taking an active part, rather than being stuck at home, she feels as if she were a bird and could fly.

L.B. Yes. What I try to reach in my writing is the desired point of freedom as a woman.

[The interview continued for another ten minutes or so after this, but unfortunately the recording machine had cut out.]

Interview with Salim Tamari, 30/04/06, Ramallah

Salim Tamari is Professor of Sociology at Birzeit University, and many of his articles and essays have been published in English.

S.T. You were talking about national consciousness. First of all, you have to see how many people read literature and those who read it, to what extent it is part of their particular identity. Usually literature becomes relevant to nationalism when it becomes part of a national repertoire on identity. In our case, I think there is a join between literature and nationalism in ethnographic studies. There are extraordinarily diffused and appear in a number of forms – they are performed as spectacular theatre, in schools, on national occasions, as ballads (the kind of ballads called *zhader*), as folklore and epic. Those are recorded. This is not actually literature in the usual sense but it has become part of the national repertoire, and they have formed a notion of national identity which is very archaic and proto-nationalist. There is an attempt to show that in this type of literature that the roots of Palestinianism goes back to Canaanite times. Peasant lore is a very important aspect of this literature and it is highly codified. This literature is not the kind you find in literary journals. Some of it is available in English, for example *Speak, Bird, Speak Again*. The other thing we have in this folk genre, there is a large corpus on folk literature in the 1920s and 1930s in the Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society, which has been published in English.

C.S. If the kind of literature I am looking at is not particularly relevant to the majority of Palestinians, do you think it can help the rest of the world to understand what is going on here?

S.T. Yes, it certainly can. It can reach an audience that would not usually be interested in politics, because politics has been demonised and is in stereotypes. Literature

uncovers the human basis. And now there is an interest in a number of outlets in Britain and America as international literature in journals. The thing about Palestinian literature that I would like to stress to you is that it's not a completely autonomous body. It is part of a general literary current that includes Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Egypt – the literature of the East – especially for Palestinian literature, because many older writers either grew up or were in constant dialogue with literary currents outside Palestine. Jabra is one of the least acknowledged writers and one of the most important. He was Palestinian but he was an Arab writer, and only the first volume of his autobiography is set in Palestine. It is called *The First Well*. Strictly speaking, he is Syrian by the way. The second is *Princes Street*. It is some of the best Palestinian literature I have read.

C.S. Do you think it is possible for a Palestinian to write and be free of politics?

S.T. It's difficult for a Palestinian to write and be free of politics. Even if the theme is not directly in the text, all Palestinians are affected by the environment; even if you write science fiction it is an escapist literature, an escape from politics, a negative example. Mahmoud Darwish has been moving away from what is called committed literature and he has been attacked severely by many of his fans because of this.

C.S. Fredric Jameson said that all Third World literature is political allegory. When I read Palestinian literature, even if apparently it is nothing to do with politics, I always read politics into the literature. In a poem about a flower or a woman, it's so easy to put Palestine behind the woman or the flower.

S.T. Maybe you should reverse it. The struggle of Palestinian literature is to free itself of clichés and from political stereotypes, from being put on a pedestal. In a way politics has blighted Palestinian literature because Palestinians see themselves in the heroic image which has been created for them, so that when they act or write or paint in a 'normal' way they are seen as betraying the message. So there is a double struggle there.

C.S. I think it's something women find difficult to cope with, because they cannot partake in the same ideas about heroism and martyrdom that men so easily do in their literature. They have to find another way to be national agents, to be part of the national body, to be not just homemakers.

S.T. I have been working with autobiographical literature in my own work and what I find missing is women's autobiography of the genre we see in Lebanon or Egypt or Syria. Very few Palestinian women writers have written autobiographies, or even

fictional autobiography. Men do a lot. [C.S. You think Fadwa Tuqan was an exception?] Yes, she was. It is only fiction, or semi-fiction, that is written.

C.S. Is that because in Palestinian culture there is a reluctance on the part of women to reveal themselves, that the public sphere belongs to men.

S.T. Men may masquerade but they do not reveal themselves. Samira Azzam, Saha Khalifeh, they write fiction which is autobiographical. Edward Said's sister has just published an autobiography, an answer to *Out of Place*. *Out of Place* generated a great rift in his family, they were very upset. They thought he betrayed their mother and father, and that he was hallucinating when he wrote it. He's obsessed with his relation with his mother. Her name is Jean Makdisi, it's called *Taha, Mother and I*.

C.S. Few Palestinians see Edward Said as representative.

S.T. The question is, is he representative of exile literature. He never wrote in Arabic, and he was at odds with the people who supported Oslo. But his literature is available here in Arabic. Fawaz Turki is totally unknown here.

C.S. To go back to the folk literature, does it belong to the people of the villages and the camps, and to the people of the towns?

S.T. There is a very strong streak of urban folklore in songs and fables. If you read the repertoire of *Speak, Bird, Speak Again* it is all the folklore of cities, wedding songs, ceremonial and popular religion. It is carnivalesque work. There is also a whole body of work which deals with saints and their worship. The work of the Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society is very important for folklore. It is analytical work. There is also Stefan Stefan's Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs.

C.S. Do you see any relationship between Palestinian writing and Israeli writing in the sense that both are trying to create a sense of identity on the same piece of land?

S.T. Let's recast your question differently. Israelis and Palestinians are new products, 50 years ago they were not [did not exist]. In the early twentieth century there were Jews who were Palestinians and they wrote in Arabic, like Mamoud and Shami. So do we put them on the Israeli side or the Arabic side? I have written a piece on one of these early Jewish Palestinian writers, Shami, and the problematic is interesting because Shami was a modernist. He came from Hebron, his mother tongue was Arabic, and he wrote in both Arabic and Hebrew. He was one of the early Hebrew revivalists, his Hebrew is between old and new Hebrew. He was rejected by the Hebrew Writers' Association precisely because of his Palestinian themes. They thought the revival of the Hebrew language should be associated with the Biblical lands – this is an interesting

contradiction because they wanted their heroes to be free from Biblical connections, because they thought of Judaism as some free from Jewishness, in the same way that the Canaanites wanted to free the land from its Jewish past. They were paganistic. In the early Hebrew revival, there is a lot of Canaanism, and they hated people like Shami. The contestation of land and identity, it goes back to the period when Arab and Jew were not held in contradiction to each other. Shami was Arab and Jew at the same time.

There are many Jews who come from Arab countries who have a symbiotic relationship with Palestinian writers. The Sephardic Jews are from North Africa and Spain, the Mizrahim are Arab Jews. The Sephardim are not Arab. Mizrahim is an Israeli term and it is problematic because of its ghetto associations. It is an interesting paradigm. Some of them identify totally with the Palestinian landscape, like Samir al-Akash, who writes in Arabic. Others write in Arabic and Hebrew. Shekel moved from being Arab to Israeli but retained the Arabic themes, his is very powerful fiction.

C.S. Do you think literature can change people's hearts?

S.T. I am sure it can. These are metaphysical questions. Arabic has an interesting problematic, which is the same as Greek. The written language is not the same as the spoken one. People here have to learn Standard Arabic as a foreign language. Old women who are illiterate cannot understand the news when they hear it on the radio or television, or when you read them the newspaper. No writers write entirely in dialect, although of course they often use it for conversations. Ballads are in dialect. Urban language is different from country dialect, and there are many different regional dialects.

Interview with Ghassan Zaqtan, 02/05/06, Ramallah

Ghassan Zaqtan is a leading Palestinian poet. He is editor of the literary page of the Palestinian *Al-Ayyam* daily newspaper, and the editor of a new quarterly poetry publication, *Al-Shou'ara*.

[Recording started while discussing the general situation, and the Palestinians as victims.]

C.S. You mean that the Palestinians played the victim in a good way.

G.Z. Yes, that's right.

C.S. But that's not always the correct, or best, way to be.

G.Z. No, but that's the idea. It's not a joke, it's a black joke.

C.S. You are victims.

G.Z. Yes, we are victims.

C.S. But a victim mentality, the psychology of victimhood, can be a bad thing also.

G.Z. Yes, if you want to say that, but I think we have our own experience in Palestine. We are talking about 100 years, not only 100 years – in the last conflict it has been 100 years – but this place has been under conflict during the past 400 or 500 years. It's the experience here, to be a victim.

C.S. It's true that the way things are you have very little power, you have no power over the Israelis and what they do.

G.Z. I think they are more strong than they could be and we are weak more than we could be too. I think that that is one of their major problems, that they are very strong.

C.S. The recent film *Paradise Now* about suicide bombers, contained the line, 'If we had aeroplanes we would not need martyrs'.

G.Z. (Laughs) Yes. I think this conflict, it's the way of Europe or the Arab regimes, or the U.S., how to import or export most of their ideas, their projects, their ideologies, to put it them in this place. This place is very strong, to swallow or accept the others' conflicts. But I think it is enough now.

C.S. In England, in Europe, now the people are far more aware of the problems of the Palestinians, and the Palestinians have far more sympathy from the people. The governments may be another matter.

G.Z. Yes, I understand that. There was a big trick at the beginning of this century. The tragedy started from there when the West and Europe, through their orientalism movement, they believed there was an empty place without people. That is the source of the most misunderstanding.

C.S. That has always been colonial ideology from the beginning, that there was no-one on the land, that it didn't belong to anyone before they arrived.

G.Z. Yes, that it was empty. That this land was waiting for the Jews, who were the victims, to be honest, at that time. From this point, I think, most of what's happening now, from nuclear weapons in Dimona, to the flying checkpoints around Nablus and Ramallah, that's the source of this big trick.

C.S. I spoke to a friend in Nablus last night who told me that Israelis come in every night, and that last night they picked up a woman and her child from the street.

G.Z. Yes, they killed her. During the last four years the same tragic events happened here in Ramallah. There was a woman killed cleaning the clothes of her kids because

she wanted to them to put them on the balcony, by snipers. There was no way not to recognise her. It's – I don't want to complain.

C.S. You have every right to complain.

G.Z. We are not only victims, we are fighters. On the second or third levels, I think we are good fighters.

C.S. Do you think the Palestinians have maintained their humanity, their sense of what is right or wrong?

G.Z. I think the Israeli policies during the last ten years, during this conflict, especially in the last four or five years, they are trying to attract us to be in the same level. That's what we have to avoid all the time. They have succeeded in some parts, to be honest. But in general I think they failed in that. The noble, or Palestinian, culture, the Palestinian history or memory about their history, their places, the little details around them, they helped us to keep our morals, not to be in the same level as the occupation. I admit that they (the Israelis) succeeded in some parts, which I think is not strange. I don't try to find excuses for some operations. I am against it. But I think the Israelis insisted on it, [**C.S.** They provoked that reaction] to push us to be in the same hole, the same circle, that they commission for us. But in general I am proud of the faith in our culture, our memory, our relation with the place, gives us the help or the strength to resist this attack.

C.S. The first chapter of my thesis is the significance of the land in Palestinian literature, and what you've just said about your relationship with the land, that it gives you strength, is very important.

G.Z. I talk about my own experience. I am a returnee, but not exactly. I was born in Beit Jala [a refugee camp near Bethlehem], and I spent my childhood, until I was six or seven years old, there. My father was working with the U.N. and so we followed him all the time in the refugee camps. We used to spend our summers in Ramallah until 1967. So somehow I had some memories to return to. I had to protect it and take care of it of course, because it was not a complete memory, just spots here and there. But when I came here in 1994 I started to make a new relation with this place that was somehow new, and I don't want to extend my exile.

C.S. When you came back, exactly how was it a new relation with the place?

G.Z. I spent forty years away and most of my life in exile, sixteen years. I liked my exile, to be honest. I didn't compare my exile with the land of Palestine.

C.S. Were you in Beirut and Tunis?

G.Z. I enjoyed my exile. I was everywhere – Beirut, Damascus, Tunis, Cyprus, Jordan. I wrote something about this, about my return to Palestine. It's something like discovering Palestine for the first time. There was a big gap.

C.S. You were discovering the real Palestine.

G.Z. Yes. There was a gap between the dream of Palestine in our imagination, the Palestine in our literature, in our politics, and, to be honest, we took many things from the Israelis, it's normal in this very complicated conflict. We took from them the idea of the land. We decided Palestine in our imaginations, we added to it over the last fifty years our illusions, our dreams.

C.S. You created a paradise.

G.Z. And it was true. It grew beside us all the time, maybe unconsciously, but each time, every time when the exiles from the other lands, and other people and places, pushed us or hurt us, we added some thing to this dream. So that, when we came back to another land, we had to unite to make it real. You have to compromise – I tried to compromise but I think it was a big gap. On the other hand, our dream wasn't only about Palestine but about how to return to Palestine. We wrote our scripts, our scenarios, our movie, of when we came back through political agreement under hard conditions. At least, this place is incomplete and our return was incomplete. We are moving from to an incomplete place, in an incomplete return.

C.S. You always dream what it's like to go back and it's never like your dream.

G.Z. Yes. During the last ten years, we have had to make compromise adjustments to reality. It is not easy at all, it is really hard. The reality is very hard and tough. And at the same time we had to fight to face all these holy things. This place is full of holy names and places, full of holy language, and religion is very strong. The religious idea always tries to crush you or ignore you or to wish you away, if you don't agree completely with their ideas. And it's not only from the Israeli side, it is also from our community. And now we have this government [Hamas] which is amazing to think that this government came through clean elections.

C.S. People have said to me that when they voted for Hamas they did not want an Islamic fundamentalist government, but they had just had enough of Fatah.

G.Z. That's true, but they didn't want to go to the sources of this unreasonable act. There are no real democratic traditions in this place, but we have these three levels. One, people are always full of doubts about the government or the ruling authority because all of the authorities that ruled this place are from outside – Turkish, British,

Jordanian, Egyptian, Israeli, and now the others are from outside too somehow [i.e. the returnees who largely made up the Palestinian Authority]. People here do not have the experience to deal with their own authority.

C.S. They have never felt they are part of the decision-making process because it has always been imposed upon them by someone else, and now they find it difficult.

G.Z. On one level, they came from outside, from exile, after fifty years. I talk now about how the people experience their own Authority. And at the same time, the PLO from outside had no experience on how to rule people.

C.S. Did the PLO create a mythology about the people?

G.Z. Most of their work was political, campaigns and information conveyance, that's all. But when they faced for the first time their responsibilities they discovered that to rule people is not to make speeches at conferences or to organise military operations, it's electricity, streets, health, education, cleansing. And for that we have this problem. There is no experience in the Authority on how to deal with the people. It's the first time for them that they have complete authority. The whole condition is not logic, it is out of logic. As what we did, we built the imagination about this place as a paradise; also the people here in Palestine who stayed here, somehow they drew another kind of mythology, of us as heroes. And they discovered that we are not heroes, and we discovered the place is not paradise.

C.S. It changed, because for a long time the people who stayed were viewed almost as collaborators with the Israelis, and then after a while, people on the outside realised it was the people on the inside who were next to the land, on the land.

G.Z. Yes, we needed a place and they needed heroes. But when we met together, we discovered the place is not real, like our dreams, it's not paradise at all, it is another place to continue our fighting. And they discovered we are not heroes, we are just people. And at the same time, we have this democratic state. I think Abu Mazen did a good job. He took a big risk because he knew Fatah would lose. It's good that Fatah are now thinking it's not for ever to rule this people. We don't need another Ba'ath, like Iraq or Syria or Egypt or Libya, and they have to rebuild, re-educate themselves in opposition, in the streets, which is good. Hamas is not a holy movement any more. When they were out of government they were holy people, a holy movement.

C.S. When you're in opposition you do not make mistakes. It is only when you are in government you make mistakes.

G.Z. Of course, and that's good. For me, it's a really good sign that Fatah accepted losing the elections, it was very difficult for them because they didn't leave out of the Authority since it was founded. Now Fatah will not be in authority for ever, which is good, and Hamas they are not a holy movement any more because they are making mistakes now and they have to deal with the needs of the people. They have to deal with the whole situation. They will have to make compromises. They don't have a very strong position – we are talking now about 56% of the people who didn't vote for Hamas.

C.S. It's good for the rest of world also that you have democracy. George Bush thinks democracy will solve all the problems of the Middle East. Now you have it, he may not like the end-product, but he has to accept it.

G.Z. Yes, and we have to accept it. At the same time, we [Fatah] have to admit we are in the streets, we have to qualify ourselves to be back on the streets. But the most important thing we need now is that people – and this was your question – most of the voters they voted against Fatah, not with Hamas, I think because of the limit of their experience they did that. They must be, after this result, more sensible about their choice when they go to vote. I think as Palestinians we have passed the difficult time. We have to face Hamas from the streets. We must learn how to use our power in a democratic way, how to support our real culture, how to talk with the people, how to work among the youth, that's our job.

C.S. You are poet. Do you still have time to write poetry?

G.Z. That's my main aim. I have just had translated some of my latest poems. They will be published in a book in Portuguese and Arabic and English, called *State of the World*.

C.S. With the political situation here being so urgent, do you think there is a danger that political values will become more important than aesthetic values in poetry?

G.Z. We have faced this question for the last twenty years, and I think it is our generation that started to write at the beginning of the eighties who succeeded in going through this very complicated map. I don't talk only about myself but about our generation – Hassan Khader, Mureed Barghouti, Zakaria [Mohammed], another five or six poets, who built themselves during the seventies and started to write in the eighties. It's a war between political conditions, between very harsh events [interview was interrupted at this point]

C.S. We were talking about politics and aesthetics.

G.Z. When you find yourself inside or a part of the revolution, and at the same time under occupation, there is no way to avoid writing about politics. I think it is luxury for me as a Palestinian poet to write out of politics. But it is on your point of view, how you see things – we have this direction in our cultural movement poets who write about politics, about big ideas, big speeches, but at the same time we have the other direction who are moving in the shadows, who try to understand the people. For me the most important thing is how to see the reflections of the occupation, of political movement, of death, of siege, all of these things. It is a reflection of things. In another way I prefer, for myself, to walk or march behind the demonstration, not in front of it. I don't want to talk on behalf of others. If you walk behind the demonstration you can find little things and capture them, listen to things. That's my subject. But it is exactly in the event itself. When we talk in general I think our literature, our writing, agree many times with the conditions of the politicians. There is not this ambivalent relationship between politics and culture. But it's not like this for the Palestinians only. You remember during the Second World War the difference that happened to the poetry movement in France, but they didn't lose their own direction. We have not exactly the same, but now I think we are out from under the political movement – look at Mahmoud Darwish now - but at the same time we are not out of the circle.

C.S. So, if you now you write about material reality and its effect on people, when you were in exile was your poetry poetry of nostalgia?

G.Z. Yes, that's so.

C.S. So what has been lost?

G.Z. If you ask me, I have my own path. We all have our own path – I talk about my generation – mainly because I wasn't in fight with my exile. That's very important for me. I dealt with the return to Palestine as a challenge. I carried it but I didn't put it as a subject. I try to push the homeland from the language, from the classic language, from the image, push it to be somehow more personal. I tried to do that. My poetry, I still try to go to the details, not to the general meanings or the big ideas. I like to talk about people, about the destiny of individual people. I think that's the most important step.

C.S. Do you think poetry can change people's hearts?

G.Z. I am not sure about that. Many things have changed in this time, not only the poetry but also the poet and the audience. We have to talk about the new location – the audience is different now to the one we knew, and I do not think the poet is still the hero, the one who is at the front of the demonstration.

C.S. Mahmoud Darwish used to be a hero.

G.Z. He used to be a hero, but he is trying hard now for more than ten years to avoid being a hero. If you read his last five books, you find he is alone now, singing alone. I think *Why Have You Left the Horse Alone* is one of his finest publications, and we have had a very long argument about that. Now he is writing a very special and strange book in prose. I have read parts of it. It is really horrible.

C.S. Why horrible?

G.Z. He is trying, one last time, he is flying, not like birds but like a person who learns. And there is some need in his work, you can touch it, you can feel it, that he wants to tell, that he doesn't want to teach, or to lead. It's really very new in his work. He wants to admit, it is not a way to excuse or apologise, he wants to admit about many things – about love, how he sees these feelings. There is another part about food. It's very open. I think the main issue here is that he wants to tell now, not to teach. Mahmoud is a good example of what we talk about.

C.S. There have been many changes in his poetry.

G.Z. Yes, and there have been many changes in Palestinian poetry. But now, after what happened in the last elections, we have to wait for a new wave of political poetry, of political writing because I think Hamas need it. For us, we passed this period.

C.S. You spoke about trying to write about the small details and material reality, and not about big ideas, do you think that women writers are closer to the small details?

G.Z. In Palestine – I don't want to be unjust – that under the pressure of needing women writers we pushed some texts which I think are not good enough. Take Fadwa Tuqan. She is a poet and I like her but I think she did nothing for the Palestinian poetry – that's my own opinion. She's not a modernist, she is not a classicist, she was always walking between the two. And she is somehow the last branch of the Palestinian romantic movement at the beginning of the last century, but we raise it up because she is a woman. When she the book about her life, we discovered another person. It is very strong, very honest – more than her poetry.

C.S. She was very influenced by her brother, Ibrahim, in her poetry. He died young, before he could experiment with modernism, so perhaps the lack of modernism in her work that you talk about is because of his influence.

G.Z. Yes, she was imprisoned by Ibrahim's memory. He always wanted to keep her as a child. She always wants to take his hand, but it's over, and she has not admitted it. She is conservative in her work. Another example. We have Saha (Khalifeh), Samira

Azzam, Liana Badr, and they are rubbish. But I think the most important thing that is happening is the new wave, the new generation, of our women writers who are not under the spotlight. They have a very good and powerful [?] For me I'm proud of this generation, in Gaza and in the West Bank. They are closer to the people, closer to their own lives, their own problems, their own needs than Samira and Saha.

C.S. But they were another generation, they were writing about another time.

G.Z. When Fadwa wrote her autobiography she belonged to this generation, but in her poetry she belongs to the fifties. I have to deal with two Fadwas. Saha, when she wrote *Wild Thorns*, she wrote about political matters, but when she wrote her story, *Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman* – that's a novel. Not *Wild Thorns* – that you can find anywhere. That's not woman's writing. But in *Memoirs* I think she belongs to this generation. I have not read all of Laila al-Atrash's work, but it is not a question of generation, we have a problem with women writers. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, she is a good poet but she stopped. I think she added at that time with her poetry more than Fadwa. Salma, as a poet, I learnt from her, she taught me but not from Fadwa. I learnt from Fadwa's prose book. Now I think we can talk about women writers, but *Wild Thorns* and Liana – why should I recognise it as women's writing. It's just writing. I need issues, I need a subject, something new

C.S. It's a pity that so little of Palestinian writing is available in English.

G.Z. I don't know why, to be honest because most of our work is translated into other languages. My latest work has been translated into Chinese, and into Italian, and now into Portuguese. I think it is a problem of marketing. Even Mahmoud (Darwish) – he is translated into French but not into English.

C.S. Some is translated into English, but only bits and pieces.

G.Z. Not like the French, they take the whole of his work and they publish it. In Italy last year they published four of his books.

C.S. One of his recent volumes, *Under Siege*, has not been published in English. I have read one of the poems in English, on the internet.

G.Z. They tried to translate it into English but Mahmoud did not like the translation, and so it stopped there.

C.S. Now, since 1948, with the Palestinians having to make themselves into a nation, into one people, how important do you think literature – poetry, short stories, the novel – has been in that process?

G.Z. Let's think of what happened in 1948. In '48 we lost our middle class, we lost the cities, the coast – all of it – and as that, we lost the mechanism, the main producer of our culture. And what happened in '48 was not only that the Palestinians were pushed out of their land but a new community collected in the refugee camps, between desert, cities, villages, and they found themselves in a new place, not like before. Before they were divided, and each one had his special way of work, of expressing his culture. But what happened in this war, not only the people from the cities went to the refugee camps and they had to redevelop themselves again. They started to discuss things in another way. I think the main cultural movement started from the refugee camps and I think they protected the Palestinian identity through their works. At the same time they invented a new kind of culture. Until now, most of our writing belonged to that period. I am talking about poetry. It's not exactly nostalgia, but we built in our imagination Palestine as a paradise and we hate our writing, the refugee camp, but there is something between that we respect the idea of the refugee camps. If you want to go along this line, the refugee camp in our culture is an exile. [?] not only producing a place, but it somehow confused the reader. Exile and our writing against exile, but at the same time, the place of this exile hero. I think because we lost not only our middle class we lost also the heroes. All of our heroes were dead before '48, we did not admit live heroes.

C.S. Who were the heroes before 1948? Were they the people who took part in the revolt of 1936?

G.Z. Yes, 1936 and also 1929, and '48. But there's a kind of agreement between the people that there are no heroes after the disaster. We have to keep our heroism in our place, in our paradise.

C.S. From what I have read of Palestinian literature, this hero figure was certainly created but is it still useful, or appropriate, to have that sort of hero?

G.Z. I think in the eighties we started to destroy that image of the hero, I am talking about my generation, and after Oslo it started more seriously. Now, during the last four or five years, another type of hero has been found, and that is the hero of the extremist Islamic idea, but it's a completely different type of hero from before. It is not revolutionary, it is something between normal people and God. He is a holy hero, not like the hero we had during the revolution.

C.S. Who exactly was the hero figure? Was it the fighter, the *fidayi*, or the person who stayed on the land, kept his land and farmed his land?

G.Z. The *fidayi* was the main character at that time, but I wanted to continue my idea about the tragic end of the hero. It's still the same, in the seventies, and now, with Hamas and their *jihad*, the top of the show are dying, how to die, because until now in our culture we did not accept a live hero. Our heroes, our memories, are dead. That's the end and I think it leads to your question about the political conditions, or the political idea. The heroes now are doing the dream of the politicians, they are the instrument of the politicians and they have to die.

C.S. They are being used by the politicians.

G.Z. Yes. It's their way to improve their ideas, but if they stay alive they will be politicians. They are pushing us all the time because they like this play. The hero has only one job, he has to die at the end of the show.

C.S. There is a saying in English that all heroes die young.

G.Z. Yes, and we have to die in their image, in the image of the Arab public culture. The Palestinian has to continue this sacrifice, this role. At the same time it's because they need a hero.

C.S. So do you believe that for the Arab governments who still need the Palestinians to die as heroes and die young, do you think they are using that for their own ends, their own purposes?

G.Z. But not only the regimes, also the people.

C.S. That's interesting, that the other Arab peoples do not have heroes of their own, they need the Palestinians to be heroes.

G.Z. Yes, and I think it's a kind of divine acting – that's our job in Palestine. The regimes want us to do this because they want to hang many problems in their states on this issue, and the Arab people are the victims, those who are controlled by these regimes. They need a symbol, something to believe in, a hero, and both of them agree in other ways about what is happening in Palestine. The extremists who come from outside Palestine, not from inside Palestine. As I said in the beginning, Palestine as a place is very hard, very heavy, and these are the conditions of the place, in our history, in our culture. Even Muhammad, our Prophet, said that people in this place, around Jerusalem, it will be their destiny to fight for everybody. They will fight for ever. They asked him where is this place, who are these people, he said Jerusalem and around Jerusalem. This job is in our and the Arab culture. I think if we want to talk about the modern writing in Arabic we have to think about these conditions. That's Palestine, because some of these people, some of the muftis, Palestine in the Arab dictionary is

wafd, land not to be bought. It's for God, and it's not a Palestinian issue – it's a Islamic and an Arabic issue.

C.S. So Palestine has become a symbol for the rest of Arab world.

G.Z. Yes, Palestine is a symbol and sometimes we try to get out of this idea – we want to be normal. We want to decide our destiny in our own way. For me I will fight against the occupation, it is an occupation, but not under these conditions.

C.S. So when you say that heroes die young, because if they grow old they become politicians, do you mean that then they compromise their ideas?

G.Z. This is one reason, but the other one is that they become normal. You can touch them and you can talk with them. There is no hero here you can talk with. The hero is a holy man. But I think we have started to destroy this symbol, but during the last four years another level of hero has been found, the suicide bomber. And they are holy, in an ideological way. It's not a question of being brave or not, it's a mixture between God and the people; it's the message of God to go there. During the seventies and eighties, when we blew up planes and fought in Lebanon, I spent three months in Beirut during the summer of 1982, there were many heroes.

C.S. And not only the men, the women also.

G.Z. Everyone – I could not ignore any one person in Beirut. I spent most of my time watching people, how they behave. I wrote one of my books during that period, *Flags*. It's about people in war. Really I don't like the kind of hero they try to persuade me to believe in.

C.S. Do you think literature has a role to play in creating this new reality, in getting away from this idea of the hero? Do you think poetry can help in that, or do you think it has to be done through political means, by discussion in newspapers? Can the imaginative world help?

G.Z. Yes, but I think my idea of poetry is somehow different. Poetry can help, but the normal life, to help the people to have a normal life, to give them a way to grow, to protect their morals, through democracy, through open discussions, through personal freedom, through keeping their traditions – through this you can talk about poetry, not about poetry alone. We have a very classical idea of dying, of resisting, of dealing with the occupation. At the same time, you cannot nurse these classical ideas of collections, of traditions, of moving speeches, with modern poetry. It is another place. They didn't even acknowledge, or give you the excuse, when you write your poetry, about the classical role. How can you persuade them at first about this new way of writing.

When they teach them, it's old values and, at the same time, when they graduate from the schools they have in their minds nothing but the classical Arabic writers, so they are shocked when they meet Mahmoud Darwish, Adunis and the new poets. There are two choices. One, for them to go through and select for themselves the modern poets, or to follow what they have. Neither of these choices is good for the student. What we need is to start with our system of education, to teach them our Palestinian writers in the schools. They should discuss Fadwa and Mahmoud, the same discussion as we are having, but now there is a gap between our modern culture and literature, let's say Mahmoud Darwish, and our students. I know it's easy to say we have to change, but really we have to do something. Maybe we can create a new system alongside the old system at first. We haven't transported the new writers to our schools. Take Jabra Ibrahim Jabra – he has been translated into English, French, Hebrew. I published this weekly newspaper (it has stopped now) and I remember when I chose Jabra. I chose him because he is a Christian, from Bethlehem, and he is very well known outside Palestine, and when I published this piece from him I received more than 150 emails asking 'Who is this man?'

[At this point, Ghassan requested that I stop recording]

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