NOVEL PALESTINE

NATION THROUGH THE WORKS OF IBRAHIM NASRALLAH

NORA E.H. PARR

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Novel Palestine

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Novel Palestine

Nation through the Works of Ibrahim Nasrallah

Nora E. H. Parr

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FOREWORD

All settler colonies wager on the passage of time to cover their crimes against the natives. Not only do they make the Indigenous populations disappear, but they also strive to thrust their disappearance into oblivion. It is not for nothing that David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, reduced the dispossession and expulsion of Palestinians from their homes before and after 1948 to a matter of time; given time, he brazenly claimed, "the old will die and the young will forget." Regardless of whether these were his actual words or whether they were misattributed to him, it is indisputable that Ben-Gurion categorically opposed the return, let alone the resettlement, of Palestinian refugees after the Nakba. What counts for Ben-Gurion is not the actual crimes of the Haganah and other terrorist militias but the amount of time it will take before they are completely forgotten. The wager on the passage of time is less an expression of wishful thinking than a reflection of strategic intent; it is part and parcel of the method of settler colonial dispossession. Its final goal is not only the elimination of Palestine and Palestinians but also the elimination of that elimination. For that to happen, memory must be made finite and forgetting infinite. What unsettles settlers, though, is their inability to forget their own crimes and, even more, the capacity of the dispossessed Palestinians to remind them and themselves of those crimes. Memory may at times override the actual crime, but without the retrospective and repetitive work of remembering there may no longer be a locus of the crime.

The memory of historical Palestine strikes fear at the heart of the Zionist entity. An alternative grand Palestinian narrative would surely result in an acute Israeli crisis of legitimacy were it to acquire worldwide diffusion, recognition, and support. Israel knows that much, which is why its Knesset and state officials routinely target and censor Palestinian counternarratives (as was the case with the attack on Netflix on its December 2022 release of Darin J. Sallam's 2021 film on the Nakba, *Farha*). Inversely, Palestinians know that their survival hinges on reiterative narrative memory and storytelling. Palestinians have never asked Israel for permission to narrate their own national story. Israel, though, keeps denying the Palestinian narrative the right to circulate. The Zionist fear of a substantial Palestinian national narrative fuels the creative imaginations of poets, novelists, and filmmakers. As Mahmoud Darwish once proclaimed, part of what makes life on this earth worth living is "the invaders' fear of memories" (*khawf al-ghuzāt min-al-dhikrayāt*). It is tragically ironic that a settler colonial state whose raison d'être is the constant invocation of the Holocaust should fear and censor the right of its victims to the memory of their own Nakba. It is as if the memory of the Jewish tragedy served to sanction rather than guard against the repudiation of the Palestinian Nakba. With Israel's relentless onslaught on the commemoration of the Nakba, it is not implausible that future generations may forget about it. Such a scenario would constitute de facto a second Nakba. Little wonder then that generations of Palestinian artists and littérateurs took Ben-Gurion's wager on the eventual hegemony of forgetting as an incitement to multiple creative and discursive practices of remembering. Not that they needed more ammunition to inscribe the atrocities of the still-unfolding Nakba but that the threats of amnesia and erasure remain tangible perils at a time when the settlers and the Israeli state continue to commit countless crimes with no accountability. How much Palestinian history had already gone missing, had been displaced or disfigured and turned into a locus of forgetting? How much can be rescued before it is too late?

There may still be a time when it will become incumbent on Palestinian artists and curators to reconstruct memory out of archival neglect or void, but with the number of Nakba survivors dwindling by the day, it is even more urgent to attend to, collect, and inscribe the actual testimonies of the survivors who are still alive. Survivors are the prime witnesses of the Nakba. They carry the proof of its occurrence in their experiences, testimonies, and accounts. Ibrahim Nasrallah launched his creative career in response to the impending threat of amnesia nested in Ben-Gurion's chilling words. For fear that the survivors may disappear without a trace, Nasrallah sought to collect their oral stories in one book before it became clear that the massive archive that he ended up with would require more than one book. Hence, the series of novels that came to constitute what Nasrallah calls *al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya* (the Palestine Comedies), with the proviso that *malhāt* conveys the root sense of an abiding interest in or a preoccupation with Palestine. While tragedy is a major theme in his multivolume epic drama, Nasrallah finds the word *maʾsāt* (tragedy) not pertinent to the contemporary historical juncture of Palestine because it imparts the sense of a premature or unwarranted verdict on an ongoing struggle for liberation from Zionist oppression.

Nasrallah is an unclassifiable writer, poet, novelist, critic, at home in multiple forms of artistic creativity and adept in the art of mixing genres, straddling them, or holding them in tandem. Born in a refugee camp in Jordan to a family expelled from Palestine during the Nakba, Nasrallah boasts a vast autodidactic knowledge that has become, in combination with his exilic and refugee condition of life, the wellspring of his prolific creative output. Nora Parr's *Novel Palestine* is the kind of book that we have all been waiting for. A book in the English language devoted to Nasrallah's oeuvre has been long overdue. *Novel Palestine* is an accomplished critical examination that travels back and forth between the shimmering depths of Nasrallah's intertextual influences and the immediate theoretical and conceptual conundrums in Arabic and comparative literary studies. Parr's abiding interest in the intertextual and technical aspects of Nasrallah's writings in combination with her acute sensitivity to comparative conceptualization renders *Novel Palestine* essential for avid readers of Nasrallah as well as for those who may never have heard of his magisterial stature (if unacknowledged for a while) in the field of contemporary Palestinian and Arabic literature.

Novel Palestine focuses partly on *al-Malhāt* and partly on *al-Shurafāt* (Balconies), yet another multivolume work conceived in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and devoted to the scrupulous scrutiny of the interconnectivities between patriarchal and state structures of power within society. If *al-Malhāt* excavates the making of a novel nation, *al-Shurafāt* explores the unmaking of a corrupt state. Parr demonstrates that Nasrallah's series devise a novel image of Palestine, a serial novel in the making, a constellating imaginative project, constantly reconfigured, in artful forms, carrying past influences and contemporary preoccupations. Inscribing Palestine, like inscribing the Nakba, is a matter of seriality and iterability. It is a project that bears the signature of Saturn, a project committed to identification over identity and to becoming over destiny—in short, it is a project in which Ben-Gurion's wager on the passage of time reaches an impasse. As the boy of *Ṭuyūr al-Ḥadhar* (*Birds of Caution*) quips, "I didn't really know what the passage of time meant." No matter what happens to the old, clearly the young are not forgetting.

With *Novel Palestine*, Parr will establish herself as the foremost specialist on Nasrallah's wide-ranging creative repertoire. All the more since Nasrallah has started to garner the international and critical attention he has for so long deserved. The renowned anthologist, literary critic, and translator Salma Khadra Jayyusi recounts on the back cover of the Arabic edition of *Zamān al-khuyūl al bayḍāʾ* (*Time of White Horses*) how fulfilled she feels that the "Palestinian Iliad" about which she had been asked for so long is finally in her hands. *Time of White Horses* was shortlisted for the Arabic Booker in 2009, but it was not until 2018 that Nasrallah won the lucrative and most coveted literary prize in the Arab world for his highly self-critical and cautionary tale, *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniyaa* (*Dog War II*, 2018). Reading Nasrallah is clearly a must. Parr shows the way.

Nouri Gana
Series Coeditor

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NOVELS OF IBRAHIM NASRALLAH'S PALESTINE PROJECT

TABLE 1 The novels of Ibrahim Nasrallah's Palestine Project, in the order they were added to their respective series (the novels shaded in gray are those analyzed in the present work)

al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya **(Palestine Comedies)**	**First published (Added to series)**	***Shurafāt*** **(Balconies)**
Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar Birds of Caution	1996 (2000)	
Ṭifl al-mimḥāt Eraser Child	2000	
Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ Olives of the Streets	2002	
Aʿrās Āmina Amina's Weddings	2004	
Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā Under the Midmorning Sun		
	2005	*Shurfat al-hadhayān* Balcony of Delirium
Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ Time of White Horses	2007	
	2009	*Shurfat rajul al-thalj* Balcony of the Snow Man
	2010	*Shurfat al-ʿār* Balcony of Disgrace

(*Continued*)

TABLE 1 Continued

al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya **(Palestine Comedies)**	**First published (Added to series)**	***Shurafāt*** **(Balconies)**
Qanādīl malik al-jalīl Lanterns of the King of Galilee	2012	
	2013	*Shurfat al-hāwiya* Balcony of the Abyss
Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ Just the Two of Us	1991 (2014)	
	2014	*Shurfat al-firdaus* Balcony of Paradise
Arwāḥ Kilimanjārū Souls of Kilimanjaro	2015 (tbc)	
	2016	*Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniya* Dog War II
Thulāthiya al-ajrās (Bells Trilogy) *Ẓilāl al-mafātīḥ* Shadow of the Keys *Sīrat al-ʿayn* Biography of the Eye *Dabbāba taḥta shajaratʿīd al-milād* Tank beneath the Christmas tree	2019	
	2020	*Maʾsāt kātib al-qiṣat al-qaṣīra* Tragedy of the short story writer
	1990 (2022)	*ʿAw* Howl
Ṭafūlaty ḥatā alān My childhood until now	2022	
Shams al-yawm al-thāmin Sun on the eighth day	2023	

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This book has been a very long journey. Its principal pleasure, without question, has been the people who have taken interest, supported, challenged, and cheered it on along the way. And of course the books. For all to whom I owe a debt of thanks, it has been my honor to have had the chance to think and read with you. I only hope that what follows has, in some measure, captured the richness of thought that you (and you all certainly know who you are) have engaged me in over the years.

The final phase of this book was supported by a fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLITERATION

This monograph uses the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*) transliteration system to render text from the Arabic. On first reference to a work, word, or author, transliteration is carried out in full, and the translation is given. All subsequent uses of the name, word, or title refer to the given translation, unless words are being defined through analysis, in which case the Arabic term remains. For authors with Arabic names who have been formally published in English, or whose publications in Arabic also give English spellings, the spelling as it exists in those publications has been used.

Citation follows the Modern Language Association format. In cases where a single work is the topic of a close reading, page numbers are included in the text to avoid unnecessary repetition in the notes. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

When no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity, all events are accidents, all progress is digression, all residence is exile.

—EDWARD SAID

[There is] difficulty implicit in making one's way through a world which is jumbled in this fashion. . . . [Giving the reader] a disordered experience of geography and space and time . . . [is] . . . clearly unavoidable if the novel is to tell its story, as I fully intend that it should, in a single burst.

—GHASSAN KANAFANI, *ALL THAT'S LEFT TO YOU*

There were more books than in the school library, more books than I had seen in my life, numbered series of books . . . and between them the most surprising, Don Quixote*, which I had never imagined was in two volumes!*

—SALWA, IN IBRAHIM NASRALLAH'S *OLIVES OF THE STREETS*

In her Arabic teacher's home library, Salwa has a realization: a story, her story, doesn't need to be told from a "beginning" to a conclusion in one fell swoop. The epiphany happens as the young woman runs her fingers along the spines of what seem like endless rows of books—books she is surprised to find in her refugee camp near Beirut. Of the many works, Salwa is uniquely drawn to the "numbered series of books: the novels of the Hilāl publishers, Hilāl's critical editions" (a bit like the Penguin classics in English). When she sees *Don Quixote* she exclaims, "I had never imagined [it] was in two volumes (*juzʾayn*)!"[1] Salwa then takes out the middle volume of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* trilogy. She flips through its pages and reads some passages out loud. As she does so, Salwa appreciates that by dint of a series title diverse works covering diverse spaces can be harnessed to express something beyond the scope of their individual covers (or, later, borders). This encounter, for Salwa, redefines what it means not only to tell, but to have a "story"—and the realization is transformative.

Salwa is a Palestinian orphan who was subject to the sexual abuse of a political official in the refugee camp her family fled to during 1948. Her father was "martyred" in Palestine not by Zionist or Israeli forces but by her uncle. These simple facts well beyond Salwa's control have meant her story never "fit" into the national frame. She felt she did not have the words to narrate the experience to herself, let alone others. Until the library realization Salwa had understood herself to be invisible; the sideline of a fragment who had no place in the Palestinian story. As a refugee, she understood, she was a part of a "broken" nation whose meaning was in waiting to return, or in supporting the work of the fighters in their effort to liberate Palestine. She felt, like the title of the novel she appears in, that refugees were as olives of the streets, rotting unconsumed away from the homeland. As a woman being abused by an official in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Salwa knew her story was one that none in the community wanted to exist. She was "evidence," somehow, of an impurity of cause. When she tried to articulate the violences done to her, she felt as though her "teeth were stuck together, no, my teeth had melted, one into the other." It was her community's closed ears that melted her teeth. To hear about and understand the abuse she underwent was to tarnish the hope for justice that the PLO embodied. This was Beirut in the late 1970s, and all hopes were pinned on a new political movement.

In the idea of a series, Salwa could imagine herself within and alongside all the other stories of Palestine. "I want to read all of these books," she told her teacher, as a way to rehabilitate her capacity for narrative. What she had been told, she fumed, did her no service. "They'd rather us live in fragments . . . fragments of bread, of books, of hope, of a dream—fragments of the homeland, and fragments of memory," she told Sitt Zaynab. The "they" that had imparted the expected shape of narrative here is multiple. It includes (at least) European colonizers and an imposed teleological way of seeing;[2] a "developmental" trajectory that posits Palestine and Palestinian narrative as always "not yet," somehow part of an unrealized whole;[3] a Zionist narrative that literally and figuratively erases Palestinian existence;[4] a Palestinian political apparatus that, in striving for legitimacy on a Euro-American colonial stage, amplifies existing harms;[5] and all the individuals with power over Salwa who stand by while she suffers. As she absorbs how thinking as a series affects her own story, Salwa begins to see the implications of her fresh discovery. If her life—as an orphan, a woman, a refugee, an assault survivor, a Palestinian—is read as a series, there could be articulated "a single complete memory" of her life, of her community, of Palestine. Such an articulation, she saw, "would suffice to return it [the homeland, that which is in fragments] to us"[6]—or at least to her.

Salwa's story is, in fact, part of a series. Not only conceptually, as she begins to imagine in her teacher's library, but in actual bookshops across the Middle East. From Jerusalem to Beirut, Amman to Kuwait, *Olives of the Streets* (*Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*, 2002) sits next to (depending on stock) at least twelve other novels each emblazoned with the same series title: the Palestine Comedies (*al-Malhāt* *al-filasṭīniyya*). Each novel in this series is, by and large, a standalone text. Almost no characters appear in more than one volume (with some delicious exceptions explored later). Each work is set in a different place or time, covering both the expected (Second Intifada–era Ramallah) and the unusual (the summit of Kilimanjaro) locations of Palestinian experience. Beyond this vast scope, the writing styles and techniques deployed differ vastly between novels. There is historical fiction, stream of consciousness, and the utterly experimental intermixing of genre types. In its construction and execution, the Palestine Comedies does precisely what Salwa had hoped it would: it "returns" a telling of her life within a "single complete" imaginative universe. In practice, this means the generation of a narrative of Palestine without the imposition of a trajectory or a predetermined "whole." But the series does not achieve this vision entirely on its own.

Shortly after the fifth novel in the Palestine Comedies series was published, Nasrallah launched a second and parallel series. As chapter 1 goes on to argue, this second series is what opened a possibility for the continuation of the first, expanding the properties and parameters of Salwa's "single complete" imaginative universe so that it was open-ended. This second series was devoted largely to explorations of the structures of state, family, and narrative (and how these structures enact administrative violence). Hinting at this alternative view that the new series offered, they came to be known collectively as the Balconies (*Shurafāt*). Each novel in this series told the story of structures that limit Palestinian life. *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*, 2004) looked at the structures that war leaves behind in government administration; *Balcony of the Snow Man* (*Shurfat rajul al-thalj*, 2009) traces the generic and bureaucratic violence of a state newspaper; *Balcony of Disgrace* (*Shurfat al-ʿār*, 2010) examines the overlapping claims of authority exercised by state police, family, and class structures; and so on. From the early 2000s on, the two series grew in tandem: every year a work was published in one and then the other.

That there are thematic similarities across the series is hardly surprising given their production schedule. But what a close look shows is that they in fact—at least when it comes to thinking about the representation of Palestine as a single imaginative universe—constitute a single literary project. To differentiate this larger effort from the two individual series, it is referred to here as the Palestine Project. It is this project that *Novel Palestine* explores. In reading the two series as interconnected, the chapters in this book argue, the full scope of Salwa's realization takes form. Where one series (the Comedies) conjures the most expansive vision of Palestine hitherto available in written form, the other (the Balconies) shows all the structures that limit—in practical terms—the imagination of Palestine in such broad scope. The work of this study is to draw out the structure and function of this "novel Palestine." To do this, it examines closely the characters, themes, textual structures, and modes of meaning-making employed within, between, and across the works. Because the series are both open ended, this is not (nor can it be) a conclusive analysis. It is only a start. It therefore takes only the "first" nine texts published in the two series—works published as part of the Palestine Comedies and Balconies series between 1996 and 2010. "First" is in quotation marks because the order of the works is not at all straightforward, as we will see.

In this reading of Nasrallah's Palestine Project, analysis finds a method of telling Palestine that includes the many different trajectories and locations of Palestinian exile, displacement, and diaspora. This method can absorb, as Salwa hoped, internal Palestinian contradiction. The linked series find a way of narrating structures of violence and demonstrating their impact on the story of Palestine and Palestinians without allowing them to impose limitations on life or imaginative possibility. The works thus take on the usual suspects (colonialism, Zionism, and neo-imperialism) but also the structures of violence that more perniciously limit the expression (and indeed realization) of Palestinian life (e.g., generic structures, like the narrative conventions of the newspaper or the autobiography). These limiting structures, in the novels, are rendered as one of the myriad stories (the story of the novel, the story of the newspaper) that make up an imaginative universe of Palestine. In this way, the Palestine Project can grapple with the relationships between these structures of power and how they function to limit or shape Palestinian lives and narratives. At the same time, accounting for these limiting structures makes it possible to broaden the representation and representability of Palestinian relationships—to imagine Palestine without these imposed limits. Without the structure of colonial and generic expectations, Palestine can be told across space and time in new ways.

While the possibilities of representing Palestine across Nasrallah's linked series are exciting, it is important to note that most are not entirely novel—either as literary innovation or analytic insight—at least not on their own. Across Palestine and literary studies, there is broad agreement that a more expansive Palestine can be imagined in a series. That the series provides a container for the representation of a more expansive idea of the nation has long been established.[7] Scholars of postcolonialism[8] and gender studies[9] have for generations drawn out a language that expands and critiques mainstream national identity articulations. Palestine studies (and indeed theories of identity) has produced dozens of volumes that expand and critique the limits and meaning of Palestinian identity and representation.[10] Critics and historians have also used the concepts of the modern and the postmodern to explore the possibilities and limitations of representation through different concepts of time.[11] Even intertextuality, the inter-referencing of one text within another and the theory around it (which is relied on heavily here), has already been identified as a mechanism for broadening an imaginative universe.[12] This existing literary and critical work does not, however, render an exploration of Nasrallah's project unnecessary. Rather, this work provides the tools and theoretical starting points for a deeper look at how all of these elements function in concert. This critical history is, then, what makes grappling with Nasrallah's expansive project possible.

Most of the literary themes and techniques developed across Nasrallah's two linked series can be found in other works. This is, in some ways, the point. Nasrallah is the first to draw connections between the mission of his writing and the work of his literary predecessors. Speaking to a London audience in 2012, Nasrallah said he believed his novels "could definitely have been written by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Emile Habibi, and Ghassan Kanafani,"[13] if only these canonical figures' lives had been longer. He saw his role, he told the room, as realizing a literary project left unfinished. And in his expansive approach, this is what Nasrallah does. Where Kanafani felt he had to excuse what he was sure would be perceived as a "disordered experience of geography" in his *All That's Left to You* and Edward Said lamented that—reading Palestine within existing frames—"all progress is digression, all residence is exile," Nasrallah did not let these conventions get in the way of writing. He wrote, then he wrote about the conventions, and then he wrote some more and called it all Palestine. It is the prolificacy, expansiveness, and interlinkages embedded in Nasrallah's Palestine Project that make it so compelling to think about. More compelling—even mysterious—is why Nasrallah's work hasn't been thought about more before now. Indeed, critics have been inexplicably and often frustratingly silent on the meaning and importance of this literary project. *Novel Palestine* works to understand and then fill the gaps in the literary record.

RECEPTION

Hailed briefly as the author of *the* national epic of Palestine—that elusive masterpiece that Palestinians (and indeed the world) had been anticipating for generations[14]—critical interest in Nasrallah has been strangely patchy. He has been described variously as an up-and-coming Jordanian writer, put on the who's who list of Palestinian authors, noted as the most prolific Palestinian writer of all time, grumbled about for writing too much, criticized for simple language, and praised for the complexity of his narrative style. In some periods of his literary career he has been championed, while in others the critics have remained strangely silent. And while there is a sort of consensus that his two series are impressive literary endeavors, there is very little (and in the anglosphere almost nothing) exploring what they mean. So why have the Palestine Comedies and Balconies series (as series) been overlooked? Why hasn't Nasrallah—as the most critically acclaimed Palestinian writer of the past decade—been the subject of dozens of monographs? Why—when his work has been translated as much as canonical authors like Ghassan Kanafani—is he ignored in English? A brief overview of his reception across English and Arabic (with a quick reference to his translation into Italian, Danish, and Turkish) not only shows how belated a thorough exploration of his oeuvre is but also draws out some of the gaps in collected critical approaches (the blind spots of criticism around Palestinian literature), which this work also aims to address or even redress.

Part of the reason for Nasrallah's patchy reception in Arabic can be boiled down to his writing. It was different. While the language was simple, the ideas were complex, and the works never shied away from the taboo. Before the 1990s, as he first started to publish, Nasrallah was read and reviewed as either an up-and-coming or underrated author.[15] Some of his early prose novels were more concept than narrative, deliciously (for some) difficult to pin down in terms of just what was happening, when, or where. This pleased some critics and annoyed others. As Faisal Darraj commented on *Just the Two of Us* (*Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ*, 1992), the work was a "narration of ambiguity." Of the mix of simplicity and complexity, another critic wrote of *Prairies of Fever* (*Barārī al-ḥummā*, 1985) that it was "at its core an anti-modern novel that collides with the axioms of realistic literature."[16] Another, more critical writer noted that Nasrallah was a commendable author not because of "his high talent and broad culture, but in his great sense of national and human responsibility."[17] His topics, in other words, were important, as was what he was trying to say, but he wasn't a literary savant. Nonetheless, the more Nasrallah published, the more attention he earned. His poetry and reviews of his work appeared in literary magazines from Bahrain to Beirut, Iraq to Egypt.[18]

Reception of his work (in English and Arabic) has also to a large extent been dictated by international politics. Wider recognition would come as global attention returned to Palestine amid the 1990s American-led Peace Process. This was particularly the case in English. What was available of his work in Arabic was, in the mid-1990s, rapidly sucked into a critical discourse that sought insight into contemporary Palestine and the sort of future it imagined for itself. So while *Prairies of Fever* had made something of a critical splash in Arabic for its experimental prose and risqué depiction of desire nurtured by an isolated character teaching in Saudi Arabia (and discussed as a Jordanian/Palestinian work), in English it was represented as the latest in Palestinian fiction. The work was translated in 1993,[19] the same year that the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, shook hands on the White House lawn with the then Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. The world wanted to follow along, and interest in Palestinian arts proliferated. With so many of the canonical writers gone, or largely retired from writing, there was a push to introduce the world to a new generation of authors.

This era saw Nasrallah anthologized in three separate volumes, two of which published excerpts of *Prairies of Fever*.[20] He was also listed in a number of English-language resources detailing who to read (with the subtext: to understand Palestine at this moment of global attention).[21] What had made a minor splash in Arabic was mobilized as part of a large wave of interest in English. On the back of this, *Just the Two of Us* was translated into English as *Inside the Night*.[22] Even with two works in English translation (the same works were rendered variously in Italian, Turkish, and Danish) Nasrallah's readership internationally was small. Beyond their appearance in anthologies and on lists of what to read, the novels were reviewed only in niche Arabic literary or Middle East studies journals and magazines.[23] Though he appeared on myriad lists of who to read, few in English picked up the work. This, it seems, speaks more to the limitations of scholarly and public discourse in the anglosphere than it does of the quality of Nasrallah's texts. This was an era when Arabic literature was expected to illustrate a point, either as a stop on the imagined (developmental) progression from oral narrative to the novel or as one of the set landmarks in the "conflict."[24] Nasrallah's work (at that point) did neither, so it was difficult to place on existing literary maps. After this surge of interest, Nasrallah largely disappeared from the anglosphere.

Meanwhile, in Arabic, Nasrallah kept writing. When the Palestine Comedies was inaugurated, Arab-world critics weren't sure what to make of it. Consensus seemed to be that there was something to the project, but there was no definitive sense as to what it meant.[25] Critics mentioned that the works all had empathetic characters,[26] and wove important links with the past,[27] but the ideas were general. Critics asked more questions of the works than they answered. In a published interview, one critic simply asked outright, "What is the theme of the Palestine Comedies? . . . [H]ow did it crystallize? What is its aim?"[28] Nasrallah did not—as is typical—give a direct answer, preferring to offer his readers scope for their own interpretations. "Perhaps," he told this critic of *Olives of the Streets*, "this narrative project was a direct response to the battle of Beirut."[29] He cites later, as a drive to write (as he would continue to do for decades),[30] an infamous sentiment attributed to David Ben-Gurion, often quoted as, "Their old will die, and their young will forget."[31] The answer gives a motive for writing, but just what the series does and how it does it remain open questions.

Finally, in 2006, a sustained academic study of the Palestine Comedies was published, titled *Narrative Universe: Readings in the Epic Narrative the Palestine Comedies by Ibrahim Nasrallah* (*Al-Kawn al-riwāʾī: Qirāʾa fī al-malḥama al-riwāʾiyya al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya li Ibrāhīm Naṣrāllah*). Its Iraqi authors identified the series as "a fictional epic composed of a network of novels."[32] It remains, as of the time of publication, the only other book-length study of the series (though there are a growing number of MA and PhD theses in English and Arabic). Chapters in that study identify themes of self/other and various forms and usages of intertextuality (religious, historical) and go over the meaning of the characters' names across the volumes. This was the first sustained examination of the themes and techniques used across the literary project. Critics, however, did not continue the conversation. Nor was the idea of a narrative universe, so clearly a claim about the limits and possibilities of Palestine, taken up by either the authors or later critics. The work did, however, add to what was becoming a critical mass of interest in the Comedies. This interest seemed to feed Nasrallah's writing. After the monograph was published, between 2005 and 2006 he would publish the first of the Balconies, *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*, 2005), and of course *Time of White Horses* (*Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ*, 2007). This would be a key moment for both series, and indeed their author.

Among the Arabic reading public, it was *Time of White Horses* that established Nasrallah as a household name. The 511-page tome follows three generations of a Palestinian farming family in a small village through the Ottoman Empire, its painful "reforms," its collapse, the arrival of the British Mandate, Jewish settlers, and finally Zionist forces. It closes as the family sits on the side of a road, their village in ruins, waiting for Red Cross trucks to take them into exile. Faisal Darraj, one of the most well-known literary critics of the Arab world, declared that Nasrallah had written *the* "tragedy of his people."[33] The novel was acclaimed in literary columns, in magazines, and in living rooms: this was a story of the Nakba that powerfully resonated. Because much literary criticism holds the story of the Nakba as near-synonymous with the story of Palestine,[34] the fact that *Time of White Horses* was the sixth in a larger project of writing was almost entirely overlooked.[35] The work on its own—not as part of a series—was seen as *the* Palestinian story. Even when it was mentioned in connection with the Palestine Comedies, it was as the series' crowning work. The assumption—even by its author—was that this story of the Nakba completed his effort to tell the story of Palestine.[36] Stoking popularity, the epic was short-listed for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2009 (then known as the Arabic Booker Prize). While it didn't win, the recognition rocketed Nasrallah and his work into much wider circles.[37]

Nasrallah kept writing—not only in the Palestine Comedies but also in his new and parallel series, the Balconies. The pattern of critical attention—looking at one work in depth and only generally referencing the series—continued. This can most plainly be seen in the coverage of Nasrallah's subsequent IPAF nominations. In the award's summary of *Lanterns of the King of Galilee* (*Qanādīl malik al-jalīl*, 2012), *Balcony of the Abyss* (*Shurfat al-hāwiya*, 2013), and *Dog War II* (*Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniya*, 2015)—which finally won him the award (the sixth in the Balconies and the first that didn't include "Balcony" in the title)—no mention was made that any of the works were part of a series.[38] It also seemed that critics hadn't noticed the "reopening" of the Palestine Comedies. Nasrallah had by this time retired from his day job as a journalist and devoted himself entirely to writing. The pace of publication has been steady. There are now eighteen novels across the two series, several works of poetry, an autobiography, and works of criticism. Instead of looking deeply into the ideas being generated by the ever-expanding series, critics became more critical. While many praised the expansive scope and constant innovation of the works, others—in private—complained that he writes too much, is repetitive, or has not evolved.

English criticism amplifies and exacerbates the lacuna in Arabic. If critics in the Arabic press and scholarly community were temperamental or ambivalent, in English they were all but silent. For all the attention Palestine gets in the news and the number of library shelves stuffed with histories and analyses, the most talked about Palestinian author since Mahmoud Darwish has gone largely unremarked.[39] By 2022, only five articles on Nasrallah's works existed in English, three of which focused on *Time of White Horses*.[40] He is becoming more frequently referenced in English, but again his absence in the field tells more about the field than the fiction. While today Palestinian authors are read for more than a description of a particular place or political moment, in the anglosphere discourse on Palestine is still "overdetermined" (to quote Bashir Abu-Manneh) by a very particular and limited idea of the nation.[41] Because Palestine is a nation without a state, discourse prefers to see literature participating in a narrative of a "nation of fragments,"[42] or "waiting for Godot."[43] Reading Nasrallah's work and taking seriously its claim to write the nation means leaving behind (or at least reorienting) the idea of a Palestine as waiting, in pieces. Nasrallah writes an expansive Palestine. The nation conjured across the works is not waiting to exist; it exists now, and it is united here in a single literary project.

BRIDGING GAPS

What is not united is discourse on Palestinian fiction. Across English and Arabic, criticism has overwhelmingly focused on a canon of six authors. Known as the "Nakba generation"—born usually during the British Mandate or late Ottoman era—these men and women witnessed and in some capacity experienced the violence, displacement, and dispossession of the Nakba. Seen as the elite of Palestinian writing, Fadwa Tuqan (b. Nablus, 1917), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (b. 1919, Bethlehem),[44] Emile Habibi (b. Haifa, 1922), Ghassan Kanafani (b. Acre, 1936), Mahmoud Darwish (b. Birwah, 1941), and Sahar Khalifeh (b. Nablus, 1941) in large part defined the role of literature in Palestinian culture and politics after the Nakba. Creating meaning out of a new set of circumstances, they set out the tropes, themes, goals, and aspirations of Palestinian writing.[45] They are retrospectively endowed with an almost mystical power of expression. As one critic put it in the 1950s, it was the responsibility of this generation to write because it was only they who could "explain to us the public what they felt of it"[46]—"it" being the Nakba, and almost always also Palestine. This generation created not only the themes and tropes of Palestinian writing, but a value of aesthetics. It was the generation that took on writing the nation as an imperative, that forged the idea of the committed writer, that cemented the assumption that Palestinian writing was writing the nation (in a particular form with a particular aim).

Shifting these aesthetic values to a new generation writing under different conditions, and with a very different set of politics, has been problematic. While one critic went so far as to say that newer generations of Palestinian writers produce work of inferior quality,[47] the sentiment is only true if the critic evaluates new work by old values. When criticism does talk about contemporary Palestinian writing, it is lumped into what has been called the "age of Oslo,"[48] "after Darwish,"[49] and the post-millennium.[50] There is understood to be a fundamental break between the "Nakba generation," and the "Post Oslo" generation. Authors like Adania Shibli

(b. 1974, Shibli-Abu Ghanam, lives between Ramallah and Berlin), Maya Abu al-Hayyat (b. 1980, Beirut; lives in Jerusalem), Mazen Maarouf (b. 1978, Beirut; lives in Iceland), Ahlam Bsharat (b. 1978, Tamun; lives in Nablus), and Majd Kayal (b. 1990, Haifa),[51] offer a scathing criticism of current Palestinian leadership, a critical treatment of canonical tropes, and a reconsideration of what revolution in the Palestinian context looks like.[52] So while the Nakba generation felt compelled but restricted by the drive to write the nation, this new generation sees the expectation of writing the nation itself as a failure. There are two different aesthetic value sets at work. They are not, however, totally exclusive. A look at Nasrallah and his work brilliantly illustrates how connected these two "generations" of writers are.

While Nasrallah is firmly excluded from the Nakba generation, he doesn't really fall into this second camp either. Born in 1954 in Jordan's Wihdat refugee camp, Nasrallah experienced the immediate aftermath of the Nakba but not "the war itself."[53] And yet Nasrallah was raised in the wake of the catastrophe, amid the same social conditions that presented writing the national novel as a matter of urgency. He was shaped by the same forces as this earlier generation; he lived through the camps, the rise of Pan-Arabism, the rise of the Palestinian resistance, and the heyday of Palestine's transnationalism. It is because he doesn't really fit into either of these camps that he has been further lost in the critical literature. It is also because of this almost bridge position between categories that he challenges the very idea of a clear divide. Like Ghassan Kanafani, for example, Nasrallah was educated and later taught in United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools. Also like Kanafanai (and so many other Palestinians), he would seek work in the Gulf, acquire an interest in journalism, and return to larger Palestinian population centers to pursue his career. While Kanafani began writing in the 1950s after he finished teaching, Nasrallah—born almost twenty years later—did not find the openness and exuberant possibility of revolutionary calls of 1950s Beirut but a somber and searching Amman where Palestinian political expression was still heavily limited in the long wake of the Black September crackdown in 1971. So while the trajectories are almost identical, the realities were not. Nasrallah wrote of a fundamentally different life experience, one that was built on and incorporated the paths and ideals that had been set out before him but that reflected his experience in a world that Kanafani would never see. So while his literary ambitions were forged amid the era of the canon, Nasrallah can also be said to write within the landscape that has informed a new generation of Palestinian authors that tends to expand on and even abandon the tropes and themes carved out by the canon.[54]

Nasrallah embodies the key elements of both "generations," as indeed his works draw on the themes, modes, voices, and character types from both and everything in between.[55] This is not only why Nasrallah typically hasn't been read by critics, but, this project argues, precisely why the time is overdue for an accounting of his works. In reading texts that challenge existing critical frameworks, new and more finely tuned approaches can be generated, ones that stymie attempts to neatly periodize Palestinian writing into so many "befores" and "afters." To achieve this breakdown, my analysis makes frequent reference to the writers Nasrallah claims as his predecessors, as well as authors who have been taken up into the critical discourse since.

WHAT READING NASRALLAH GETS US

Reading Nasrallah's linked series gives us more than an alternative framework for the evaluation of a Palestinian literary corpus and a reevaluation of existing discursive silos in the field of Palestinian literature. Thematic, structural, and close readings of the Palestine Project reveal a vision of Palestine whose underlying grammar, symbols, and function have not hitherto been fleshed out. This is not the nation in waiting, or the nation of fragments. The imaginative universe that the Palestine Project conjures a unique set of foundational assumptions about the relationship between people, place, and time. Many of the novels actively work to teach their readers to "see" Palestine with the tools generated by the works. Some of this work happens within a single novel, some across one or two different series. The Palestine that the works render may be utterly different from existing models of the nation-state (so often the frame for reading and indeed writing), but this nation is far from unrecognizable. In fact, the Palestine of Nasrallah's novels brings the bits of Palestine—like Salwa's—that are known, experienced, but not acknowledged into the same conceptual frame as the tropes, stereotypes, and assumptions so often brought to readings of Palestine.

The Palestine conjured in Nasrallah's fiction holds space for the whole of an estimated population of ten million worldwide.[56] It accounts for their shifting locations that only begin with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Palestinians of Israel,[57] and those in the remaining fifty-nine official refugee camps "outside" the area of Mandate Palestine in today's Jordan, Lebanon,[58] and Syria,[59] as well as the long lives lived in exile and the diaspora. Beyond these "typical" locations of Palestinian life, the Palestine Project reckons with the nonrefugee populations who "remained" in their cities and villages after 1948 and 1967, which often became unrecognizable, and those who left, returned, and left again, or took paths less traveled, to places not generally registered as locations of Palestinian experience. The linked series incorporate changes to the dominant figurations of Palestine, so that Palestine is at once what it was before 1967, 1948, 1936, and 1914 and what it was after. The works do this by developing an extensive symbolic and structural vocabulary, worked through within and across texts of both projects. This vocabulary draws extensively on existing innovations in Palestinian literature but also trends in Palestinian and international political discourse. It takes up notions of resistance and revolution, transnationalism and solidarity, and weaves these concepts into a fleshed-out structure of telling that overcomes so many of the limitations placed on the imagination and representation of Palestine.

To best draw out these parts and components, analysis is divided into three sections. The first is dedicated to ways that the linked series create relationships: between texts within a series, across series, and with other works in the Palestinian and world literary spheres. These relationships and connections are housed under the umbrella term "Intertextuality," which broadly speaking here means "all that puts one text in relation to another." Chapters in this first part tap into both structuralist and Arabic literary terminology to show how conceptual links between texts create a vocabulary for the imagination of Palestinian history and geography. Chapter 1 digs into the series as a conceptual vessel that flips the notion of a "nation of fragments" on its head. It uses multilingual intertextuality theory to understand the nature of the relationship between texts (and indeed the nature and limits of the text). Chapter 2 goes deeper and explores three ways that the various parts of Palestine can be related: it does this using the symbolism of the twin and the Arabic grammatical principle of the dual (*al-muthannā*). These set out a type that allows multiple bodies to be at once distinct and connected outside of linear and developmental space or time.

Chapter 3 moves on to look at how the works of the Palestine Project create relationships between time and space in the absence of the linear model. It uses the idea of the chronotope (or how space and time cohere in narrative) and coins the "chronotope of accumulation," which determines what can be included in the vast network of the nation. Rather than collect the individuals and happenings that occur within a given demarcated zone and/or particular historical trajectory, spaces and events in Nasrallah's Palestine are Palestinian because they have been witnessed as such. This idea draws on the Palestinian and Islamic sense of witnesses as *sh-h-d* so that Palestinians simply witness a time or a space or a community as Palestinian, and it becomes a part of the collected texts/elements of the nation.

Part 2 goes on to read how Nasrallah's texts understand and account for the existence of this Palestine-as-network in a world that has done and continues to do violence to Palestinians; a world that is both practically and ideologically hostile to Palestine as an entity. Chapter 4 looks at the Balconies series and shows how the idea offers quite literally a new "vantage" for narrative. The balconic vantage—as a location at once inside and out—acknowledges and makes room for how embedded representations of Palestine and Palestinians are in systems that are both violent and oppressive. Palestine and Palestinians, after all, exist in a network of states, their governments, and their economies. The balcony as a position of narrative acknowledges that not only do Palestinians live across and between so many other structures of power, but Palestinian political discourse and even the genre of the novel as a mode of telling are all indelibly linked to colonial-era assumptions about the nature of the nation. What were once invisible structures of power that delimited and curtailed representations of Palestinian life, and life itself, become visible from this balconic position. Chapter 5 shows how these structures of power are rendered in Nasrallah's Palestine as so many other texts in a series. In this vision of Palestine, power is accounted for as just another "text" in the network of representation. What these first two parts of analysis ultimately show is a representation of Palestine where existing structures of power no longer act as the operating logic. Power structures become only part of the story and are subsumed within the powerful imaginative system of the network. Here places and times are related outside of ideas and ideals of boundedness and sovereignty, and Palestinian experiences outside of the mainstream become speakable and hearable.

What remains is the people—the characters and communities who move through this reimagined geography. Part 3 therefore turns to the configuration of the person in Nasrallah's linked series. Chapter 6 looks at the series' use and adaptation of existing tropes of Palestinianness. Challenged and problematized from the moment of their inception, the character of the fighter, the hero-poet, and the mother-of-the-martyr are still present within the Palestine Project but no longer define the limits of the individual. One by one the models are shown to be problematic because they see the individual as only one thing. The successful man was a fighter whose personal and national realization could come only in the liberation of the homeland. The successful woman was a mother who supported the success of her sons. Not only is the citizen of Nasrallah's Palestine open-ended and multirelational (like the nation itself), but their success is defined in the refusal of imposed limitations. The tropes persist (in Nasrallah's work and elsewhere), analysis suggests, because they can be mobilized to push against some of the violences done to Palestinians and therefore keep imposed limitations to life and community at bay. The tropes do not, however, any longer constitute the limits of the person. Exploring the implications for this, readings find a fundamental conceptual shift in the relationship between the individual and the nation. This is no longer tied to relationships of before and after, any singular point of origin or perceived destination. The individual does not "become" Palestinian in the linear developmental sense but "accumulates" meaning and in doing so keeps the network of the nation open.

Chapter 7 explores how in a world of limitations successful characters of the Palestine Project navigate the structures that impose harm. Using Sarah Ahmed's notion of orientation to read Nasrallah's *Balcony of Delirium*, "delirium" is advanced as a method of action. In delirium, the individual gains the balconic vantage and dissociates from imposed narratives; navigating through them but refusing their limits. The work of being Palestinian, for the two series, is navigating existing structures (playing by some rules, evading others) so that the drive for open interpretation is sustained. The ideal Palestinian in the Palestine Project is one who can see and interpret structures of limitation but understand that they can live and create meaning outside of them. Chapter 8 looks to the characters of Nasrallah's texts that best managed this practice of delirium. The notion of the citizen writer (distinctly not the hero-poet) emerges as an ideal model. This ideal citizen, analysis draws out, actively and continuously engages in the writing and imagining of their community, taking in new parts that have either been neglected or that have newly appeared. This citizen must—in a network of ever-proliferating parts—constantly reinterpret meaning as new additions/editions accumulate, and constantly push against limiting frames.

PART ONE

Intertextual Palestine

In reality, we cannot comment using conventional methods on that which is unconventional. . . . [C]ategorization here is unimportant. What is important, I think, is its transcendence of categorization, so to speak.

—IBRAHIM NASRALLAH

[*Intertextuality*] *penetrates the walls of time and place, leaps to the past, plays with the present, foresees the future.*

—IHSAN AL-DIK

Before you write Palestine in blood, learn to write it with ink.

—MOIN BISEISU

STARTING WITH SOME OF THE BASICS—or so they might seem—this section lays out answers to the most ordinary questions asked about an unfamiliar story. As this project tries to narrate an unfamiliar Palestine, we might begin with "Where is it?" and "When is it?" (the "who" comes a bit later). The answers the chapters in this part draw out and redefine the terms on which these foundational questions are asked. Drawing from intertextuality theory, Arabic grammar, and Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope, analysis sets out the parameters for the "where" and "when" of Nasrallah's Palestine but also, fundamentally, the "how." These foundational paradigms of imagining ultimately reorder ("un-order," "dis-order"?) the tenets of space-time that the national novel is assumed to write. This begins with a telling of the story of the Palestine Comedies (*al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya*) and the Balconies (*Shurafāt*) as a single literary project, for this logic—what brings the series together, what holds them as a unified body of material—is also what binds the vision of Palestine that they co-create. It is the mechanisms of linkage that become the where and the when.

Ultimately the works of the Palestine Project develop their own vocabulary for a description of the nation. Since that vocabulary has not yet been set out, analysis begins by relying on existing theory, in particular, the work of Gerard Genette on what he calls the science of "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts."[1] From citation (when a character asks, "To be or not to be?," invoking Hamlet) to parody, or in Genette's words, "types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres,"[2] Genette set out a vast accounting of the many ways and means of relationship between one text and another in his three encyclopedic volumes, *Palimpsests, Paratexts*, and *Architexts*. Genette's precise language is harnessed here to begin describing the relationships between place and time in Nasrallah's Palestine. This is not a new approach to reading Palestinian literature.[3] As the literary critic Ihsan al-Dik at an-Najah University in Nablus puts it, in Palestinian literature "intertextuality is unescapable."[4]

For decades the techniques of intertextuality have been recognized as something that knits the spaces and times of Palestine together. For al-Dik, intertextual devices allow authors access to their own literary archive of "religion and *adab* and myth and history."[5] Similarly, Abd al-Hadi Abu Samra at Al-Azhar University in Gaza has shown that intertextuality "makes present *turāth* [cultural heritage] by calling on missing texts and tying them in" to an imagined present.[6] Al-Dik reads the inter-referencing of texts not only as a way of preserving the Palestinian past in literary form, but as a chance to arrange and create relationships between the parts of the archive and "see what is not seen."[7] The interweaving of references, in al-Dik's words, "penetrates the walls of time and place, leaps to the past, plays with the present, foresees the future."[8] Ibrahim Nimr Mousa at Birzeit University, reading Tawfiq Zayyad, extends this further, writing that "intertextuality overlooks the borders of time and space."[9] The use of intertextuality theory to read Nasrallah's series simply takes existing thinking to its logical limit, or rather, reads how Nasrallah's Palestine Project mobilizes intertextuality to create a richly articulated vision of Palestinian time and space.

Intertextuality can make fiction boundless, drawing connections across and between what seemed before as disparate places, times, and epistemologies. It thus has very clear possible usages for the imagination of Palestine, which exists in the hearts and homes and hills of a great many different geopolitical locations. Though one student at the Islamic University in Gaza lamented the "difficulty in determining the scope and complexity of intertextuality, and the multiplicity of methods for its application in contemporary studies,"[10] for this project the diversity is a boon, furnishing analysis with a vast array of ideas and theories. Here it includes the work of structuralists (Mikhail Bakhtin, Gerard Genette) and semioticians (Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes) but also the tradition of *adab* (literature, or more accurately, belles lettres in the Arabic literary convention) and *balāgha* (rhetoric). Where chapter 1 uses existing terms to describe what is at work in the creation of the Palestine Project, chapter 2 adds the Arabic grammatical principle of *al-muthannā* (the dual) as a mode of textual relationship to the growing list of ways one text can create meaning through interrelated networks with other works. While intertextuality theory recedes in chapter 3, it remains an important conceptual component throughout this book. Indeed, it is the network of relationships that forge Nasrallah's Palestine Project that creates a "place" for the nation, so that we might answer Edward Said's question, "Is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences?," with a resounding yes.[11]

1

Palestine as Series

Ibrahim Nasrallah had, since the early 1980s, resolved to write Palestine's national novel. The first fruit of this endeavor was a book titled *Birds of Caution* (*Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar*), published in 1996 as a standalone work. It tells the story of a young boy who grows up in the Wihdat refugee camp, where Nasrallah himself was raised. The novel was largely autobiographical.[1] It was perhaps because of this that it seemed not to satisfy the author's desire (or the critics') for a sweeping national tome. So, with the material he had collected—reams of interviews with elders, historical reference works, testimonies, and so on—Nasrallah continued to write with the same aim. This time, however, he turned his hand from the chirpy and introspective voice of a child narrator to a more historical mode of writing. Instead of following a young boy born in the aftermath of the Nakba, the protagonist of this second novel is Fouad, a Transjordanian villager who joined the Arab Liberation Army in the 1940s. The time frame of this novel tackled the Nakba (as a failure of the Arab world) and its broader political context head-on. But *Eraser Child* (*Ṭifl al-mimḥāt*), which was finished in late 1999, does not actually feature any Palestinian characters—save for a falafel seller who gives Fouad a free lunch in Jerusalem and later Palestinian corpses when he enters Deir Yasin.[2] So while it tackled crucial Palestinian events and historical experiences, it somehow did not seem like a great candidate for *the* national novel either.

Sometime after the publication of *Birds of Caution* and before the publication of *Eraser Child*, something coalesced, something that linked these works to Nasrallah's wider drive. When *Eraser Child* was published in 1999, it was issued simultaneously with a rerelease of *Birds of Caution*, and in these new editions both novels bore the same series title emblazoned on the spine: The Palestine Comedies (*al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya*). This decision—to bring both works within the same imaginative umbrella (as indeed they stemmed from the same creative drive)—would set the foundation for a new paradigm of imagining the nation. It created a space of telling that could fit all of the locations, trajectories, symbols, and structures of Palestine in a way no single work could. This first chapter looks at the device of the series as Nasrallah deploys it and, reading this into the larger literary context of the device, proposes that the intertextual linking of works within the series provides a foundational paradigm for the imagination of Palestine as a single entity of many parts. No longer a "nation of fragments" or a nation "waiting for Godot," all the parts of Palestine in the series are marked as full and complete, just as the novels that told them were.

Broadly, the Palestine Comedies are concentrated on "the story of a people (*shaʿb*)," and as critics have described them, they are a "celebration of the of the spirit that touches the soul of a Palestinian being (*insān*)."[3] Each work in the Comedies is set in a recognizable national location (Ramallah, the Galilee, the Palestinian camps in Jordan and Lebanon), each of which is specifically named and described, including references to (variously) specific landscapes with street names, cities, events, and even historical figures.[4] The Palestine Comedies take place across distinct time-spaces (Ramallah during the Second Intifada, the Jerusalem hills during the Nakba); they have (almost) no repeated characters. No two novels are set in the same geopolitical location, and the order of publication happens without any sense of linear chronology (see table 2). The Balconies, on the other hand, tell the story of the Arab state—that entity under which so many Palestinians have been living since 1948. These works are set in nameless places that could be any Arab country over the past thirty years (or into the next thirty); they tell the stories of structural violence and the control exercised by police, government, media, family systems, surveillance, capitalism, and the genre of the novel. Together, to appropriate Khoury's description of the intertextual, Nasrallah's series explore "all of the possibilities" of Palestine, and more importantly leave open the inevitability of change to come.

THE PALESTINE COMEDIES

As a series, the Palestine Comedies eschews expectations of linearity, retrospectivity, and geographic contiguity. Table 2 gives a general overview of the works, when they were published, and when they were added to the series. The series offers, for example, no real "beginning," no point of origin from which everything stems. Ideas of chronology or development must be quickly abandoned, as an overview of the series shows. Written and added to the series "first," *Birds of Caution* takes place between 1950 and the early 1970s; the "second," *Eraser Child*, doubles back to portray events between 1920 and 1948; and the "third," *Olives of the Streets* (*Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*), jumps ahead and takes place between the 1970s and 1990s. The temporal skipping continues across the series, so that the Palestine of the Comedies covers (so far) some six hundred years, in no particular order. No reordering would create a cohesive timeline; there is no possible way to read the works that renders time linear. So there can be no clear temporal

TABLE 2 The novels of the Palestine Comedies mentioned in this study, by date added to the series, with a brief summary of the place and time in which the work is set

al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya **(Palestine Comedies)**	**First Published (Added to series)**	**Location, Year, Actors**
Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar Birds of Caution	1996 (2000)	Duheisheh camp (Bethlehem), Wihdat camp (Amman), 1950–1970s
Ṭifl al-mimḥāt Eraser Child	2000	Hijaz, Amman, Palestine 1920–48
Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ Olives of the Streets	2002	Unnamed refugee camp near Beirut, 1970s–1990s
Aʿrās āmina Amina's Weddings	2004	Gaza Strip, Second Intifada
Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā Under the Midmorning Sun		West Bank (Ramallah region), Second Intifada
Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ Time of White Horses	2007	Triangle region, Ottoman era to Nakba
Qanādīl malik al-jalīl Lanterns of the King of Galilee	2012	Lake Tiberias region, Galilee, seventeenth century
Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ Just the Two of Us	1991 (2014)	Unnamed Gulf city, 1980s
Arwāḥ Kilimanjārū Souls of Kilimanjaro	2015 (tbc)	Team of disabled Palestinians scale Mount Kilimanjaro in 2014
Thulāthiya al-ajrās (Bells Trilogy) *Ẓilāl al-mafātīḥ* Shadow of the Keys	2019	Works are set in Bethlehem/Jerusalem in the 1920s–1940s. They collectively tell the story of Palestine's first woman photographer and the world she documents.
Sīrat al-ʿayn Biography of the Eye		
Dabbāba taḥata shajarat ʿīd al-milād Tank beneath the Christmas tree		

origin. Without this "starting point," there can be no "development," in a linear sense, between the works; there is no trajectory, no stated goal. In fact, the series is open, with no end in sight. The fact that the work is open-ended prevents the production of what Etienne Balibar calls the nation's "retrospective illusion," or the generation of a tautological historical narrative that links the nation present to the past.[5] Just as no linear order can be established through the temporal settings of the works, no linear order can really be created (thematic, symbolic, etc) out of the "order" in which the works were written.

To even define which novel of the Comedies was written first requires a complicated answer. *Birds of Caution* and *Eraser Child*, as we saw, confound the identification of an easy starting point, as the Comedies only came into existence when both works were placed in it (or declared to constitute it). Further complicating the idea of an origin for the series is the retroactive addition of *Just the Two of Us* (*Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ*), published first as an independent work in 1992 and added to the series in 2014 in its third edition.[6] Did the series begin before it was invented, in 1992? Or did it begin even before *Just the Two of Us* was published, perhaps with the very desire to write the Palestinian epic? What if later retrospective additions were first published before Nasrallah had even hatched his epic plan? The nation is thus formed and reshaped with the addition of each "text" regardless of when or where that text "originated." A collection of works with no identifiable beginning and no end in sight (Nasrallah constantly hints that the series will continue indefinitely)[7], the novels represent events, themes, and symbols as they are imagined in a particular place, at a particular time. Like Palestine, there is no "end" to the Comedies. The series' operating principle might be best stated in the words of one protagonist in Nasrallah's *Under the Midmorning Sun* (*Taḥt shams al-ḍuḥā*) when he is asked to tell his own life story from start to finish: "I don't see an ending at all, I see only a chain of beginnings. The ending is many beginnings: so where to start?"[8]

There is no point of retrospective because works are added to the Comedies every few years. They are not even all issued by the same publishing house. Nasrallah insists that the 2015 *Souls of Kilimanjaro* (*Arwāḥ kilīmanjārū*), published by HBKU Press (formerly Bloomsbury Qatar Publishing) and not al-Dar al- ʿArabiyya li l- ʿUlūm nāshirūn, which has published the others, is part of the series. The novel is a fictional account of a hike up Kilimanjaro that Nasrallah participated in; the walk brought together a community of disabled Palestinian teenagers from across the locations of Palestine. While its inclusion remains "unofficial" for reasons of publisher politics, this unofficiality simply speaks to so many other elements of Palestine: unrecognized legally but included nonetheless. There is, moreover, a series within the series. In 2019 Nasrallah added, all at once, three novels about the development of photography (loosely) in Bethlehem in the early 1900s. The series is known as the Trilogy of the Bells (*Thulāthiyat al-ajrās*) but is firmly part of the Palestine Comedies.[9]

Similarly, the Comedies make no claim to a Palestinian place, at least not in the geopolitical sense of a sovereign territory. When trying to define the "space" of Palestine through the Palestine Comedies, one must quickly abandon the notion of a bordered sovereign territory. Instead of combining the many locations covered by the novels into a contiguous territory, the Comedies claim dozens of locations across myriad political boundaries. Beginning with the Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan and Lebanon, the Arab Liberation Army barracks, Gaza City during the Second Intifada, and so on, the geographic scope of Palestine is not limited to any one territory administered by any one authority at any one time. The series includes the story of Daher al-Umar and his pseudo-state in seventeenth-century Tiberias, parts of the southern Jordanian desert when it was under British control, and an unnamed Gulf country where two Palestinian refugees arrive from Lebanon. Even well-known places are recast. Ramallah, today the de facto capital, is treated in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords and presented at once as the place where one protagonist has lived all of his life and the site of another's "return" to the homeland: the same space represents two different experiences of Palestine. Each of the places that the novels portray become texts—locations—of Palestine. With the addition of *Souls of Kilimanjaro*, the settings of the series cover some 6,500 kilometers. And that, again, is only so far. Just to list the spaces is unwieldy, but to imagine them as a single cohesive unit is even more of a challenge. How do all of these "spaces" fit together? The series provides an answer. The final section of this chapter, once the full scope of the two series is laid out, returns to the story of Salwa, whose lesson about the value and possibilities of the series as a vessel go far beyond the moment of her first discovery.

Underscoring the diversity of the texts of the Palestine conjured in the Comedies are the many different narrative styles that each novel employs. As if to further stymie the reader's attempt to find an easy cohesion between the novels, the works of the Comedies range from historical fiction to stream of consciousness, "realist" to absurd. *Birds of Caution* begins its story from the narrative perspective of an unborn fetus, while *Just the Two of Us* is told by either a set of twins/doubles or a character with multiple personalities (we never do find out). *Time of White Horses* (*Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ*) masquerades as historical fiction, but its footnotes are fabricated, and it takes place in an imaginary village (the only one of the Comedies to do so). *Lanterns of the King of Galilee* (*Qanādīl malik al-jalīl*) assumes a more standard historical tone, but the grandmother in *Time of White Horses* appears mysteriously in one of the work's asides, forcing the reader to again question the authority of the "historical" voice.[10] The would-be hero of *Eraser Child* is constantly undermined by a sarcastic and all-knowing narrator, and the authoritative journalist who tries to tell the story of Salwa in *Olives of the Streets* is told repeatedly that he has not properly listened to her story.

However different the texts may be, they are unmistakably connected. Even on the surface, the works are connected by what Genette would call their "paratextual" elements. The matching cover art, production style, and series title displayed prominently on the cover and spine all link the works visually, as do lists of the "rest" of the novels in the series (which itself keeps expanding as new works come out and new editions of existing novels are released).[11] These changing paratexts offer, to quote Genette, "an invitation, in advance, to read it [the books] twice: the first time, right now, as a 'whole,' and the second time, later, as 'part of a group.'"[12] Paratextual elements (to say nothing yet of the thematic overlaps) create a "relationship of correspondence"; in other words, the novels become intertextually linked.

There are also themes and symbols developed across the Comedies (as well as the Balconies) that knit the works together. One that chapter 4 examines is the anemone, the ubiquitous red flower that carpets Palestine's hills in the spring. Popping up across the works, the flower is developed as a symbol of violence and hope yet to come, signaling the oppression not only of the British but also the "honor" system's violence against women. It is also an expression of multiplicity-in-difference, as a symbol of hope/violence and in the shape of its cleft leaves and many petals. As chapter 4 explores, the symbol plays on the word's Arabic origins (*shaqāʾiq nuʿmān*) and the way its roots are deployed across the novels of both series. But more on that later.

Most important here, is that it is these shared elements—themes like the anemone, the subject of Palestine, and of course the series title—that make the reader of one text in the series aware of the others, so that none is ever totally independent. The result, imaginatively speaking, in Genette's terms, is "the actual presence of one text within another."[13] Just as when a character asks "To be or not to be?" and Hamlet enters the mind of a reader, upon opening one volume of the Comedies, all the other possible volumes appear in the imagination. And so it is with Palestine: a nation conjured in the mind across countless kilometers, countless other states, and time/spaces that span centuries. Just as Palestine does not take shape in a vacuum, however, neither do the texts of the Palestine Comedies.

THE BALCONIES SERIES

By the time Nasrallah was waist-deep in the Palestine Comedies, he launched a parallel series of works that focus on the insidious violence of state structures. While distinct, the two series nonetheless share a tantalizing singular imaginative grammar. Read together, they furnish the reader with a sense of the problems of time and the violence done by imposed state orders on individuals, particularly Palestinians. Reading both as a larger unit of writing—as a collective Palestine Project—it is clear that the works of the second series emerged out of the questions raised by the first. What the new series did that the explicitly national novels could not was take a view on the state and its forms that the story of the nation missed—or had to exist outside of. Indicating this position—at once inside and outside the state—is the title of each work and indeed the series, known collectively as the Balconies.

With the majority of Palestinians in the Middle East (and indeed beyond) living subject to the state structures of other nations, it became clear in the Comedies that the story of Palestine could not really be complete if confined to the nation and without taking account of the role and rules of the state. The subjects of the works (so far) are state, government, news media, religion, patriarchy, the novel, surveillance, and security. Each of the Balconies can be read as an independent examination of usually invisible but always insidious state structures, of ordering forces that operate over those within the state's sovereign grasp. The series has a structure and logic of its own that reveals how state power permeates all avenues of life. The first four of the Balconies are particularly marked as a collective due to their shared title structure *Shurfat al-*_____ (*Balcony of the*). Prefacing all of the works with "Balcony of" was later discarded for a paratextual series title on the cover and spine of the works marking them as *al-Shurafāt* (The Balconies). It seems that once the unique frame of the balcony was established, later works dispensed with the title formality.[14] With the first of the Balconies published in 2005, it also seems clear that questions raised (and answers found) through this series forged the Comedies into the shape they are found in today.

It seemed, for a time, that a series on the state would begin, more or less, where the story of the nation left off. We can see in table 3 a five-year hiatus in publications in the Comedies, as focus shifts to the Balconies. During this time, critics, and Nasrallah himself, celebrated the end of the series with his pièce de résistance, which saw him nominated for his first Arabic Booker award the following year. *Time of White Horses* seemed—and was presented as—the national epic to end an epic series.[15] The novel is the story of the Nakba and masterfully integrates oral history, folklore, fictional footnote, and heroic figures into one tale. The elements of the work equally embody and trouble the ideal of the national hero (so prevalent in Palestinian cultural and political discourse) and indeed stories of the Nakba as an "origin" for the national story. But after three works of the Balconies, Nasrallah surprised his readers with another (and then another and another) work of the Comedies series. After this, a work was added to each series every other year. They were fully intertwined.

The first of the Balconies, *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*, 2004), for example, examines the state, the media, and the linkage of 9/11 to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[16] In a totally experimental stream-of-consciousness-style story that weaves images of dead Iraqis and Hollywood film, the novel centers on a government information officer whose faith in the system of truth and representation falters until it is destroyed. The next, *Balcony of the Snow Man* (*Shurfat rajul al-thalj*, 2006), follows a government news writer and explores how narrative structures engineered by the state have parallels in the ways of telling employed by the novel; they are structures that literally kill.[17] The third book of the Balconies plumbs the power of the state even further. *Balcony of Disgrace* (*Shurfat al-ʿār*, 2010) was penned amid the 2008–9 Gaza onslaught and published the following year.[18] It takes place in an unnamed city (modeled on Amman) and follows Manar, its protagonist and heroine, who begins life as the hope of her family. She dies, however, after having been abducted by a man seeking vengeance on her brother, raped, refused an abortion, imprisoned by the state, abused by her guards, and raped by a fellow inmate; and she is finally shot dead by her brother as "the windows and balconies filled with hundreds of shadows looking out over the street" (233). As the story of the young woman's tragedy unfolds "the war on Gaza continues"

(151), a war that is paralleled with her murder through a linked investigation of the structures of power that, though they claim they are protecting the vulnerable, quite often only chew them up.

Not only do the novels of the Balconies explore the nature of power structures, but they also show how these structures participate in (and even to a large degree dictate the possibilities of) narrative. The focus on invisible structures is reflected in the form of the works, which are on the whole much more "experimental" than the Comedies, as chapters 4 and 5 explore. The two series are really part of one imaginative literary project, which I call the Palestine Project. Giving narrative shape to the pernicious, invisible, and horrendously violent structures of the state, and tracing how these structures are repeated across the operation of family, police, and religious institutions, seems to have liberated the story of Palestine from the necessity of an ending. A look at the publication history of the combined works (table 3) shows how intimately linked they are and how the ideas produced in one quite literally lead into another.

The Palestine that emerges here is almost precisely the reverse of what Benedict Anderson described in his *Imagined Communities*. The modern nation, Anderson wrote, was conjured in the mind as a "sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time."[19] The vision of the nation that Anderson so famously drew imagined this sociological organism as "solid," so that it was within a certain boundary that individuals could understand their co-nationals as inhabiting the same (to use Anderson's term) "meanwhile" and moving through history as a unit. The container for Palestine here becomes the series.

Where the Comedies disarticulates the assumptions of linear time and bordered space, the Balconies allows us to see the structures of power. A nation, after all, is not really only composed of time and place, but the concepts that create relationships between them. Anderson called these the "discrete historical forces" that pressed distinct visions of time and space into the shape of the nation-state. What the Balconies brings to Nasrallah's Palestine is the story of the not-so-discrete forces acting on Palestinian times, spaces, and people; the forces that pressed Palestinians into particular patterns of being. In identifying some of the structures at work, a difference can be seen between Palestinian lives and aspirations and the limits that are imposed on them.

SERIES IN CONTEXT

As a way of writing about complex interrelationships across space and time for a national community, the series seems ripe for an exploration of Palestine. Indeed, Nasrallah is not the only author who has used the device to tell such a complex story. Elias Khoury—the Lebanese author of Palestine's first declared national novel (an irony that has not gone unremarked)—has played with the series on a number of occasions. His famous *Gate of the Sun* (*Bāb al-shams*, 1998), he writes,

TABLE 3 The novels of Ibrahim Nasrallah's Palestine Project addressed in the present study, presented in the order they were added to their respective series (the novels shaded in gray are those analyzed in-depth)

***al-Malhāt al-filasṭīniyya* (Palestine Comedies)**	**First Published (Added to series)**	***Shurafāt* (Balconies)**
Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar Birds of Caution	1996 (2000)	
Tifl al-mimḥāt Eraser Child	2000	
Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ Olives of the Streets	2002	
Aʿrās Āmina Amina's Weddings *Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā* Under the Midmorning Sun	2004	
	2005	*Shurfat al-hadhayān* Balcony of Delirium
Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ Time of White Horses	2007	
	2009	*Shurfat rajul al-thalj* Balcony of the Snow Man
	2010	*Shurfat al-‘ār* Balcony of Disgrace
Qanādīl malik al-jalīl Lanterns of the King of Galilee	2012	
	2013	*Shurfat al-hāwiya* Balcony of the Abyss
Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ Just the Two of Us	1991 (2014)	
	2014	*Shurfat al-firdaus* Balcony of Paradise
Arwāḥ Kilimanjārū Souls of Kilimanjaro	2015 (tbc)	
	2016	*Harb al-kalb al-thāniya* (Dog War II)
Thulāthiyat al-ajrās (Bells Trilogy) *Ẓilāl al-mafātīḥ* Shadow of the Keys *Sīrat al-ʿayn* Biography of the Eye *Dabbāba taḥata shajarat ʿīd al-milād* Tank beneath the Christmas tree	2019	

"was initially two volumes, but I put it into one book . . . [because] Younis [a protagonist] was dying from the beginning," a fact that he felt knit together the different stories. *Gate of the Sun* was an epic told over two sections that Khoury ultimately bound together. It was an epic, however, that Khoury would come to revise in what he calls a three-part sequel titled *Children of the Ghetto* (*Awlād al-ghītū*),[20] whose protagonist, Adam, claims to have known the characters in *Gate of the Sun* and criticizes them for—among other things—abandoning their politics. The new trilogy thus revises and extends *Gate of the Sun* and is itself told over multiple volumes. Khoury explains, "I want to explore all of the possibilities of [Adam's] life,"[21] a quest that required an expanded and expansive way of telling. Writing a story over three volumes was "not my choice," he insists; "I would not have chosen to write like that. I'm not Naguib Mahfouz and I don't like the style of Mahfouz in the trilogy." Yet, he adds, the story of Palestine "couldn't be done in one volume."[22]

Mahfouz, likely the most well-known and widely read Arab novelist, is famous for his national novel, which is also a trilogy. His Cairo Trilogy[23] is hailed as the "canonical national allegory" of Arabic literature.[24] Critics seem to have passed over the implications of a national narrative being drawn out across three distinct texts. The Trilogy's tracing of Egyptian politics across three generations of the Abdel Jawad family through the critical years of state formation from 1914 to 1944 has been called a work of "vast historical scope" and complicated national political allegory.[25] At the same time, its telling of politics through the different vantages found in each volume eschews the teleological, complicating the construction of an easy coming-of-age narrative for the nation. The Trilogy lays out a story of complicated negotiation on which a nation is balanced (or, perhaps, unsettled). If the prototype of nationhood in the Arab world has a complicated relationship with the form of the state when it comes to fiction (and, indeed, politics), it seems hardly surprising that Palestine-in-fiction would need a unique shape too.

Beyond Palestine, Peter Hitchcock in *The Long Space* identified in the series "a crucial chronotope of decolonization."[26] Not only, he elaborated, do series allow for a full exploration of different elements or locations of a transnational or multilingual experience, but "these extended narratives extenuate time's purchase on their comprehension,"[27] so that not only was narrative practice imagined anew, but reading and understanding were transformed—both could happen over what he termed "the long space." Hitchcock saw, for example, in Assia Djebar's Algerian Quartet and Pramoedya Toer's Buru Quartet a trend in which postcolonial nations could be imagined in all their complexity. The series, he found, gave authors the "long space" necessary to communicate the importance of duration and crossings that a single novel seemed to limit. Djebar's Quartet provides an interesting case in point. It is a national project in the sense that the works are meant "to reestablish links with the maternal world from which [the author] felt distant" after leaving Algeria for France with her family.[28] In a sense, the series imagines Algeria together with its exiles as a single imaginative space. The final volume of the quartet was never written,[29] and thus the final image of the nation is left open for continued interpretation.

The series can also write political formations beyond the nation. Radwa Ashour's Granada Trilogy conjures a Pan-Arab world in a story that sought to reckon with its collapse and "cope with defeat."[30] Her work fits well with Hitchcock's assessment that the series works as a tool for telling the nation where the nation form doesn't quite work. The device, he writes, is "bound to the concrete predicaments of postcolonial narration as transnational critique."[31] But it also goes further. The series can imagine nations with a complex relationship to the state, as a way of grappling with competing problematic structures. This is certainly its use in Nasrallah's works. Once his effort to write *the* national novel had taken shape as a series, the idea of Palestine was suddenly released from the confines of the nation as a bounded and linear idea.

SERIES AS CONTAINER

The idea of Palestine as a series is reinforced by the themes and characters of the novels that make up the Palestine Project. We saw this in Salwa, whose discovery of the possibility for expression in the series served as an introduction to the literary device. It is worth, now that the basics are set out, returning to the scene where Salwa discovers *Don Quixote*, Dante, and the Hilāl works to see how expansive the notion of the series is and to read more closely into her life and context. As the introduction established, Salwa's story was impossible to tell in the context of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon in the 1970s. Her community simply did not have the means to hear it. This impossibility is examined in more literal terms through the character of Abd al-Rahman, a Lebanese journalist who learns about Salwa in a short newspaper article about PLO corruption.

Abd al-Rahman becomes determined to find Salwa and tell her story. Of course, he does not want to tell her story exactly but the story of her sexual assault at the hands of a leadership meant to protect her. Her story is, for him, a story of PLO corruption. The central tension of *Olives of the Streets* is Salwa's struggle to have the journalist actually tell *her* story, since she has already given up on being able to tell it herself. Just like her community could not hear her, so were Abd al-Rahman's ears blocked—but not by the same existential narrative. For the journalist it was genre and the way he planned on telling Salwa's story that got in the way. In the news story about PLO corruption Salwa was just one of a list of sins, and in a biography—which the journalist spends the length of the novel trying to write—he wants to tell how Salwa was turned into an assault victim. In both, her life as she knows it is erased. On reading a draft, Salwa is compelled to throw the pages out the window, telling the journalist, "If I hadn't cast out these papers I would have died under them" (7). Neither of these forms can hold her story. The idea of the series offered an expansive alternative.

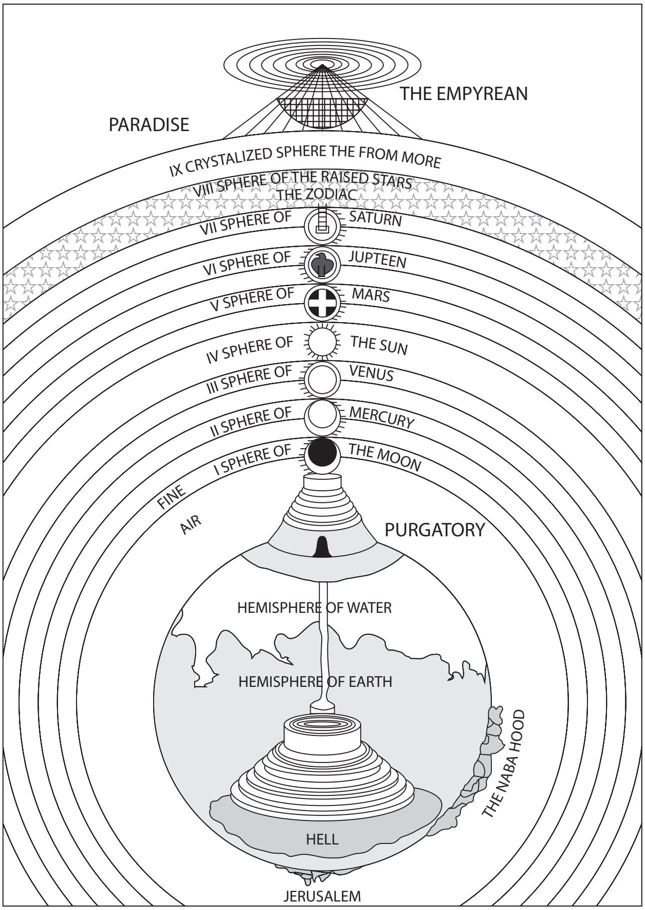
It was no coincidence, however, that Sawla picked up *Purgatory*, the middle work of Dante's *Divine Comedies*. Within the wider rhetoric of the Palestinian struggle, Palestinian refugees living in the camps are understood to be living in a sort of middle space of waiting.[32] As Salwa remarks in the novel, the keys that many of the refugees held on to, and the Haifa Steel Workers card that her uncle keeps in his pocket (102), are meaningless except as markers of the past to which there is a hope of return. There is "nothing real" to existence in the camps, Salwa lamented, "except us, waiting for ourselves" (13), unless the purgatory of the camps can be considered a place, a time of Palestine; unless the camps might be understood as connected to the story of Palestine and not an interminable aside. So as Salwa comes across *The Divine Comedy* and remarks, "I didn't understand the title, but put my hand out toward *Inferno*, [then] *Purgatory*, I liked it best of the books, and I opened it," she reads into the pages of *Olives of the Streets*, and the already established Palestine Comedies series, a key moment of connection. When she flips through the pages, she chooses a passage that marked the first instance of imagining a link between the Christian heaven, hell, and purgatory as physically connected spheres.

Let me provide some context (which is in fact another hallmark of intertextuality, since no work can be brought into another without bringing its own times and spaces with it). When it was produced in fourteenth-century Italy, Dante's trilogy (referred to in the novels as *al-Kūmīdiya*) caused a bit of a stir. It was the first Christian imagination of scientific and theological connection between the celestial realms.[33] Before Dante, heaven, hell, and purgatory had only been ideologically linked; there had been no depiction or figuration of what a relationship might have looked like or how it could be talked about. In tracing the character Dante's journey from the levels of hell and the stages of purgatory and on into heaven, Dante-the-author forged an imaginative—and geographic—path between the spaces. Indeed, in order to narrate movement between, say, the abysmal valley of pain and the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante and his readers had to imagine these geographies into being. By invoking Dante, Nasrallah (by way of Salwa) is telling his readers that here, too, a geography is being imagined.

It is no coincidence, then, that the passage of *Purgatory* that Salwa reads out "loud" into her novel, is one where Dante is stitching together realms of the divine:

> *"As is he who suddenly sees a thing before him whereat he marvels, and doth and doth not believe, saying, 'It is, it is not.'"*
>
> Then I turned to its next pages:
>
> *"And lo! a sudden lustre ran from all quarters through the great forest, so that it put me in suspect of lightning."* (63)[34]

The unmarked lines come from Cantos VII and XXIX. The first is verse 12 of Canto VII, where Dante has just entered purgatory. The words in the quote are spoken


THE EMPYREAN
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VIII SPHERE OF THE RAISED STARS
THE ZODIAC
VII SPHERE OF
SATURN
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JUPTEEN
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IV SPHERE OF
THE SUN
III SPHERE OF
VENUS
II SPHERE OF
MERCURY
I SPHERE OF
THE MOON
FINE
AIR
PURGATORY
HEMISPHERE OF WATER
HEMISPHERE OF EARTH
THE NABA HOOD
HELL
JERUSALEM

FIGURE 1. A visual representation of Dante's celestial realms, rendered in the 1400s by an unknown cartographer based on an interpretation of the narrative trajectory that Dante and Virgil/Beatrice take through Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory.

at the precise point of confluence between hell and purgatory, by Dante's new guide who thinks it miraculous—or in his words, he "doth and doth not believe"—that his guide from hell can pass through into the second world.[35] Not only can Dante move between spheres, but so can his guide, who is witness to the narrative passage. This means that the "stuff" of one realm can also exist in another. That Virgil did not turn to dust or vanish was proof that the worlds were one world. By invoking this passage in the pages of a novel of the Palestine Comedies, Nasrallah tells the reader that new imaginations are possible and that they are demonstrable through narrative.

The second passage Salwa reads out loud seems less straightforward. It comes from Canto XXIX, tens of pages later. Reading, "lo! A sudden lustre," brings the story of Dante to the peak of the Mountain of Purgatory and is the start of a scene in which the journeyers observe an allegorical play. According to critics, the play is performed for Dante-the-character to help him (and Dante-the-author's reader) understand purgatory at a deeper level.[36] In the source text, the "sudden lustre" (in the Arabic, *nūran surra*) that appears as if lightning is in fact a light that literally illuminates a sort of play-within-a-play.[37] We thus come to a play within a text (*Purgatory*) that is an allegory within a series (*al-Kūmīdiya*). Readings of the allegorical play have suggested that the instance is a moment of clarity not simply in *Purgatory*, but in the *Divine Comedy*, that illuminates a particular vision of the cosmos and the nature of god.[38] Nasrallah, then, draws on a teaching moment to indicate that he is offering one of his own.

According to its critics, the play in Dante's Canto XXIX is a dense representation of the lessons and themes of the Scriptures, presented in purgatory in the final stage before reaching heaven. This is a reaffirmation of sorts of the veracity of the scriptures; transmitted stories of the heavens written down by people on earth. That what is said to be the word of god is affirmed in the celestial realm reiterates the relationship between belief in god and the afterlife.[39] This links not only the three celestial spheres, but the world of "man"—and it demonstrates the sustained connection. The earth and the heavens, even beyond the celestial realms, are brought into a single geography. This moment of illumination, the precise exclamation of "a sudden lustre [that] ran through all quarters of the great forest," urges readers to read the story of *Olives of the Streets* not only into the works of the Palestine Comedies but also into the world they inhabit as they are reading. The allegorical play works simultaneously as a metaphor for how intertexts (from a play-within-a-play to the device of the series) forge a wider spatial consciousness and can create links between the world and how one understands the way one navigates one's way through it.

Through *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*, the nature of the relationships, and indeed the ways and means of movement between heaven, hell, and purgatory, became figurable. Where once these spaces were understood as separate, or even not conceived spatially at all, Dante's imagination saw figures moving between the layers of the afterlife, connecting them in ways that would change the hereafter into a single contiguous and multilayered space. The intimation is that the same can be done for Salwa and Palestine: both nation and character are in different ways singular bodies whose telling requires the service of multiple texts. While Dante's *Divine Comedy* aims to illuminate the path to salvation, the Palestine Comedies uses text and intertext to create new relationships between stories, their times, and their spaces. While characters from Dante's texts moved between worlds, the larger passage within which the cantos of *Purgatory* are quoted reminds the reader that there are many ways of linking texts beyond the repetition of character.

In fact, when Salwa looks at her teacher's bookshelves, it is not just works with repeating characters like *Don Quixote* or the *Divine Comedy* that she registers. To more fully quote the passage:

> There were more books than in the school library, more books than I had seen in my life, numbered series of books: the novels of the Hilāl publishers, Hilāl's critical editions, world literature, international plays . . . and between them the most surprising, *Don Quixote*, which I had never imagined was in two volumes! [Then] there were two I did not understand, and I put my hands out toward them: *Hell, Purgatory* . . . (63)

There are referenced here several types of series, the creation of which—and engagement with which—communicates a different sort of relationship between texts and between reader and text. *Al-Hilāl*, for example, is an Egyptian literary magazine founded by Jurji Zaydan. The series would have been recognizable by what Genette called "the series emblem."[40] The series was something of the equivalent of the Penguin "classics," where works in orange or silver jackets are recognized as important whether or not the title is known to a prospective reader. The works of the Hilāl series, in the words of Genette, "fit a certain 'profile,'"[41] in this case of desired or deemed useful knowledge. In Arabic literary history, these works defined what it meant to be "well read" in the "modern" era. This series-by-emblem connects the texts by their profile—a profile that a publisher decides and gatekeeps. What is or is not canonical, or worth reading in a particular genre, is signaled. A series, then, can collectively communicate the importance of the works within it—importance that also seems to transcend place and time.

This is certainly what Nasrallah's Palestine Comedies achieve. Not only do two series emblems create a Palestine that transcends space and time, but they together create a conceptual container for this novel nation. In reading the texts of the two series, this imaginative space becomes quickly populated with new ideals and vocabularies to explain and narrate this particular vision of Palestine.

2

Al-Muthannā

> *It didn't report I was dead. That means I'm still alive. I examine the parts of my body and find them all there. Two eyes* [ʿaynayn]*, two ears* [udhnayn]*, a long nose, ten toes below, ten fingers above, a finger in the middle.*
>
> —MAHMOUD DARWISH, *MEMORY FOR FORGETFULNESS*

If it is all very good to think of Palestine as a series, we still might wonder: How does that work, really? What does it do? What does one "text" of Palestine mean in relation to its others? What are we actually to make of this idea from the Palestine Project? This chapter begins an answer. It looks at the use of *al-muthannā*, the Arabic grammatical principle of the dual. This way of encoding a relationship between entities is explored as a device, a method of relationship, and a foundation of relations that knit the "texts" of Nasrallah's Palestine together. The dual codes for a "pair," as in the Darwish quote above, adding an *ayn* to a noun to indicate that there are two things in a single relationship. In literature, the dual is much more than simply a code for the number of objects. A common trope of Arabic poetics,[1] the dual signifies an indelible connection, where one element might exist as a single entity but is unimaginable without the simultaneous conjuring of a second element. Two elements functioning as one—like a pair of eyes, of hands, of lovers. The function of the device is manifold and is built across several works in the Palestine Project. This begins with a set of twins but expands to capture the unique relationship between pairs more broadly (doubles) and then broadens further to encompass the relationship of members in community. *Al-muthannā* becomes a way of expressing a simultaneous singularity and multiplicity and is used to express relations in the nation.

Take the example of a pair of lovers. Composed of two distinct individuals, in their love they become a pair *ʿāshiqayn* (two lovers), like, say, Layla and Majnūn, Noor and Mohannad, Brad and Jennifer. The relationship forged between the two is particular—legendary, popular, or perhaps infamous. The connection and its meaning (forged out of the coming together of two parts) often outlive the individual elements. The same, in a sense, goes for a hug (two arms) or a kiss (two lips); the thing (the hug, the kiss) brought of the pair (of arms, of lips) is separate but part of the pair itself and only possible through the parallel action of both. In Nasrallah's works, this many-in-one relationship complicates the broad strokes of the series-as-container. The dual shows one of the many ways that texts within the series can be related and, most importantly, how this relationship persists across both space and time.

Explored here and later in the conclusion, *al-muthannā* marks a fundamental logical principle of relationship in Nasrallah's Palestine. It is a way of understanding how things function as one/many. Thinking through the dual offers a fundamental shift, as Adania Shibli has observed separately, from the dominant configurations of the nation as an ethnonational entity whose foundational binary is I/other. With the dual, as Shibli has described it, emphasis shifts to "I/us."[2] Rather than the nation as a category of exclusion, the focus here is how (what) elements are related. The ramifications of this grammatical shift are profound. For example, *al-muthannā* builds on and gives national structure and meaning to exilic and diasporic lamentations of hybridity, of what Edward Said called "out of place"-ness, where his one/many identity can be nationally meaningful rather than understood as a "lack" or absence that is doubled (not Palestinian, not American).[3] The paradigm of the dual gives a vocabulary of belonging, not only for people-across-spaces but also, as is later explored, the spaces themselves and the "events" that happen within and across them.

The dual, however, takes work—as analysis will show. The first example, of the twin girl characters in *Amina's Weddings* (*A ʿrās āmina*),[4] provides an ideal model. This replicates exactly the dual as Shibli described it: "*Al-muthanna* does not perceive the other as non-I or as a person that is a copy of I, and it is not a higher synthesis/unity of the two."[5] However, as the second example goes on to show, the different parts of *al-muthannā* exist in a world that is full of power imbalances, which complicate the smooth operation of the I/us relationship. The second section of this chapter looks at the sort of work it takes to keep the I/us in balance, through a story of its failure in *Amina's Weddings*' twin text, *Under the Midmorning Sun* (*Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā*), and its two sets of pairs that end up in a very uneven triangle. The final section goes back to the work of balance but shows how this I/us relation can expand past the pair/dual/twin and include the multiple bodies/spaces/texts of Palestine.

THE TWINS

The ideal *al-muthannā* is achieved in Nasrallah's works through the figure of the twin. In 2004 Nasrallah published a book in the Palestine Comedies under the title:

> *ʾĀrās ʾāmina*
> *Taḥta shams al-ḍuḥā:*
> *Riwāyatān*

[Amina's weddings
Under the midmorning sun:
A pair of novels][6]

Under the title was a subtitle, *riwāyatān*, in which the dual *-an* indicated that there were, in the bound volume, in fact two novels. These works were distinct: no two characters were repeated between them, they were set in different locations, and they each developed their own ideas and symbols. Yet, in being combined in a single bound volume, they were somehow required to be read as one. The "first" novel, *Amina's Weddings* (which can also be translated as "safe weddings," a double meaning that the text plays with), was marked out with its own title page a few leafs after the publisher information. The same was true for the second, *Under the Midmorning Sun*, which was marked not only with a different title, but different art below it. The images on the two internal title covers were distinct from the image on the "main" cover. The first took place in the Gaza Strip and the second in the West Bank, both set during the Second Intifada. Read together, the works told the story of the Intifada, which happened across discrete locations but was manifest as a single event (a single bound volume). Through Intifada, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank become a pair, *al-muthannā*. The territories are linked despite being territorially separated. This was two stories, one book. At least at first.

In later editions, the novels were published separately in discrete bound volumes, with nary a mention of their shared past. Their connection was indicated only with the series title, Palestine Comedies, on the spine. Readers picking up a new edition would never know that the works had once shared a title. If you ask Nasrallah, he would say that by putting the novels in a single bound volume the wrong signal was sent that one should be read "first."[7] In separating the stories across two bound volumes, he explains, a better balance was achieved; each story could emerge as it should, without order or hierarchy. This was the second example (after the twins) of a successful dual presented by the two works. The twins were such a powerful *al-muthannā* that when one twin died the other was able to keep her memory alive by pretending to be the other sister from time to time. In order to prevent one story from consuming the other (as happened when the dual became unbalanced in *Under the Midmorning Sun* and one protagonist ends up killing the other), they had to be recognized as separate-yet-connected. It is not just producing an "us," then, that the works signal as important, but the *creation* of "us" alongside its discrete parts. Moving through this process in turns, we examine the twins, the uneven set of doubles, and the work of balance to keep the dual operational.

Nasrallah's twins provide the ideal *al-muthannā*. Randa and Lamis are identical, one embryo that cleaved and created two bodies indistinguishable in appearance. Described as "a *fūl* bean that split" (31),[8] they are two distinct bodies that can be read and interpreted at once as an "I" and an "us." The girls began life as one entity and will forever be associated with those early weeks as a single cluster of cells. This unity haunts all aspects of their lives, so that the experiences of one twin are automatically read into those of the other. While they are identical in appearance, the personalities of the two young women are distinctly different. Randa is a writer, an intrepid, and her actions depict someone adventurous and outgoing. Lamis, on the other hand, stays close to home, is sensitive and timid. But the girls often feel "stuck" in the individual social personalities that their bodies have been assigned. Randa does not always feel brave, or Lamis timid. Both women resist being defined *only* by their individual biographies. They use the fact of their identical appearances to expand these limited roles. The fact of *al-muthannā*—that they exist socially as a unit—actually expands their personal possibilities.

At several points the girls exchange social roles: one twin takes on the social life of the other. For example, Randa, days after her sister witnesses the murder of their neighbor, urges the timid and reserved Lamis to take on her more outgoing personality. Lamis had seen their young neighbor shot dead by soldiers at an Israeli checkpoint, and while she had tried to save him all she could do in the end was look on, helpless. Randa writes of Lamis:

> She became sad, so sad that she could no longer bear it, so I said to her, "Lamis, if you want me to be Lamis for a day, or two, or ten, until you feel a little better, then I will be." And she said to me, "I wanted to say the same words to you, because you are much more sad than I am; you haven't even cried." (40)

Each girl sees the other suffering and suggests that being able to grieve or stop grieving will help the other in the days after the killing. In other words, they suggest that the "I" take refuge in the "us." They can be better, healthier as individuals when they can mobilize the collective and escape the roles they have taken on/been assigned from time to time. Here Randa's characteristics, the traits that mark her as Randa, become available for Lamis and vice versa.

This special relationship exceeds the lives of the girls. This becomes painfully clear when Lamis is killed. Randa is of course devastated but also faces a critical loss. She has spent her life as part of *al-muthannā*, as part of a duality constituted by the existence of another element. In order to keep the collective—and her whole self—alive, Randa refuses to tell anyone which of the girls has died. Claiming to be Lamis at times and Randa at others becomes a way, not so much to deny the loss, but to maintain the whole that also constitutes her. So long as Randa claims to be Lamis, the collective space of the twin remains, and Randa retains the ability to include the collective within herself. When challenged about this behavior, Randa insists, "I want people to know that she didn't die" (136); in other words, the world that *al-muthannā* created has remained beyond the life of she who helped constitute it. As Ghassan Kanafani's brother put it, "The sibling is a part of you [*al-akh al-shaqīq*],"[9] even after death. Once conjured into existence, *al-muthannā* exists even beyond its constituent parts. As a grammar of the nation, the dual describes how discrete and distinct entities become part of an irreducible larger unit. Through the dual the "texts" (or I's) of Palestine remain part of the nation long after the individual parts have ceased to exist on their own.

DOUBLES

Through *al-muthannā* the magical bond of the twin is appropriated for the national collective. Beyond the scenario of identicality, however, the "parts" of *al-muthannā* are not always "equal." In Nasrallah's novels, the double expands the idea of the twin and explores what can happen when the parts of *al-muthannā* are out of balance. There is here a certain degree of pedagogy on the idea, as when Salwa reads the *Divine Comedy* to show readers the possibilities of the series. In this case, however, teaching happens as a warning. In the story of *Under the Midmorning Sun, al-muthannā* becomes a hierarchy, with powerful parts subsuming the "us" into their "I" and then claiming to represent the collective. This happens twice, once in the figure of a corrupt theater director who subsumes the energy and ideas of his assistant, an aspiring actor. The second is a repetition, where the aspiring actor eventually takes over the personality of a former fighter he has written a play about. It is because of the oppression of the writer by the theater director that the writer seeks to oppress the fighter. The unevenness is repeated, passed down the chain. The lesson teaches readers that in *al-muthannā*, parts must always remain distinct and in balance if they are to remain at once "I" and "us" and therefore part of the nation.

A story of the failure of *al-muthannā* unfolds over the uneven and dangerous politics of post-Oslo Ramallah. The Oslo Accords had signed a Palestinian Authority (PA) government into existence; the leader of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, had shaken the hand of Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres on the White House lawn, concluding one phase of the 1990s Peace Process. Ramallah had been declared the de facto capital, and huge bundles of aid dollars poured in to support the would-be state. The PLO became the PA, a pseudo-government of a hoped-for nation-state. Local organizations were displaced by a government made up of "returnees," which was beholden to a set of unfinished negotiations that left the exercise of sovereignty to an undetermined future. This precarious imbalance is reflected in *Under the Midmorning Sun*'s three main characters: a former *fidāʾī* (freedom fighter), Yasin; a Ramallah native and general "nobody," Salim; and a theater director known only as al-Duktūr (the Doctor).

It isn't clear where al-Duktūr is "from," or what he does beyond run the theater and schmooze with the new Ramallah elite (from which he apparently gets cash to run the theater). The man is cruel and constantly puts Salim (the actor and writer) down, calling him ineffective and irrelevant. Salim, for his part, is alone. Though a

Ramallah native, he is the last of his family in the city; everyone else has emigrated abroad, and he has been entrusted (left with the burden of) the family home to maintain. He has found no role in the new government and says of his life that it passed "without flavor or soul" (25). Until he meets Yasin. Hearing the tale of the former fighter, Salim gets the idea to write the man's story into a play, a monologue about the trials and tribulations of a man he sees as a quintessential Palestinian hero. As he writes the play, Salim feels the "door to life" (25) open. He has "fallen under the spell of a character" (21) and goes on to produce the play despite Yasin's objections. The mistreated Salim admits to himself that this is because he "wanted to play [Yasin's] role on stage, or in truth, in life!" (21). This is the reddest of the red flags indicating that *al-muthannā* is out of balance.

The next warning sign comes through the appearance of a Scandinavian theater troupe and their workshop on Bertolt Brecht's idea of estrangement. Salim utterly dismisses al-Duktūr's suggestion that he rewrite the monologue along the rules of "Brecht's book *The Theory of Epic Theatre*" (21). Hardly a novel theory on the Ramallah stage, estrangement as a tool of political engagement had been taken up enthusiastically in the 1980s by Ramallah's Balaleen theater troupe.[10] In Brecht's words, "The aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident [so that] the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite *gest* of showing."[11] For Salim, this would mean to stage the fighter critically and encourage the audience to ask questions about the nature of the character and its performance. This is precisely what Salim does not want. He wants to perform the trope of the hero, and to take on the role.

While al- Duktūr suggests the idea to belittle Salim, the young man's total rejection relates as much to finding a way out from under the thumb of the director as it does his desire to inhabit Yasin. As the playwright reflected to himself following al-Duktūr's suggestion, "He could not talk about Yasin in the third person as Brecht explained," because the way he had imagined the performance "from the beginning was [about] the format of speaking, as if it was Yasin al-Asmar who would take over the body of Salim Nasri on the stage, not the opposite" (22). The technique of estrangement would force a critical distance between actor and subject and ask audience members to see and be critical of the unequal dynamics at work in representation.

In an ideal scenario, Salim would have asked what story Yasin wanted to tell. Yasin would have (as chapter 8 details) urged his fellow citizens to take up a new fight and redefine the ideal of the hero. Instead, Salim turns Yasin into a calcified symbol of a glorified fighter that neglects all of Yasin's personal experiences. Salim in no way respects, listens to, or interacts with Yasin as he writes the play. Failure to create a critical atmosphere of estrangement is seen as the drive to subsume the other. This comes across powerfully in the novel, as Salim is so intent on becoming his version of Yasin that when the real Yasin is arrested by the Israeli military the playwright's first thought is, "What if Yasin was killed in prison? What if he died under torture?" (15). His wondering is not concern. Rather, with Yasin out of the way there is no one to object to Salim continuing to perform the play, no longer just in Yasin's village, but "in the heart of Ramallah" (119). With no one the wiser, Salim starts to limp when outside of the theater, emulating Yasin's gait, altered by his first experience of Israeli torture in prison. Salim also increasingly forgets to remove the gray hair spray, which makes him look like Yasin—not thirty-something, but like a man in his sixties. When an adoring fan asks, "I want your signature, but not with your name Salim Nasri, but rather with the name of the character you portray" (155), Salim obliges. When someone asks if the character of the monologue is based on someone else, Salim declares, "There is only one Yasin in the theatre, in the world!" (157)—meaning himself. He takes over the idea of Yasin while the real Yasin is being held in a cell.

Circumstance provides one last opportunity for Salim to integrate the voice of his double into the play—to realize *al-muthannā* and avoid a collapse of the I/us relationship. One night when Salim remains on stage after the close of the monologue, he hears a voice ring out in the empty hall and is unsure if what he hears is his own voice adlibbing on stage or if the voice is Yasin's. Salim wonders if Yasin has been released from prison and if it is in fact his voice in the audience that Salim has heard. If this voice is his own, Salim is not sure if the words are his or "if he had heard them from Yasin a long time ago" (159). He is forgetting where he ends and Yasin begins. Unlike the relationship between Randa and Lamis, Salim cannot—does not want to—keep the two "I's" distinct. The next night, the same thing occurs. As before, Salim speaks not knowing if it is him, his memory of Yasin, or Yasin himself who utters the words. The grammar of the text keeps the "true" source obscure:

> A voice erupted from the darkness of the audience: Did you forget the role? . . .
> It sounds like my voice, Yasin said.
> It sounds like his voice, Salim said. (171–72)

Meanwhile, the reader learns that Yasin has in fact been released from prison. He *is* in the audience, where he "found his second self on the stage without having ascended to it" (119). Watching Salim perform, Yasin "saw nothing but his own movements [on the stage,] he felt he was seeing a ghost who looked like him but did not look like him" (171). Yasin is unsure if he should intervene in the hope that making himself present in the theater would break the illusion that Salim had created. Terrified that his illusion of possession will be broken, Salim kills Yasin in the street later that evening, taking on the persona of the fighter (rather than any actual life of Yasin) and obliterating both his own and Yasin's experiences in the process. *Al-muthannā* has collapsed entirely—but not for the reader.

The final pages of the novel move rapidly. Barely has the reader had time to sort out who was speaking in the theater when Yasin leaves the building, angry, confused, and disoriented. He is having a hard time reconciling his own memories of his past self, his role as a fighter, and the new challenges that continuing resistance to occupation and oppression has been met with in this new Ramallah. Before he reaches any conclusion, the aging fighter, just released from prison, is thrown from his feet by an explosion. Israeli military vehicles have entered the city to put down the uprising, which is as much against the continued occupation as it is the failure of the Oslo Accords to realize a nation-state. Caught in the fire, Yasin is left "on the edge of death" (175). On the ground and trapped under a car, Yasin sees Salim, who has finally closed the playhouse. The actor approaches his muse. Yasin smiles, assuming he will be rescued. Salim hesitates, still wearing his costume and stage makeup, so he perfectly resembles Yasin. He then takes out a gun, which al-Duktūr has furnished him with, and "point[s] its tip toward the middle of that smile, the shot of the gun explode[s], and that smile got wider before it drifted away to nothing" (175). The representation of the fighter has won, and the actual fighter is erased.

The pair—writer and muse—would thus have become one in the person of Salim if it weren't for the reader who has seen the drama unfold. The reader, despite or even because of Salim's rejection of a position of distance, of estrangement, has witnessed all aspects of the collapse of the dual and because of this can keep the many figures separate. The reader sees the inequalities at work and can hold these imbalances within the I/us of the nation. While it is difficult at times to understand who says what, it is simple to see Yasin (a character, a play, a man, a prisoner, a fighter, a lover, a returnee) as distinct and related to Salim (the actor, the playwright, the recorder of memories). The question of "who" the characters are at any one moment becomes an issue of the identity being claimed, not one of what they are, distinct but related.

The question of who claims to be what in the context of post-Oslo Ramallah leads inevitably to the question of new government and national representation. The text represents the failure of the PLO to account for diverse national experiences in its new political role as Palestinian Authority. This is al-Duktūr and his presentation of power and authority, which tells Salim he is worthless. It is also the new PA that has channeled the figure of the fighter into the role of the bureaucrat, turning the actual fighters into calcified icons for the sake of creating Palestine as a state.[12] The novel is actually exploring the failure of the PA in its efforts to collapse all of the parts of Palestine into a single teleological representation. The call to read the "play" of the new government through a position of estrangement is one that rehabilitates all of the other parts of Palestine to the national story. It is only through estrangement that the men are separated once again into two unequal parts, trapped in a deathly relationship but—at least—separate so that they can both remain part of a larger national configuration along with the warning that their story encodes. To maintain *al-muthannā*, hierarchies must be acknowledged and taken on as part of a story.

COLLECTIVES

Al-muthannā expands beyond the relationship between individuals when the idea is read across both *Amina's Weddings* and *Under the Midmorning Sun*. Brought into conversation, lessons from one and ideals from the other show how the paradigm of the twin can be balanced across a larger group of people. This happens in both life and death but is always categorized by a sustained balance, where the essence of *al-muthannā* persists over time, even as the individuals who constituted it may come and go. Successful collectives are maintained through the critical gaze of estrangement, so that no member becomes or claims the group as constituent of their "I," thus allowing the I/us to remain in balance.

The first time such a collective is conjured is in *Amina's Weddings* when Randa relates the story of two men, killed together in an Israeli air strike. Though they are two bodies, they become one victim in death, as mourners are unable to distinguish the remains of one man from the other. The description of the aftermath of the strike is gruesomely poignant but shows how, like life, common death can unite individuals into a "whole," creating a collective that confers new and different meaning on all of the individuals involved. The incident is different from the death of the twin or the murder of Yasin, because it is generated by an experience that the two men undergo simultaneously. The experience is the context that unites them, and it is the experience and its ramifications for the identities of the men that the text is concerned with.

Family, community, and onlookers mourn the double tragedy but also seek to honor the two men separately in death. Given the religious necessity to be buried "whole," however, the question arises as to how this might be possible. Randa works through this as she participates in the community mourning:

> We spent two days scrubbing [their remains] off the walls and roofs of the houses. When we gathered them into bags, we realized we couldn't tell the flesh of one from the other. We asked ourselves; why not bury them in one grave? They [the community] refused. But tell me Aunt Amina, isn't it better? Why should the martyrs work to find their body parts from another grave on the day of judgement? (56)

The two men are "united" in the experience of the air strike, a reality made inescapable as the bodies become a "single flesh." The air strike has reversed their separate beings into one metaphorical body, a reversal of the *fūl* bean. The men cannot forever be reduced to this one final experience, however. The prospect concerns Randa as she thinks about what will happen next for them.

Islamic practice holds that a man will not be "whole" in paradise if he is not whole in the grave. It is also the duty of a Muslim to ensure that members of the community have a proper burial. In the context of contemporary Palestine, this has come to create a collective responsibility to collect the flesh of those torn apart by military violence. What the community decided, Randa explains, is to collect the bodies of the men and separate them into two graves. As she picks up the pieces, Randa wonders if it would not be more of a violence to try to artificially separate the parts of the tragic union. The two men are one, she concludes, and not for "man" to separate. Her own reading is that the men must remain as a collective until an unknown point in the future (or indeed, in the imagination), when they can reclaim their own selves—in their case, before god. Their stories are tied, they are individuals but a whole, and harm would be done separating them. Built in, however, is the idea that, at the appropriate time, the men will resume distinct existence.

Just when or how individuals become individuals after they are brought together in a collective is explained and expanded in an extended scene that takes place almost in the background of *Amina's Weddings*' main action. In the last chapters of the book, Amina hears a news report about another man hit by an Israeli strike. The details of the victim lead her to believe—to be certain—that it is her husband, Jamal, who has been killed. She goes to the hospital to identify his body and collect it for burial. When she gets there, however, she finds the body unrecognizable. The doctor tells her there are twenty other women who claim that he belongs to them. Amina and the doctor have the following exchange:

> —He's my husband.
> —Twenty women have come to see him and said he was their husband.
> —Twenty women? No, Jamal has only one wife and that's me. (90)

Funerals for the unidentified man, Randa narrates, are held across the Gaza Strip (92), with each of the twenty women insisting that the body is that of their missing husband, brother, or son. Amina, who even after Jamal's death continues to narrate her chapters *to* him, reflects, "They didn't know if you were you or if you were someone else, some other martyr" (92). While tragic, and certainly emblematic of the wider tragedy under way in the Gaza Strip, uncertainty about the identity of the martyr forges a shared experience between the twenty-one women who claim him as a relative—as if they all join a single family, a collective, as a result.

The twenty-one women, each believed to be the intimate family member of the unidentifiable man, gather as a collective each day in the graveyard where the body is buried. The twenty-one women become one woman: the mother of the fighter, the widow, and the bereaved. They are, in a sense, Ghassan Kanafani's paradigmatic character, the woman who crystallized the "mother of the fighter" figure, Umm Saad (a figure to whom we return in chapter 6). But, crucially, they also remain their own selves, not solely identified by their relationship with a dead Palestinian youth. This multiplicity-in-singularity becomes apparent when, one by one, the women either find the bodies of their missing husbands, their brothers return home for a brief visit before going into hiding again, or turn up injured in the hospital. Many of the women realize that the buried man is not their loved one. The numbers of mourners at the grave quickly reduces to twelve, but these remaining women continue to practice the ritualized community formed around collective loss, holding the space open that had been created by the original twenty-one. When one of the younger women, who had stopped attending the grave returns one day sobbing, feeling guilty that she had left, the remaining mourners intervene. A woman explains to Amina that her fiancé had returned, and she had cried for joy, but she then felt guilty about her happiness while there were so many women still at the grave. She promises to continue coming to the cemetery, asking the other women, "How can I go and leave you by yourselves?" (96). The other women, however, tell her, "Don't come back" (96), and to remain with life instead of being tied to death.

While one woman's grief had helped create a community, the community remains despite her leaving it and is not weakened by her departure. So, although the women are united by death, becoming the strong specter of the "mother of the fighter," they are not bound to the symbol. When it is time for life, they say, the shadow must be cast off. Collectives, the examples intimate, codify relationship forged through a moment, or an event, that affects any number of people. This moment is elevated from any of the individuals within it, so that they can stop being constituted by it, and the collective remains. As the example of the women shows, an individual can participate in the event even later, "after" it has taken place. The collective created through the happening no longer needs individuals to sustain it and is not limited to a particular set. For both the slain men and the bereaved women, that moment must not imprison or delimit either the self or others. Those brought into a collective must be kept in balance with all of the other moments and collectives an individual has constituted, passed through, or remains within. These collectives form elements of the nation. They are brought into being and maintained in a delicate balance of forces.

3

Accumulating Meaning

The Palestine conjured in Nasrallah's two linked series is not held within a single bounded geography, so its elements cannot be structured into a linear temporal order. Time, instead, is accumulated, pulled into the national network of "texts" (individuals, collectives, locations, happenings, etc.) through the establishment of relationship (like that of *al-muthannā*). This chapter looks closely at the process of accumulation, how it functions through and alongside the idea of space as discontiguous and, perhaps most importantly, how it determines the parameters for what is included in the texts of Palestine. What, analysis asks, determines whether or not a given "text" is or is not taken as a Palestinian text? Indeed, if the space and time of the nation are—or could theoretically be—everywhere and any time, how do you know what is or is not Palestine? The principle of accumulation sets out its own parameters, based on its own tautologies and processes. In literary terms, the question is one of the coherence of elements, among them space and time. Bakhtin's notion of the literary chronotope is useful here as a way of understanding the connections that happen with accumulation. In different genres, Bakhtin wrote, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole."[1] As the Russian structuralist explained it, the basis on which these indicators fuse "determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well."[2] It also determines the vision of the world that this "man" walks within.

Time (and its spaces) in the Palestine Project is accumulated somewhat in the manner of Walter Benjamin's angel of history. This angel observes time and sees it as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet." In this figuration, time is imagined as a "pile of debris" and not at all an ordered unit.[3] Benjamin never specified whether this pile accumulated time chronologically, so that the oldest was on the bottom and the newest on the top, but in the accumulated time of the Palestine Project, the pile has no order, and the "wreckage" is "hurled" at the pile from across space and time. Things are not so much thrown in by an invisible and external force but pulled through the establishment of relation. Just how is the subject of the first section, "Chronotope of Accumulation," below. The chapter's second section looks at the angel, or, in the terms set forth in Nasrallah's fiction, the witness—that figure who determines what is "seen," what is accumulated in the "pile of debris" that constitutes the sum total of national texts. The final section details how the "pile"—like the Palestine Comedies series—never "ends." With an ever-growing body of "texts," the relationships between those texts can grow exponentially. Just as the shape and structure of the Palestine Comedies remains open, and how this totality is understood shifts depending on what that totality is; so too for interpretation and meaning-making when it comes to Palestine.

Thinking the nation as an accumulation of possible elements rather than an ordering logic is something Palestinian authors have struggled to demonstrate for generations. Ghassan Kanafani, in his 1966 *All That's Left to You* (*Mā tabaqqā lakum*), addresses the problem of time, and the expectation that it be rendered in a way that is linear and developmental. The novella precisely "accumulates" time outside of chronology and even makes the clock a character (rather than an organizing principle). The resulting narrative, Kanafani worried, was too challenging for the reader, who expects linearity. In his introduction, Kanafani apologized for the "difficulty implicit in making one's way through a world which is jumbled in this fashion."[4] Of course, the Palestine of Kanafani is only "jumbled" when one tries to see it only in linear terms. Despite concerns about readability, Kanafani pushed his readers, telling them that such a jumble, what Helga Tawil-Souri calls "a disordered experience of geography and space and time,"[5] is "clearly unavoidable if the novel is to tell its story, as I fully intend that it should, in a single burst."[6] To tell Palestinian experience in a way that would not see it as "disordered" does not take a radical leap; it just requires that we read texts on their own terms.

Rather than reading Kanafani's text as one of "fragmentation" and "conflicting lines," as critics have generally described it,[7] reading it on its own terms reveals a construction of national meaning as it functions for his Palestine. In the novella, a pair of siblings fight different yet connected battles simultaneously. The sister confronts Israeli occupation, Palestinian collaboration, and national/religious gender roles in the Gaza Strip. The brother struggles with family expectations, the realities of geopolitics, and the political segmentation of Palestine as he leaves Gaza to find his mother in Jordan. The two constantly push off systems that would limit them as individuals and as a family collective. In one scene the brother literally battles a clock in the desert as he fights for his life, a powerful signification of the suffocating limits imposed on the characters by external forces. Jumping between siblings, into and out of their memories, across space and time, the novella—hardly a representation of postmodern fragmentation as critics suggest—is a face-value portrayal of how Palestine happens. The only reason readers keep calling it "jumbled" is because we have not had the vocabulary to describe what it *is*, only what it is not. It is not simply a "pile" of fragments but a real-time accumulation of Palestinian texts that take on national meaning as they are added to the collection.

This chapter engages a close reading of a single text, to pull apart in minute fashion how it makes national meaning through accumulation. It turns to the first in Nasrallah's Palestine Comedies, the largely autobiographical 1996 *Birds of Caution* (*Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar*) and elaborates the logic that Kanafani worried was too difficult for the casual reader. Indeed, *Birds of Caution* might be called an elaboration of Kanafani's "jumble," or his "pile of debris," and a fight against the ordering power of chronology. So while *Birds of Caution* at first glance reads as a coming-of-age novel, a bildungsroman, its operating logic is really far from linear or developmental. Instead, the novel studiously reroutes the relationship between individuals and time and lays the foundation for an idea coined here as the "chronotope of accumulation." This, perhaps, is why it was hoped for as a candidate for Palestine's national novel but was never realized as such (until and unless as part of a series.)

Birds of Caution tells of a boy, his birth in the Duheisheh refugee camp near Bethlehem (even before it was a recognized camp), his family's poverty, his betrothal as an infant, and the family's eventual move away from the 1948 armistice line to Wihdat refugee camp, constructed by UNRWA. Readers learn of the boy's education in UNRWA schools, how he learns to catch birds in the fields outside the camp and collect food rations from the refugee agencies. Structurally, the novel accumulates these many experiences, in and across their many locations. The story is not one of a boy who grew up to be a model Palestinian, or who was shaped by the historically (or politically) pivotal moments of the Palestinian past. In its accumulation of experiences (which are unconventionally but also undoubtedly Palestinian) the work deftly and delicately forges a model for Palestinian national time.

Narrated by a boy protagonist known only as *al-ṣaghīr* (the small, masc.; the small boy), *Birds of Caution* begins before the beginning, while *al-ṣaghīr* is still in his mother's womb. The narrator is a cheeky, alert, and very perceptive fetus, who tells the world as he senses it, collecting bits of information and then making meaning out of them. Importantly, he does not tell his story in retrospect but in that "single burst" that Kanafani wrote of. The protagonist's life is recorded as the fetus-toddler-boy-adolescent perceives it, with the limited and then growing awareness that comes with accumulated knowledge. Because at times information that the boy collects is not attached to any other bit of information, the work could easily be mislabeled as one of "postmodern fragments," but it is not. Each bit of information is just waiting to take on a richer meaning as the boy's perception expands. The story takes shape as an infant's perception does. Imagine, for example, how a baby begins to understand food. First, it learns about the taste, then perhaps its texture, shape, season, name, and cultural meaning. The food is not immediately known as, say, a fig, but is sweet, squishy, round, summery (or the impression of these things). Only later is it "fig." To all of these accumulated bits of information the boy narrator acts as a witness, collecting the facts and feelings of Palestinian existence and—without reference to any of the political or teleological frames available for "knowing" the nation—he creates a network of relationships between all of his accumulated knowledge so that Palestine comes to take on meaning gradually. In other words, Palestine accumulates.

CHRONOTOPE OF ACCUMULATION

> *I didn't really know what the passage of time meant.*
> —*BIRDS OF CAUTION*[8]

In the nation-state, time is imagined retrospectively as happening in linear and homogeneous-empty fashion. I have imagined this as a sort of nation fish tank where a territory-shaped glass fills evenly with water, which rises in a linear fashion up the side of the tank. In *Birds of Caution*, time does not fill a tank; it does not "proceed" and order happenings within space: time accumulates. To reappropriate the words of Benjamin, in Nasrallah's "first" of the Comedies, events and their spaces pile up as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage."[9] This was his description (in "On the Concepts of History") of a tenth and final mode of time apprehension called the "angel of history." In this model, Benjamin asks his readers to imagine time as uncontrolled by the order of a "chain of events." In *Birds of Caution*, Nasrallah writes what this sort of accumulation looks like in narrative terms but without the sense of chaos that Benjamin's angel seems to witness. In *Birds of Caution*, it is not chaos but simple, basic information that accumulates, and—once it has been accumulated—that information is ready to become attached to other bits of information. Within the "pile," relationships form, creating the nature and texture—the shape—of all the accumulated elements.

The boy of *Birds of Caution* is like the angel of history, collecting memories, smells, and perceptions, making connections one by one, so what looks like a chaotic pile is for the boy (*al-ṣaghīr*) the order and story of his life. This offers a model for understanding how time works in the intertextual—the unbounded and non-sovereign—nation. "Texts" are collected only in the "order" that the boy narrator experiences them. This means events are often collected "out of order," since he might come to know about something years after it "happened." The same goes for experiences of space. The "texts" of the spaces that the boy lives are collected in the order that he understands them, beginning with Duheisheh camp, then Palestine, the West Bank, the Wihdat camp, and Jordan. Each begins by meaning only what *al-ṣaghīr* has experienced of them but comes to mean something different as the boy grows older and understands more of geopolitics and what different people say about their own experiences of these spaces. As he collects information, *al-ṣaghīr* makes and remakes meaning out of these texts and their relationship to each other (and other texts) as and when information appears for interpretation.

Take, for example, how *al-ṣaghīr* learns about night and day. At once the simplest and most complex of ideas, it is put together piece by piece to ultimately create a unique understanding of the passage of time. This becomes a sort of template for how meaning unfolds in the rest of the work. In the first weeks of his life, the boy makes myriad observations—about his mother, his father, his need to eat or sleep—but the most poignant is his process of learning about what he first calls the *qaṭʿa zarqāʾ* (blue swath) above his crib. The blue swath is the sky, but as *al-ṣaghīr* understands it, it is a vibrant splash of color that only sometimes appears. When he sees it, he is happy. The first relational meaning through accumulation is made: blue swath/happy. The next happens when *al-ṣaghīr* realizes that the swath is only present when *umm al-ḍawʾ* (mother of the light, or source of the light, "the sun") appears (23). Swath/happy/sun. An additional bit of information is stored and connected, and the idea of the sky and the sun expand toward "day."

After a few weeks *al-ṣaghīr*'s cot is moved away from the window and the *qiṭaʿa zarqāʾ* to keep him out of the draft. The boy cries until a neighbor suggests that his mother allow him once again to "see the face of his god" (14–15)—to put him back in the sunshine, in view of the world outside. Catching this small aside, *al-ṣaghīr* becomes convinced that the sun is a god who makes the blue swath above his cot appear and then disappear. For the boy, "god" is *umm al-ḍawʾ*, that which lights up the sky so it becomes the blue swath. It is much later when his mother takes him outside that he "learned that the blue swath was so much bigger than I had imagined" (25). This is how the boy comes to understand time: the brightening and darkening of the window above his cot, observation of his own surroundings that create a perception of the world. The world of the boy is forged out of chance and dependent observations, so while he has clearly created a sense of the accumulation of days, which teach him new things that make meaning out of the world, he also insists, "I didn't really know what the passage of time meant" (10). A pattern emerges but depends on whether he happens to see the sun, or observe the swath, or hear some new bit of information that adds to the "texts" or information being collected in his imaginative universe.

Things happen in relation to *al-ṣaghīr*, not in relation to an external point or measure. The same is true for observations of space. What matters for *al-ṣaghīr* and the chronotope of accumulation is the boy's own relation to space, not the designation of space on a never-seen geopolitical map. What *al-ṣaghīr* knows is that when people visited to celebrate his birth "some had been big, some had been small" (23). He adds to this the supposition that perhaps "some of them had come from very faraway places" (23). It does not seem significant. However, it becomes the basis for the boy's understanding of location-in-space. Space is relational, to the self and to the other spaces that are occupied. In the universe of *al-ṣaghīr*, what is close is big—both literally and in narrative terms. First he describes the layout of his neighborhood: "There are faraway houses, but they are small" (25). He means the houses across the valley from his own cave-home, which appear small to him and cause him to wonder whether they are built that way. He can't decide if those who live in them are small or "perhaps they build them small like that only to sleep outside of them" (23). There are big people and small people, there is far and near; but since far things are small, the boy concludes that small people must be from faraway places. This is how he calculates the differences between children, who he plays with and discovers the world alongside, and adults, who operate with norms and expectations different from his own. Distance, and difference, then, becomes big and small, just as time becomes light and dark.

What is critical is that space, time, and community—what they are and what they mean—are dependent on the narrator. Instead of a people conjuring a nation that can then contain and direct them as a political unit, the story of *al-ṣaghīr* presumes him to be the driving and connecting force. He accumulates knowledge and creates meaning in layers with himself at the center. This is how the novel registers no "rupture," interruption in time, or dislocation in space when the boy and his family pick up and move from Duheisheh across the Jordan River into the Wihdat camp near Amman. Where departure from the historic land of Palestine plays a central role in national identity, the fact goes totally unmarked in *al-ṣaghīr*'s account of life. For his story, it is not the location, the route traveled to reach the new camp, or the political realities that drove the boy's family across the river that are relevant—though these are the things that are typically nationally marked.

For *al-ṣaghīr* leaving Palestine is registered only in terms of relation to the familiar. What is recorded is that he will be reunited with his friend and betrothed, Hanun (Ḥanūn, "kindness," but also colloquially the name for the anemone), when the family reaches Wihdat. The journey, for the boy, is thus more of a reconnection than a dislocation. Hanun's family had gone to Wihdat after her father was killed in a border skirmish (common between 1948 and the mid-1950s in the Bethlehem area) to join her mother's family who had fled across the river in 1948.[10] Again, none of this context "matters" for the fabric of the text, and the boy only computes that she has left to a place unknown to him—outside of his universe. He asks his mother:

> Is it because I made her mad that she left?
> No, they just went to Wihdat to get someone
> And will we go too?
> When our turn comes. (61)

Their "turn" was when the government in Amman, tired of the border skirmishes, finishes building New Camp, as Wihdat was first known, and enticed refugees away from the armistice line with the promise of better living conditions.[11] While his world, his movements, his experience of space is structured by the condition of being a refugee, it is not governed by the idea of fragmentation or loss. There are no presumed relationships to either people or place, just the desire for reunion with Hanun and perceptions of a new place once they arrive.

It might seem tempting to invest such a story with so few visible "markers" of geopolitical space or historical time with universal meaning (as opposed to national). However, in the chronotope of accumulation time and space are marked as particular, just in a profoundly different frame. *Birds of Caution* is not a timeless or universal story disconnected from worldly place. It is particularly Palestinian, but re-plots how the nation comes to be marked. As *al-ṣaghīr* accumulates a mass of experiences, he creates a critical volume of relationships through which he can understand and interpret the world. That world is Palestine. He is a boy born in a refugee camp near Bethlehem shortly after the Nakba who is relocated to an official camp on the outskirts of Amman in the mid-1950s and who is killed shortly before Black September in the early 1970s. In political terms, *al-ṣaghīr* is marked by the aftermath of the Nakba and the rise of Palestinian resistance. What is important is that these historical "facts" tell the reader little about what matters to the boy. Nor do they decode the process by which he enters and makes sense of the world-that-is-Palestine.

Instead of historical landmarks signposting the story, it is *al-ṣaghīr*'s birth, hunger, friendships, erections, love affairs, and hobbies that create the logic of *Birds of Caution*'s narrative. *Al-ṣaghīr* creates the "knots" of narrative based on random life experience and turns these intersections into a web that far outlives the narrator. The story of *al-ṣaghīr* inverts the coming-of-age as Bakhtin described it, where "everyday and biological sequences are fused into unitary markers of the epoch."[12] Instead, everyday and biological data are suspended in an infinite space-time and connected to other bits of data (other "texts") when these become available. Instead of producing meaning in relation to these historical narratives by pinpointing a time and a place and a teleology, *Birds of Caution* produces meaning through the senses of the child, as he accumulates bits of information about what the world is and how it works. These bits stick together and eventually take form through his ever-widening worldview.

Linking, or perhaps explaining as a process, the way that *al-ṣaghīr* makes sense of and interprets the world is his position as witness. This is a narrative mode, a way of bringing time, place, and people together that defines as much how the boy operates within his world as how the novel presents the position of the boy. Both formulate a framework for understanding the metrics by which the "pieces" of Palestine come together in time.

PARADIGM OF WITNESS

What makes the story of the boy and his chronotope of accumulation not just "another" chronotope of specific or limited Palestinian experience is *al-ṣaghīr*'s power as witness. The act of witnessing is the tautology of Palestine's nation form. For the nation-state the circular logic is, to use Balibar's phrase, the "retrospective illusion" that all history has led up to a particular point in the present.[13] For Palestine as it is imagined here, the tautology is that what is witnessed is national, and it is national because it is witnessed by a member of the nation; a member of the nation has the power to witness because they are recognized as part of the nation. This builds from witness as in the Arabic *shahāda* and not the contemporary Western juridical or trauma-centered usages. In Arabic *shahāda* carries both literary and eschatological meanings, which are drawn on equally as the concept is developed as a national signifier in *Birds of Caution.*

Witness becomes a critical tool of perception—perception authorized by a community—that determines what might be accumulated into a collective consciousness. A socio-religio-juridical concept, from *sh-h-d,* witness means "to see" and draws not only on an Islamic juridical tradition, but customs of community making and Palestinian national symbolism. First, and foundationally, *shahāda* is a key word in the Muslim testament of faith. It defines the proclamation that ordains one a Muslim and indicates belief and submission to the religious (and juridical) system: "I testify [*a-sh-h-a-d-u*] that there is no god but god and Mohammed is his prophet." The recitation ensures that the newly born are brought into or remain a part of a larger community—a community that is not bordered or national, which expands across time and space. It is also recited at death, to ensure that the deceased remains part of the community in the afterlife.

To make this proclamation (*yashhad*) is to enter Muslim community. Once part of this community, one can act as witness (*yushāhid*) juridically speaking to help maintain the legal bonds of that community. The word also forms the basis of *shahīd* (martyr), which in Palestinian national terms has become synonymous with anyone killed either in the service of the nation or by Israeli/Zionist forces—these conceptually becoming one and the same. Doubly marking the boy as a particularly Palestinian witness, *Birds of Caution* titles the first and last chapters "*shahāda*." This references the recitation of the religious phrase at his birth and death, bringing *al-ṣaghīr* into community, but also calls him a witness. That the number of chapters in between are numerically marked from 46 to 1 and the two *shahāda* chapters bring the total number to the symbolic 48 reinforces the connection.[14]

How witness works in *Birds of Caution* is as a sort of Benjaminian angel. It is *al-ṣaghīr*'s "seeing" of a thing, his witness of it, that makes something national. But it is not necessarily his perception or how he puts meaning together at any given time that designates something as Palestinian. He is the collector, not the interpreter. Once *al-ṣaghīr* has collected various "texts," they are left to the reader to construct meaning out of them. An example of the boy's vision here is useful. Embroiled in his own private concerns, the boy will walk through a field and observe the buildings surrounding it, or overhear a conversation, or be upset by an encounter at his work at the Amman fruit market. These happenings and the settings they happen in are collected and sometimes become attached to other collected texts. This idea of happenings as discrete-but-connected (and collected) is reinforced by the structure of the novel.

Birds of Caution is written in vignettes. Each chapter is made up of a dozen or so discrete "happenings" (vignettes), which "happen" in different places and times, some in the past, others as memories, or in the "present" of *al-ṣaghīr*. These happenings are separated from each other—marked out as different and discrete—by an asterisk centered on the page between two blank lines (-*-). The reader hops from one vignette to another, with no smoothing out or explanation of what relates one vignette to the other—or what each might mean to *al-ṣaghīr*. There is, in other words, no larger "arc" that the vignettes are put into. Vignettes are simply collected. In any given chapter, that which is witnessed comes as it does in life—often without order or connection. For example, in chapter 38, the boy witnesses a fight between his parents. Following this happening, the story records the memory (it is unclear whose) of earlier fights. Next, in order, are presented scenes where the boy goes to the well and gets wet, then tells his mother he was at the sea; the boy asks for siblings and records a memory (it is unclear whose) of the difficulty of his mother's conception; the boy gets dirty in the muddy streets of the camp—and it goes on. The following section has a breakdown of the events/memories/happenings that take place in a single chapter of *Birds of Caution* and presents a full analysis. These vignettes are not linked with any "and therefore" or "because"—ideas that would show that one thing happens as a consequence of another. They simply happen and are recorded: witnessed.

Witness is more than just the collection of vignettes. Once all of these "texts" are accumulated they become national knowledge. This idea again rests on the Islamic juridical concept of witness. Brinkley Messick has called the practice of witness so powerful that it holds together the Islamic world as a legal and religious community.[15] In Islamic textual practice individuals sign and authenticate (witness) the transfer of knowledge from one person to another. It is this witness, Messick explains, that ensures knowledge comes from reliable sources, so that it can be trusted by the community as a basis for law and belief.[16] All elements of Islamic law are determined and verified through witness, beginning with "hadiths [and continuing] to the historical links of genealogy,"[17] so that narratives of the Prophet Mohamed are verified through the process of witness. As Messick reasons, it is witness that governs knowledge production within and for the immediate and imagined wider religious community. Far more than an oath, Messick writes, "witnessing pertains to the contemporary bonds of a social community,"[18] linking individuals to each other, and to a history of text and knowledge. This is also where the tautology of the paradigm of witness as a national act is drawn from.

Islamic legal knowledge must be witnessed in order to constitute law (sharia) and constitutes sharia because it is witnessed. The *shahāda* serves what Messick describes as a function of "vertical . . . and multiple-node transmission."[19] The narrative assumptions that dictate the terms of a Palestinian national story in Nasrallah's works are thus two: there is a community, and it is verified through witness. *Al-ṣaghīr* becomes a literary version of the Palestinian caricaturist Naji al-Ali's ubiquitous Handala, the small boy marked in the corner of countless political cartoons, his back always to the viewer, his presence an affirmation of a Palestinian looking at and claiming the world in front of him as Palestinian. This form of witness replaces historical teleology as an entry into narrative. It also allows for many and simultaneous connected but not codetermining stories to emerge. Witness accumulates not only what the boy sees, but memories and flashbacks that attend and complicate that which is experienced. These collectively tell of his life and the network of lives and patterns in which he is enmeshed. The example of *al-ṣaghīr*'s aunt is a case in point.

That the accumulated texts of *al-ṣaghīr* in fact capture the story of his aunt Maryam illustrates the power and possibility of this strategy of accumulation. A peripheral character existing mostly out of the frame of interest of the child, Maryam comes up in the daily life of *al-ṣaghīr* as well as in the memories he collects. Her life is witnessed, and in finding the connections between the vignettes that are available, a first example of accumulated meaning making emerges. When learning about his parents' marriage, for example, *al-ṣaghīr* hears that his father had first been promised to his maternal aunt, Maryam. The comment, "If your sister had accepted [my marriage proposal], the boy would have been hers" (27), illuminates for the boy why she pays so much attention to him. It is only later, though, that the boy learns why his aunt refused the union: "That fair young woman had fallen in love with an officer from the Arab Liberation Army" (29). This "fact" does not move the narrative forward, as the retold memory ends and the daily life of the boy proceeds; it is simply another happening collected in the heap. Just because the information began as an "aside," however, does not mean it is any less important than the main events in the child's life. Really, the story of the boy cannot be said to be any more "central" to the novel than the story of Maryam and her lover (or any of the myriad other texts that are collected). All unfold and overlap for the reader in open time.

The aunt and *al-ṣaghīr* grow close after his father is arrested. His mother must raise her now several children alone. Because the boy is the oldest by quite a few years, he is left to his own devices and finds his aunt as a companion. She had always looked out for *al-ṣaghīr*, and even though his mother, Aisha, later has more children, Maryam's "heart was closed to any but the boy" (57). She had understood him as the child with Ali that she would never have, a symbol of a life unled. This devotion makes Aisha nervous at times, angry even. These feelings conjure memories of the sisters' early rivalry, but the memories of rivalry also contain information about Maryam's past and the forces that kept her single. In one memory, which appears as one of hundreds of vignettes in the novel, the sisters covertly read a letter from Sulayman, a midrank corporal in the Arab Liberation Army (ALA; composed of soldiers from Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine and charged with protecting Palestine from Zionist forces) who promises Maryam that when the war for Palestine is over, they will marry.

The couple had met when the ALA came to protect their village but were separated when the sisters fled for safety with their parents. The letter reached her in the camp. After reading it, Maryam outwardly insists that Sulayman will come back for her, an assertion that leads to the fight between the two sisters. Aisha does not share Maryam's certainty and skeptically asks why Sulayman won't just come and marry her now, instead of pinning marital success on the success of the war. She casts the letter as so much face-saving rhetoric, saying, "Why all these words if he is so trustworthy?" (57). Maryam feigns anger with her sister but inwardly laments, "Whoever abandons the country for their own sake will not return" (59). The memory leaves the precise reasons for Sulayman's departure unknown, whether it is because he has no real interest in Palestine (or in Maryam) or because he was called into battle elsewhere. At this point the question is open: Has Maryam's happiness been sacrificed to save Palestine, or has an ALA officer used Palestine's saving as a rhetorical device to deceive her? Will he prove as untrustworthy in personal affairs as his army was in its promise to save Palestine? In the 1950s the national sentiment leaned toward the first assertion, though its shadow alternative was never far from view.

In later chapters more information is gathered about Maryam. Crucially, however (and as the next section elaborates), that information and the conclusions that one might reach from connecting the information do not negate the relevance of the conclusions reached until now. All connections between one vignette and another always remain valid. This is because there is always the expectation of the possibility of more information. Without the presumption of a "conclusion" to the story of the boy, or the story of Maryam and Sulayman (or of Amman, or of the camp, or of the boy's flirtations, or the rise of the resistance), the tidbits readers glean are presented as correct, full, and meaningful—as they are. The question of the trustworthiness of the ALA, for example, is a valid question in the ongoing story of Palestine and communicates a great deal about the concerns of refugees in the 1950s and 1960s. The condition of uncertainty communicated in Maryam's reading of the letter is a story in and of itself. If more information emerges, a new story develops that does not erase the validity of what is already known. The paradigm of witness has no expected outcome.

Where teleology creates meaning by fitting events into a predetermined conclusion (so that knowledge is verified because it fits within the trajectory tautologically, or in Julia Kristeva's terms, it explores the binaries set out at the beginning without ever collapsing them), witness's preverification comes through the idea that the community requires it. Witness is necessary for community—a requirement for entering community—and is an act that ties the individual across space and time. It makes sense of what is observed by linking these elements into that same open framework, creating relationships between information generated by the chronotope of accumulation. Witness thus makes meaning in an open-ended fashion, as the chronotope of accumulation simply continues to collect national texts.

CONTINUOUS MEANING

The generation of continuous meaning rests on the ideological possibility of—to recast the words of Kristeva—an unbounded text. This is what *Birds of Caution* is constructing. The "bounded" text that Kristeva theorizes is structured around existing "discursive binaries"[20]—pairs of oppositions that tend to structure perceptions of life and its meaning. Kristeva points specifically to binaries that create narrative arcs (or loops), like "life-death, love-hate, fidelity-treason."[21] These presumed binaries, where one is encoded for in the idea of the other, for Kristeva, create narrative loops so that the story of life, for example, is told against and inside the presumption of death or, similarly, that a story of fidelity is structured by the possibility (likelihood?) of treason, and so on. In this structure-of-telling, a text in essence ends where it begins, by reaffirming the binary whose arc it follows. For example, if something ends in death, it affirms life, and also the binary life/death; if something does not end in treason, it affirms that fidelity requires its absence (or, if there is treason, that fidelity is challenged by treason—either way the binary sticks). *Birds of Caution* reorients meaning (and here specifically national meaning) away from closed binaries and teaches its readers to generate national knowledge (which is national because it is witnessed, and it is available for interpretation because it has been accumulated) outside of them. The novel is not a closed text, or a predetermined one.

Birds of Caution takes a pedagogical approach and pushes its readers into an open process of interpretation. Readers, like *al-ṣaghīr*, collect information. When there is enough information to make meaning, or create relationships between bits, readers create a sort of knowledge packet. These packets await connection to other packets, with the expectation that all will become linked through ever-widening networks of perception. For example, by the third reference to Maryam, readers start paying attention; there is meaning being generated. In noticing the repeated references, readers realize that they have been collecting information—just like the boy. Because there is no binary that predetermines relationships between parts, information collects gradually. As bits accumulate, readers must undergo a process of continuous interpretation. This at once "organizes" and creates relationships between one thing and another. Continuous/suspended meaning takes place when accumulated information creates different kinds of meaning, which is never closed or determined but instead is constantly amended as more information (from what is seen or remembered) becomes available.

To demonstrate suspended meaning, this chapter "undoes" some of the "order" falsely constructed in the two previous sections. In some ways they artificially separated elements of accumulated texts and continuous meaning-making in order to describe and explain the nation in terms that "make sense" within homogeneous and empty time. The story of Maryam and Sulayman, for example, was dug out and told chronologically, though this is not at all the way it was told. What follows is an attempt to reimmerse these two narrative "threads"—taken out of their contexts—in the form they take in the novel. To do this in a way that is not overwhelming (as much of the book is at first reading), this section zooms in to look at a single chapter and show how meaning is constructed in a way that suspends any ultimate determination.

Chapter 38 finds the boy almost a teenager. The "real time" events of the chapter take place around 1970, understood from the context. Vignettes portray high tensions between Palestinians in the camps and a Jordanian government keen to exercise sovereignty in the wake of the 1967 defeat. At this point Israel had occupied the West Bank, and Palestinians were increasingly organizing, frustrated at what all saw as a failure of Arab unity to prevent the seizure of more Palestinian land (and dashing further hopes for a return of Palestine to Palestinians). It is in this context that the boy ventures farther from the camp, taking on work in the fruit market of Amman, and that we once again encounter the story of Maryam and Sulayman. The chapter is segmented into thirteen vignettes. Running through an entire chapter, moving from one vignette to another and building meaning, readers develop skills of suspended interpretation.

Titled just with the number, "38," the chapter opens with a short description of the first winter that *al-ṣaghīr* spends in the Wihdat camp. The poetic protagonist relates his new world: "The cement cans spread out in the distance without an end in sight. . . . A game of repetition in small rooms, in narrow alleyways" (80). This description is followed, after the separating asterisk, by a second scene, describing a domestic space where the boy sparks an argument between his aunt and mother. The short scene is reproduced here in its entirety, to give a sense of the pace of the work.

-*-

> He asked her: All the other kids have brothers, how come I don't have one?
> She cried.
> He forgot his question for a long time, until it returned again.
> He screamed: Why don't I have a brother?
> She cried.
> His father's aunt said: You want a brother?
> He said: Yes.
> She said: We will marry your father.
> You mean to a woman not my mother?
> Ah.
> So he screamed: I'll break her head with a rock if she comes.
> The mother rejoiced. The aunt fumed. The father saw the whole scene and stayed silent, the father who had waited to be given a boy so he could name him Gamāl.

-*- (83)

The vignette begins and ends without references to the preceding or following scenes and is demarcated with the asterisk set between two dashes. The only temporal indicator is the absence of siblings for *al-ṣaghīr*, who arrive when he is of school age, and the political reference to Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egyptian president and leader of the Pan-Arab movement from the mid-1950s to his death in 1970. After the close of the vignette, the chapter continues with another eleven scenes. These are summarized below. A scan of the vignettes shows each as seemingly unrelated to the next. How does the reader "make sense" of these events? A few options emerge.

CHAPTER 38 AND ITS SUBSECTIONS/VIGNETTES (PP. 80–93)

1. First winter in Wihdat. The houses and conditions are described. The boy wants to go out of the tent, but his mother doesn't want him to. He goes.
2. The boy asks for a brother, then is shocked when a relative suggests marrying his father to another woman.
3. Women fetching water from a well, doing their laundry. They are watched by the boy, who comes home wet and tells his mother he was [impossibly] at the sea.
4. Begins "Aisha didn't have a house," revealing the young woman waiting for Ali to arrive for the wedding ceremony. While waiting, Maryam is happy for Aisha. This happiness makes her "heart ache." A flashback to Maryam reading a letter from Sulayman. Second flashback to first meeting of Maryam and Sulayman as she goes to the well to fetch water. Maryam's reflections indicate they have had intercourse. Sulayman's vision of Maryam narrated. Concludes with Maryam refusing to answer question of flashback: Aisha, "Did he kiss you?" We know Sulayman is a corporal in the ALA.
5. Preparations for Aisha's wedding. Ali's aunts criticize Aisha's body. Maryam calls the judgement of women against women "evil." Maryam wonders where Sulayman is.
6. Sulayman sees Maryam from his guard post. He goes to find her. Finds her at the well, describes her beauty. Thinks about her for three nights. Masturbates while on guard duty.
7. The wedding. Ali shows Aisha their new "house in a cave on a hill." Halima, Aisha's new stepmother, demands that everyone but the bride and groom sleep outside of the cave on the wedding night.
8. Story of how Halima got married to Ali's father. His mother had died, and exactly thirty-nine days after he asked to marry the ugliest woman in the village so his children would be looked after. Umm Thurayya, Ali's aunt (who we elsewhere learn wanted to marry her daughter to Ali, who was also the midwife for the boy. All of her children die except a sickly Thurayya) blames their too hasty marriage for the soon to follow death of her infant son, saying it jinxed him [she was upset that Ali would not take her daughter as a second wife].
9. Pastoral vignette on how life in the cave on the hill proceeds.
10. Begins: "The war didn't forget anyone, they were set upon by the liberation army, which could not even liberate itself." Narrator says: "This broke Abu Ali." Marital discord between Halima and Abu Ali [Ali's father].
11. More marital problems. Abu Ali threatens Halima.

12. Umm Thurayya tells Halima not to blame Abu Ali.
13. Ali and Aisha bring mattresses up to the cave to try to better the conditions there. Concludes: they were “still hoping to make a life there.”

As the scenes unfold, readers must continually carry out microanalyses to identify the connections between the accumulated parts. Sometimes no connections can be made. Both the character of Umm Thurayya and the specter of war are given no background context and had not appeared in earlier chapters. Umm Thurayya is in fact not formally introduced until the next chapter, so her comments here hang in the narrative, awaiting a formal relationship with another piece of information that will help readers understand one part of the relationship with the boy. We have no idea what Umm Thurayya and the specter of war have to do with the boy or why they matter in his world. But because they are witnessed, we know that they must. At first disorienting, the writing style forces readers to seek connections beyond a contained space, or linear/developmental time. Instead, the focus shifts to relationships between individuals, to small communities that take shape, or to locations/events that are brought to life.

Thinking about the chapter in nonlinear terms and disassociating the parts from their page order reveal four main themes: the developing relationship of Maryam and Sulayman, the story of the marriage of Aisha and Ali (the boy’s mother and father), the story of the relationship of Halima and Abu Ali (the boy’s grandparents), and the story of the war. The relationships figure in almost all the sections of the chapter, intersecting and overlapping. Other relationships emerge in the theme of weddings and romantic and familial love relationships, as well as the relationships between alternating characters in each of the pairs. For example, a section detailing interactions between Halima and Umm Thurayya develop their relationship, which connects subpairs to each of the main story lines. The same is true for interactions between *al-ṣaghīr* and Umm Thurayya (his father’s aunt), who tells the boy that his father should marry again so that he can have a brother. This not only reveals an otherwise unnarrated backstory of the pressures on the relationships between the boy’s parents, but also some of the social tensions that exist within the camp. Suspended interpretation pulls vignettes together by diverse and overlapping means: by theme, by recurring characters, by location of action. The result is an interlinked network forged with and through each vignette as it is read.

Though another theme may belabor the point, that is rather the point. There are so many ways to make meaning out of the vignettes that all different methods come to exist simultaneously. This includes broad themes such as gender and the social roles of women. More than in any other chapter, in 38 we get a real sense of the diversity of roles that women play both supporting and critiquing each other. It is under this theme that the story of Maryam and her once-lover takes another leap in meaning. In what is otherwise a vignette about marriage, love, family, and the nascent political activity of the camp boys, Maryam the childless matriarch finds information that changes the interpretation of her love for Sulayman. It is the late 1960s, judging by the age of *al-ṣaghīr* and the tense political climate of the camp. The boys of Wihdat have gotten into trouble with the Jordanian authorities, and Maryam marches down to the local police station to sort out the trouble and bring the boys home. When she steps into the building and finds the officer in charge, she is shocked. It is Sulayman. He has been down the road from her for decades while she "waits" for him to fulfill his promise to save Palestine and marry her. Though this was true from the start, it only became part of the Palestinian story when it was witnessed.

The encounter, and the "knot" it creates in the narrative web, pulls the story of Maryam and Sulayman across the Jordan River, where it was left spatially, and through memory where it existed through flashbacks, into the present. The story of waiting and anger take a quick turn, as Maryam shouts to her once beloved:

> For twenty years I looked for you, and waited for you and you were under my feet right here? For twenty years I rotted here–she beat her chest–I rotted here like all of those other people rotted and more. . . . [Y]our name wasn't the only lie, your entire being was a lie, it was on me to understand that a long time ago. (317)

What was once a subplot becomes a powerful symbol for life as a Palestinian refugee. Developed over 38 chapters, the sense of loss and betrayal is shared between reader and Maryam, who have come to know the woman as one comes to know anyone: through periodic episodes that tell a dozen different stories. Accumulating and assimilating this new information creates a differently shaped Palestinian narrative, but it is not closed. It remains to be seen what she will do now that her personal story (and the national story) has changed shape.

As a microcosm of what *Birds of Caution* makes possible, the story of Maryam is just like the stories that emerge from all of the other characters that appear in the novel, including the story of the boy. The themes and subthemes that develop in the course of their lives often continue well beyond their presence in the text, so that a sense of social structure, place, displacement, love, and growth all develop in conversation with each other. This is all possible because of the structure of the work and its chronotope of accumulation. Rather than being stymied by what Elias Khoury called the "struggle between presence and interpretation that never stopped since 1948,"[22] *Birds of Caution* crafts a structure of meaning-making (of "interpretation") that does not rely on "presence." This fosters "incomplete" national interpretation since new information will certainly come to light later—in later chapters, later flashbacks, and later texts.

So far, then, the Palestine that emerges in Nasrallah's texts is one of many linked parts. The parts can be imagined as complete and discrete (yet connected) elements of a larger whole through the notion of the series. These linkages, through the notion of *al-muthannā*, can forge bonds between people and locations, giving texture and substance to the meaning of connection between the many texts in a series. All of these elements produce a unique national chronotope, where space, time, and people are united through the paradigm of witness. Witness collects the elements of the nation, and the open-endedness of the idea of the series (and indeed *al-muthannā*) sets the scene for an accumulated meaning-making, created as it happens across the many times and spaces of Palestinian experience, including across the field of memory. Of course, Palestine has been forged by more than its own people, places, and times. Other external structures have had powerful and devastating impacts. It is to these that the next section turns.

PART TWO

Seeing, Telling, Power

The thing we can be sure of here, is that you didn't know a thing about that which was circling around you.

—NARRATOR, *ERASER CHILD*

You travel, from one end of the Arab world to the other, in Europe, Africa, the Americas, Australia, and there you find Palestinians like yourself, who, like you, are subject to special laws, special status, the marking of a force and violence not yours.

—EDWARD SAID

Ibrahim has given us a feat of luminous writing; it is not a calming model, but takes a marginalized point of view and makes it visible.

—FAISAL DARRAJ

HITHERTO, ANALYSIS HAS FOCUSED ON THE WORKS OF THE PALESTINE COMEDIES. As an expansive project that conjures Palestine only within the limits of imagination, it in many ways has free rein to narrate the Palestine that has been edged out, cut off, and silenced by other dominant narratives. While this approach has widened the scope and representability of Palestine, it leaves out what has—excruciatingly—also been a part of the Palestinian story: the violent structures that have and continue to repress and exclude it as a living organization of people and places. Though the Palestine Comedies does not shy away from the representation of violence perpetrated against Palestinians, the focus tends to be on how this violence affects individuals and at times small communities, never really the national collective or the shape of the nation itself.

Violence has, however, affected Palestine at the structural level. Palestinian life, its times, and its experiences have been indelibly shaped by colonial, neocolonial, and settler colonial forces but also systems of patriarchy, religion, and social norms. What the Balconies series achieves is the representation of these structures as part of the story of the nation rather than as the nation's limiting factors. These structures are "seen" by the Balconies so that they too can be accumulated, read into the network of texts that the Comedies created (while not limiting the possibilities of the Comedies). This view was forged perhaps accidentally, in the first of the Balconies, *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*), which was written during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. The work grappled with what it meant for Palestine and the Middle East more broadly to experience its first Western-led invasion in over a decade. It was, for many, a reliving (or reassessment) of the meaning of foreign occupation and direct imposition of a new and present control.

The invasion reminded Nasrallah, and us all, that the age of imposed structures was still upon us. As the world watched Iraq change irrevocably—its possibility horizons changed, faced with new limitations and new logics of limitation—Nasrallah began work on a novel that would grapple with the inescapable arrival of this type of control. He looks at this logic as what Foucault described as a "system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain."[1] The work sets out to explore how the logic of a US invasion and its mechanisms of control can lead us to think about the much less visible limits that it creates. What does absorbing this logic do to the individual, to society; how does it limit the person; how does it limit Palestine? Though perhaps most importantly, the novel would ask: What is this framework? Are there others?

Balcony of Delirium was not a one-off text. Nasrallah would later return to the idea of structural limits, first in 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014, and 2016 and just about every other year since. Eventually, for every story in the Palestine Comedies that came out, another would be published in what became a second series: the Balconies. Once one is attuned to limiting structures, myriad structures become visible, and each—it seemed—had to be accounted for. Written almost in parallel, the story of imposed structures (principal among them the nation-state) became wrapped up in the story of Palestine that emerged in the Comedies. To read Palestine as *just* the Palestine Comedies today would be to miss a great deal. Indeed, it was only the initiation of the Balconies series that spurred Nasrallah to write past what had seemed to critics at the time as the culmination of the Palestinian story in his 2007 *Time of White Horses*. In fully grappling with the state and other imposed structures (which mostly, in the end, function the same way, as we shall see), the possibilities for the imagination of Palestine seemed to pass a hurdle; structures that once limited the national story were now part of its network of texts. And there were many structures to excise from the level of the imagination and bring into Palestine's novel form. So more and more "balconies" were written.

This second series, read alongside the Palestine Comedies, tells the story of Palestine as it exists in a world of states and forces of limiting control. It also tackles the issue of how imagining Palestine as intertextual, as dual, and as accumulating is meant to happen when so much exists to reinforce the idea of a nation as exclusively a bounded and linear state. Over two chapters, my analysis shows how the balcony (that place of liminality, of inside/outside) becomes a position of narrative and a way of reading—of knowing and producing knowledge about—the nation. This liminal vantage upends the power of the single all-powerful point of view, which scholars from Michel Foucault to Timothy Mitchell and Vanessa Ogle have described as a way of seeing that produced the nation-state from the colonial era on. This narrative vantage presumed an omniscience, a sense of the possibility of knowing and telling everything on earth.[2] Mitchell called this omniscient creation of knowledge "enframing" and described it as a way of seeing—seeing that happened from above, as a "bird's-eye" view.[3] This is the same vantage—from which the world was ordered in order to know and therefore control it—that Foucault called the "panopticon."[4]

Telling the nation from the balcony, instead of Foucault's watchtower or Balibar's point of retrospective, upends what scholars have called the tyranny of a single-view knowledge production. The political scientist Cedric Robinson described this tyranny as one of both oppression and exclusion. Anything that did or does not "fit" within a manufactured sense of normal, he wrote, is erased or deemed "irrational."[5] This would include anything seen from the watchtower that did not fit into linear and developmental narratives, for example. Hawari, Plonski, and Weizman have shown how this type of exclusion operates in Palestine, outlining "both productive and repressive practices that work together to render their [Israeli/colonial] history and present 'normal'" at the expense of Palestine and Palestinians.[6] Within the episteme of the state and its linear retrospectivity, Palestine and Palestinians become the abnormal, the outcasts, obliterated, ignored, or, at best, seen as material for assimilation into this dominant worldview.[7] Critics have said it is next to impossible to undo or undermine this position, which, as Fredric Jameson writes, is because "we cannot not" see the world but from the elevated perspective.[8] This omniscient, elevated retrospectivity that orders the world into linear narratives and discrete locations is so embedded in thought, he writes, that it functions as a "pane of glass at which you try to gaze even as you are looking through it."[9] In other words, seeing the world through the logics of space and time that produced the nation-state is basically equivalent to "seeing": there is no way of looking, of seeing beyond this "glass" because it is the very thing through which we look. How to see otherwise, from the position of the liminal balcony, is the subject of chapter 4.

This inside/outside vantage, and the way it narrates power, offers, to use Robinson's words, not so much an "an alternative but a negation" of the dominant modes of order.[10] Robinson wrote about the perceptions of time among the Tonga people and saw their own negations of power impositions as resistance to and an exposure of "the possibility and actuality that orthodox Western thought was neither universal nor coherent"[11]—that it was not the only way of seeing. Palestine, too, can see differently. This shifts what Edward Said has called the "partial tragedy of resistance," where texts "must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or a least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire."[12] In other words, Palestine must speak back to power on and in its own terms. While the balcony carries out this act of recovering, it also goes beyond recovery in the development not only of its own language but also of a unique structure of telling. Palestine is not told here within the logic of the dominant power. The balcony does not respond to but takes control of colonial logics and locates these logics in a broader story.

The balcony as a vantage point and position of telling "negates" colonial-era knowledge and knowledge-making because the vision offered does not respond, revise, or reorder its rules. Rather, power is subsumed, recognized, and integrated within its larger encompassing structure. It does this not only by making the glass—that logic of looking—visible, but by incorporating it as part of the story of Palestine. This happens through the mobilization of the same set of intertextual devices that we saw in part 1. In Nasrallah's imagining of Palestine, structures of power and ordering are recorded and accounted for as texts. While powerful and all-encompassing, these texts are reduced to the status, say, of genre, so the limitations of seeing the world become no more frightening than the limitations of expression imposed by a newspaper article (the pyramid of urgent facts) or the conventions of letter writing (date, salutation, information, closing). In this accounting, genres, structures of power, are removed as epistemes, as discursive umbrellas, so that they no longer constitute the invisible operating and ordering logic of Palestine.

In literary terms, these structures become visible as what Genette calls "architexts." In Genette's schema of intertextuality the architext describes the rules and conventions by which genre operates—in other words, the at times unquantifiable differences between a memoir and a letter, an op-ed, or a novel. Architexts, as Genette puts it, are those "transcendent categories (literary genres, modes of enunciation, and types of discourse, among others) to which each individual text belongs."[13] Like a realist novel, a haiku, a *qasīda*, or a tweet, each genre—like the nation-state, capitalism, religious authority—has its own easily identifiable logic, its architecture of telling. The novels of both the Palestine Comedies and the Balconies series mobilize the tools of architextuality to teach readers to "see" structures of power. Just as readers can identify when a character reads out a letter in a novel or inserts the lines of a poem into a newspaper column, so too are they taught to separate the structures of the nation-state, of colonialism, of imposed religious authority, from the realities of Palestinian life and nation. This is the subject of chapter 5.

Functionally, structures of power operate in Nasrallah's Palestine as texts (architexts) and enter intertextual relationships with other elements of Palestine. Understanding the nature of these relationships is to parse out the effect and operation of power within the nation. As texts, structures of power can—indeed must—be critiqued, their logics understood. This helps explain how texts interact and describes the nature of the unevenness in the relationship (between the nation-state and the camp in Wihdat, say, or a colonial legacy and a soldier in the Arab Liberation Army). Of course, texts are not just their logics of telling; they are also that which is told. In reading power as an architext, the "stuff" or information contained in a story can also be read differently. There is a separation between the "stuff" being ordered and the logic that this "stuff" is ordered by (like the way Salwa's story is "ordered" by the journalist, compared to who or what Salwa is beyond that telling). Principally, this is a sense that the logic of telling or of an imposed power does not define or delimit its subject. So, even if Palestine, for example, is told within the parameters of the bounded space and linear time of the nation-state, this does not mean that this logic defines or delimits the nature of the material. Palestine, as we saw in part 1, is far more than this nation-in-waiting. The vantage of the balcony teaches that structures of power (texts) are understood to give only a particular set of information and that there is always more to the story, as we shall now see.

4

Balcony as Vantage

The balcony has associations in the context of the Middle East that are critical for the analysis of its narrative function in Nasrallah's work. The anthropologist Farha Ghannam gives an apt overview of the balcony's meaning in her description of the architectural feature in an urban Cairo neighborhood. Her depiction neatly parallels the operation of the balcony as a position of seeing, telling, and knowing in Palestine as it comes across in Nasrallah's Balconies series. Socially and imaginatively, Ghannam writes, the balcony is "used to interact with others and to present the self in public."[1] It is a crossing point, she describes, between inside and out, a position of surveillance and site of social control—but also a location where these structures are subverted.[2] As a position of viewing and being viewed, of contact and separation, the balcony is multiple and simultaneous—a far cry from the bird's-eye view (where the watcher is unseen and all-seeing) or the panopticon of colonial knowledge-making.

Just how this vantage is achieved, and how it changes ways of telling and of seeing, is the subject of the following three sections, which look in turn at the first three novels of the Balconies series: *Balcony of the Snow Man* (*Shurfat rajul al-thalj*, 2009), *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*, 2004) and *Balcony of Disgrace* (*Shurfat al-ʿār*, 2010). Though extraordinarily different—in style, subject, character, and plot—the three novels convey a single powerful idea: that telling and representation are both powerful tools and tools of power. Each of the Balconies tackles a different manifestation of episteme, and in fact breaks down Foucault's notion of the term into many different parts. These parts represent so many different logic structures that govern or dictate how one sees and understands the world around them. From first to last published, the works tackle subjects that include news media, government institutions, literary writing, and religious/cultural norms. And these are just the topics of the works of the Balconies considered here. Others look at surveillance technology, education, and the law (etc.). Each of these themes or topics is explored as a way into understanding the structures of power that limit what can be sad, or even thought.

Building on the work of the Comedies, these novels also mobilize intertextuality, this time to help readers find and identify the edges of systems and structures. When the edges are found, it becomes easier to understand the functioning of each system and then see past them. The "balconic vantage" to coin a term, which is used to find these edges, has at least three functions. It is these functions of the balconic vantage that this chapter tackles. The first is to decenter the position of telling a national narrative, moving telling and knowing away from an omniscient and retrospective position where all things are seen from a central vantage. The second function of the balcony is to disrupt linearity and attempts at "enframing." There is within the series a sense that the impositions of these frames of knowing are relentless and must be constantly unsettled. The third function is slightly more permanent, so that from the balcony one can engage the work of dominant structures of knowing, to make room for the operation of an intertextual Palestine. Each of these functions are explored in turn below.

DECENTER

The second of the Balconies, *Balcony of the Snow Man*, fractures the panoptic point of seeing as a position of authority. Readers are presented with repeated authoritative "texts" (a biography, an autobiography, and a mystery to which we shall return) each of which offers a version of truth undermined by the other texts. While each claims to be more authoritative than the last, none tell the same truth. Readers undergo a process of encounter where they work to make sense of what is happening in the terms that the text sets out (i.e., this is a story about an ambitious man who is led astray by his ambition) and then alienation when they discover that the supposed truth being presented there is false (the man says he is not ambitious). During this repeated process, readers learn to identify structures of narrative control, to glean information from what is presented within the different structures of telling (the biography, the autobiography, etc.). At the same time, they learn to understand the limits that ways of telling put on what it is possible to say or know. By the end of the novel readers find that ultimately the "truth" of the people and events described lay somewhere outside of the many texts within the covers of the work.

The encounter/alienation process is, formally and structurally, repeated three times in *Balcony of the Snow Man*, which is divided into three main parts corresponding to the different genres of telling described above. Each part presumes the total immersion of readers, and each presents a "realist" and compelling story. At the start of each new section readers are abruptly ejected from the logic of the preceding part and asked to enter a new system of telling. The novel thus cannot quite be described as any one genre; it is inside and outside each.

The first genre encountered is a linearly plotted psychological biography. Here a story is told about an individual, where the plot is driven by the inner needs and desires of the protagonist. The story is told within 152 pages and gives no hint that its style and form do not make up the entirety of *Balcony of the Snow Man*. The biography is fun, suspenseful, and engrossing. It begins by telling the story of an ambitious but downtrodden journalist, Bahjat Habib, who works for the state newspaper (of an unknown and unnamed Arab state). This story of Bahjat leads up to and revolves around the character's journalistic career and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: the chance to get his name on the front page. As the psychological novel tells it, it is because of Bahjat's underprivileged upbringing and sense that he has something to prove that he accepts what is ultimately a dubious opportunity. Bahjat is meant to write another sort of authoritative text: a headline newspaper article. He is handed the story of an execution and must go to interview the "condemned man" in prison the day before he is scheduled to die. Because the execution is meant to happen in the early hours of the morning, Bahjat is supposed to submit the story of the man's death before it occurs. He ends up, in a frantic effort to make sure his story is true, being responsible for the man's execution (as we will see). In this biography, the newspaper article parallels the story being told of Bahjat. The execution is the defining feature of both and is where both stories end (or is the point of retrospective from which they are told backward). Bahjat has done a terrible thing (had a man killed) because he had something to prove. This is not, however, how Bahjat sees it, which we learn in the second part of the novel.

When it abruptly ends, readers of Bahjat's biography are plunged headfirst into a semiautobiography of 128 pages apparently written by Bahjat himself. At first, it seems that this is offered as a corrective to the biography. Bahjat says he hopes to "write" the wrongs of the first text, which we learn was penned by one "Mr. Ali." His reason for writing, Bahjat states, is to fix "all those bad habits of books that try to novelize the story of your life" (163). Mr. Ali, in fitting Bahjat into a teleology from the point of the execution, wrote a man that Bajhat did not recognize. As Bahjat put it, "If I had read what he wrote about me in the first version without my name being there, I wouldn't have recognized myself in the words" (178). The novel, because it took on the "bad habits of books," told the "wrong" truth. It is at the intersection of the two texts that their ideas, their structures, of truth and knowing are revealed.

What Mr. Ali had done was write using dozens of tropes of the realist-style novel: time-stamped chapters that count down in reverse the minutes of a clock that ticks in homogeneous empty time down to a zero hour that brings all narrative strands together. The story is told from a point of retrospective. These homogeneous empty seconds end in the headline news of an execution that the entire country will read about in the papers the following morning. The psychological novel opens with a time stamp at "2:35 a.m.," when word had come in that the prison sheikh was sick. Without someone to perform last rites, the execution would be postponed. With the announcement of the man's death already at press, the newspaper officials are in a panic. They call in Bahjat, demanding he fix the problem. The news cannot be wrong; the man must die on schedule. For the reporter, the problem of the ill sheikh becomes a personal catastrophe. His own insecurities drive Bahjat to "fix" the problem. He makes sure the "condemned man" is killed so the news of his death, already at the printers, can be correct and his story—finally on the front page—won't end up an embarrassing disaster. Ultimately, Bahjat has determined the end point of the man's story before it has ended, and he must force the trajectory of his life toward that point.

Ensuring the predicted death of the condemned man is ensuring Bajhat the resolution of his own desire for success at work. This success is, notably, within an institution cited as one of the manufacturers of the notion of national time (filling up, in a linear fashion, the nation's bounded space): the newspaper.[3] As the narrator tells it, Bahjat had always wanted recognition as a journalist but was never quite up to the task. "Bahjat did not enter the world of journalism reassured of his writing talents," (15) the biography tells its readers, adding that the character had felt inadequate and invisible his entire life because of it. Writing the story of the condemned man was meant to be the middle-aged father's breakthrough article: "Bahjat dreamed of news, real news, and many times he thought about making it himself" (36). No matter how hard he worked, however, Bahjat's articles ended up on "some other page" (36)—never as the headline. This, the biography explains, is why Bahjat takes the matter in hand. He races around the city amid an epic snowstorm to find a sheikh who can ensure that the execution takes place. Despite some tense moments of assured failure, Bahjat manages, and he delivers the sheikh to the prison.

As the condemned man is executed, Bahjat realizes he has killed a man with a life beyond (and in addition to) his status as the character of "condemned man." Bahjat realizes, "It was my job, all those years, to convince the old and the young that they wanted news of them in the paper, as if those who did not have news about them had no existence" (100). It is with a deep sense of failure that Bahjat returns home, at 5:16 a.m., and hands the newspaper to his wife, saying, "Read it."

> Her heart stopped.
>
> She saw his name in small font under the headline "The government executes a man condemned for murder . . . " (146)

To imagine the page, it might look something like this:

> *The government executes a man condemned for murder, by Bahjat Habib*

The wording implicates Bahjat in the death. Bahjat's drive for fame killed a man who may not have been guilty—at least according to Mr. Ali. Both Bahjat (of the first text) and Mr. Ali (the writer of the first text) have imposed an architext on their subjects and done violence (real and metaphorical) in the process. This is the violence of the singular vantage.

The psychological novel and Bahjat's response (in addition, really, to the newspaper article) demonstrate the violence in an imposition of the narrative arc that begins and ends at a singular point and is told by a single authority. Guiding readers to this conclusion is a series of insertions in part 1, author unknown, that provides what seems like extratextual information, first about the "condemned man." The information from this text does not seem to inform Bahjat or his article and is only for the reader. From this material we learn that the condemned man had killed a would-be rapist as he threw the man off a prostitute who refused to offer her services (145). When he saw that the state would not understand the mitigating circumstances, the "not yet condemned man" left the country and "stayed away a long time." When he returned

> the police were waiting for him and had gathered nine unsolved crimes to charge him with. . . . [T]he woman [who he thought he had seen being raped] believed what the judges said [about him being violent] and considered herself lucky to have escaped a link between herself and a man who had committed nine crimes behind her back. (145)

So the "condemned man" is given a convenient (linear) narrative by police, which is taken up by the court and repeated in the newspaper: he is a bad man who did a bad thing and should be punished. Conveniently, the punishment is death, so the man cannot contest the story for long. The writer is complicit in state violence. The same violent single-vantage logic is exercised by the state, by the newspaper, Bahjat, and Mr. Ali. They each narrate their subjects through convenient narratives to fit a predetermined end point.

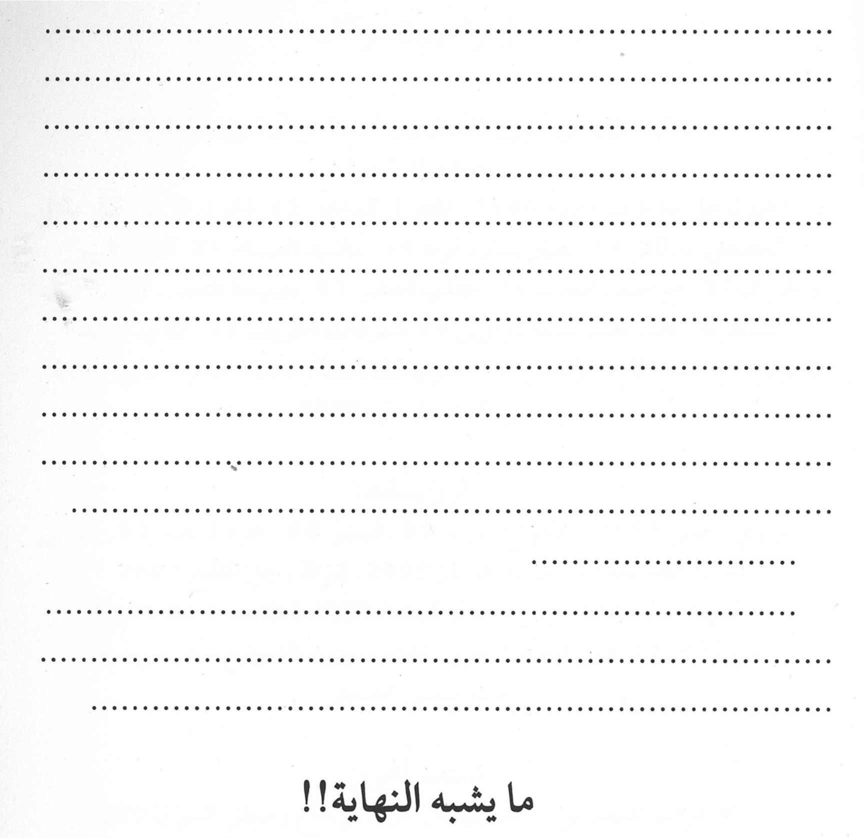
This, at least, is what Bahjat accuses Mr. Ali of in his 128-page corrective semiautobiography, also written in "realist" style. It proclaims a different truth and is written as a sort of response to the first work. It is in this corrective that Bahjat explains he had far more interest in the office secretaries than in the news he printed. Bahjat, according to the man himself, is neither a hardworking journalist nor a loving husband as Mr. Ali had made him out to be. He accuses Mr. Ali of selective narration and suggests that these other facts would have complicated the narrative. For Bahjat, failed dalliances and the pursuit of various "off-limits" women are what drive the story of his life. He writes at length about the mistress of a government minister and how he was "enjoying a look at her full and fresh face, and her legendary ass" (239)—a move that he credits for his failure to advance at work. Both Mr. Ali and Bahjat create their own teleology based on the facts they deem most important. The stories—while competing—are both written from a single narrative vantage. Each genre—the biography and the autobiography—has its own narrative arc that necessarily skips over some information. So, both writer and form are implicated, both identified as problematic. They are also separate. The news is shown as a problematic format, as is the biographical novel. Their authors, while no less problematic, are differently so. To adequately interpret a text, *Balcony of the Snow Man* intimates, the reader must critically read its form, as well as the position of its author. In other words, the reader must be able to look both inside and outside the text at the same time in order to make sense of what it says.

While assessing the limits of form and the content of a story gives a critical sense of what is being told, truth, the many texts of *Balcony of the Snow Man* intimate, cannot be found in any one text. Rather, it is found in the imaginative space somewhere between text and author. This finding is reinforced in the novel's final intertext. A third part titled "What Remains Hidden" (281) once again appears unannounced. The title page for this final section has all the paratextual elements of the title pages of the first two texts. The "cover art" of this part includes an Arabic translation of a stanza from the work of the first-century Chinese poet Xuedou Chongxian. The stanza prepares the reader for what comes on the following pages and creates a frame for the relationship between all of the different texts presented in the novel. The stanza reads:

> The shape of my book [*kitāb*] has seven forms [*ashkāl*]
> Three or five forms
> So I looked in all of them
> For the truth, and found none
> Now, night is falling (155)

The relationship between truth and representation that Xuedou describes parallels that set out in *Balcony of the Snow Man*. Not only do the genres each claim truth, but they also claim the exclusive ability to represent it. Within the same *kitāb*, the same book of *Balcony of the Snow Man*, the different texts (the psychological novel, the autobiography, and the third part) appear as only *ashkāl*—as forms—of the same story. Working around the central character of Bahjat, each is tied as much to the type of text being produced as to the story it tries to tell. If a reader, like Xuedou, looks to the book (even in each of its forms) "for the truth," none will be found.

In presenting and undermining its texts, *Balcony of the Snow Man* demonstrates that any one system or genre is only one "form" of the thing being represented. This is much like the larger structure of the Palestine Comedies, where truth resides in the larger collection. What this final text adds is the idea of the impossibility of a truth being represented by a text at all, and the necessity of an imagined infinity of texts. For while this final section has only one chapter, consisting of three pages, in the playful spirit of Shidyaq, these pages are filled with twelve variously sized paragraphs all composed of a seemingly endless series of ellipses (Figure 2).[4] The running dots conclude with a final line, centered on the page. It reads: "What looks like the end" (285).



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ما يشبه النهاية!!

FIGURE 2. Ellipses as they are used in *Balcony of the Snow Man*, with the final phrase, "what looks like the end!"

By suggesting that "what remains hidden" is infinite, the section reveals the "truth" as a Borgesian "Library of Babel" "composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number" of books.[5] No one position of telling can access everything that needs to be said for the truth to be available. *Balcony of the Snow Man* confirms what Borges's librarians had already concluded—that "trying to find sense in books" is futile, "equating such a quest with attempting to find meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines of the palm of a hand."[6] From the texts of *Balcony of the Snow Man* readers know a great deal, though mostly about the limitations of knowledge. Knowing, in the novel, is less about the "stuff" that happens than how it is represented. This attention to the position of narrative puts the reader in that place of the balcony: paying attention to what is seen and also how it is being seen. The panoptic view is made insufficient.

DISRUPT

The inside/outside of the balconic vantage is not just a position for narrative. In *Balcony of Delirium* (the first of the series) it also emerges as a technology of interpretation. This tool has the power to disrupt the relentless imposition of the panoptic gaze. The in/out of the balcony is presented as a way to disrupt the forceful imposition of powerful narrative frames, and to find a way out. In the language of the novel, the balconic vantage turns "order" into a delirium that makes space for the practice of an intertextual Palestine. Delirium becomes a sort of interpretive framework where it is possible to be at once within an imposed structure and outside it. This technology of interpretation is presented through the novel's protagonist and "everyman," Rashid al-Nimr, who goes from his home to his office job five days a week. He has just returned from work in the Gulf states, where he had sent remittances to his wife and children. Now home with a government job at the Information Office, Rashid must adjust to a very different life in a home and an office that operate through logics unfamiliar to him. The subject matter is almost banal, but it is not the humdrum of life that the text follows. Rather, *Balcony of Delirium* follows structures and their logics—the same structures and logics that Rashid is trying to adapt to and understand.

What makes the novel true to its title is that it looks at all structures simultaneously. It follows Rashid as he tries to wrap his head around the new rules of the office, the habits/expectations of his wife and children, and, at the same time, the larger political context in which he exists: the gently repressive policies of the state he works for, the US war in Iraq, what emerged as a "War on Terror," and how these logics influence and shift realities at home and office. Written in one sitting,[7] *Balcony of Delirium* is a radical intervention into narrative and reads as an outpouring of thoughts and ruminations on the violence narrative systems. The delirium induced by the reading, which is often quite disorienting, not only disrupts but also destroys the panoptic as a possibility of making any singular "order." Rather, the work identifies many competing orders that Rashid tries to figure out. In the end, however, it is only in letting go of all of them that he can find his way in the new surroundings.

This experience is reproduced for the reader through the novel's narrative style. The novel moves rapidly from one scene to another; it uses images, movie stills, newspaper cutouts, and drawings seemingly haphazardly. Where *Balcony of the Snowman* used multiple genres, these at least were separated clearly by section. In *Balcony of Delirium*, structures are introduced rapidly and without preamble. At first this is confusing, as all obvious avenues to find logical connection between elements of the text are stymied. As both Rashid and the reader work to "make sense" of the world/texts, they are forced to abandon preconceived frames of interpretation. This makes it an exceedingly difficult novel to read. As one Goodreads reviewer put it, "The man said delirium on the front page and he wasn't lying," going on to wonder if the author had heat stroke when he wrote it and assessing it as "very bad, vague, cloudy, almost incomprehensible."[8] This is, I think, the point.[9] By forestalling interpretation, the reader must engage differently with the text to look for clues. This section looks at the most alienating technique employed in the novel to demonstrate how it prevents readers from imposing frames of knowledge, then coaches them (though perhaps only very determined ones) to generate knowledge. This knowledge—from within yet outside the ordered systems of telling created by the panopticon—is balconic: it is multiple, it is simultaneous, and it accounts for structures and that which is within them. This expands the notion of a structure from a genre to the rules of a job, the system of a household, or the rhetoric of an imperial war.

One of the most compelling and challenging features of *Balcony of Delirium* is its use of images as representations of structures-of-thought. There are twenty-nine images spread across the novel's 202 pages. These include thirteen photographs, five paintings/sketches, three film/TV stills, four newspaper articles, and four instances of font play. Each image is embedded in paragraphs of text, and while some seem to directly illustrate something mentioned on the same page, others appear without comment or apparent connection. The first image proves educational. It is a map, which to use Genette's terms is a "text" in and of itself, with widely known and particular conventions for reading. A simple sketch of buildings and streets covering just over one city block, the map appears early in the first chapter as Rashid begins his first day of work as a government information officer. The map ostensibly gives the layout of the block around his office, but it ends up as a tool for trying to understand a mysterious instruction that Rashid's predecessor hands down to him.

When journalists come in for information, he is told, do not let them look west. The instructions amount to a logic of the workplace. This is a logic that Rashid is simply supposed to accept. As his predecessor explains, "Journalists will visit you to take pictures of the place, and I'm warning you, don't allow any of them to go on to the roof to take pictures." He goes on, saying that when journalists come, they "can take pictures from the left, . . . to the south, to the east, to the sky, but not to the west. It is on you, it is on you to tell them, because it is forbidden, expressly forbidden, expressly expressly" (20). What neither the reader nor Rashid understands, is *why* the rules are thus and why the journalists "must not look west." This is where the map comes in. After receiving his training instructions, Rashid takes a walk around the office to try to sort out what is to the west. The map appears without explanation, as a sort of visual rendering of Rashid's observations. The only thing that the walk adds besides the information on the map is that the alleyway behind the office has the "smell of urine" (11).

Encountering the map, readers look to see if it offers new information. The drawing contains no navigational markings or legend, and there is no title to confirm that this is in fact a representation of Rashid's office. These elements, however, are implied; they are precisely the set of conventions that are (at first) unquestioningly applied in order to garner meaning. So north is assumed to be

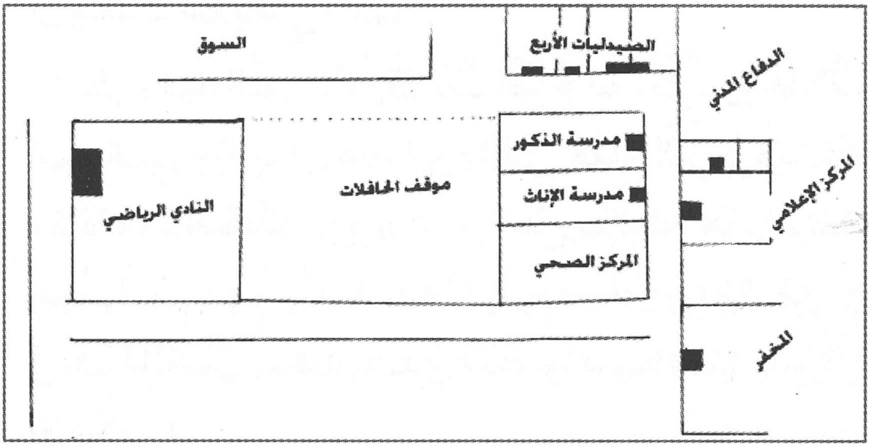

FIGURE 3. The map displayed in *Balcony of Delirium*, which appears after Rashid explores the area around his new place of work. The novel never explicitly says that this is Rashid's drawing.

the top of the map, and from there, west of the Information Office (the labeled building in the middle at the far-right quadrant of the map) can be identified as a block of three buildings: a boys' school, a girls' school, and a health center. Beyond the school complex (reading right to left, again a convention) are a bus stop and then a sports center. In plotting the buildings on a street map, the sketch allows readers to see directly what Rashid and his predecessor narrate. The map puts in visual form what had been described in prose and, significantly, gives readers a different way of accessing the scene. However, neither map nor narrative gives an easy answer as to what is to the west. This is where readers struggle: What does it all mean?

When images and other intertexts are encountered, precisely because they make no initial "sense," readers are forced to question how the image "should" be read. At times, the context in which the intertext is situated provides enough information to "read" its meaning. At other times, readers must reach into their experienced past, into cultural knowledge, or into the realm of international politics to locate a context in which the image was initially situated (like the photograph of Ashley Judd, or the Iraqi dead after a market bombing, or the second plane flying into New York City's Twin Towers). This extra-context accessed by readers is brought into the novel and put to service in telling the story of Rashid and the broader story of the structures that he is surrounded by. The map serves as a useful example of how this works.

Since regular conventions don't reveal what is west, readers might try to interpret the map differently. Perhaps the map is a mirror image and could be read backward; perhaps it has purposefully been placed on a different axis. Maybe it is of a different area. The question becomes for readers how to go about "reading" the map so that it adds information. Otherwise, why include the image? In using the map and Rashid's narrative to help interpret the "rules" that Rashid has been given, we are reading the architexts: one text (the office rules) and its conventions is being read against another (the map), trying to either make sense of or even undermine the first. In trying to discern meaning from these abutting, complementary, but somehow contradictory texts, readers must consciously deploy conventional knowledge from outside the novel and then question that knowledge as a useful interpretive lens. To no avail, at least initially.

The solution to the mystery of just what is west doesn't come until much later in the novel (and here not until chapter 6), but the exercise of reading, of interpreting the map, Rashid's reaction, and the instructions, prepares readers for an even more opaque scene that follows. A turn of the page brings one of the novel's richest examples of disruption and production of the inside/outside balconic vantage. The new chapter begins; its title, again vague, "Fluttering Wings," greets readers. From first glance, readers see a different mode of text on the page: metered verse and then an image embedded in the text. This foretells the highly intertextual and metapoetic nature of the chapter. The action begins as Rashid takes a nap. As he drifts off to sleep, an unknown but authoritative narrator steps in. This narrator addresses readers in prose, then in metered verse, and using images. Reading the highly figurative chapter in depth gives a full sense of how intertextuality is mobilized to create the balconic vantage and how the novel requires readers to gain this perspective along with Rashid.

The chapter can be broken into three parts: a sort of dream narrative written in metered verse, a semimetered section of prose poetry, and then more verse, all told by an unknown narrator and punctuated with an image. The first verse is a dream narrative, the fact of which is actually more important to interpretation than the words. In classical Arabic biography, Dwight F. Reynolds explains, both poetry and dream narrative function "as messages from outside . . . that act as portents of the future or as authoritative testimony."[10] Read as such, the poem offers insight "from outside" into the nature or meaning of Rashid and his experiences. As a dream narrative, it is a truth that neither dreamer nor reader might comprehend. So the dream-poem comes to the reader as if a truth—like the truth of the office predecessor who simply dictates the rules without explaining them. Thus far, still truths without sense.

When the poem ends, the same dream narrator notes that Rashid "woke up before all of these flowers could bloom," acknowledging the undeveloped ideas that the poem brought into the text and hinting that these poetic suggestions will "bloom" later on. They do, in a later dream, which is touched on in chapter 6. Once the dream is over, Rashid wakes from his nap and finds himself thinking about George W. Bush. The narrator switches briefly from poetry to prose.

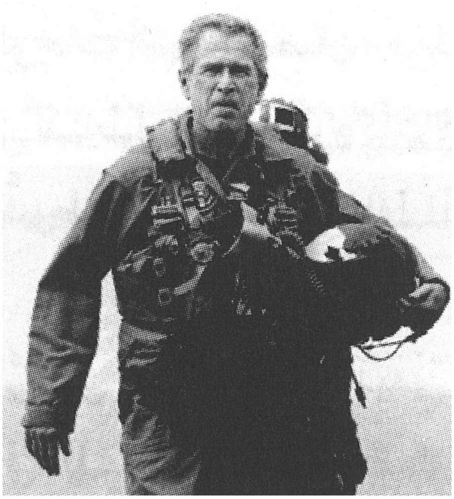

FIGURE 4. The image of former US president George W. Bush as it appears in *Balcony of Delirium* at the end of the dream sequence.

In prose (which is nonetheless quite poetic), the narrator describes that Rashid is thinking of George W. Bush's infamous "mission accomplished" speech, delivered to US troops aboard an aircraft carrier returning from service in the Persian Gulf during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (Figure 4). Running through Rashid's head, according to the narrator, is a radio broadcast, the lines of which are recorded: "And the broadcaster that he loved announced, in terrifying words: 'The start of a new era'" (15). The words refer to Bush's speech again, where he declared a turning point in the US combat mission in Iraq. He told assembled troops, "In the images of fallen statues we have witnessed the arrival of a new era,"[11] a new era signified by the fall of Saddam Hussein, the occupation of Iraq, and US military intervention in the region. The lines are punctuated with an image: the US president as he disembarked from a fighter jet, helmet under his arm, walking to a podium to deliver his speech, the words of which have haunted Rashid.

The remembered (quoted) speech and the image are two more examples in *Balcony of Delirium* where the reader is meant to read the structures of the texts into the narrative. Each text is unpacked in turn below.

First, the photograph. This text acts as "a temporal hallucination,"[12] which at once documents an event with a fixed moment and place and is a reproduction that can be viewed anywhere at any moment by anyone. Roland Barthes, in his *Camera Lucida*, theorizes that through an encounter with the still image, the viewer is given direct access to a scene. The encounter includes the knowledge that the image is created via a lens controlled by one individual. In this way access is at once direct and mediated.[13] Photographs, as Dava Simpson has discussed, "produce both knowledge and experience. They are not only records of a frozen past; they are also placed in contemporary contexts."[14] Through the image the past becomes present, read within and alongside a different age, to say nothing of a different geography. In the poem, the systems and structures that shaped the past of the photograph and invisibly crafted the image are being read—along with the image—into the "present" scene of Rashid's life and all its invisible structures.

The reader must draw on these ideas to understand what the photograph "means." Not only this, but one might also go on to wonder whether the photograph is art or witness. As Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri have observed, "Because of the photograph's persistent use as documentary evidence, the presence of photography in literature almost automatically challenges accepted distinctions between fiction and nonfiction."[15] The reader must ask the following questions: Within the text, is the image fact or fiction? Does it operate with the authority of a footnote or give the guidance of a preface? Perhaps it functions as a sort of quotation? This series of almost inevitable questions creates a critical position for the reader, who is forced to interrogate the parameters of fiction and eventually the conventions that are embedded in it;[16] in other words, the reader must forge the inside/outside position of knowing from the balcony. The reader must be in the text and outside it at the same moment.

Ultimately what the reader takes away from the dream-intervention is first the inability to make established "sense" of the presented material. The second is the development of a critical sense of texts, a honed ability to recognize what is being told and how, and to recognize that all "truths" are not in fact true. This disrupts the power of the totalizing narrative. Like *Balcony of the Snow Man*, the structures become part of the story, but unlike the story of Bahjat, here the reader must struggle along with Rashid to find "sense" in the jumble of structures. Structures of power are thus subsumed within narrative, become part of the story, and the very nature of the invisible rules are put up for interrogation. As readers go through the process of interrogating each of the types of text they are presented with, they are forced to find a balconic position—as the only stable location for sustained interpretation. The book, like this section, very often leaves the reader suspended, without plot resolution until other structures and their relationships are also disrupted and made available for analysis.

DECODIFY

The focus of *Balcony of Disgrace*, the third book in the series, shifts from the macro level of genre and architext to the micro: the impact of these structures on language. The novel, which unlike all the other Balconies has a woman as its protagonist. It follows Manar, the once-celebrated only daughter of a working-class family with aspirations to social elevation, as she becomes pregnant as the result of a rape by an assailant seeking revenge on her father, imprisoned "for her own protection" in a state facility, sexually assaulted by other inmates, and shot in the street by her brother. All this is done in the name of family, state, and religious notions of "honor." Through her story, "honor," "disgrace," and "family" are examined as concepts co-opted and calcified by the state, the middle class, and the larger family network. The work of the balcony here is to show how language itself becomes part of powerful narrative frameworks, so that words can be used to force people within a particular narrative trajectory. Of course, in showing that this is simultaneously true for multiple systems, the purchase of power on language can be subverted and words given new meaning. Rather than units of language to express the realities of everyday life, words in *Balcony of Disgrace* become tools of oppression and control that serve no one and nothing but existing regimes of power. This imposition is made palpable, as it is quite literally enacted on the body of Manar. The work of the novel is to show how language can reproduce regimes of control and at the same time use tools of the in/out balconic vantage to disrupt and decenter the definitions imposed. The balconic vantage can thus decodify language, extract its meaning from the operation of power, and open words once again for use within a changing and open experience of life.

"Disgrace" is first spat out by a jealous uncle whose son has been refused marriage to Manar. The uncle, long months after his son was turned down, learns of Manar's rape and hangs a "banner of disgrace" above her family home. He claims that her rape dishonors the family (the loss of virginity, the unsanctioned transgression, the inability of her father or brothers to protect her), and declares to her father and brothers: "I hope to god there is a man in this house to rise up and protect their honor" (105). The idea is, if the immediate male relatives could not protect Manar, at least they should protect the larger family. The uncle taps into a notion of family honor that would seek the "evidence" of violence done to the family eliminated. That evidence is Manar.

The young woman has nothing to do with either dispute—between her father and her attacker or her uncle and her parents who refused the proposal—but it is her body that disputes are waged through and over. These definitions of honor, disgrace, and protection are not only used by Manar's uncle but also by the state when police and a judicial system barge onto the scene and claim that they "are here for her protection" (179). Once in protective custody, Manar is just as badly abused. Disgusted at the conditions, she insists, "I will not agree to go in there" (184), but even as she is stripped and hosed down, the guard scoffs, "Why? Are you more honorable than them?" (184). The guard uses the idea of honor to violate Manar again. An inmate later promises to protect Manar if she complies with yet another assault. The pregnant Manar gives birth alone in the prison. The only people who protect and honor her are a group of similarly disgraced women with no power or honor at all (at least in the systems that claim the monopoly on the terms).

Here each "authority" creates its own version of the same language, logic, and the maintenance of a (neo)patriarchal structure.[17] The self-styled authority of the state, when it comes onto the scene ostensibly to protect Manar from her family, stems from the image of a father-type protector of the motherland.[18] If the state were to challenge the uncle, for example, and declare that family honor was not connected to the protection of the purity of the woman and mother figure, the entire logic of state authority would collapse. So protection is done on the same terms, but the state claims the ultimate authority to carry it out. This is not an uncommon elision of notions of authority. Palestine's declaration of independence, for example, which sought to establish the nation as a state in 1988, establishes a definition of Palestine and Palestinian based on the masculine protection of woman/mother Palestine. As Joseph Massad has argued, in the declaration "men actively create glory, respect, and dignity, women are merely the soil on which these attributes, along with manhood, are grown."[19] To protect the nation is to protect women, Massad has shown, and to maintain the identity of the nation is to keep its honor.[20] So the ideas are at once distinct but codependent: to be a nation is to be a family in the patriarchal sense, to belong to this nation is to have honor, which is preserved by keeping the nation honorable. Those who penned the declaration were meant to be the ultimate representatives of that masculine honor. What *Balcony of Disgrace* does is challenge this linked set of meanings so that protection, honor, and disgrace take on new—and still national—meanings that cannot be easily dismissed.

Balcony of Disgrace undermines these associated words by connecting Manar's story to the events of the 2008–9 Israeli war on Gaza, which takes place in the background of the novel. The war is perceptible only at brief moments, on a television station, so that after "songs from Nancy Ajram" characters see "the Al Jazeera news is broadcast, the war on Gaza continues, and there are protests around the whole world" (151). But the news is just as quickly clicked past. Also haunting the backdrop of the novel is a habit of hanging a "black banner over the door" (195) of homes as a show of protest against the little done by leaders of the Arab world as Gaza was bombarded. These black banners play on the associations of nation as motherland, with Israel metaphorically "disgracing" the Arab world by violating Palestine. What undermines this is that the banner hung over Manar's home (hung by her uncle as a sign of her rape and the necessity of her family to remove her—and her stain on honor—from the family) is several times mistaken for a flag mourning those killed by the Israeli bombardment. At one point Manar's mother even displaces the disgrace assigned to Manar and her family onto the Arab world, telling one visitor who does not know about the rape that the banner is like "the many banners you see like it, that people raise mourning the souls martyred in Gaza" (219). Manar is transformed into one of the Gaza dead, a Palestinian killed because of the failure of Arab states to protect her. The shame, then, the disgrace, is on those who failed to protect.

The parallel thus inverts the way "disgrace" is used and applied. The same structures that read Manar as disgraced to maintain their position in power are shown as disgraced for failing to protect the Arab and Palestinian nation—not as a state, but as a people. This puts disgrace-Manar-Gaza into a relationship that ultimately inverts the usage pattern and cracks the imposed narrative logic. It is allowing the violence to take place that is the disgrace. The title word no longer only defines Manar and what will happen to her as the logic of power's definition is carried through, but also defines the systems themselves. *Balcony of Disgrace* is an indictment of systems governed (and which govern) by calcified language and concepts.

Beyond the link between its heroine and the people of the Gaza Strip, *Balcony of Disgrace* weaves in a complex set of questions about the process of giving words meaning and how this too is tempered by words' construction within structures of power and ordering. The novel does this through an intertextual link to Ibn Manzur's thirteenth-century compendium the *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Tongue of the Arabs), which has become a repository, an almost definitive history of the possibilities of language from Arabic's early period.[21] Words in the *Lisān* have come to represent the traditional and "original" meanings of Arabic words and roots. It is no coincidence, then, that on her first day at university, after her father drops her off at the campus gates, Manar goes directly to the library reference section to look up a word in the *Lisān*. She is seeking meaning but also seeking to challenge and create meaning (and indeed logical ordering) anew.

The word Manar looks up is *sh-q-q*, a root word with several definitions that hauntingly parallel the protagonist's life. The first meaning she reads into the novel is "cleave" (*shaqaq*), the breaking of a whole into parts; next and related is "brother" (*shaqīq*), or sibling parts of the same larger family structure; then "lightning" (*shaqīqat al-barq*), that which cleaves the sky; and finally "martyrdom," through the story of the *shaqāʾiq nuʿmān*, anemone, said to grow where martyrs fall, after the classical Arabic tale of the martyred Nuʿman b. al-Mundhir who was slain in righteous battle.[22] Manar reads these definitions from the lexicon entry directly into the pages of the novel, but it is not a direct transcription of the definitions offered.[23] Rather, Manar makes some critical selections, reducing the six-page entry from a twenty-volume lexicon into a single page on which she rearranges the roots, their references, omits most, and ultimately transforms the definition of the word into a story that mirrors her own. The meaning of "sibling" and "cleave" symbolizes the relationship between Manar and her brothers who would turn against her; the lightning symbolizes the traumatic splitting experience of the rape and finally her death as a "martyr."

Manar's act of consultation and questioning of meaning is an act that builds on a tradition of language exploration in Palestinian letters (indeed in Arabic literature more broadly). Jeff Sacks has written about the lexical explorations of Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, who saw in the late 1880s that "any act of gathering together is order and organization, which is to say, putting each thing in its place."[24] This was in a context of standardization and codification that sought to modernize (and organize) language.[25] So whether Ibn Manzur set about to put language in "its place" or not, the creation of the *Lisān* as a document of tradition certainly had that effect. To consult the *Lisān* is to consult tradition, but for Manar the rewriting reorganizes its meaning—disorganizes it, so that she can gain a power over language and its links to tradition and past. *Balcony of Disgrace* demands a "return" to tradition where language and its meanings are an infinite gathering rather than a precise narrowing.[26]

It is worth very briefly noting that this same technique of decodifying tradition through the rearrangement of Ibn Manzur's lexicographical compendium is deployed across the works of the Palestine Comedies series. In the linked novels, a rearranged *Lisān* entry appears, not embedded in and as part of the text, but excerpted as back matter that paratextually links the different works of the Comedies together.[27] The *Lisān* excerpt appears as a ten-line entry from the root *l-h-w*, the same letters that produce the word *malhāt* (comedy). The different definitions are presented under the title, "Of *al-Malhāt* [Comedy] and Its Roots."[28] The excerpt lists the meanings of different *l-h-w* words, it seems, in order to derive a meaning for *l-h-w*, or comedy. In this case, *l-h-w* is also the word that describes and defines Palestine in the series title, so the list and its entries are also describing Palestine.[29] Where in the Comedies this redefinition is of the nation, in *Balcony of Disgrace* it is a reclaiming of language as something powerful for people rather than something that people (and Manar in particular) are subject to. This book is not the only text in the Palestinian literary corpus to demand that language be wrested from structures of power. Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness* (*Dhākira li l-nisyān*), for example, mulls the meaning of Beirut, changing it to B-E-I-R-U-T so that the place shifts from one that history has endowed with meaning to a disarticulated set of letters that reflects Darwish's personal experience of the 1982 Israeli invasion. The word is taken out of the telos of history and politics and into the realm of the personal.[30]

While Manar is killed by her brother, her life and story offer a decodified language with which to speak about the nation as an honorable entity separate from the state—even an entity oppressed by the state. Manar demonstrates what the Comedies only hinted at: the power of a reinscription of meaning into language co-opted by authority. Her story offers a decodification, indeed decalcification, of language that is now free of the structures that controlled it. This allows language to express and rescript or describe anew the experience of Palestine as an intertextual nation and provides an open set of tools—alongside work to decenter and disrupt the imposition of powerful narratives—to give narrative and practical space for Palestinian lives.

From so many "vantages," then, the balcony provides a space of narrative for this novel Palestine. Not only does this inside/outside disrupt the central and retrospective point of narrative required for the imposed power of state, but it can disrupt that power when it is put into operation. This disruption gives Palestine and Palestinian lives that essential space for representation, and the balcony's decodifying power—to see how language is used by power to maintain power—means language can be redefined to speak other possibilities. What this means specifically for the nation that becomes possible in Nasrallah's Palestine Project, is the subject of the next chapter.

5

Power as Geography (Power as Text)

A first reading of the texts of the Balconies teaches the reader to identify structures of power as architexts and demonstrates that there are often multiple structures operating simultaneously within any one narrative. Looking again at the Balconies, this time in conversation with the Palestine Comedies, this chapter considers how knowledge of these architexts changes how the story of Palestine can be told. For indeed, around, across, and beside the chronotopes and linkages of Palestine that the Comedies forged, a network of power structures compete, repeat, and overtake each other. These structures of power and their interactions provide as much of a geography of Palestinian life as the literal terrain on which Palestinian stories take place. It is this terrain that the present chapter explores. It asks: What does this operation of power look like, how do structures interact with each other, with the texts of Palestine?

As chapter 4 laid out, there are multiple structures of power in operation at any given time. The first section of this chapter shows how understanding the terrain of power first requires the balconic vantage in order to identify and parse the many different structures. Analysis shows that structures of power in Nasrallah's Palestine act as texts within the national intertextual network that the Comedies set out. The second section looks at one of the ways that these structures (texts) overlap—as echoes of each other repeating the same patterns of control, so that what can look like one system is in fact many. This sort of relationship is very much distinct from the connective power of devices like *al-muthannā* or the series. The third section looks at what happens at the intersections of these echoes, how structures of power clash and intermingle and create the terrain for the nation. The fourth and final section returns to the balcony, not just as a position from which to identify power, but as a place where Palestine and Palestinians can be excavated from these interlinked structures of power that would otherwise erase them.

The three initial points of analysis are read through two novels, *Eraser Child* (*Tifl al-mimḥāt*, 2000) from the Comedies series, set between 1930 and 1948, and *Balcony of Disgrace* (*Shurfat al-ʿār*, 2010) from the Balconies, set in 2008–9. The works—which could not be more different—are read in tandem, with the lessons of one complementing and extending the other. *Eraser Child* is the story of the Nakba but as it has never been told before.[1] It is the story of the depopulation of Palestine rewritten as a narrative of the failure of the Arab Liberation Army to save Palestine. No longer telling the story of exile or depopulation, the novel flips the trajectory of telling from "what happened" and "why" to "how"—how the structures of power that claimed they were aiming to save Palestine instead replicated the structures that they claimed to resist. *Balcony of Disgrace* is the story of a very different kind of catastrophe. It follows Manar, a young woman in a nameless Arab city, as she goes to university and finds her way in life. At the cusp of independence, she is gunned down by her brother. This is a story about the concept of honor, who defines it, and who has control over it. Where *Eraser Child* tells of structures like British colonialism, neocolonialism, and the ALA and *Balcony of Disgrace* looks at class, religion, and the state, both begin with a critical look at family structure and show how no system of power—even familiar ones—is immune to the drive for totalizing control.

Where the texts of Palestine's places, times, and people formed networks of association (the series, *al-muthannā*, etc.), bringing parts together across time and space, structures of power create a hostile geography. Mapping the multiplicity of these structures, and understanding how they operate alongside and against each other, makes it easier to read these texts as they operate ultimately within the network of Palestine as a sort of constellation of elements. This reading beyond (and reading into power) is what the final section of this chapter turns to. It puts these lessons to use and returns to the story of Salwa in *Olives of the Streets* (*Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*, 2002). It reads the work as a story not only of architexts (in this case, those at work on the life of a young Palestinian refugee in Lebanon during a period of PLO sovereignty in the camps) but also of the young woman that they "read" or represent. While the story of the woman, Salwa, is never formally told, the reader is taught to excavate her perspective and her experiences through the architexts that present her. Readings of the first two novels—how they identify architexts, how these architexts overlap and intersect—prepare the analytic tools for the third. Here we learn how to excavate a hitherto invisible text, to peel back the structures of power and the narratives they impose on people (places, events) and pull out from beneath the "text" as it might be without the limitations. Once excavated, we see that the texts are no longer invisible and can take up their place within Palestine.

MULTIPLE ARCHITEXTS

Manar and Fouad, the protagonists of *Balcony of Disgrace* and *Eraser Child*, are not—for different reasons—agents of their own life stories. Rather, they are acted upon and narrated by others. This is devastatingly typical of Palestinian stories (and so many others)—where it is forces of power that determine what is important or narratable about a person or a place. Worse, forces of power also often dictate what it is possible for an individual (and therefore an individual's story) to be. The stories of Fouad and Manar look directly at these architexts and how their multiplicity makes the lives of each protagonist invisible. While the two come at the structures from very different perspectives, it is this difference in fact, that demonstrates a certain uniformity of structures of power, which operate on individuals indiscriminately.

Fouad is the simple, slightly lazy, passive, youngest boy in a household of girls. He is raised on the edge of the Jordanian desert in the 1940s to believe the world is at his service. When he becomes a young man, however, the reader comes to understand that it is in fact Fouad who is at the service of the world—where the world is a consecutive set of overlapping structures of power (here British colonial power, neocolonial power in the Transjordanian government, the structure of the family, and the structure of the ALA). The young man simply does not have the critical faculties to realize it until too late. Manar, for her part, is the celebrated only daughter of an aspiring middle-class family in a contemporary Arab city in the late 2000s. Her father's hard work and dreams for her success make it seem as though all roads are open to her. In the early chapters Manar thrives—attending university, falling in love with a fellow student, and finding her calling in the field of social work, which she chooses as her career. When Manar hits a crisis point, however, it becomes clear that she had been seamlessly navigating what are separate structures of power (here family, class, religion, state). While each novel goes about creating and identifying architexts differently—and indeed the characters traverse different sets of structures—the result, as we will see, is the same. Each system—operating as though the others don't exist—attempt, bodily, to impose their logics.

Though Manar and Fouad are protagonists who see the world as operating under one system, narrative clues in each work tell the reader that this is not the case. Both novels are organized into distinct parts or phases, and each phase explores the conventions of a different social/political force that operates as a distinct structure of power. As the characters pass from one "phase" into another (phase of life, or politics, or of geography), they enter a new structure of power. In *Eraser Child*, Fouad passes through zones that correspond to chapter divisions, governed by (respectively) family, imperialism, proto-imperialism, Pan-Arabism, and nationalism. In each case Fouad is at the service of the system in question. For each new power he serves, he initially moves to a different location. Because he moves from place to place, Fouad does not immediately perceive that there are many structures operating at the same time (just with different zones of administration). Complicating the matter, is that the normative structure—that of the family—is also a structure of power.

Growing up in a remote northern Arabian Desert village, Fouad does not see power because life is built to serve him. What is shown of this adolescence is "typical," scenes with his mother hanging the wash, his sisters cooking dinner and being told to "give you anything you wished" (46) while his father is in the fields. The first chapter of the novel diligently creates a discrete world ordered by the family with the father at its head. This world neatly corresponds to Hisham Sharabi's definition of (neo)patriarchy, wherein the family structure is (imagined) as a discrete system characterized by the "dominance of the Father (patriarch), the center around which . . . the natural family are organized."[2] Under this system, Sharabi adds, "the paternal will is the absolute will, mediated in both society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion."[3] While Fouad sees very little of this coercion in his early years (he is the celebrated son after all), the same description of a single will organizing the relations of a particularly located community also comes to characterize the systems whose control he comes under later. Indeed, for all the structures "between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations."[4] While appearing benign as the work begins, this idea of the discrete operation of power comes up again and again—in ways that seem less and less "typical."

When Fouad grows up and joins the British Legion—the desert forces founded by Glubb Pasha as part of early British attempts to exercise sovereign control over Transjordan—the order of relations that characterize the system are the same. This, like the family structure, doesn't read as problematic (especially for Fouad), since the system is understood as a continuation of the system at home; but instead of the father as the head of the house, it is the British monarch. In the barracks and life in the army, it is the British who are in control, with a vertical line of command extending all the way—at that time—to the king. And Fouad wants to impress his way up the chain. He was the star attraction at home and desires desperately to be recognized in this new setting. He sets his sights on one blue-eyed Colonel Gregory, who he bends over backward for—even apologizing when he can't offer a match to the official who is preparing to torch the colonial archive ahead of a British evacuation. While both of these systems seem fine to Fouad (who does not blink at the torching of colonial records), an unnamed, apparently omniscient narrator steps in repeatedly to cue the reader into the systems as they are encountered. This narrator creates the balconic vantage from which it becomes possible to see the operation of power in even the most "typical" settings.

While *Eraser Child* is centrally told through the life experience of the hapless, gullible, and naive Fouad, who unquestioningly accepts the rules as they are given to him and plays along to get along, his insufferable naïveté is countered by the presence of the omniscient but only sometimes present narrator who offers occasional critique of the protagonist. This critical voice prompts the reader to take a critical view as well. The narrator interjects periodically with funny, sometimes scathing comments on the life of Fouad. The protagonist continues through life assuming that it will bend to his wishes, at which the narrator interjects, "but the truth is that you didn't know" (55), the implication being that Fouad really has no idea about the world he exists within. Or later, the narrator interjects to cast doubt on a decision, adding, "in my opinion" (70), and ultimately belittling Fouad's ideas. The narrator even reflects on the young man's actions with the remark, "The thing that doesn't stop confusing me . . . " (53), presenting Fouad as an untrustworthy narrator who cannot perceive all that is around him.

The limitations of Fouad as a reliable narrative source are underlined from the very opening of the novel. At one point, the narrator addresses Fouad directly and urges him to "look closely" (*inẓar jayyidan*) at a scene.

> Corporal Fouad tried as much as he could to focus in the direction that his friend [the omniscient narrator] was pointing him, but he saw nothing.
>
> [Narrator] "Do you see what I see?"
>
> Corporal Fouad gestured with his head, for he did not want to let on that he could not see what his friend saw. But he said: "Yes."
>
> [Narrator] "Do you see it clearly?"
>
> He gestured again. He was less certain about himself and about his friend!
>
> [Narrator] "I see your dear mother busy with the washing. . . . [D]o you see her?"
>
> Corporal Fouad gestured with his head a third time, but he wasn't even sure that he was looking in the right direction. (9)

What Fouad sees and what the narrator wishes him to see are not the same thing, but the protagonist so badly wants to fit in that he doesn't say a thing. That Fouad is hapless, that he takes things for granted and that the narrator knows it, implicates the reader. Indeed, the narrator addresses much of the work to "you" (*anta*), which we read at once as Fouad and also as us, the readers. We too are asked to "look closely." And while the reader begins to see the repetition of power—principally in Fouad's desperate desire to fit into it—by the time we encounter the last structure, the presence of multiple systems becomes unmissable.

As the war for Palestine heats up, Fouad decides to join. He leaves the barracks of the Jordanian government (where he had been transferred, a system we return to shortly) to join the Arab Liberation Army. Here there is no smooth operation of power. As Fouad prepares to enter Palestine and cross the Jordan River, an old sheikh tells the recruits to be careful as they prepare for a difficult journey, expressing concern and caution for the men about to fight for Palestine. The old man, however, is shuffled off and replaced with an enthusiastic youngster who assures the waiting soldiers of their victory. The Arab nation was sure to succeed, he said. This is the narrative Fouad wants to believe. The father was supreme, the king was supreme, and now, Fouad is told, the Arab nation is supreme. But the sheikh had spoken his piece: the mission was not an assured success, and there was sure to be danger on the way. This warning is papered over (for Fouad), but the warning remains. Without paying attention, Fouad crosses the Jordan and enters the final phase of his story under the command of the ALA.

Though Fouad notices the slips in operation of control in the ALA (more on this shortly), as he moves through each system he does not question or challenge its aims, values, or customs. Each, in effect, has total administrative control within its geographic sphere of operation (until we learn that they do not, which we turn to in the next section). What is important, at this point, is only that there exist distinct spheres of control, each of which have the appearance of total control so long as the others are not present within the same operational zone. The same becomes true of the spheres that Manar, some seventy years later, navigates: her family, the middle class, and the state. Where the different structures that Fouad moves through correspond to his geographic shifts (and to some extent, life phases), the structures Manar traverses all operate within her native city. To help distinguish the structures, Nasrallah uses structure. Each of the four parts of *Balcony of Disgrace* comes to represent one of the structures that frame and play a key role in the abuse and ultimate killing of Manar.

Reinforcing the idea of a structure of power as a closed administrative zone, the four parts of *Balcony of Disgrace* (each of which contain several chapters) are written as almost discrete teleologies, so that the scenes that begin a section also end them. The formula is not entirely straightforward. For example, in part 1, the first chapter closes with a scene of Manar's father dancing and being dangerously tired afterward, declaring, "Did you see how I returned to my poor legs like new again. Do you know, it was impossible for me to stop dancing!" (11/76). The final chapter begins with the same scene of dancing, repeating the lines verbatim, but continues for several pages, showing that what had appeared at first as a celebration turns out to be an ominous foreshadowing of Manar's father's deterioration, the loss of the use of his legs, the loss of livelihood, and the inability to protect his family any longer. He had been injured in a car accident and pushed his body beyond its capacity to celebrate Manar's graduation from university. Though the proud father had worked hard to make sure his only daughter received an education and had fended off criticism from his brothers as well as refused marriage proposals from her cousins (angering his relatives), as the novel's part 1 and Manar's education come to a close, her benevolent parent no longer deploys his own version of the family system as her architext. The narrative loop, or the circle of control of the family, is not in fact a closed one.

Each of the four parts of the novel (except for the final part, which follows the structure with a very short addition, discussed in chapter 8) repeats the same formula, so that the lines that end the first chapter begin the last (Table 4). Each part, similar to the structure of Fouad's story in *Eraser Child*, narrates a different system within which Manar operates.

TABLE 4 Chapter structure of *Balcony of Disgrace*

Part	
First chapter	Last chapter
Scene	Scene
J	F
K	G
L	H
M	I
N	**J+**

NOTE: Each letter indicates a new "vignette" or scene. Each chapter has the same structure and repeats the first vignette at the start of its final narrative salvo. The same information (often verbatim) is given, but the story continues and gives more information, more context for the opening scene, changing its meaning and how we understand what is happening. The same vignette (marked as J above) begins and ends the part. So the part and its chapters narrate in a sort of circular fashion. Where the J of the first chapter ends, however, the J+ of the beginning of the last chapter begins.

After looking at Manar's family, the novel turns to the class structure. Manar enters this system through the university. It is here that she meets her upper-middle-class nouveau riche boyfriend, who is intimidated by the family structure he must eventually come up against. It is also through the university that Manar decides on a career, takes an interest in art and cinema, and crafts for herself a future that is different to the one available only through her family network. This, what analysis calls a "class" system, is defined in the text by its difference from the family system and the places it takes her to: the cinema, the mall, the gallery—generally places of commerce or global cultural production. This is entrance to a sort of global middle class. Manar's father, his insistence that she study, and his refusal of marriage proposals that would have taken her out of school, had made her entry into this other system possible. However, with the failure of Manar's father's health and the inability (or unwillingness) of Manar's brothers to insist that his will continue, the extended family structure eventually tries to reclaim its power over Manar.

The systems compete and eventually collapse. Competition has nothing to do with Manar but rather her father's taxi business and her brother's failure to pass the taxi license test. To make an income, Manar's father goes outside of the family system and rents the cab to a neighbor. When the brother finally passes the test, Manar's father gives him the cab. The neighbor is furious and rapes Manar as revenge. Crucially, he gains access to her while driving (another cab) downtown when she is out with her boyfriend on the way to the cinema. He tells her it is too late to be out on this other side of town and offers to take her home. The rape happens literally between the two neighborhood geographies. One system has challenged the other, and both are injured in the process. When Manar's extended family learns of the ordeal, her uncle declares that she—who refused her cousin's proposal—is a stain on the family and must be killed. Her boyfriend, who meekly tries to propose and absorb the “dishonor,” quickly disappears when he realizes the extent of the situation. Family and class thus clash, and while family seems at first to prevail, it is eventually challenged again by the state. As the final section of the last chapter outlined, police were summoned to Manar’s house as her elder brother attempted to close the circle of power from the family structure. She is taken, in the next “part” of the novel, into protective custody and a judicial system intervenes, not releasing her until it is assured that she will be safe (the family agrees to send Manar to another brother in the Gulf). Each system has its own vision of the appropriate direction for Manar’s life or provision for her safety. What this is in real terms, however, is simply the exercise of complete control by any one system. Family thinks she is best off marrying her cousin, class would send her to the new part of the city with her bourgeois boyfriend, and the state would remove her from her family’s care and send her abroad.

The four parts of the novel represent discrete “bounded texts,” in Kristeva’s sense of the term; each text sets out the limits of its own epistemology, explores the possibilities available within its structure, but ultimately confirms the assumptions about the possibilities laid out in their opening pages.[5] Family can only see family as a solution; class, as class; and state, as state. The constant repetition of closure is relentless. So relentless that the reader cannot help but notice the patterns. The haunting echo of verbatim text repeated at the beginning and end of each part underscores where attention should be paid: not to what the structures portrayed promise, but to their operating logics. This structural device cues the reader to the same sense of awareness in reading as the critical and omniscient narrator does in *Eraser Child*: the interjections, the looped narratives, the foreshadowing, and the repetition. Literary devices draw inescapable attention to the rules and limits of structures, each of which imagine themselves as sovereign. Both protagonists are caught in a world made up of overlapping and competing structures of power, each of which claims narrative and at times bodily control. At the same time, however, the inevitable overlap in the operation of these structures gives space for transgression. The inevitable movement between structures that perceive themselves as sovereign and distinct reveals the nature of the operation of their power, and the way that these operations affect both Manar and Fouad.

MANY TEXTS, SAME STRUCTURE

For Nasrallah’s Palestine, the operation of power is not singular; it does not operate uniformly over and across space. While Fouad was able to imagine that discrete systems operated over independent geographies, Manar saw these systems compete and overlap. This, in the Palestine Project, is how power ends up being experienced as a single system; each architext, using the intertextual language of Genette, “amplifies” the others,[6] so that power structures seem larger and more universal than they are. A second reading of *Eraser Child* shows that here, too, the systems are not discrete as they claim—though they repeatedly claim to be so. In returning to Fouad, analysis gains tools with which to better understand the chaos of systems that seem to focus on and destroy Manar. In both works, we find that power acts as multiple distinct and discrete elements (architexts) that unevenly impose orders of possibility on the other elements within their sphere. This section looks at the overlaps between systems, and how each echo within the others but also echo each other in terms of function.

Each of the systems of power that Fouad and Manar move through (and are read by), for example, operate as though they have autonomous and distinct authority. Like an episteme, architexts of power have their own logics and boundaries of possibility, which they presume are unbreachable. The way these elements interact with others is as a lens of interpretation, claiming imaginative control over other elements through what can most easily be described as an exercise of what Anthony Giddens has called an "administrative monopoly."[7] Architexts of power each presume total control over a particular zone and an authority that issues from a single source, whether custom, religion, inheritance, or economy. What first becomes clear as the different structures of power are identified is that each exercises the same type of imaginative and administrative power. Each also presumes a monopoly. One structure of power echoes its others.

The British Legion, for example, is well known to have operated, as one scholar put it, as an "instrument for the pacification and integration of a predominantly tribal society into a state to whose central authority the tribes became responsive and to whose administrative control they became subjected."[8] It was a unit that precisely replicated the priorities of the imperial project. It, like the family, operated under the direction of a single imagined will. In both the family and the British imperial setting, Fouad is recognized as someone who will "play your role in the game" (57)—with the game being the subjection of a space and its people to patriarchal and then later colonial control. The Transjordanian government where Fouad went to work next is depicted as a reproduction of the same. Since Fouad had done such a good job in the British Legion, the administration sends him to the *Sayyid al-balad* (the local governor) as "the favorite present from the chief of the army to the chief of the city" (102). This is the government of King Abdallah, which was installed as a proxy by the British, so that the chief of the city supported the colonial position exactly: one was a precise replication of the other.[9] While the ALA, as an apparent revolutionary force pushing off the specter of colonial control, seems like it would provide a different model, the hapless Fouad outs the model as yet another echo of the top-down model. The desire for power for its own sake in the ranks, and indeed the command, of the ALA is demonstrated in the novel by the organization's reaction to Fouad's British-made gun; a parting gift from the Transjordanian governor.

The ALA was meant to be a revolutionary and anti-imperial force working against the imposition of an outside will; it was meant to represent in a way the will of an Arab people. In theory, the ALA was an expression of a growing movement of Pan-Arabism, a "nationalist notion of cultural and political unity."[10] In practice, however, the ALA replicated the power structures—the top-down authority, the work to maintain administrative control over a vast geography. The fight for Palestine was simply one aiming to expand that scope. We see this plainly through the way the ALA and its officials look at—and fight for control of—a British made gun. In their envious glances, their attempt to control it, the ALA officials signal no critical position when it comes to the type of power they seek to impose and the way their ranks are organized: they want the British gun not for its facility in taking down an enemy but for its symbolism. For officers in Fouad's ALA unit, control over the British gun means status, which they clamor for above all else. As the narrator explains, "News of the rifle reached [Fouad's ALA unit commander] Assad Bīk" quickly (184), and while the commander "couldn't have determined the difference between two rifles or the difference between two [of his own] men" (184), he is determined to have the machine for himself, or at least confiscate it from Fouad in order to preserve his own sense of authority.

This is not an army working for a common purpose but rather one "marked by disunity, mutual suspicion, and cross-purposes"[11]—and an attempt to wrest power from competing structures simply to exercise control itself. Fouad's experience with the ALA reveals its stated aim of liberating Palestine as false. He sees firsthand what historians detail as a unit whose "antagonisms and suspicions undermined any hope of firm, realistic decision-making."[12] And so the commander, instead of focusing on how to save Palestine, goes "to war with one of his men" (184) over control of a weapon neither can use properly. It is not Palestine, after all, that the ALA is after—it is the expansion of power.

Like the British Legion and the ALA for Fouad, the state reproduces mechanisms of control over Manar that her extended family and class structures had earlier tried to exercise. The systems do not act in distinct geographies but rather overlap, each operating as if it is the only structure of power. After her brother tries to kill her and her middle-class beloved meekly gives her up to pursue his own interests, the police enter Manar's home and take her into protective custody. Here protection means control, and control is total. Manar is taken to a prison facility where she is treated as a criminal. Manar's imprisonment reinforces the symbol of the closed and indeed confining realities of each power system portrayed in the novel. Couched in the language of familial protection, the state steps in as proposed guardian, offering to defend the young woman from her male relatives and offer her shelter. Parroting the same value set as the family, state control guarantees her about as much "protection" as her father had: none. Once in custody, Manar is badly abused. Disgusted at the conditions, she insists, "I will not agree to go in there" (184), but even as she is stripped and hosed down, the guard scoffs, "Why? Are you more honorable than them?" (184). The guard uses the idea of honor—one that, as we will see, had been mobilized by a number of actors within the family system—to force Manar to abide by its logic. The paradox, of course, is that while the systems are claiming to protect her honor, they are in fact perpetuating her violation.

Representing the state—but truly detailing the operation of power across the structures detailed here—the prison curtails all aspects of Manar's life. Rising when the lights go on, eating when fed, exercising when permitted: the prison reads onto Manar its own vision of life, of normalcy, of the pattern of a day. Life according to the rules of the structure is, as Foucault described, a "power of normalization."[13] The women's prison is the most powerful embodiment of what Foucault described as a "place for individual transformation that would restore to the state the subject it had lost."[14] Where the family and the middle class had sought to imprison Manar ideologically, the state does so literally. Each mirrors the other in some way, replicating modes of dominance. This reinforces the idea of the simultaneous and bounded loops of narrative. Protection becomes confinement, and the state insists that it is the ultimate authority over not only Manar, but the class and family systems.

The structure of the novel creates a narrative framework representing, and reinforcing, the world that Manar moves within. The story is told in repeated closed loops that, while operating from different starting points, enact in form and function the same limitations as the systems she encounters and manifest the same prison. These narrative loops symbolize the closed nature of the power structures that "narrate" Manar and represent a structural impossibility of escape. These structures quite literally compose the story of Manar, and to read her story is to read how each of these systems (almost like the genre structures in *Balcony of the Snow Man*) shape the possibilities of her life. The same is true for Fouad, except in this case it is not the story of his own development that is limited; it is the story of the territorial loss of Palestine. What made the life of Manar unbearable is precisely what created the impossibility of a Palestinian territorial sovereignty: both were "protected" by an interlinked and repeating system of power structures that exercised a problematic authority over their claimed zone. This repetition, this exercise of control by multiple parties with different interests (but parallel mechanisms), made national life impossible.

INTERSECTIONS

While each structure echoes the operation of the others and each imagines its own administrative monopoly, the structures eventually overlap. These overlaps become sites of intersection, and often competition, which is played out on the bodies of the protagonists. Reading the violence that the structures carry out on Manar and Fouad, the edges of power are put in the spotlight. It becomes clear that architexts in Nasrallah's Palestine operate as separate and distinct, but they are not, and in fact they are multiple and overlapping. The structures are also—though they don't admit it in terms of their operating logics—interdependent and formed in relationship with one another. In other words, architexts are in intertextual relationship with one another, and reading the story of Palestine requires an understanding of how and why these interactions proceed.

While Fouad's family structure is understood as a discrete force with rules and conventions, the family also invisibly recognizes its limitations. When something goes wrong at home and the safety of the family is threatened by bad blood between households in the village (Fouad had put someone's eye out with a stone, and the family feared retribution), Fouad is sent into the service of the British Legion. The family sees this as a separate place, so that sending Fouad to the military base near the city is as though sending him to another state with its own laws and boundaries. Not only will his service earn the family income, but it will put Fouad out of harm's way. When he returns home for his uncle's funeral, however, Fouad's mother worries about the inevitable clash between family and British affiliation, as he sports the military uniform. She only relaxes when he takes off "the rank of Private Fouad" (122), but she still worries and decides that until he returns to the capital, "she will have to treat [him] with great caution" (122). This is in part because of the trouble the family was in before he left but more immediately relates to the funeral: his uncle had been killed fighting in Palestine. So, on the one hand, Fouad needs to skirt the notice of the family he injured by throwing a rock at a suspected thief, and on the other, he needs to maintain deference and respect to his martyred uncle whose priorities and politics were different from those of the British Legion that Fouad is controlled by. While each system imagines its control as absolute, it is with qualifications and the inevitable tension of overlap.

Structures of power are in relationship—but one of competition that reinforces boundaries rather than dialogue. While on the surface the village seemed far away from the colonial administrative center, years earlier it was in fact British forces that had shot at a gazelle and missed, with the stray bullet killing his older brother. While unrecognized and unaccounted for within each structure (the event is mentioned almost in passing), family and imperial power had been clashing and competing in the village for years. Fouad's movement between the systems is also a product of their relationship. With another son in the house, they might have been safer, but with seven daughters who all needed to get married, Fouad was better off elsewhere. This clash between forces served to structure the life of the family even as things continued on the assumption that it operated under a patriarchal monopoly system. Just as the dominance of the village patriarchal system is undercut by the British, so too is British authority challenged by patriarchy, as well as emerging nationalist sentiments in the then (quasi-)independent Jordan.[15]

For example, when the women of the city start writing Fouad love letters and insist on accompanying their high-ranking husbands or fathers on their official visits so they can flirt with the young man, the soldier's appeal as a subject of female desire endangers his ability to represent the British, who in fact rely on the compliance of notable families to sustain rule. As he is a low-ranking soldier and a villager, pursuing any of the women would end his career. When "a number of people learned about [his] situation" (107), it becomes only a matter of time before gender politics embedded in the system of patriarchy drive Fouad out of the service of the British. Confused, he turns to a new organization, whose structures of power he hopes will finally give him meaning and help him make better sense of the world around him. He asks permission from the "chief of the city" to fight for Palestine with the ALA. Fouad once again packs up his few belongings and joins the Pan-Arab force of fighters who are organizing on the borders of Mandate Palestine to confront the Zionist militias. The overlaps, lacunae, and glaring contradictions he is faced with when he crosses the Jordan River and battles in the hills of Jerusalem are, finally, what push him to see the different structures of power at work, their service to their own interests, and how this service and self-sustaining functioning ultimately loses Palestine. The realization leaves Fouad lost and looking for his own personal compass. But we return to that part of the story in the next chapter.

Manar is similarly caught in the competing and overlapping structures of power that create her life's geography. The narrative loop of *Balcony of Disgrace*'s part 2 opens and closes with the young woman's return home, with her dress ripped and face tear-stained (83), in the middle of her eldest brother's scandalous wedding to a second wife. Neither the reader nor Manar's brother understands why she is crying when the passage first appears, but the intervening pages once again explain how the scene came to pass: the tears are the result of a clash between the family and class systems. As a taxi driver, Manar's father had been able to buy himself out of the family structure by aspiring to the middle class. He takes charge and tells his brothers that he is protecting his family through cash, not "honor." He drives Manar to and from university every day and tells the whole neighborhood that he will "raise his head" and his status through her work. Meanwhile, Manar studies and goes to art galleries and the cinema with her new boyfriend, Issam.

All of a sudden Manar's father loses his ability to work and buy his way into the structure of the middle class. He is injured in an accident, his back and legs rendered unfit for driving. His eldest son, Amin, fails his taxi license test, and the family is forced to hire out the car to a stranger, Yunis. The one condition of his lease is to drive Manar to the university campus. While it was fine when it was Manar's father driving her to school, with Yunis at the wheel things change: Manar is no longer protected by either her father or his work. The business relationship between Yunis and Manar's father sours, and the driver takes it out on Manar. While Manar is out with her boyfriend, Yunis stops her downtown and admonishes her for being "in this area so far from the house without telling [anyone], and the sun will set shortly!" (103). Using the family logic of protection to challenge the bourgeois logic of culture and independence, he insists that Manar come home with him. Issam makes no objection and waves goodbye as Manar gets into the car.

Manar is afraid; she sees the entanglement of two separate systems as a threat to her person. She is afraid because Yunis had been ousted from the family circle when Amin finally got his license, and her father had broken the lease contract in favor of his son. Bourgeois and family logics here become at odds. Because it was the family logic that saw the car taken away, Yunis takes his revenge according to the same ordering code. Where he feels his honor has been sullied by Manar's father, he taints the family honor by raping Manar on their way home, dropping her off at Amin's wedding with a ripped dress and tear-stained face. Where Manar was working to rise into the middle class, the family system has now exercised its logic on her body. While Issam tries to find a way to bring her back into his world, she is too firmly gripped by the family structure, and he gives up. The systems may operate simultaneously, but their notions of monopoly are distinct, and Manar's movement between the two ends in violence. The same is true when Manar moves between the state and the family.

Manar's uncle Salim hangs a black banner on the home of the family and declares, "I hope to god there is a man in this house to rise up and protect their honor" (105), asking a male relative to kill her and clean the stain on their honor, but the state steps in, in the form of police officers who declare, "We are here for her protection [*ḥimāyatihā*]" (179). She is only released when the state is satisfied that the family will not impinge on its monopoly on violence. Each system is sure it has the solution. But when Manar is released, it is her own brother who takes control and implements the family logic—gunning her down in the street. None of the systems that Manar interacts with is interested in anything more than protecting their own logics, and danger is certain when the logics overlap, displaying the weaknesses of one or the determination of another to assert control. While each suggests that it will ensure her care and indeed fulfilment, when threatened by another system—when the sovereignty of that system, its internal logics and organization—the structure closes in on its subjects and imposes its monopoly on violence instead of merging interests.

Once power is visible, it is thus fractured. Narrative and the imposition of logics are not only the purview of a single system. Rather, the lens of the modern and the attempt to order everything within a particular area into a certain logic is a task that is repeated by multiple systems, with ultimately different ends. So where in Genette's terminology the architext is the ultimate meaning maker, that which sets out the parameters of possibility, in reading Palestine the architext is pulled out of this hierarchy and into an intertextual relationship alongside multiple simultaneous and overlapping structures of power and grammars of control. While architexts are prevented from imposing a single frame of reading on Palestinian lives through the balconic vantage, they do create a substantial and often violent geography of power. Structures of power, then, are as important to understanding the realities of Palestine as the people, places, and things that they work to order. Sometimes, as we shall see below, all we have of the story of Palestine is what comes through these structures of power, and it is through the vantage of the balcony that we can learn to find Palestine despite them.

EXCAVATIONS

In the Palestine that Nasrallah writes, the realities of individuals and even the nation often need to be excavated from imposed narrative frames. Stories of Palestine and Palestinians often reach the reader through so many narrative layers that the people and places that should be at the heart of the narrative end up representing the structures of telling rather than themselves. Whether Palestinians are serving as an example of oppression, deprivation, "terrorism," resistance, or the plight of the refugee, realities are buried beneath structures of telling. What the vantage of the balcony tells us is that what is represented through these systems must be understood to be only part of the story, separating out that which is represented and the tool of representation. As we saw in the earlier sections, Palestine is the sum total of these structures and that which they have claimed to represent. Sometimes, however, these structures occlude that which is represented, and we must find a way to excavate the object.

In *Olives of the Streets*, the text that needs finding is that of Salwa, a young woman whose life is made invisible by a number of architexts that displace her from a Palestinian narrative. The novel is set in an unnamed refugee camp near Beirut in the 1970s. The peak years of the internationalization of the Palestinian struggle, it was the era of the freedom fighter, symbolized by the men of the PLO—an entity that epitomized the dream of Palestinian self-determination. At this place and time, the PLO had a tense relationship with Lebanon, the country that played host to most of its fighters following the 1971 exodus from Jordan during Black September. Salwa, the novel's protagonist, is raised by her paternal uncle in the camp after her father had been killed in the violence of 1948 and he had taken on her mother as a wife. The uncle is a PLO supporter and works to aid the cause for liberation. He is seen in the community as someone who supports his family and his country.

These factors make it very difficult for anyone to hear Salwa's accusation of the grossest corruption by her paternal uncle. As Salwa narrates, her uncle killed her father in 1948 so he could take her mother, he supports the PLO only because it gives him power, and the bulk of his "support" for the organization is in the form of pimping out Salwa to a local functionary. In a context where Palestinians are fighting for freedom, are the unwelcome "guests" of the Lebanese with no state apparatus of their own, and finally have the support of the international community that is cheering on their political ethos, no one wants to hear Salwa. To hear her would be, it seems, to discredit and destabilize all the good that the PLO was doing. It is the unlikely figure of Abd al-Rahman, a Lebanese journalist, who seeks out Salwa to tell her story, who grapples with what it means to hear and to find frames of telling that can express her truth.

His first attempt is a failure. Abd al-Rahman has his own reasons for finding Salwa and telling her story: she is the chance at a scoop on the Palestinian leadership's depravity. He had read a short reference to her in a Lebanese newspaper article accusing a local PLO leader of corruption. The official's abuse was only one of a litany of sins gathered to discredit him. Abd al-Rahman decides to track down the woman and find out if the allegations are true. The journalist collects his story. After reading the manuscript, Salwa marches into his office and throws the pages out the window, declaring, "If I hadn't cast out these papers I would have died under them" (7). On reading the manuscript, she finds that what she was told would be pages that told her experience instead tell the story of a victim of the PLO. She says, "I cried the whole night. When I read your pages I cried more than I had in my whole life" (5). She finds this more destructive and humiliating than the abuse that brought her to the writer's attention. The journalistic-style story that Abd al-Rahman renders thus repeats the damage of the camp official. Both make it impossible for her to be heard.

In *Olives of the Streets*, the story of Salwa is buried beneath other narratives, other architexts. In terms of both plot and formal structure, the novel is one of multiple texts in relationship and Salwa's experience in her own words is at the bottom of the pile. While the novel opens with Salwa throwing out the pages of Abd al-Rahman's manuscript, it is not until the end of the work that a reader understands how to find and pay attention to Salwa's own words. In fact, Salwa's version of her life is only captured on "six cassette tapes, on which were the whole story, from its beginning, but not to its end" (8), but we never hear them. Her words are not only shaped by Abd al-Rahman's writing, but supplemented, put into conversation with, and cast into question by the voices we do hear. As journalistic practice requires, Abd al-Rahman asks Salwa's uncle, the school principal, the local sheikh, and the PLO official who sexually abuses her to corroborate her story. Even while Abd al-Rahman knows that asking Salwa's abuser to verify her story is somehow wrong, he has no other way to think about writing. The journalist tries to mollify his guilt: "But why did you go to see her uncle? Abd al-Rahman asked himself. To make sure her story was true this time" (36). What the reporter learns from her school principal and the uncle, however, does not corroborate the young woman's story. They call her crazy. The principal tells him he had "never seen a girl who loved boys and chasing them more than her" (55), and her uncle tells him, "We tied her up because she was crazy!" (55).

It is these voices that are recorded in the novel, where Salwa's cassettes go unplayed. The reader must learn to deprioritize not only structures of telling but also other voices that these structures bring in. What the writer wants is for the facts to "line up." This is why Salwa calls the manuscript "a shelter for lies, not a refuge for me," and what is hinted at when she calls the manuscript "a story from different perspectives" (5). She tells the journalist, "You want it to be *accurate*," and reminds him, "This is life, not a story; have you forgotten?" (5). The journalist's

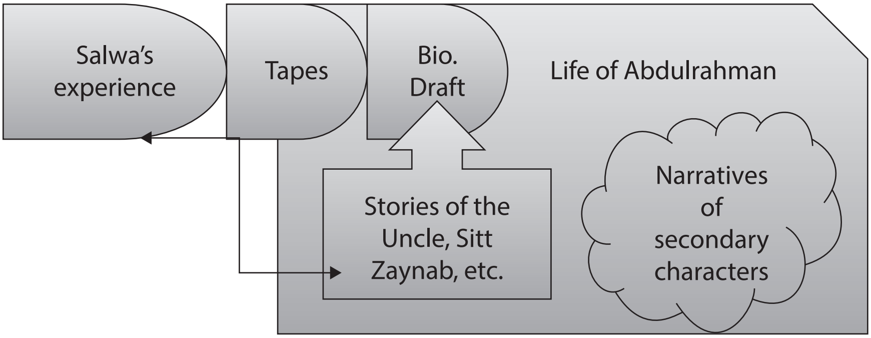
Salwa's experience
Tapes
Bio. Draft
Life of Abdulrahman
Stories of the Uncle, Sitt Zaynab, etc.
Narratives of secondary characters

FIGURE 5. A visual rendering of the different "texts" in *Olives of the Streets*, which appear within the frame of the novel and which are narrated as existing beyond the telling of the work.

quest to write her story inscribes into the novel not only Salwa's experience but also the structures that created it. This, in essence, is a deployment of the balconic vantage to see and identify the intertextual structure of the novel. This, the reader learns, is the only way to gain access to Salwa.

The visual rendering of the intertextual structure of *Olives* in Figure 5 shows that while all these different narratives are put to work to find Salwa's story, her own voice and her own logic of events are never heard directly. In the figure, inside the large rectangle are the "texts" related within the time frame of the novel, and the texts outside the rectangle are referenced in the novel but do not occur as it is read. While imperfect, each shape in the figure can be thought of as a "text" (an imaginatively limited space with its own logic and self-developed parameters, along the lines of Barthes's definition),[16] with no correlation between size and importance, and the arrows indicate the degree of conversation between them (or how much the reader's knowledge of one text might influence an understanding of the others). The overlapping sections suggest how one text frames or gives context (adding another layer of conversation) to the text that it underlies. So it is the rectangle of Abd al-Rahman's life that frames the novel. That rectangle shapes and shades the entire narrative as it is presented to the reader. However, within that rectangle, and informing it, are other texts that influence not only each other but also Abd al-Rahman's life. So while the narratives of secondary characters do not make it into the manuscript that Salwa reads, they do inform the life of Abd al-Rahman and are recorded in *Olives of the Streets*.

As what Genette would call a palimpsest,[17] each narrative writes over and occludes the young woman's "original" story. Salwa's "actual" personal experience is outside of the frame, but the tapes she records are not—at least not entirely. While her words are never directly relayed from the tapes to the novel, we at least know they existed. While Salwa struggles to have her story heard within the many texts that overwhelm it, her "text" nonetheless shapes the many others that surround it. By parsing the many different elements, Salwa's story can be seen—if not heard—as can its influence on other texts. Though the shape of Salwa's story can only be measured in the negative, in the void created by the outlines of its silencers, it can in some measure be identified. That story is there, at the bottom, in fact secretly dictating the parameters of that which seeks to overwrite her.

In trying to see through the other texts to find Salwa, we are taking the advice of her schoolteacher, who advises the journalist:

> If you want to write well about Salwa, you must listen to the tapes once, twice, three times, until you feel that Salwa is no longer in the tapes, that she has escaped and become part of you; when you forget about the tapes, you must write Salwa as you feel her, and this is all you must do. (79)

It is only by releasing himself from the expectation of a narrative that the journalist can find a space for Salwa's nonlinear, "incomplete," and "unverified" telling of her own experience. The narrative is no longer a linear biography, journalistic interview, or fact-checked article. Through Salwa's insistence on rewriting, on relistening, and on hearing her tell her own story, her story can be found. The texts, read as structures of power, no longer bury her but tell their own stories of oppression, leaving the way clear to see Salwa behind them. So where Salwa's uncle abrasively asks Abd al-Rahman, "A novel!! And will you bring back Palestine with your novel?" (43), the answer, in a way, is yes.

PART THREE

Novel Citizen

If I was not Palestinian, I would be nothing.

—JABRA IBRAHIM JABRA

I mean, who's the nation other than you and me, we're it.

—SAHAR KHALIFEH

Each man or woman brings the nation to life by his or her action.

—FRANTZ FANON

WHERE PART 1 LAID OUT THE TOOLS AND DEVICES that connected Palestinian place and time in Nasrallah's linked series and part 2 worked to account for geographies of power that intersect with these connections, what remains in the story of Nasrallah's Palestine is its people. Who are the Palestinians of the Balconies and Comedies series? What are the parameters put forward by the Palestine Project to evaluate and understand what makes a Palestinian? What marks an individual as a successful or problematic national agent within this open-ended, multiple, and expansive Palestine? Then, more important, how do Nasrallah's characters navigate this configuration of space and time? How do they make sense and meaning out of their relationship with the nation? The final three chapters set out to answer these questions. To do so, they use and adapt the language of the citizen as a concept that theorizes the reciprocal link between a nation and its people. It is through this lens that the analysis finds in Nasrallah's works a rescripting of national character tropes, a novel construction of the self in relation to the nation, and a recrafted model for the ideal citizen.

While the body of existing theory on citizenship—what it means and how it functions—is based almost exclusively on Euro-American models, it offers a rich and often structuralist vocabulary for parsing the mechanisms of the relationship between person and nation. The need to rely as a starting point on Euro-American theorizations is (at least) twofold, first because of the limits of Palestinian political discourse around the state model (for manifold reasons) and second because of a corresponding limit in the cultural field. Neither, for the deep structural reasons of colonialism and more pragmatic reasons that are outlined below,[1] has been explored in detail. In a practical sense, there is no formulation of juridical citizenship for all Palestinians because the idea has been pushed off the discursive map by a peace process beholden first to principles of sovereignty. All other factors are left for later. Thus any framework for deciding who is included, how they are included, what they are entitled to, and what responsibilities the state has toward them is absent.

As a result of this state of affairs, discourse on Palestinian citizenship has been confined to two areas: Palestinians as citizens in other nation-states and then the question of what it means to "be Palestinian" in the personal sense. For the first of these, for the most part, historical, political, cultural, and even literary analysis of Palestine in the context of citizenship revolves around the problem of belonging or exclusion from *other* nation-states. Most discussion has been in the context of Palestinian citizens of Israel, who—since the British Mandate period when citizenship laws were put in place[2]—have worked strategically within the parameters of the state to gain the widest access to freedom, justice, and self-determination.[3] This puts Palestinians in Israel—as well as in the less discussed Arab states—generally outside or at odds with state policies and politics, negotiating a way of being Palestinian against the structures of belonging that other states set out.[4] Citizenship in the nation-state model, as Noura Erekat puts it, "effectively negated their [Palestinian] status as a political community and dismissed their demands for self-determination."[5] This is centrally because, as the legal scholar Asem Khalil has put it, "focusing on state-centered citizenship [for Palestinians] . . . is at best counterproductive and futile and at worst a dangerous endeavor,"[6] risking further fracturing of existing administrative Palestinian identities.

Work in the cultural realm has focused equally on the problem of exclusion: what is not rather than what is. Here the relationship between the individual and the nation tends to be discussed as a very personal experience—and usually one of alienation. "What does it mean to be Palestinian?" is also generally a question asked and answered by Palestinians "outside" of the territory that was once Mandate Palestine, and even "outside" the refugee camps. Yassir Suleiman's 2016 volume, *Being Palestinian*, offers an example: it presumes that being Palestinian is automatic for those "inside" but is in need of discussion or definition for the diaspora.[7] Even this delineation of inside/outside follows the imaginative parameters of the nation-state model and does not reflect the realities of the Palestine that Nasrallah's works put forward. One of the few examples of cultural criticism that looks at Palestinianness from the perspective of refugees is Edward Said's writings in *After the Last Sky*. Focusing on Palestinians in the Arab world, he also relies on state-style policies to define Palestinianness, saying that Palestinians in the Arab world are "given special cards identifying them as 'Palestinian refugees.'"[8] Of course, an identity document is not the complex legal-cultural web of citizenship. Neither of these forms of being, or belonging, can quite account for the sense of unity or shared aspiration of nation and its agent. "Being Palestinian" is more than "an essence,"[9] a cause, something to wait for, an idea to rally behind, or a vague sense of something that is not quantifiable. While the imaginative parameters of this sort of citizen have not been explored in discourse, they are everywhere in fiction, and they are worked out thoroughly in Nasrallah's Palestine Project.

To parse the vision of the Palestine Project, it is not the analysis of juridical citizenship that is useful. Rather, it is the forays that Euro-American theory has made into the vast imaginative infrastructure of citizenship that set the stage. Joseph Slaughter's work is particularly useful. In his *Human Rights Inc.* he demonstrated the relationship between ideals of citizenship and narrative patterns of the bildungsroman to show how that literary genre became tasked with educating the individual into the correct path of national belonging. As individuals grow up and come of age, they are being shown the "correct" way into maturity—which is also the age of most European nations' age of legal responsibility. The bildungsroman, Slaughter writes, "is a sort of civic sixth sense that gives personal texture to the abstraction of the nation-state and citizenship."[10] This "sixth sense," or how one knows to go about being or becoming a national, Slaughter goes on, is "cultivated within the constraints of the state/citizen bind."[11] In other words, there is a clear and even rigid imaginative structure within which narrative constitutes the individual in relation to the state. This relationship, this "bind," is not legal but rather imaginative, where the goals, possibility horizons, and ideals of "success" or "failure" are set out by the national story. So too in the Palestine Comedies, though the bind is of a different sort.

When read as patterns for becoming linked to the imaginative structure of the nation, the tropes that haunt Palestinian fiction—the fighter, the hero-poet, the mother of the martyr—begin to make sense. Chapter 6 looks at these figures and reads (from the balconic position) them as past iterations of a hoped-for relationship between the person and a now-outdated vision of liberation. My analysis finds these tropes were modeled on a method of "becoming" a citizen in anticipation of a nation-state. In the absence of a state, individuals inhabiting these models can never actually realize citizenship. This is at once why the tropes are problematic and why they persist. In the Palestine Project, the tropes act as texts and also as echoes of limiting structures of power. While this configuration of relationship is marked as significant, the works of the linked series also put forward their own configuration of relationship. This shifts again the grammar of association. Rather than "becoming" a citizen and learning to fold the self into the desires and architecture of the state, Palestinian characters in Nasrallah's works rather engage in a process of "being." As opposed to "becoming," "being" is open ended and can establish the same reciprocal relationship between the citizen and Nasrallah's Palestine. It also, my analysis draws out, creates the parameters of a wider community subjectivity.

Chapter 7 looks first at the process by which the citizen engages citizenship. Rather than taking on and assimilating the goals of the nation-state as Slaughter described (he phrased it, quoting Mark Redfield, as the "integration of a *particular 'I'* into the general subjectivity of a community"),[12] in the Palestine Project, characters work to find what is called here a Palestinian "orientation," to take the term established by Sara Ahmed. In her *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed describes an orientation as "not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance."[13] The work of "being" a Palestinian citizen means perceiving and moving through a world that is often hostile to Palestinian presence while maintaining the ethos of openness, multiplicity, and balconic vantage. Palestinians in Nasrallah's work "find [their] way through the world" by adopting a perspective of delirium,[14] a term adopted from Nasrallah's *Balcony of Delirium*, which is where the problem of navigating a hostile word and maintaining the personal priorities of Palestine is treated most fully.

In marked contradistinction to existing formulations, which begin with what is not, a close reading of Nasrallah's work presents a more positivist articulation. This builds on the small but growing body of thinking exploring the meaning of "Palestinian" as it exists as a contemporary and even historical practice. For example. Zena Aga, in her 2022 series of curated articles, explored experiences of Black, Queer, and incarcerated Palestinians. Maurice Ebileeni writes in *Being There, Being Here* about what it means to include Hebrew, Danish, Spanish, and English narratives in a "polylingual category of Palestinian literature that could comprehend the ongoing cultural and literary implications of displacement."[15] Works like these answer warning calls made as early as the 1990s, as Palestinians saw the "battle of liberation" reduced to a discussion about Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.[16] Some contemporary scholarship is working hard to widen the lens, or to make sure that all of Palestine's "texts" are available for inclusion. What remains absent, however, and where the chapters below make their real contribution, is reimagining the architecture of the relationship between people and nation.

6

Being versus Becoming

Hero, Mother, Child

The hero-fighter and the mother of the martyr, whether embraced or abhorred, remain ubiquitous in Palestinian politics and culture as persistent yet awkward measuring sticks that assess whether and how one embodies Palestinianness. They are the only widely known markers for identity and belonging that, in theory, provide a road map for the fulfillment of both self and nation. Yet they are as likely to be treated with derision as they are to be taken up as (dysfunctional and problematic) models. In understanding the contemporary formulation of an actor-nation relationship, these tropes clearly need to be understood: What is their function? Why do they persist? Are they useful, or should they be discarded? Answering these questions requires a digression through the vast scholarship on tropes of Palestinian nationalism, their embedded assumptions about gender, and the relationships these encode for between self, sexuality, territory, and the shape of the nation. For, as scholars have long noted, living out the tropes of the nation and the aspirations for liberation have liberated neither the self nor Palestine. As Amy Zalman put it, the imaginative directions for a successful self and a successful nation "don't all point in the same direction."[1] The sections in this chapter explore how, why, and what an intertextual Palestine offers by way of a different model.

Analysis shows that the persistence of the mother/fighter tropes serves a two-pronged function. First, it is a space for discussion. Texts that take on the tropes and criticize them demonstrate to other characters (and indeed readers) where and how the models go wrong. Correctly reading and understanding why archetypes are problematic becomes part of the solution of surpassing them. Second, and just as crucial, the archetypes of the hero-fighter and the mother of the martyr are shown to be stale models of relationship linking actor and nation, models that were honed in earlier political moments. These "types" encoded for a relationship between Palestinian and Palestine when the nation was being imagined as an eventual state. Criticizing these models, then, becomes synonymous with criticizing and reimagining the relationship between actor and nation. The tropes never fully disappear, however. Living in a world where the nation-state is the status quo, the ideal actors of Palestine learn to read and mobilize these limiting representations and inhabit them when it serves a broader interest; the roles are always relinquished, however, when they limit the possibility horizons of group and individual.

This chapter traces the parameters and usage of the hero-fighter and the mother of the martyr as problematic tropes of "becoming" Palestinian. It links these tropes to a time when Palestine was imagined as a nation-state-in-waiting and the national actor was understood to act in the service of realizing the state. With no state in sight, the trope and those who inhabited it were, in a sense, doomed to failure. Now that thinking and discourse has moved past the state, something else becomes possible, but of course the past does not disappear. Reading across the works of the Palestine Project, my analysis shows how the tropes of the nation-state are absorbed into the intertextual nation. This process, however, differs between the hero and mother ideals and is related to how they were co-constructed, with mother a substructure of the hero. For analysis, it makes sense to begin with the "heroes" of the Palestine Project, who are portrayed as variously corrupt, doomed to failure, or refusing to inhabit the hero model. It is this last approach that renders the hero a text and liberates the characters from it, leaving the individual free to follow what the next chapter describes more fully as a Palestinian orientation.

The third section examines the mother of the martyr trope. As a subordinated model—so that the hero is meant to realize the state, and the role of the mother is to support the hero rather than liberate Palestine directly[2]—the women characters of the Palestine Project texts have less difficulty escaping the trope. Reading characters, here the analysis moves on, building on the idea of the individual as an agent interacting with the texts of Palestine. Characters who are burdened with the trope of the mother show an adeptness at mobilizing, or engaging with, the symbol as and when it suits a wider purpose. This is a sort of balconic intertextuality, where texts of the nation help individuals successfully navigate the world around them. Comparing the portrayals of the hero and the mother, the characters' ability to "succeed" is tied to their ability to critically assess the tropes and treat them as texts rather than as a direct 1:1 model whereby realizing the success of the self is inhabiting the goals and limits of the tropes. The middle section brings these into productive conversation and explores the child as an almost balconic option, not yet expected to perform the tropes and liberated somewhat from national expectations.

The child as the third, almost nonmarked, actor in the nation provides the analytical key for reading and interpreting the hero and mother tropes and the individuals who variously inhabit them. This is where the difference between the bildungsroman—as a genre that creates the ideal citizen of the nation-state—and the ideal citizen of an intertextual Palestine is most clear. The difference allows for the beginnings of a definition of "success" for the citizen of this alternative nation form. Success, readings show, is not "becoming" the trope of the nation-state. Rather, "success" resides in resisting subsumation into outdated models and critically engaging these texts of the past. The sections in this chapter, then, move from the hero figure to the child to the mother, building at once a definition of the trope-as-text and a vocabulary for "success" that rests not on the "becoming" of the coming-of-age but on an open-ended and creative "being."

DEAD-END HEROES

There is not one "successful" hero across Nasrallah's Palestine Project. The only exceptions, as we see in the final section of this chapter, are the heroes who refuse the label and strike out on their own to redefine the terms of personal and national success These successful heroes manage the simultaneous fulfillment of personal and communal aims through the performance of a role. At times this role coincides (in smaller or larger measure) with the trope of the hero. These examples, however, compete for attention with a cacophony of failures. From the lonely peasant who fights off the Ottoman tax man but is denied a life of love, to the corrupt Palestinian Authority lackey who uses the ideal of the hero to steal aid money, the shortcomings of the hero take up just as much space as its alternatives—if not more. Rather than discard the hero trope as a failure, then, this first section digs in, first to understand what exactly is failed and then to consider the function that inclusion of the trope serves in the construction of a relationship between nation and actor.

For the heroes of Nasrallah's work, and indeed across much of Palestinian fiction, the further away from the possibility of a sovereign nation-state Palestine gets, the worse the failings of the hero. Reading this into existing literature on the hero figure, the trope is revealed as a construct of the nation-state/citizen relation, something that was constructed over time as Palestinian liberation became funneled into the desires of the nation-state. But even as the state became a less desired and even impossible option—at least in terms of a form that the individual could mature into or recognize personal achievement alongside—the figure remained. This dogged persistence of the figure of the fighter and all its failures acts as a warning of the kind of citizen model to avoid at all costs. This symbolic movement can be seen clearly in the heroes of the Palestine Comedies, whose two typical heroic figures live before the Nakba. Khalid, a protagonist in *Time of White Horses* (*Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ*, 2007), and Dhaher al-Omar, in *Lanterns of the King of Galilee* (*Qanādīl malik al-jalīl*, 2012), set in an earlier time, almost succeed in their mission of uniting personal and national/communal desires. Dhaher fails only because his sons do not manage to maintain his legacy, but Khalid, who lives the Nakba, fails because he must sacrifice love to resist powerful oppressors.

Unlike the rest of the heroes in the more contemporary-set works of the Palestine Project, Khalid is earnest in his attempts to co-constitute his own identity through a fight for the protection and preservation of his Palestinian community. After robbing the Ottoman tax collector of what was stolen from the village, Khalid becomes a local icon. He stood up for what he believed in and is celebrated as a result. But not without consequences. He is now pursued by the Ottoman authorities, and his village cannot protect him. This, on the one hand, elevates his hero status even higher. In his life as a fugitive from the vengeful authorities, he is transformed into a "silhouette, which blended with that of his horse, both frightening and mysterious" (146). On the other hand, it decimates his personal life and alienates him from actual participation in village life. As he hides in the mountains, Khalid's fiancée's father cancels the wedding because the heroic acts have put both families at risk of reprisals from Ottoman governors.

If Khalid was a local celebrity for his fight against the Ottomans, his assassination of a British official marks him as a national hero. But his life besides and beyond the heroic—of love, of family, of participation in his village community—disappears as his hero status increases. As he fights for the nation he, in the words of Mourid Barghouthi, "is elevated to a symbol, up there in the sky"; the essence of the man "slips from our hands" and is removed from the network of community.[3] He remains a hero but is reduced to a myth, a "phantom atop the hill" (147), seen only from afar. Khalid turned "into something of a legend, a story told by young and old alike, to the point that some thought he actually was nothing more than a legend."[4] "Now that he had become larger than life, it was an easy thing for girls to fall in love with him" (152), but what they fell in love with was with the image of Khalid as a hero and not the fallible and at times foolish young man who the novel traces out in its opening chapters.

Becoming a hero for Khalid is a personal loss, one that haunts him. In the years to follow, though Khalid marries another, "he would later bring to mind" thoughts of his first beloved "to banish sorrow when it took him unawares, and when joy embraced him, to experience it in all its fullness" (101). In becoming a hero, Khalid is denied half of what, as Mahmoud Darwish describes it, makes him Palestinian. In a letter written just three months before the "national poet" passed away, he wrote to the authors attending the Palestine Festival of Literature: "The Palestinian is a human being, a tormented soul with daily questions; both national and existential. The Palestinian has a love story, who contemplates a flower and a window open to the unknown."[5] It was a potent reminder, from the man who so often felt "besieged" by the expectation to write the nation,[6] that being Palestinian meant life as well as politics. For Darwish, and for Khalid, the national hero, the expectation that self and nation are co-constituted through creation and protection of sovereignty, proved a trap.

For Palestine, eager to join the world of states, the problematic yet persistent paradigm of the ideal citizen as hero-fighter emerged, then "slipped from the hands" of a lived and changing reality, to become an immovable and problematic text. In this figuration, as Laleh Khalili explains it, "archetypal martyrs become iconic protagonists. They embody people's histories," and the story of the nation.[7] These idylls represented a well-crafted vision of the currently stateless but inevitably independent Palestinian. The model of the fighter provided a framework, a form of co-constitution, or "citizenship," that tied action for the nation to the imagined result of the liberation.[8] This construction of a heroic ideal also set out goals and horizon possibilities, so that being Palestinian meant becoming or learning to inhabit these roles.[9] In this model the self was meant to be both personally and nationally successful when the homeland was liberated. The road signs,[10] in other words, that point toward personal fulfillment were at this point the same as those that lead to national success. At least from the 1960s (if not simultaneous with its creation), however, this figuration has been critiqued and shown as problematic. Yet this ideal persists as the sole available measuring stick for national being.

This stock figure gained status as powerful myth. The idea of the fighter gave individuals what Massad calls "nationalist agency"[11]—the personal ability to identify and be identified as Palestinian. The hero, as Zeina Halabi put it, "personified the stable triangulation of past/present/future and the inevitable transition to a future of certainty and liberation."[12] But while the fighter gave a community a sense of purpose and direction in a world of states, it subjected the individual to the teleology of a guaranteed and predetermined outcome of the nation—but only if that nation was a nation-state. It is because of this figuration that the Palestinian national experience is so often described as one of waiting for Godot,[13] the title of the Samuel Beckett play about interminable waiting, where, as one critic describes it, "objectives no longer exist[,] . . . [and] time does not exist either, life is 'treading water,' so to speak."[14] Neither nation nor its actors can be fulfilled until a state is realized. The national hero cannot truly be read as successful until the nation is free (sovereign). For Khalid, taking up this role estranged him from himself.

Where Khalid might be seen as "just" a tragic hero facing impossible circumstances, the divisions visible between the idea of the hero and the reality of the person are widened in *Eraser Child* (2000), a work in the Palestine Comedies set chronologically after Khalid's failure to save Palestine. The novel, like *Time of White Horses*, ends roughly at the Nakba and follows the protagonist Fouad's childish dreams of heroic success and the problems that result as the mantle of the hero is thrust too quickly upon him. As the narrator puts it, Fouad "became one of the famous, no, the heroes, before [he was] given a chance" (186)—a chance, in this case, to see the hero as a false promise. Fouad's peers see only his physique and read in his facial hair the old adage that "a man's honor lies in his moustache,"[15] equating honor with masculinity and masculinity with power and presuming that the trifecta will lead to inevitable success. So powerful is this image that the day Fouad is sent from the village to the British Legion, "no one saw the tear" that fell from his eye as he wept in fear and sadness "because their gazes—all of them—

were on the thick and substantial moustache sitting atop [his] lip like the sign of a person who was more than his age" (43).

In this hapless character, the "signs" of the hero repeatedly come up false, but the idea is so powerful that despite his continued failures everyone is certain of his success. This continues to the end of the novel, when Fouad returns to Amman after failing to save Jerusalem-Palestine. Even at this loss his superiors would insist he is a hero, declaring, "If it weren't for you we would have lost the rest" (272). So while Palestine was lost, the ideal of the hero meant to save it somehow remains. And as Fouad breaks down—as we see in chapter 7—spending his days looking into a giant mirror he has bought for the barracks, he looks for the child who never had a chance to find his own way, for the *ṭifl al-mimḥāt* (eraser child; erased child)—the child (and perhaps the nation) that was erased by the vision of the hero. These problems, we see, are not just for Fouad as a person: his personal development ceases as the world he inhabits calcifies him as "hero." Fouad takes up arms as a member of the Arab Liberation Army (*jaysh al-inqādh*, the glorious Pan-Arab effort to save Palestine from colonial forces), and despite or even because of his calcified hero status, he loses every battle he is in. Thus, as Joseph Massad has argued, the promise of the hero is false because the hero figure represents a way of being Palestinian modeled on "western-style nationalism,"[16] and in its figuration repeats the limitations of the sate model (not least of which is the highly gendered nature of the roles). The hero represents a linear developmental model whose goal is bounded by territorial sovereignty, the creation of a container that can hold and retroactively make meaning out of their struggle.

The more contemporary "heroes" are even more removed from the pastoral "phantom atop a hill" figuration and either blatantly manipulate the idea to gain authority or refigure it entirely. In *Olives of the Streets* (2002), the local leader, a member of the PLO, rapes the work's protagonist, who finally convinces a local sheikh that she is being abused. He attempts action, but when he sees who the perpetrator is, he does nothing. The leader, known only by his honorific title "Ḥaḍrat," or Sir, is respected because of his role in the community (not for any leadership attributes), so no one intervenes. "Sir" wields his power and its promise of national, personal, and community fulfillment and leaves Salwa feeling as though her "teeth were stuck together, no, my teeth had melted, one into the other" (132). Criticism of the leader and the promises his position held were socially prohibited.

In *Under the Midmorning Sun* (2004), a similarly nameless al-Duktūr (the Doctor) demonstrates that the same formula for abuse holds as the PLO transforms into the Palestinian Authority. Charged with setting up a pseudo-state in parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the auspices of the Oslo Accords of 1993, the PA again transforms the idea of the hero as an expression of power and authority. Al-Duktūr mobilizes the idea to suck up the aid money that came with the Accords. Claiming to be developing Palestinians through theater, he uses his position as director to step over (and on top of) his conationals and to elevate himself. This “hero” takes on his nickname, “the Doctor,” “as if the title was what he had been waiting for from the moment of his birth” (25)—though he never earned it. His title is as false as the ideal he wields: returning with the Accords to develop and modernize a fragmented Palestine so that it could take a place among nations. Al-Duktūr is precisely the lie of what Stephan Guth describes as “steady progress, a bright future lying ahead, and near victory,” which quickly “turned out to be a fatal lie, a mere fiction.”[17] If, as Laleh Khalili has written, in post-Oslo Ramallah “the people [were] divided into two groups: that of the select who rule and steal, and that of the majority which complains and searches for someone to save it,”[18] then al-Duktūr is surely in the first and represents perhaps the worst of the problems of a new Palestinian leadership in his actions and the way he uses the idea of the hero and its “modernist discourse” to manipulate others.[19]

In no cases does the hero-fighter adequately provide an ideal for the individuals inhabiting it to relate to the nation. The mantle of the hero is separated from the individual—who might claim it, wear it, or abuse it—but can never be fully realized by fulfilling the hero-fighter’s different manifestations. Rather, the paradigm of the fighter limits the possibilities for the individual and the way they can participate in the nation. The hero is left behind as a model for the citizen precisely because it is closed, stagnant, and not in active relationship with the parts of Palestine. The hero is portrayed as a political configuration that might once have had, but quickly loses its relationship to the lived conditions of Palestinian reality. It is left behind as a text of power, a text whose structure imitates the linear and teleological model of the nation-state. It is the figure of the child—not yet completely burdened with the need to perform the national tropes—that allows the hero-fighter to remain as a text and provides an alternative figuration for the actor-nation relationship.

FREEDOM FROM “BECOMING”

Children in the works of the Palestine Project, and in Palestinian literature more broadly, often represent a freedom from the pressures to fit into existing tropes of the nation. Where for adults the prospect of a failure to fit is equated to a failure of the individual, for the child—especially the young child—there is not yet pressure to mature, or to develop, in a particular way. In this freedom the child provides a model of the actor-nation relationship liberated from the drive to “become” or to inhabit a particular goal. Young children do not need to “become” national; they simply “are.” The difference boils down to grammar, being/becoming, but utterly shifts the role of the individual and the nation. The most carefully examined example of this difference—becoming versus being—is Nasrallah’s *Birds of Caution* (*Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar*, 1996), where the basic tenets of the bildungsroman are mobilized and subverted. The child demonstrates to the reader the possibility of being in the world without the traps of “becoming” national through maturity and gender performance. Once the paradigm of being is established in the character of *al-ṣaghīr*, it is easy to see the same at work for children across the works of the Palestine Project, who collectively define what it means to "be" Palestinian.

"Becoming" a citizen, a national of a nation and a successful member of its community, is, in Slaughter's terms, to be recognized as an "incorporated citizen."[20] A person, in other words, who in their actions constitutes the state because their end goals are coterminus with the ideology of the nation. This co-constitution, especially in postcolonial contexts, offers what Pheng Cheah calls a fictive "remedy" for the dislocation and ruptures of colonization.[21] In generic terms, narrating this type of becoming is a bildungsroman, or literally, a story of training or education in that very *nahda*-era sense, where an individual was trained to be modern and live "properly" as an agent of the world (of course, the world according to colonial designs). But in the case of Palestine, when there is no state, performing the trappings of a state, or even a state-in-waiting, leaves the individual alienated from community—as we saw in the section above. In fact, the actor in and of Palestine must unlearn the paradigms of nation-state-ness and, instead of "becoming" national through this education, learn from the state of the child and simply—in an open-ended and flexible sense—"be."

As the first novel that Nasrallah produced after determining to write *the* national story, his boy protagonist is bound to be invested with heavy national meaning. However, the child, known only as *al-ṣaghīr*, is very specifically *not* a fighter who marks territory, protects land and women, or presumes that by being able to protect women/nation he will be fulfilled. He is not Kanafani's Mansour from "The Child Borrows His Uncle's Gun and Goes to Safad" (to which we will shortly return); he is not a vision of a fighter-in-waiting. And while his life is forged by key landmarks in Palestinian politics, it is not these that his life story is collected around. As chapter 3 drew out, the boy's perception accumulates impressions of a national experience rather than a preset national narrative, and these are assembled into an open-ended framework that represents Palestine. What this section traces is the one thing that does, in a sense, drive the narrative that the boy offers: not the necessity to meet others' expectations, but instead a love for birds.

The symbol of flight, of freedom as an ideal, crafts a new configuration of nation/actor that avoids the traps of teleology and maintains an open view to the possibilities of the future. Crucially, it also remaps the gendered hierarchies of the hero/mother, where the hero must protect the mother/land, and the mother must nurture the child to fight. This, as the title *Birds of Caution* hints, is done delicately through a linkage between the boy's emerging sexuality and the understanding he develops of protection—specifically, protection of birds (and then later, of women and friendships). The link comes most pointedly early on, when the boy refuses to hunt birds in the fields around the Wihdat camp like the other boys. When *al-ṣaghīr* captures the birds in nets, traps, and cages, he releases them, to "teach them caution," so they learn how the traps work and won't get caught in them again. *Al-ṣaghīr* teaches his friend Khalil about the traps. When their first catch flies away from the net, Khalil cries, “We lost him!,” to which the boy replies, “We gained him” (123). For *al-ṣaghīr*, “gaining” the bird is ensuring that it would not be captured, that it would stay safe and free—a condition he charges himself with maintaining. This idea of learning about traps and avoiding them is gradually mapped onto the tropes of “becoming” in the form of the fighter and the mother of the fighter. But first it is linked with sexuality.

This association and the understanding of protection from being trapped is also what motivates the boy’s amorous actions and his vision of masculinity. This does not always go over well with the other boys in the camp, who complain, “You taught the birds to be cautious and now none of us are able to catch them” (114). While the boy can prevent other camp kids from catching birds by teaching the birds caution, when they start “hunting” his beloved (145) with no intention of “releasing” her, the boy is at a loss. His beloved, Hanun, had also, from the start, been associated with the symbol of the bird. She is the daughter of a neighbor in the Duheisheh camp near Bethlehem, and when the boy, not yet through his first weeks of life, hears her feet ruffling the edges of her dress, her “soft footsteps” are forever associated with the “singing [of bird feathers], with the same ruffling beat” (8). We learn that for *al-ṣaghīr*, love does not mean possession, or staking a claim, but is an active protection of people and animals (and Palestine) from the traps that would see them confined.

There can be little doubt that the boy—whose gendered name *al-ṣaghīr* clearly marks him as male but not-yet-a-man—operates as a redefinition of gender-nation associations. It is no longer virility, in its associations with the binaries passivity/aggression, weakness/strength, defeat/victory, that orients the boy’s view of his power. This is shown clearly when the boy is teased for not fitting typical tropes. He understands that he is being mocked but responds on and in his own terms. Playing on the Palestinian slang for a young boy’s penis (*hamāma*, also the slang for “dove”), *al-ṣaghīr* is belittled by his peers when he challenges them on their treatment of Hanun. “Don’t you have a *hamāma*?” his rival teases, intimating that *al-ṣaghīr* is still a boy and unable to compete for Hanun’s affections. The boy does not respond to the associations about manhood and virility, however. He responds in the language of birds: “No, I have an *ʿuṣfūr* [lit., “bird”]” (145). He is not weak like a captured dove, his response intimates, but is free like the birds he teaches caution in the fields. He does not define success in the performance of masculinity or trappings of the national hero and—reading further—sees this construction as a trap, just like the trap he teaches the birds to avoid.

With these insights, even stories of children read as prototypes of the national hero from the golden age of resistance in the late 1960s can easily be recast. Kanafani’s canonical character Mansour of “The Child Borrows His Uncle’s Gun and Goes to Safad,” for example, may take up arms to protect the nation, but he does so to escape a set of community expectations that deny him agency and trap him in a doomed national configuration. The story of Mansour is set during the Nakba but appears in Kanafani's 1968 collection, *Of Men and Guns* (*ʿAn al-rijāl wa al-banādiq*),[22] so it can be said to reflect on the Nakba rather than to offer an account of its events.

Watching the adults in his life panic as word of Zionist militias emptying nearby towns and cities spreads, the young Mansour begs his uncle for the old man's even older Turkish gun. Despite being refused, he disobeys his elders and heads to Safad with his uncle's gun, as the title of the story suggests. In doing so, he disregards admonitions that he is too weak, too small, too immature to carry the gun, and he makes the journey and contributes to the battle. Heroes, after all, are grown men. While he holds his own in battle—proving that this sort of heroism is not limited to grown men—the battle is lost. The lesson here is not that the stubborn persistence of the child is a model for men.

Mansour's father, who had taken a weapon and gone to Safad to fight, is killed. Mansour is there to witness his death, and the story concludes with Mansour "in the wet emptiness watching his father slowly dying, impotent and unmoving."[23] In no case does the model of the hero succeed—not in the elderly uncle trying to protect the child from battle, not in the father fighting for the safety of the land. The only success, as Hilary Kilpatrick's deft analysis shows, is the boy's, because he alone is able to see when existing structures are holding both person and Palestine back.[24] The often-missed moral of the story is defiance of rigid structures and established notions of producing self/nation. Mansour, in reading the world around him, challenging tropes, and finding his own way, parallels *al-ṣaghīr* in what is ultimately a call to subvert stale authority structures. Indeed, for both children, as Kilpatrick puts it for the world of Mansour, "authoritative structures are being radically modified by the forces of circumstance"[25]—and it seems possible only for children to escape these structures and forge alternatives that better suit circumstances. And there is the crux: the child succeeds because he can see when the "authoritative structures" are getting in the way.

While the child in both cases finds his own path toward the linkage between self and nation, *al-ṣaghīr* and Mansour are also ultimately swallowed by the larger failures of the worlds they inhabit. Mansour's story finishes in the "wet emptiness" of a lost Palestine, while *al-ṣaghīr* works futilely to maintain his model of being in a world structured by hero and state. This position, however, becomes more and more difficult to maintain. His beloved Hanun joins the resistance as tension in the camp heightens, what would come to be known as Black September approaches, and a clash with Jordanian authorities ultimately finds Palestinian politics removed from the country and displaced to Beirut. Against this backdrop, where the figure of the fighter reigned, *al-ṣaghīr* tries to maintain his worldview. When Hanun goes missing the boy announces that he will fly (*yaṭīr*) to find her. It is as he goes to find her that he is killed—trying to liberate his beloved from a paradigm of nation and citizenship he sees as fruitless. For the boy, it is better to teach caution.

How the novel narrates the boy's death is telling. It is not told as an ending but uses obscured language to keep open the infinitesimal possibility that he is still alive and at the same time drawing on eschatological tropes that see him leaving the earth toward the sky. The narrator describes the boy soaring over the camp looking for his beloved to make sure she is not captured in the nets of politics, but he cannot find her and gets tired. The boy-now-bird (a national martyr who would refuse the mantle) "cannot find a place to land" (331); there is no safe space. Finally, in what reads as a sort of dream, the boy finds Hanun, and as birds, they fly away together (332). For the story of the boy, which becomes a national story, it is the bird and its freedom—attained through caution—that now signify the link between actor and nation. But the world he lives in is not yet ready for the new configuration. It is up to the women characters, the would-be mothers of would-be martyrs, to find a way to live in and through this refusal to "become" in the sense of the bildungsroman and to rather "be" in an open-ended and, as it transpires, intertextual sense.

WOMEN'S SUCCESS

> *And what if the symbol is lost? If the symbol is lost, I lose myself. What's left? . . . I'm no longer the land, no longer the symbol, no longer the sun, but I'm the feeling . . .*
>
> —SAHAR KHALIFEH[26]

From Salwa's launch of Abd al-Rahman's manuscript out the window in *Olives of the Streets* to Randa's exasperated accusation that Gaza's newspaper editors are slaves to existing narrative formulas when they reject her articles on the lives of children killed amid the Intifada (*Amina's Weddings*), women in Nasrallah's series are critical of the limited forms of representation that the fighter/mother paradigm offers. Randa, for example, is the first to remind readers that the "hero" is also a person in a body who "eats and drinks and watches television, and dreams and plays or gets angry or listens to music or goes to the bathroom" (*Amina's Weddings*, 61). Without these details, she regrets, the individual "is pushed aside and we don't see anything of the poet but his poetry" (61). This is a grave mistake, the young writer warns, because it reduces a person to a frame "as a character becomes a character in novels" (61). She here takes aim at the teleological character, that frame of already determined becoming that constructs not only the ideals of the hero but the mother as well. Crucially, for Randa and the other women of Palestinian fiction, there is a difference in the construction of the mother of the martyr that allows a remove from the pressures of "becoming" and opens a pragmatic and intertextual space to "be" within and between the texts of the nation.

The role of Palestinian women, like men, relied on the idea that the Palestine sought was a bounded and sovereign state. Beth Baron has deftly shown the symbolic relationship between sovereign national territory and women's sexual purity,[27] where "nationalists elevated the concept of family honor, which was based on female purity, to a national plane, and honor became a larger communal affair. . . . The nation had an honor to defend, and those who shared honor made up the nation."[28] While Baron looked at Egyptian sources, the same formulation holds true for Palestinian women.[29] Of course, without the nation-state, the idea of a woman as a bordered space that shouldn't be violated transformed to accommodate the needs of the national movement. And the national movement was based on the hero. Rhoda Anne Kananneh, citing Foucault, observed that the role of women was to "integrate . . . in the state's utility,"[30] which in very blatant terms was to take care of the fighter or produce (by birthing) more fighters. Women were the territory to be protected and were what would sustain the fighters until the land might take their place. Despite this apparent complementarity, the role of the woman in this national configuration is dependent—for the realization of either personal or communal success—on the role of the man.

In the figuration of the Palestinian there is no such thing, Massad explains, "as *Palestinian women* struggling for Palestinian women's rights, but as *Palestinian* women struggling for discursively constituted Palestinian rights."[31] No matter the actions or personal desires of the woman national, he goes on, "Palestinian is always already conceived in the masculine."[32] Where the relationship between actor and nation for men was modeled on the state and becoming a fighter to protect the idea of that state, for women, the self as a national being could be fulfilled only by discursively supporting the default male role. So where men—aiming to "mature" and come of age into their role as Palestinians—were done violence by having to fit into the *particular I* of the state structure or risk being socially invisible, women were done a double violence in that their limited belonging is a by-product of another construction. In the only real existing construction of a national, women are twice removed from the nation. Women were thus at a remove from the nation-state construct. This remove created a sort of vantage on the impossible nature of the construction. This vantage, we shall see, created the beginnings of a balconic position from which women could identify, critique, and then engage with the text of the hero trope.

Salwa, the protagonist of *Olives of the Streets*, has the most direct approach to the portrayal of women-as-land-as-mothers. When she reads the manuscript of Abd al-Rahman, the journalist who sought to make his fame by exposing the corruption of a local PLO leader who abused her, she sees in it her reduction into a trope of the nation(state)—the evidence of a man's failure to be the hero he claims to be. Salwa is literally handed the national tropes as a text, a text she also literally throws out the window. While this act of rejection doesn't ever really get rid of the powerful figuration of the hero/mother, it does liberate Salwa from any personal expectation that she must reproduce the model. The text still exists, just not as something that Salwa chooses to embrace or use as a personal benchmark.

Critically, with the ideal of motherhood "out the window," it can then be critiqued, rendering the relationship between the person and the idea intertextual. As texts in dialogue, the distinctness of each is preserved, and it is the conversation generated between the two that provides a model of "being" that is the new ideal for the national (of any gender).

As "being" rather than "becoming" nationals, women characters in the Palestine Project are constantly engaging with the texts of the nation—including the tropes of the hero and the mother. Reading this engagement provides a clear example of how the in/out vantage of the balcony allows for an intertextual approach to "being." The most sustained example of this in the Palestine Project comes in *Amina's Weddings* (2004), set in Second Intifada–era Gaza, where the protagonist, Randa, nearly literally rewrites the paradigmatic mother figure. She goes direct to the source, to Ghassan Kanafani's *Umm Saad*.[33] Written in 1969—short years after the Arab defeat of 1967—the work is about its titular character, known only as the "mother of Saad." The woman, of unknown but apparently advanced age, is portrayed as a paragon of steadfastness, a hero herself and mother of natural heroes (the novella reveals that her son Saad has gone off to join the resistance). She is transformed from the mother of Saad, symbolically, to the mother of all fighters, giving up on worry for her son and displacing that worry onto the nation and its safe return. Umm Saad becomes the mother of Palestine, made a mother by her willingness to transfer love of an individual son to love of collective "sons" of the nation. This system of signification turns Umm Saad from a person into a symbol.[34] Even in Kanafani's words, the character "is not an individual woman" but becomes a myth.[35] This representation troubles Randa, who is busy recording the grief of the mothers of her neighborhood, whose children had been killed by the Israeli military during the Intifada. The experience of recording these "real women" prompts her to ask, "How many pages would Ghassan Kanafani have written if he wanted to say the story of Umm Saad in all its minute detail?" (62).

Living in a community of women whose men are absent—off fighting, in prison, dead—Randa seeks a role. She also seeks a narrative space for her experiences on a national level. Her search begins when, seeking to "make sense" of what is happening in Gaza during the Intifada, she records the stories of martyred children from her neighborhood. At first, she tried to have the stories published in the local paper, but the editors tell her they aren't important. So she decides to compile them in a book of her own. She writes in her diary, along with the stories of the children killed and their mothers' memories, an extended reflection on the woman that is Umm Saad. So not only does Randa refuse the subordinate position—waiting to be protected or liberated, in the wings while the men act—but she engages the paradigmatic figure of this construction and asks why it came to be. In her writing, Randa critiques the model, recognizes it as a text produced for a particular moment in time, recognizes its (limited) utility, and engages the text so as to expand on it. Her diary entry is worth quoting at length.

> I know a woman like Umm Saad, she will always be amazing, but will she be amazing in the same way after twenty, thirty, forty years? Maybe she was like me, like us, but this is not exactly my question:
>
> How did Ghassan put the most beautiful of her in the novel?
>
> Was it because when she met him she loved him like he was Saad her son, and so he made her feelings erupt as though she was talking about her soul? Or because the novel wouldn't be a novel if it was like that, and her character couldn't be a character if it wasn't like that? He said what he needed to say in the time that he had, and said it in the words that he had in mind, and no other words but them, and made the rest disappear, only to appear a second time and say what must be said at another moment?
>
> How many pages would Ghassan Kanafani have written if he wanted to say the story of Umm Saad in all its minute detail? And would we love her if we read her life in a thousand pages, or two thousand? Would we love her like we loved her in ninety pages? And is she full here, not missing anything, simply filling the moments of a time that the people have left behind? (62)

Randa wonders about the possibility, half a century after Kanafani created the character, of representing Umm Saad as a woman saddened by the loss of her son. As Randa's grandmother warns, to write a woman the way Kanafani wrote Umm Saad was to tell only one part of her. This was dangerous, the elder warned, because if a person buys into the narrative, "they'll remember their shadows more than they remember their real selves, and with time, they won't be able to see anything but a picture" (121). Randa wants more than a picture. And so, in fact, did Kanafani.

According to those who have read Kanafani's personal papers, "there are indications that he wrote, or thought of writing, at least two further episodes about her."[36] He too had sought to expand on or multiply the possibilities of the mother, but his life was cut short by a car bomb planted by Israeli intelligence agents, which killed both the writer and his young niece. Almost as if he knew he would not have enough time, or that it was not yet the right time for a more diverse and complex portrayal of the Palestinian mother, Kanafani lamented, "If only there were enough time, now one could really write some Palestinian stories!"[37] It is, perhaps, only as a series that the agent of the nation can imagine themselves (as full and complex individuals) as part of the nation (which is equally full and complex). Randa takes this to heart. In her renderings, women are not frozen "as a character becomes a character in novels" (61); rather she writes compilations "about them[,] . . . what they said, what they dreamed of" (125).

The further Randa gets from the codified, newspaper, novelized, stock models of people and life in Gaza, the closer she comes to understanding the world around her. As she gains access and understanding of her experience of Palestine—as a person and a place trapped within structures of power—she realizes it is not the tropes that have helped her understand. It is rather the opposite. Knowledge and understanding of her context come, for Randa, from “mothers who never went to school a day in their lives.” Randa hears, repeatedly, “something so deep, so insightful, that no learned person would be able to say half of it” (60). This leads the young woman to the profound conclusion that Kanafani had “said what he needed to say in the time that he had.”[38] She takes it upon herself to continue the story. The trope of the mother is thus undone as a teleological and closed tool of becoming through intertextual engagement: reimagining Umm Saad from a different place and in the “time that she had.” Thus, representations of the mother figure also take on their place and time. Rather than the only available model of “becoming” national, they take their place as texts within an intertextual Palestine. Women like Randa and Salwa demonstrate how these texts can be—often productively—engaged with, either as a declaration of a life otherwise or to dig deeper into the many “sides” of women (and indeed most characters). Engaging with the trope opens essential conversations, both within the texts and for the reader. For both, it becomes clear that the nation has moved on from the hero/mother paradigm but certainly not forgotten.

The “successful” citizen, then, sees Palestine moment by moment, refuses limitation, and understands representation within larger systems, where at a time and a place reducing the self or nation to a single “part” is necessary or inevitable but is always escapable. This approach to the world, perhaps, is the teaching of caution, so that once the time and the place have changed, the citizen can continue to grow, to be reconstituted within the full range of national possibility. Rather than closed, determined, and rigidly gendered individuals failing to liberate a sovereign homeland, citizens navigate, witness, and produce the nation through their own acknowledgment of lived experience. Citizens, then, do not “become” Palestinian in a process of maturation but rather learn to navigate their nation in a constant quest to remain and keep others out of the traps presented by the systems of power and delimitation that exist therein. If for the character of the bildungsroman there is the constant possibility of falling out of the trajectory of the state, and “failing” as a national personality because the goals of the individual do not line up with the desires of the nation, for the citizen of Nasrallah’s Palestine, the trap is rather the inability to see, to critique, or to maintain distance from the telos and its echoes, in order to remain oriented within Palestine. But what, exactly, makes this approach to the world Palestinian? It is to this question that the next chapter turns, to build further on the notion of orientation.

7

Palestinian Orientation

What makes national meaning out of "being" Palestinian is not just the personal success of the individuals who realize this open-ended worldview. There is a much wider umbrella at work, and it is within this structure that the daily actions and reactions of individuals take on a larger collective value. It is not a national telos, or the folding in of that "Particular I" into the linear narrative of the state, but it is, similarly, how the individual knows theirs' and others' actions are Palestinian and acts as a gauge for personal success against the national frame. Rather than the "becoming" of state, the structure of Palestinianness is better described as a national orientation, a collective sense of possibility, of goals, and, as Sara Ahmad puts it, a way to "find our way through the world."[1] In describing what a Palestinian orientation means in fiction, the discussion moves just as much around what is to be avoided as what is to be done. Finding a Palestinian "way through the world," indeed, is equally about how to elude the pitfalls of being erased by other powerful national narratives as it is about forging imaginative frameworks for being and belonging.

In tracing the relationship between the agent and the nation, characters hone a perspective, an orientation that cuts through the many overlapping structures of power, allowing the individual to reach conclusions about action that will sustain their relationship to the nation in an open-ended fashion. This is, in essence, a constant refusal of closure, of assertions of telos, of predetermination and foreclosure that would delimit the practice of continuous interpretation of the ever-increasing texts of the nation. There is conceptual precedent for this idea. Mark Rifkin, for example, has deployed Sara Ahmad's work on orientation to reframe thinking on the relationship between Indigenous communities in the United States.[2] Rifkin defines the differences in terms of time, as an ordering principle as we saw it in parts 1 and 2. He terms an orientation to the state a life within "settler time," where the individual is "oriented" to the fulfillment of the (teleological) national story. For Indigenous peoples, who nonetheless reside within the state, Rifkin looks at how communities have a differently articulated "orientation," a different way of understanding, imagining, moving within, and creating meaning from time. This "way of being," unlike an orientation within the state (or a becoming into the state, to use Slaughter's terms) allows the mutual constitution of a self and community through one's actions. Turning directly to Ahmad's work adds nuance to the idea.

A Palestinian orientation is not a case of being oriented to a point of desire, to use Ahmad's development of idea, but being oriented "around." "To be oriented around something," Ahmad reasons, "means to make that thing central, or as being at the center of one's being or attention."[3] In this case, it is the intertextual network of texts that the Palestinian person is not only oriented "around," but indeed within. This fits nicely with Ahmad's description, where orientation around a thing (the intertextual network) is to "make 'that thing' binding, or to constitute oneself as that thing."[4] As indeed Palestinians, as texts within the network certainly constitute and are constituted by (by being oriented around) the intertextual network. At the same time, Palestinian orientation also operates in the negative, not by the exclusion of, say, "Orientalism" as Said articulated it and Ahmad explored, but as a sort of avoidance and critical distance. The balconic position that creates the network of Palestine's texts carefully directs Palestinians away from structures that would co-opt them, that would orientate them away from the practice of mutual constitution of the open self and the open nation. In the literary language that emerges from Nasrallah's works, and in Palestinian fiction more broadly, this orientation is expressed in the language of Arabic literary madness.

Madness in Arabic fiction is not the operation of a normalizing control that Foucault famously described in his *Madness and Civilization*. It not the operation of "madness" as a social phenomenon in Palestine, which at least since the nineteenth century worked in a similar exclusionary sense as that described by Foucault. As one orientalist observer described madness in Palestinian society circa 1920, madness is "anything eccentric, out of the way, contrary to custom."[5] Madness as the basis of a Palestinian orientation is rather based on generations of Arabic literary and folkloric depictions of "truth in madness" or "wisdom of insanity" (*junūn*),[6] which run across Arabic (and indeed Anglo/European) literary tradition. This sort of madness allows order and power to be seen as the problem and madness as the solution. In Arabic fiction, as Rasheed El-Enany concludes, the category of madness is at once "a means of dismissing the dissenter, of disclaiming the contravener of convention and upsetter of perceived correctness,"[7] and simultaneously "an act of self-assertion, insomuch as it is a final rejection of the unjust norms of society, a counter disclaimer, a rejection of society's 'irrational' sanity."[8] Whether it is because the "mad" had no legal standing in Islamic law,[9] or because of their association with the otherworldly *jinn* (spirits), the social designation provides in literature a certain freedom from imposed logics. In Arabic literary history, madness is also closely linked with truth seeking and indeed truth telling when faced with the problematic logics of power.[10]

In his deployment of madness as a way out of the oppressive logic of the state, Nasrallah draws on a long history of the idea in Palestinian, and not just Arabic, fiction. From Darwish's *Diary of Ordinary Grief* (*Yawmiyyāt al-ḥuzn al-ʿādī*, 1973) to the institutionalized wife in Jabra's *The Search for Walid Masoud* (*al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Mas‘ūd*, 1978) to the more recent *The Mad of Bethlehem* (*Majānīn Bayt Laham*, 2013) by Usama al-Issa, perhaps the most famous call to delirium in the Palestinian corpus comes in Emile Habibi's canonical novel, *The Secret Life of Said, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (*al-Waqāʾiʿ al-gharība fī ikhtifāʾ Sa‘īd abī-al-naḥs al-mutashāʾil*, 1977). In its aptly titled epilogue, "For the Sake of Truth and History," madness is proposed as the only way to access the truth of the experiences of Said. Indeed, if one did not know the context from which the narrative of Said was drawn, it might easily be read as absurd. But "illogical," as the novel's frame narrator discovers, is the only way to understand what is being communicated to him in a series of letters that make up the bulk of the narrative. The letters claim that their author, Said, had been taken to outer space by aliens. The aliens had rescued the Akka native from a life being torn apart by his efforts to simultaneously meet the expectations of the new state of Israel as a citizen and of his Palestinian friends and colleagues as a national. Not quite believing that Said has been writing from outer space, the narrator finds the postmark on the letters and travels to find their point of dispatch. This turns out to be the Akka asylum. The asylum staff, however, cannot confirm—nor can they deny—that Said had been a resident. There was once a resident there, they said, with a similar name, but he "had died about a year before."[11] Was Said's story then nonsense? Or was it truth that existing logics simply could not recognize as truth?

With a final interjection, Said submits a proposal to the narrator, and indeed the reader. It comes in the form of a sort of parable, which requires a little unpacking. Said tells the narrator, who is trying to find a way to verify Said's story, "Get yourself a brush and a bottomless bucket and stand next to me and do some painting."[12] The key here is "stand next to me," to simply take what Said says at his word—even if it seems illogical. Said is asking the narrator and the reader to give up on what they think is logical and to stand in the world that Said inhabits—to understand a different sort of logic. The final line of the novel thus reminds readers that understanding how a minority experience makes meaning, or is made sense of, often means letting go of the majority logic. In imaginative terms, the logic of the state must be painted over with a brush and a bottomless bucket. In keeping with the refusal of teleology, and the open-ended way of being that the idea of citizenship in Nasrallah's texts requires, the bucket is also endless, the process of painting over the logic of power an endless one. This idea is not only taken up in the works of the Palestine Project, but through their very volume is expanded on to such a degree that analysis can pull out a set of parameters, a vocabulary with which to describe and deploy this position of "madness" as a way of being a citizen.

Nowhere is the idea of madness worked out more fully in Nasrallah's oeuvre and indeed in Palestinian letters than in the first novel in the Balconies series, *Balcony of Delirium* (*Shurfat al-hadhayān*, 2004). As the introduction and elements of part 1 set out, the Balconies series kicked off a new layer of narrative for Palestine and was able—once Palestine as an intertextual network was established—to dig into what it means for Palestine to exist betwixt and between so many other nation-states. Like the Comedies, the Balconies was not initially conceived as a series, but its foundational novel, and its highly experimental prose, opened new vistas of representation. This, in the language of the text, is delirium (*hadhayān*). Delirium is developed as an aesthetic, as a way of seeing and being in the world that amounts to the infrastructure of an orientation.

The sections below draw out three central elements of delirium-as-orientation. The first is how a Palestinian orientation allows both individual and community to dissociate from but live alongside structures of power. This is the negative, or cautionary, element of the Palestinian orientation. Next are strategies for maintaining what at times characters worry is a disorientation, as well as strategies to move through the world while seeing the powerful logics that tend to order it disassembled. The final section looks at the different goals—personal and national—that emerge when living as Palestinian through this (dis)orientation. These three elements are drawn out across readings of two works, one from the Comedies and one from the Balconies, both of which were read in earlier chapters but whose readings were suspended (to use the language of suspended interpretation as it came out in *Birds of Caution*). My readings here thus begin with where we left Fouad in *Eraser Child*, the second work in the Comedies. The failures that it draws out are those that are taken up and answered in the first of the Balconies.

DISSOCIATING FROM STATE LOGIC; OR, "BREAKING THE MIRROR"

It is Fouad's failures that make the call for an alternative way of existing in and navigating the world beyond the structure of states—a call for the articulation of delirium as a way of being in the world. In chapter 5, the analysis left the young man, a hapless soldier in the Arab Liberation Army and the protagonist of *Eraser Child*, alone in the hills of Jerusalem, having lost his unit and for the first time in his life being left without a commanding authority to instruct his interpretation of the world. Through his subsequent actions, and his failures, the work sets up an urgent call for delirium, which in this first instance means dissociating from structures of power and learning to see the world without them. Unaccustomed to having to think for himself, Fouad's first solution is to tune in to the radio, which he had managed to salvage from the field of battle when his ALA unit was defeated by a Zionist militia. He takes the radio and tunes in to Radio Cairo, then Radio Beirut in the hope of gaining information on where his unit might be, so he can reconnect with the battle to liberate Palestine. The news on the radio, however, is not useful: it does not report the lost battle. Tuning in to the Cairo broadcast, Fouad is confused because the transmission "didn't carry anything but good news" (238), with announcements of constant victory sandwiched between "songs of joy" (239) that no longer lifted his spirits. This good news did not fit with his own experience. He had expected reports of defeat because this is what had happened. The logic of this power (ALA) had no room for defeat. The dislocation between experiences and narrative is a first for the soldier; it is a crack in the vision of the world that had been presented to him, and that he had accepted.

Without any credible logic to make sense of his surroundings or orient his actions, Fouad, hilariously, follows a goat. At least, he thinks, the goat is on its way to a village where he could be directed back to his battalion. But the wandering animal is not headed back to any old village; he is returning to Deir Yasin after having fled the massacre there in April 1948. Rather than help to rejoin the inevitably successful battle for Palestine, Fouad finds only corpses. The soldier is the "first to enter Deir Yasin after the massacre" (255).[13] He spends two days digging a mass grave and does not know what to make of it. As one of the landmark events of the Nakba, the massacre at Deir Yasin would prompt many Palestinians to preemptively leave their villages and seek safety from what were from that point understood to be vicious and advancing Zionist forces.[14] Even without this retrospective view, Fouad understands the incident is serious. He "searched for a single news broadcast that was able to say the truth to the world" (253), but he found none. Even at this late point in the lost battle, he had only heard reports of the "victory of the allied Arabs in their battle that they had tackled courageously until now" (258). The frame of the ALA and assured victory in realizing a sovereign Palestine is revealed as false, but Fouad clings to it. Though reality does not match what the broadcasts say is real, Fouad will not give up on it because he has nothing else and does not know he can trust his own perceptions.

When Fouad sees an airplane fly overhead, he immediately assumes it is an enemy craft on its way to "strike the capital [Amman]" and worries for the safety of his former boss in the Sayyid al-balad. It is a UN plane, however, in a tailspin after being shot down by Zionist forces, "even though the UN flag was clearly visible" (244). Hitting a tree, two peacekeepers emerge, one dead and the other soon identified as John William, a Norwegian. At first, Fouad's "surety was shaken with the felling of William's aircraft, if only because it meant they [Zionist militias] had forces able to fell a plane" (248). It is William's testimony—as a narrative of events from a different point of view—that finally makes it impossible for Fouad to continue reading the battles of the Nakba as a sure ALA victory. The contradiction between the newscasts, the realities of Deir Yasin, and the story of William present further cracks in Fouad's stubborn insistence on following the narratives of structures of power. To help the reader see Fouad's folly, the omniscient narrator interjects, "The news doesn't lie, despite the fact that you saw what you saw" (267). It is at this point, with constant contradictions between what he hears and sees, that doubt in the truth content of the ALA (as a representative of all the other structures of power that he moves through) finally sets in. Fouad starts wondering who he can trust and begins to question his faith, first in William and then in the news broadcasts, then in the ALA, and finally in "order" and logic more generally.

Eventually, Fouad lets go of these logics and demonstrates the first stage in achieving delirium. One cannot, he demonstrates, follow nondominant logics so long as they look to the structures of power for guidance. The young man leaves William, the UN peacekeeper, and sets off toward Amman alone, with no structure to fit himself or his experiences into. On his way Fouad sees his reflection in an old Roman well he comes across, a reflection he no longer recognizes because he has no logic to make sense of the "facts" that it presents him with. He has been defeated, Jerusalem has been lost, and none of the different systems that professed ultimate superiority (that he had encountered) had prevailed. Once upon a time his bushy and shining moustache meant he was a powerful and undefeatable force; his tall stature and broad shoulders were read by each of the systems that he entered as strong, a clear winner. Though he still has his height and his moustache, they no longer mean the same thing. He can no longer read these symbols into the face reflected at him in the old well; he sees an image he cannot understand, but he has begun to understand that making sense of this image will help him navigate the world around him.

It is Fouad's new tentative belief in dissociation from structures of power that sees his ultimate fracture from existing systems. He eventually arrives back in Amman and goes to the home of his old patron, the Sayyid al-balad—the last place of safety he had known. Upon arrival, Fouad prepares an apology for having failed to bring the official's British rifle back "victorious" (as he had promised) and for losing Palestine. By the summer of 1948, Jordan had control of only the West Bank and half of Jerusalem. The Sayyid al-balad, however, welcomes the young man home a hero, proclaiming, "If it weren't for you, we would have lost the rest of Palestine!" (272). This last comment finally sees Fouad break with the structures that had controlled him. He could not interpret his experiences as a victory. For the moment, however, Fouad finds delirium as a negative—not yet a positive—state. It is here an absence of orientation but represents a first and necessary element of achieving something different.

Fouad's failure to let go of ordering structures cripples him and acts as a warning to readers that another way must be found. Fouad, to further study the new reality, goes out to buy a mirror and puts it in his barracks. He looks in it day after day, examining his broad shoulders, his moustache, his uniform for work at the office of the Sayyid al-balad, and the memory of the tear he shed when leaving the village. These elements drift about him, dissociated from the structures that read him as a hero and ignored evidence otherwise. Fouad is left facing all of the different "texts" of his self but has no instructions on how to understand what they mean in relation to each other, or to the world around him. What he finds is that the systems that gave him meaning had been "erased." The mirror is the soldier's attempt to reconcile his experience of the world with existing narrative structures, but at the close of the work, he remains sitting, still lost, in front of the mirror. It is not until *Balcony of Delirium* was published four years later that an answer is produced for Fouad, and a sense of how to reconcile these elements of self into an orientation and a way to move through the world emerges.

FINDING MEANING IN DELIRIUM

We saw in chapter 4 how *Balcony of Delirium* taught readers to identify and critically interpret the often-invisible texts that shape storytelling. The Balconies demonstrated a vantage of not only interpretation, but of bringing elements together to create meaning that included the reading of structures of power. This vantage transformed the story of Rashid al-Nimr, the work's protagonist, from the strangely banal recounting of a man heading to work every day to a composite of myriad texts told from multiple perspectives. Instead of the recounting of a humdrum and unremarkable life, the story of Rashid—who had recently returned from the Gulf to an unnamed Arab city—became one of a man navigating multiple structures of power to find a way to feel "at home" in his new surroundings. In "making sense" of Rashid's story, its elements—like those in the world of Fouad—had to first be taken apart and then, as we see here, put back together. The "logic" of reassembly is, in the language of delirium, the logic of a Palestinian orientation, a way of making sense of and moving about in a world with both dangerous and familiar texts. By resisting the pressures of conforming to any one of the systems that Rashid encounters and learning to hold off interpretation of the many different texts that make up his life, Rashid (whose name means, after all, "of sound mind") becomes oriented to his world of texts and finds clarity. This is where we pick up his story. While we left Rashid in chapter 4 confused, very much like Fouad at the end of *Eraser Child*, Fouad has a series of dreams that helps him create and sustain an orientation through which to make sense and move within the competing and contradictory structures of power.

Both characters are left asking, if the men must enter a state of delirium to dissociate from structures that obscure meaning-making of their life elements, what happens next? Is there a way to make "sense" of delirium? A close look at one example of the interaction and interrelation of the many texts of *Delirium*—which, recalling from chapter 4, are very often visual in nature, including cinema stills, photographs, maps, and news clippings—shows how it is possible to "make sense" in a state of delirium. The technique deploys the lessons of both the balconic vantage and the open-ended paradigm of continuous witness developed in chapters 3 and 4. The example builds on analysis of Rashid's dream sequences, which have already been identified as a particular genre of telling within Arabic literature, a genre of truth telling, of revelation, and of finding meaning in the world that is not at first apparent. Rashid has several dreams over the course of the novel, which increase in complexity, creating a tight network of interreference and ultimately a language of interpretation—of orientation. Underscoring that what is presented is a way of seeing, the dream narratives incorporate cinematic intertextual devices. Not only do each of the series of three dreams use the language of cinema production (zoom in, pan wide, etc.), but they reproduce still images and even relay plots. This language quickly develops into a tool for orientation, showing how delirium—beyond a way of dissociating from structures of power—is also a logic of interpretation. It gives information on the ways and means of moving through the world as Palestinian and shows how information gathered through perceptive tools of the balcony forms not just a network of texts that constitute the nation, but a lens of interpretation that guides intertextual action.

The dreams that teach readers and Rashid delirium-as-action are highly intertextual. The first dream sequence comes as part of a flashback, with texts jostling upon other texts, and it is the relationship between them—determined by dissociating from existing logics—that creates its own logic of action, or orientation. The dream is signaled by the narrator, who tells readers that Rashid remembers coming home from a particularly intense day at work and decides to have a rest. The narrator goes on briefly to explain what made the day even more trying than usual. It was September 11, 2001—the day two airplanes hit the World Trade Towers in New York City. Rashid, in an unnamed city in the Arab world, had needed to process the information. On top of this news, which at first Rashid found unbelievable, it had been another frustrating day at the Government Information Office where Rashid had continued to supply misinformation to visiting journalists, though he still did not understand why. In the taxi on his way home, "moments after the start of the [news] broadcast the host announced in his deep hoarse voice that he had a correspondent on the line from New York. The news was live, and the correspondent said that a small plane had hit the World Trade Tower" (87). Rashid arrived home to watch on television and saw on repeat the second plane strike the second of the World Trade Towers. He cannot make sense of what he sees and takes a short nap to combat the overwhelming information. During the nap, he has a dream.

In his dream Rashid is a giant bird, soaring in the air (a signal for truth established in the earlier novel, *Birds of Caution*). While in flight, a feather is dislodged and floats freely for a while, until Rashid-the-dream-bird notices. Then, "before it reached its place by about a meter at the most, he [Rashid] flapped his wings, and that feather fell smoothly beside the foot of Forrest Gump, in that famous film" (88). The lines are punctuated with a still image from the film (figure 6).

The dream does not last long. Shortly after the bird decides to land, Rashid is awakened by his wife's voice. The snippet is well worth pausing over, however.

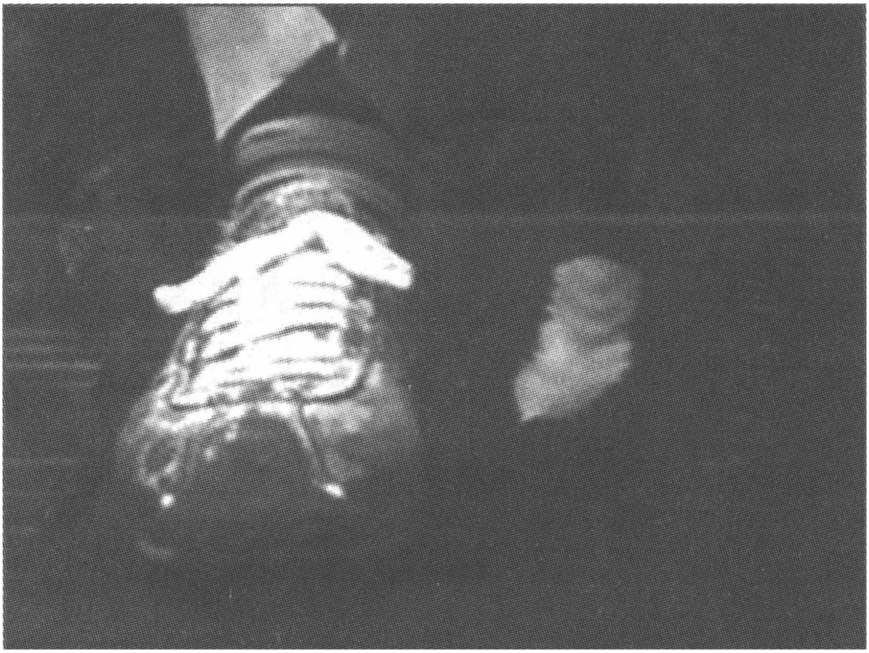

FIGURE 6. A still from the movie *Forrest Gump*, as it appears in *Balcony of Delirium*.

Using the suspended interpretation of the child in *Birds of Caution*, analysis of the first dream provides tools for understanding the later two, and all three provide the clue to "making sense" of delirium. The interpretation of the film in the dream begins with a reading of what is in essence a recasting of the iconic opening scene of *Forrest Gump*.

The opening credits of the 1990s American classic play over a wide shot of a blue Georgia sky dotted with clouds. The shot follows the descent of a single white feather, which seems to be drifting in the wind. Critics of the film have interpreted the scene in line with one of its major themes: the question of whether the world is one ruled by destiny or chaos. Gump, the titular protagonist, brings up the question in a voice-over a few minutes into the opening credits, wondering out loud about his mother's favorite saying, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get." What he wonders is whether life is totally random or if there is a kind of destiny that one heads toward. He puts it succinctly near the end of the film, remarking, "I don't know if Mamma was right or if it's Lt. Dan, I don't know if we each have a destiny or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on the breeze."[15] Lt. Dan, we learn between the musings, is Gump's commander during the US war in Vietnam. While Gump is deployed he saves the life of the lieutenant, who had been badly injured in battle. Lt. Dan returns to the United States a paraplegic and is initially furious that his life had been saved. He tells Gump that he was meant to die. He explains that he has had a "relative die in every single war in American history" and that Gump has thwarted this larger plan. He explains, "We all have a destiny, nothing just happens, it's all part of a plan."[16] Gump's question is reinterpreted in *Delirium* to open a discussion about how different techniques of seeing produce different information about the same thing.

Rashid's dream, where the feather drifts but then is pushed in a particular direction by the pulse of a bird's wing, makes its own determination about destiny versus chaos. Though the feather ends up by Gump's foot, in the dream Rashid himself was the bird, the entity creating the pulse of air and pushing the feather in a certain direction. It was neither destiny nor chaos that determined where the feather would land; it was Rashid who took control and guided the feather to his desired location. Rashid's dream takes the camera of *Forrest Gump* and pans out, showing the forces that move the feather, and thus broadens one of Gump's central questions. Rather than just destiny or chaos, *Delirium* prompts readers (and Rashid) to think about the forces behind either of these options. What, it asks, creates the framework of a perceived destiny (teleology)? What creates the idea of chaos? The question is no longer one of destiny versus chaos but who is controlling the story. The answer, for *Delirium*, is concealed forces. Narrative, the dream suggests, is no accident, nor is it the tracing of a destiny. It is the careful plotting of greater structures just outside of the frame. A Palestinian orientation begins, then, with the invocation of a wider and more critical field of vision—of understanding that controlling forces are often just out of frame and that the story is usually a lot more complicated than it seems.

The second dream continues to make use of the cinematic and is titled "Zoom in . . . out" (52). With this dream we begin to see how many texts can be interpreted together by the individual so that delirium and dissociation also have the power to interpret relationships and guide action. This uses the notion of cinematic techniques, of close-ups to indicate personal emotion and wide angles to connote the movement of plot. This lesson begins by signaling that movement—of the camera, of the individual in the world—is something that produces meaning. The chapter contains the novel's next dream sequence, which moves on to a second movie, the 1962 *Lawrence of Arabia*.[17] This dream chapter is narrated as though it were film directions, describing how a camera should move to produce an effect on the viewer. The dream begins:

> In the background thick smoke
> In the foreground military vehicles approach, raising dust
> From the sky, cries of victory
> But the eye could not make out the whole scene
> (It reminded him of that scene from *Lawrence of Arabia*) (57)

The chapter continues narrating part of the "when Lawrence returns from the Sahara" scene. The shots include panoramas of desert dunes, thick clouds of approaching dust that eventually cloud the once-clear vision, setting an ominous tone, reinforced by dramatic music. As it continues, readers are told when the "camera" closes in on different actors and what angle is chosen to access faces or portray feelings. Likewise, when the "camera" zooms out the screenplay describes creating a sense of wider action: "the camera moved back/or with that movement that people in the film industry call, 'zoom out'" (63).

The action assumes two things: who/whatever is directing the lens knows simultaneously what is going on at a micro and macro level and with this knowledge chooses where to point the lens to create a particular (and predetermined) effect. The position is said in the screenplay to be "like a balcony" (62), reminding readers of the necessity of the balconic vantage when assessing a story. The camera gives a single vantage from its perch above, but the dreamer can see the camera, the balcony, and the action and put it in perspective. The balcony is also, then, able to cue readers into the existence of macro and micro devices that construct a scene, not all of which are visible or indeed represented within a narrative. The cinematic chapter ends when, suddenly, hands block the lens, ending the scene and waking Rashid from the long dream. Shaking, Rashid has a moment to reflect and realizes that the hands that had blocked the lens filming the scene of *Lawrence of Arabia* in his dream "were, oh the terror, the same as his hands" (63). The interjection of hands into the field of view, combined with the effort to describe the mechanisms of creating a scene, reminds readers that cinema, like a novel or a photograph or a history, is constructed, mastered by a set of usually invisible hands and indeed an invisible set of processes. This is the logic that operates at Rashid's office as well, which—now that readers have the tools of seeing related in the dream narrative—is available for further interpretation. Rashid, indeed, deploys this new insight to understand his job.

After using the compass to establish west, Rashid scouts again around the building and even plans to move the office furniture around to try to gain a new perspective on the directions he has been given—to prevent journalists from looking west. Nothing reveals new information; he is left with a single text and his critical stance toward it. After his dream, Rashid has a new idea. After work one day, Rashid goes to the home of his predecessor. He had asked the question, "Why must we not let them look west?" before, but having—along with readers—learned to read the relationship between intertexts to discern meaning, he knows he must ask differently this time. He has learned that the "structure" of his workplace is the same as any other conventional text: one that is determined by an invisible set of logics, often more than one. So rather than ask the old man to narrate the reasons the rules were made, Rashid changes the rules of storytelling. He no longer asks for a beginning; in fact, he no longer asks for the story of the rules at all.

Understanding now that space and time affect both narrative and perception, Rashid asks *when* his predecessor started working at the Information Office. The old man answers, "I started working after the first Gulf War, just after the first war [the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–88]" (63). Rashid continues, "And when did the decision about taking pictures get made?" The old man replies, "After the second Gulf War [1990]" (63). Put in the context of a regional conflict that peaked more than a decade before Rashid took up the post of information officer, he understands that the rule was determined and justified by a logic that no longer applied. It, like all the others, would not help make sense of the geography and logics of the space he now occupied. But at least once he understood the logics that were in operation to create the rules of the office, he could see them in their own context and remove them from his own. Only in letting go of the possibility of direct and logical relationships could any sense be made.

As an orientation, delirium is a tactic of reading but also a space from which individuals can separate understandings of self and perceptions of existing logics. So when Palestinian men and women face tropes of the nation, other national narratives, or structures of power that dictate how they must operate within the world (indeed, Rashid's job was still to not allow journalists to look west), individuals can see that these logics exist but understand that these logics do not define them. Delirium is a space of and for interpretation, so that individuals can choose how to act or respond to the possibilities for action represented by the many texts of Palestine. While Rashid never quite gets up the courage to do anything about his revelation, he clearly has an impact on his son, who uses the logic of delirium to arrive at different conclusions from those any of the available structures of thought would have allowed. His conclusions are, of course, shrugged off as nonsensical but in analysis can be taken up as the beginnings of a model of action-as-orientation.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Though never taken up by Rashid, the civil servant's unnamed son offers a complete vision of the world that would allow perception and meaning making to happen outside of imposed frames. The child speaks rarely within the novel but makes his method of sense-making clear in an extended monologue. The monologue, which extends over several pages, repeats phrases from and is loosely modeled on a segment of the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist novel, *Either/Or*.[18] The monologue is delivered as Rashid's son makes a plea to get a family dog, not a bird as his father prefers, because it is more traditional in their neighborhood. The plea takes the same form as Kierkegaard's chapter, "Either/Or: An Ecstatic Lecture." For the philosopher, the chapter operated as a critique of Hegel's philosophy of truth and the apparent certainty it offered.[19] Kierkegaard's vignette, as scholars interpret it, "presents an inverted Hegelian dialectic,"[20] wherein truth can only be knowable through experience, as opposed to discernible in relation to knowledge. For Kierkegaard knowledge was a structure, not a truth.[21]

Knowledge in the monologue acts as a predetermined and teleological framework that can only ever confirm itself, so that no other way of knowing or being can be admitted. The child, following Kierkegaard, demands something different.

Kierkegaard uses basic examples to illustrate the futility of knowledge, setting out a general personal conundrum of whether or not to marry and how to trace the logic of either the yes or no position. Rashid's son takes this model of reasoning but rather than dismantling knowledge generally takes aim at a particular form of knowledge and the logic it produces—the logic of 9/11 and the "war on terror." In his choice of examples, the boy reflects back to his father precisely the problematic logic of the "war" that had slowly pervaded the Middle East (and much of the world) amid the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (during which, we recall, the novel was written). In making his argument, the young boy ends up giving a five-page diatribe, setting up an elaborate trajectory of tragedy that he says would stem from the purchase of a bird, as opposed to the dog—or in bowing to the norms of the neighborhood and not the world of the boy. The monologue repeats the same sentence pattern, which extends and expands Kierkegaard's version. In the philosopher's version, the logic repeats thus:

> If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry, you will also regret it; if you marry or if you do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret both.[22]

The child's follows a slightly different pattern:

> If you buy us a bird, there will be a problem, if you don't buy us a bird, there will be two problems. (31)

Where Kierkegaard gives just three examples, the child gives a dozen, each of which lead to another set of poor choices. Repeating the formula, "If . . . [then] there will be a problem, [but] if you don't . . . . [then] there will be two problems," the boy connects events according to a logic of the politics of the war on terror in an exaggerated way. This sets up a cause-and-effect paradigm that is modeled on the "common sense" the boy perceives and is criticizing.

It is worth looking at the passage in full, though for simplicity's sake, some of the repetition has been taken out. The first sentence is quoted in its entirety, and the following sentences simply trace the logical development of the argument with the key parts underlined and ellipses for the text quoted above, which are repeated for each new proposition verbatim:

> If you buy us a bird, there will be a problem, if you don't buy us a bird, there will be two problems [. . .]
>
> > if there is a falcon in the area there are two problems, if the falcon sees the bird . . .
> > if the falcon is hungry . . .
> > if it comes to eat it . . .
> > if we don't kill it . . .

> if I love it . . .
> if I get angry at it . . .
> if the anger doesn't go quickly . . .
> [I will be] hit with depression . . .
> if the depression doesn't leave quickly . . .
> I [may] try to take my life . . .
> if I go crazy . . .
> if I go totally crazy . . .
> if you take me to an institution . . .
> if I don't love the hospital . . .
> if I think about fleeing . . .
> if I try to flee . . .
> if I am able to flee . . .
> if the guards don't see me . . .
> if they don't tell the police . . .
> if I don't return home . . .
> if I don't marry well . . .
> if the police don't get me . . .
> if I go more crazy . . .
> if I'm dangerous . . .
> if they chase me . . .
> if I flee to America . . .
> if I hate America . . .
> if I curse America . . .
> if America hears me . . .
> if America gets mad . . .
> if they know who I am . . .
> if they don't forget they are mad . . .
> if we can't favor them . . .
> if they attack the country . . .
> if they launch a powerful attack . . .
> if they occupy us . . .
> if they catch me . . .
> forget the idea! . . .
> if you don't forget the idea . . .
> if you take revenge . . .
> they will kill you or not kill you . . .
> The youngest finally fell silent, and caught his breath, and then he said:
> And you want to put us in that position? Buy us a dog and leave us! (31–35)

The argument is absurd and gets more absurd as the boy imagines the reaction of "America" to being cursed if he were hypothetically to escape the asylum he could be committed to if he fell in love with the falcon that might eat the birds that his father wants to buy for the balcony. The key difference from Kierkegaard is that where the philosopher sets out a logic whereby nothing is known (all possibilities will be regretted), the child sets out a trajectory that ends in "they [the United States] will kill you." So for the boy whatever happens there is a threat of death (whether it transpires or not), and for the child the only reasonable solution, to end the looming possibility of death by the United States, is to stop denying him a dog. Existing logics are detrimental, he explains, and certainty about the "truth" of these logics is damaging. The boy's monologue is a lesson in the need to overthrow certainty and follow the logic of a critical position.

Ominously, Rashid buys the birds. Readers do not hear again from the son, but information is gleaned from a fight between Rashid and his wife, who is exasperated at having to clean up the bodies of the dead birds that keep being eaten by a falcon, which litter the balcony. It is as if the boy's predictions, the "what if's" are being borne out. Rashid responds to his wife glibly, yet defensively, that the pile of feathers is "a long way from looking like that hill of men in the Abu Ghraib prison" (132). The remark is accompanied by what was in 2003 a ubiquitous image: a pile of naked Iraqi prisoners, with their American wardens standing over it. The men in a heap recall the heap of birds on the balcony, denuded of their feathers by the falcon who has torn them apart. The reference is a reminder to Rashid of the truth of his son's statement: without finding the logic of their critical position, their truth is only the perpetual likelihood of death. Rashid cannot see what his son can: first, the operating logic of the time is an American "war on terror"; and second, the urgent necessity of not only understanding why one must "not look west," but acting differently with the information.

While Rashid's son doesn't exactly set the parameters for action or act as a guide for a Palestinian orientation, his focus on birds brings a productive comparison. Where birds were the starting point for the son's monologue, they are also, we recall, the driving ethos of *al-ṣaghīr* in *Birds of Caution*. Rashid's son does not want birds since they will only be eaten, and *al-ṣaghīr* spends his time in the fields next to the Wihdat camp catching and releasing birds, "teaching them caution."[23] For Kierkegaard, the bird represents being "set free from telluric conditions,"[24] and the only possibility of release from the telos of knowledge. The problem for Kierkegaard, as one critic put it, is that "decisions about what to do always concern the future,"[25] and predictions about what the future might hold are always already determined by the cultural expectations of social life. What Kierkegaard wanted to impress on readers is that predicting or determining action against an anticipated future is impossible, because the "future is always unknown."[26] Rashid's son asks his father to let go of predetermined ideas of the future that are rooted in an understanding of the past that is no longer relevant. This letting go is all the more urgent, in the son's estimation, since the present dominant telos can only lead to the likelihood of death.

The children of the Palestine Project once again demand an open frame, not just of interpretation, but of orientation. This is easier said than done, as Fouad and Rashid demonstrate. As Palestine is an open collection of intertexts, it is not a stable object or tangible thing (or even idea of a thing) that can *be* a thing that orients. Being oriented around Palestine and its network of texts means being oriented around its tools: the constant deployment of the critical lens of the balcony, constant avoidance of problematic structures, and reminder of open endings and undetermined futures. These are the elements of identity, and what ensures that the constitution of the nation is simultaneously the constitution of the self. It is the position of delirium that marries the device of dissociation with the space for interpretation and indeed allows the space for open-ended action. These collective ways of being produce the nation through refusal of closure and continuation of the identification and collection of new and old texts, as well as relationships between them. It is these actions—as exhausting and persistent as they seem—that create the larger umbrella of meaning. This constant action is the work, the state, the orientation of being Palestinian.

8

Citizen Writer

If the mother of the fighter and the hero/martyr were the models of nation/agent meant to constitute a nation-state, the citizen writer emerges in the works of Nasrallah's linked series as the character trope that can ideally constitute the intertextual nation. The citizen writer is a figure that draws on but recrafts the role of the writer as Palestinian and wider Arab literary society had cast them. Nasrallah's citizen writer as a social figure that takes on and absorbs many of the roles that the Arab writer has had since the early eras of literary production, from the scribe and official record keepers of empires to the preserver of local tradition in the form of the storyteller. At the same time, the citizen writer as the figure emerges across the works of the Palestine Project is the ideal and pedagogue that emerged during the *nahda*, providing instruction and material so that others could engage in the "correct" sort of roles and behaviors. The citizen writer is not, however, the "modernizing educator" teaching the new generation how to properly "become" in the world as it was imagined by colonial forces. This citizen writer avoids the traps of colonial entanglements that the nineteenth-century writer so often fell into. As it emerges in Nasrallah's linked works, the citizen writer is a carefully honed combination of the elements of the figure of the writer past but forged as the reader, writer, and editor of an intertextual Palestine. What this ideal character does is actively write, read, and organize the texts of Palestine into their ever-shifting network. In so doing, they also recast the role of writing and its relationship with the projects of decolonization and liberation.

While the writer in Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian folk tradition had long been cast in a position of imaginative authority,[1] debates about the authenticity of their representations reached a fever pitch as the novel gained prominence in Arabic.[2] Pheng Cheah, drawing together the consensus of myriad postcolonial writers and scholars, identified the genre as one of "decolonizing nationalism."[3] In writing the nation—as a nation—into the genre of the "modern" (colonial) world, authors created a narrative solution, an easy way of explaining how to end "suffering from the chronic malaise of colonialism."[4] Of course, this was also figuring the world in the literal format of the colonizer; as Said put it, it was cultural engagement on the "battleground" of the colonizer. In going to the battleground of the colonizer, he explained, we have already lost something to the "culture of empire,"[5] because the terms of debate, the possibilities of worldview, are already restricted. For Pheng Cheah, this sort of engagement means that the ideas of resistance are constantly "haunted" by the ideology of its "other."[6] The figuration of the citizen writer picks up on these debates—as indeed an ideal of the intertextual must—but ultimately recasts the role to answer the needs of the nation's novel form.

Reading across the works of the Palestine Project and embedding the analysis in longer trends of Palestinian and Arabic literature, this final chapter examines the writerly citizen, its attributes, the way it recasts existing models of the relationship between writer and people, and, ultimately, the new imaginative possibilities for citizenship and belonging that this ideal opens up. The analysis draws from examples across Nasrallah's linked series, embedding the types and characters in their longer and reorganized traditions. The sections below explore in turn the meaning of "writer," here using Roland Barthes's term "writerly," to understand the interactive role presumed to exist between reader and writer in the intertextual nation. The writerly citizen, the first section shows, need not in fact write but simply hold open the space of imagination for continued dialogue and relationship. Once established, the citizen writer (as writerly) is compared to the closed and often teleological figurations of writer that Palestinian fiction has generated. Finally, through the figure of the citizen writer, we read the "endings" of the works of Nasrallah's linked series, which the world of intertextuality in fact maintains as open possibilities. The Palestinian citizen, just as the nation, in the words of one Palestinian to another in a classic Emile Habibi story, "will stay 'without a tail' [ending] till you and I can write one for it together."[7]

WRITERLY CITIZENS

The job of the citizen is to witness Palestine and be critical of it, to move in and be shaped by its texts but to refuse to allow those texts to set the limitations of either self or imagination. Carrying out this work as an individual—rather than as part of a community imaginary—is not an easy task. In their active identification of texts, and creation of meaning "on the fly," citizens figured in the Palestine Project are writerly. The term, coined by Barthes, is useful in that it denotes a particular position of relationship between reader, text, and world, a position that values continuing creativity as its core principle. As the French critic himself explained, "Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."[8] The ideal citizen of Palestine is precisely thus: "no longer a consumer" of other textual systems or ways of ordering knowledge but a producer.

This way of being in the world is perhaps best represented in Nasrallah's series in the character of Yasin. One of two protagonists in *Under the Midmorning Sun*, Yasin was a fighter with the resistance who has been invited by the newly formed Palestinian Authority to "return" to Palestine as the new government is set up in Ramallah in the wake of the Oslo Accords of 1993–94. Yasin is, in many ways, the only "ideal" male hero of any of the novels discussed here. The problem is that Yasin abhors the title. The hero/fighter is a national figuration he finds stifling and works tirelessly to throw off in favor of a writerly existence. This writerly approach dictates all of Yasin's actions and decisions, and it is this constant process that marks him as writerly—because he is in perpetual dialogue with systems that would prefer to read him as the biographical citizen and a citizen who would guarantee a state. But Yasin can identify power and its problems and can see the violence that the frames of the state have imposed. This is why he refuses them and insists on something different.

Yasin knows that his "return" to Palestine was a political move meant to bolster the newly created PA.[9] He is aware that his arrival, and the arrival of former fighters from Tunis, Lebanon, and Jordan, is meant to mark a shift in the battlefield from resistance to governance, law, and order, to signal a triumphant "return" to the homeland.[10] But Yasin did not believe the teleological narrative of Oslo; he knew much had changed, from the available space of Palestine to the laws governing it and even the returnees themselves. In this new Ramallah, he saw fighters "out of their time, their place" (44), and he did not want to be like the "people who just returned to their country to die, as through their nation couldn't live if their corpses were not underneath their soil" (43). So when Yasin decides to return, he resolves to do so on his own terms, vowing, "I will return only if it is possible for me to establish new memories" (43). He does not want to live in the shadow of an old and problematic story but rather write his own. Yasin wants to be writerly, to respond to the new world that he arrives in and absorb its differences—not as a return, but as a new phase of life.

It is not so easy, however, to insist on dialogue and openness when there are systems intent on imposing ways of living and becoming on the individual. Yasin is constantly at battle with forces that would see him reduced to the "hero" (and, indeed, to "villain" for the Israeli forces that arrest him), a move that he sees as similarly erasing the national lives and experiences of his friends and family. The man's battle with these limiting structures is manifest in his encounter with Salim, a Ramallah native who is a generation younger than Yasin, who has grown up under Israeli occupation, and who has idolized the fighter figure from afar. An aspiring playwright, Salim is intent on capturing the power of the fighter, so that he might feel "as if we are on top of the occupation and not underneath it" (87). He proposes to write a monologue. So where Yasin wants to make new memories in Ramallah, Salim's draft play begins when Yasin took up arms, follows him on missions and gun smuggling through the Palestinian bases of Ajloun, and ends with his return. The choice of ending re-creates the Oslo teleology, so that the fighter's goal is fulfilled with return: it is a choice that figuratively, and then literally, cuts Yasin's life short. Despite Yasin's constant insistence that he is *not* a hero and his resistance to retelling the same old stories, he finds himself trapped in the narrative—an actual narrative, performed on stage by Salim.

Trying to explain to Salim that heroism is not a useful paradigm either for capturing his life or for understanding a nation, Yasin articulates the difference in perception between being "written" and being writerly. He tells Salim:

> You transformed me until I became a hero that has no meaning; I'm just the hero because I have a story, written or performed or published in a newspaper or in a book. (158)

If this is the reductive sort of writing, then Yasin has the antidote, and he tells Salim that according to his worldview:

> everyone could be a hero, any of those who fill the streets: children, women or sheikhs each of them could be heroes if they had a story. I was like them until I had a story told about me. (158)

In the Palestine that Yasin sees, "in truth, all heroes are like each other." By observing, reflecting, critiquing, and being open to the world as he discovers it, Yasin finds all Palestinians capable of making the national story. He again insists to Salim:

> Try for example to tell the story of Nimr on its own, or of Umm Walid on her own, or of Numan, and what would happen? They would all become the main character and I would be secondary. Do you understand now the meaning of a story? And how can you manufacture one with the flip of a hand? (158)

For Yasin, a "story" (the teleological and reductive kind) is wholly insufficient for reflecting the Palestine he understands to have lived and to continue to live as part of. A "story" is repressive, and it is only in actively absorbing other parts of the nation and seeing them in relationship that an accurate shape of the nation, and the self within it, emerges.

Yasin as a model writerly citizen likewise engages his own public to think more critically about how they act within and interpret the world. While he has little luck with Salim, the former fighter does seem to make inroads with his extended family, in particular, his aunt Umm Walid, who adopts him into her family when he "returns" from abroad. Yasin coaxes his aunt into thinking critically about the logic of occupation—which continues in the West Bank despite PA claims to liberation. Umm Walid has become accustomed to the rules of the occupation, so much that they become the invisible parameters of her life. She has, in effect, given the occupation narrative and even imaginative authority. To demonstrate this to her, Yasin plays a game of logic and imagination, trying to have his aunt let go of the logic of occupation and enter delirium. He asks:

> Have you ever in your life seen an airplane drop flowers on a city?
> Of course not.
> But you've seen an airplane drop bombs on a city.
> Any number of times.
> You see! The world is crazy! (136)

His aunt agrees. Yasin presses his advantage, trying to show how pervasive the logic of the occupation has become. He makes a final connection between life—as it is sensed, felt, and known—and the systems of logic that they operate within. So he asks Umm Walid, in the same conversation, "How many times have you told Abu Walid that you love him in front of other people?" (136). The answer, at least the first time he asks it, is, "None." The reason for the question, and its connection to a writerly citizen position, is explained through several of Yasin's other experiences of "return."

Perhaps he is determined to continue life when he moves to Ramallah, but encountering the grim realities of an occupied Ramallah gives him pause. The former fighter experiences several clashes in orientation whereby what he sees as normal behavior is clocked as absurd—so that bringing a bouquet through a checkpoint becomes as crazy as a plane dropping flowers over Palestine. On his first time going "home" to Umm Walid, for example, he insists on buying her flowers. The gesture gets him pulled over and detained for four hours. His cousin, who picks Yasin up from the border to take him to the house, already thought the gesture of buying flowers a strange one, so he could only roll his eyes when Yasin got angry at the soldiers for their treatment. Everyone—both soldiers and his cousin—acted as if Yasin's simple bouquet was extravagant and his expectation that such extravagance would be tolerated by soldiers absurd. Other scenes—also at checkpoints—see soldiers ridicule Yasin's friends. One is forced to kiss a veiled woman when he tries to help her cross the military zone. Detained, the youth is told he can cross if he kisses the young woman. The kiss was the safest way to bypass the checkpoint and avoid further harassment (173), but it was also a serious breach of social norms. Not only did the expression of love wilt under the logic of occupation, but social decency did as well—and so too did the public expression of love between Umm Walid and her husband.

For Yasin, expression of love and respect for those he cares about is the logic of life. His insistence on following this logic means running against the logic of occupation, which he does not know or care to know. However, for Umm Walid and the other members of his family, living by the rules of occupation and maintaining the hope of the Oslo narrative that this was the road to "return" was what kept them alive. Yasin learns to read this context, creates a dialogue with it, and so becomes a "writerly" citizen. It is his insistence on learning, recognizing, and placing the different systems—in his case, the narrative of return, the logic of occupation, and the confining parameters of Salim's play—within his worldview rather than allowing them to dictate his imaginative possibilities, which make Yasin an ideal writerly citizen. Without the innocence of the child that *al-ṣaghīr* and Randa have, Yasin doggedly retains his clear vision of being and uses this to find his way through the many oppressive systems encountered. Yasin becomes the producer of his own logic: he insists on flowers, he refuses to be taken over by the plot of a heroic monologue, he refuses to speak with Israeli soldiers when he is imprisoned, and he continues seeking love when he is once again released. Yasin also keeps and maintains dialogues with other characters—like Umm Walid—urging them to take on his position so that they too can produce Palestine.

. . . BUT NOT THAT KIND OF WRITER

The writerly citizen often comes up against the more generic figure of the writer as a limiting force. The interaction between Yasin and Salim—the writer who wants "mythic stories" and their subjects who struggle for different representations—is one that the Palestine Project stages over and over again. We see the problematic writer constantly: as Abd al-Rahman tries to write Salwa, in the "men of the newspaper" who reject Randa's stories, in Mr. Ali who writes Bahjat, in Bahjat as he writes "the condemned man," and so on ad infinitum. In their representation of the imposing, "readerly" writer (Barthes's term for the writer who produces closed texts), the works grapple with the legacy of writing a problematic force. These interactions tackle head-on the colonial legacy of the novel, its implication in the *nahda* project of modernization, and the involvement of nationalist movements in replicating problems of the state in their search for liberation. These, the encounters insist, are not part of the remit of the writerly citizen but are rather pitfalls to identify and avoid. The writerly citizen thus draws on, reroutes, and reframes existing figurations of the writer prominent in the Arab and particularly Palestinian context. Life as a writerly citizen becomes a process of overcoming the problems of writing, which became too connected to the modern project. As if to drive this connection home, the earliest writer in the Palestine Project is a British Mandate officer who writes beautiful poetry at night and by day works to eradicate Palestinian resistance to the growing Zionist movement. He is the opposite of the ideal, for many reasons.

Edward Peterson is a thinly veiled critique of writings of the "East" that have more to do with the visions of Europe than the realities of Palestine.[11] In *Time of White Horses*, the officer's lyric poetry is included in footnotes that are jarringly juxtaposed to his horrendous treatment of Palestinians. For example, on the same page that Peterson orders the execution of livestock from an entire village (where he suspected villagers had not turned in all of their weapons), a footnote reads:

> That night, Peterson wrote:
>
> No one will ever love you as I do, neither the bullet nor the rose / No one will ever love you as I do, neither the tiger nor the gazelle . . . (324)

With no reference or attention to the destruction he has caused, Peterson writes only of a bizarre anguish over his love for Arabian horses. In a very Zionist/Orientalist mode, Peterson sees the horses of Palestine as uncared for (though the men of *White Horses* treat horses as distinguished members of the household) and dreams of taking home some of the animals. He writes beautifully about horses (who none "will ever love . . . as I do") but cannot see what happens in front of him.

What Peterson lacks is what Hannah Arendt calls "plurality";[12] he executes his orders by day, keeping the Palestinian population in check. The poetry Peterson produces does not initiate a conversation between parts and utterly fails to integrate his end-of-day insights with his actions during waking hours. For Arendt, the simple presence of multiplicity—that there is a day and a night, that there are many texts to Palestine—is insufficient to guarantee the correct worldview. Rather, the parts must be integrated, understood as related and complex, otherwise they render individuals and experiences, in the words of Arendt, "whats" rather than "whos."[13] The person as a "what," to quote Randa from *Amina's Weddings* (an ultimate writerly citizen), is to render an individual as a "character in a novel"—or for Arendt, "a type or a 'character' in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us."[14] Writing, then, must make connections, must identify multiplicity and grapple with its tensions; it cannot simply bypass or overlook—erase, even—the context of its subject.

Peterson was not the only corrupt official to be associated with literature. Many of the corrupt hero figures encountered in the Palestine Project also pose as writers, like al-Duktūr, the theater director who claimed his work would help create a state but who in fact was only interested in the flood of aid money sent in to bolster the Oslo project. Al-Duktūr and the other problematic writers represent the dangers of writing when its goal is associated with the state. As Stephan Guth put it, describing *nahda*-era bards, "the idea of literary commitment and, ultimately, the whole project of modernity" were understood to be in "the service of the nation."[15] Writing was meant to indicate "steady progress, a bright future lying ahead,"[16] whether this was the outing of PLO corruption in Lebanon, the fortification of the hero figure in Oslo-era Ramallah, or the exposition of a vain and mediocre newspaperman in an unnamed Arab state. This is certainly what al-Duktūr relied on for his status. Writers were hailed because they were able to imagine the nation as teleological and bounded, ordering citizens within that frame so the people could learn to behave and imagine in such a way as to conjure that nation into being—and this was meant to bring liberation.

The limited representations of "bad" writers in the Palestine Project are rejected at every turn. Salwa in *Olives of the Streets* throws the pages of Abd al-Rahman's manuscript out the window, saying if she hadn't, she "would have died under them." In *Balcony of the Snow Man*, a second section finds Bahjat, the protagonist of part 1, talk back to the first author to tell him: "If I had read what he wrote about me in the first version without my name being there, I wouldn't have recognized myself in the words" (178). Bahjat decides to tell his own story, which instead of addressing the claims of the first, follows the memory and moments important to Bahjat. In the process of creating this intertext, Bahjat realizes that he too had been a "bad" writer in his pursuit of a news story. Told an article would make his career, Bahjat has a condemned man executed because the story of his execution—already at press—might have been "wrong" had the man lived another day. These sorts of imposing writers appear everywhere and fall neatly into the categories Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili point out as "elite Palestinian voices belonging to politicians, military leaders, and those with Western education," who, they add, "are usually masculine."[17] The continued presence of these sorts of characters in Palestinian fiction warns of the persistence of this model of writing and way of seeing that writerly characters must identify and avoid.

Of course, the forms and techniques of the modern were not adopted wholesale or without some critique. As Muhsin al-Musawi writes, even though the modernist intellectual was meant to forge a path for the nation—which was nearly always imagined as a state—when it came to fiction there was a "distrust of established forms,"[18] and a sense that Western formulas might not adequately represent Arab experience. It is this dissenting writer that a citizen of Palestine is encouraged to emulate. Randa of *Amina's Weddings* certainly represents this position as she seeks to rewrite a Gaza under siege, railing against the newspaper editors who refuse to publish her articles on children killed during the Intifada. Salwa of *Olives of the Streets* is also constantly active trying to record her experiences. Though she is not a writer herself, she works tirelessly with Abd al-Rahman so that he might finally get her story correct, though he does not. Even Manar, the protagonist of *Balcony of Disgrace* who is raped, struggles to shift the looming narrative that she is a disgrace to the family, a "stain" on their honor, and must be killed to remedy the situation. The young woman fights myriad systems that would label her a failure, and even at the end of the novel, in a handwritten note, she declares to her parents that she was a "good girl," and she wants them to continue to think of her as their pride and joy. She, like so many other writerly characters, refuses delimitation by problematic writers—whether writers of books or reproducers of systems.

OPEN ENDINGS

The foremost role for the writerly citizen—even those who might not yet have achieved their delirium—is to refuse teleology. This most basic principle means that the possibility for delirium remains open and indeed that the intertextual fabric of Palestine can continue to be produced. Even if, one day, there is a Palestinian solution that takes the model of the state, there will remain a great deal that is Palestinian that will never fit within its parameters. To keep what has been lived, traveled, experienced, and remembered within Palestine—or to maintain Palestine as receptive to new rememberings—it must remain open. Creating this open-endedness is at once what makes an intertextual Palestine possible and what ensures its continuation, so that any individual citizen is producing and being produced by the nation even after death. This keeps the story of the individual open, told and retold by Palestine—forgotten one day, perhaps, but always with the ability to reabsorb and reinterpret the whole configuration based on the accumulation of new texts. In the works of the Palestine Project, this message is driven home by the life and actions of five protagonists who, while they die at the close of their respective novels, can leave their perspectives, their orientations, and their life projects open and available to others beyond the final page of their stories.

Randa in *Amina's Weddings* kept her twin, Lamis, alive by living as both women and refusing to tell anyone which child had died. Manar's brother in *Balcony of Disgrace* presumes he can eradicate the "shame" brought on his family when her uncle declares, "This banner [of shame] is not coming down from its place until someone takes down the spirit of that fallen woman, who contaminated the honor of the family" (182). Manar's death, however, is transformed into a near-global warning and a condemnation of the systems that killed her. The novel is dedicated "to women everywhere . . . in defense of the right of the victims for love, life, freedom and hope" (5). The work positions Manar's story—a promising young woman who is raped by an acquaintance, denounced by her extended family, abandoned by the middle class, taken into police custody where she is raped by an inmate, and ultimately shot in the street by her brother—as an ongoing tragedy, as one of an ongoing series of events that constitute a phenomenon. Not only this, but the novel gives Manar the last word, even after her death, so that she might forestall such conclusions imposed on the lives of these other women. In her handwritten letter, which appears after the formal "close" of the novel, Manar insists that she should not be remembered as the shame (*ʿār*) of the family. There is shame, she intimates, but it should be left for the systems that killed her.

The same life-after-death appears in *Olives of the Streets*, when Salwa is thrown thrice from the roof of a building by the men of the official who had abused her. Every time her body hits the pavement one of the guards asks, "Is she dead yet?" (203). After the final impact, a haunting voice, instead of asking a question, makes a strange statement: "One of us has to get up now, Salwa" (203), which is repeated twice. The speaker could be her murderers, knowing her story will never really die, because it has been recorded on a set of audiotapes and in the memories of all the camp residents who—though they were not courageous enough to speak up—knew what was happening. It could also be her friend and teacher Sitt Zaynab, who insists that her experience be heard and who spends time with the journalist writing her narrative so that he might not reduce it to a "story." The voice leaves, also, the faintest possibility that the young woman is still alive—and in a way she would be, so long as the structures that seek to silence her do not prevail. Salwa, Randa, and the boy of *Birds of Caution* are all in fact calls from beyond the close of their novels to keep their memories, their orientations, alive and active.

Yasin of *Under the Midmorning Sun* has no audiotapes like Salwa, no ascent into the heavens like *al-ṣaghīr*, and no twin like Lamis; in fact, his double is a murderous one who aims to kill the writerly hero in both fact and fiction. Salim, who wrote a monologue about Yasin's heroism in Lebanon, felt threatened by the former fighter's insistence that the play should not be performed. So attached had Salim become to the idea of representing the hero that he treacherously wondered when his muse was arrested by the Israeli military, "What if Yasin was killed in prison, what if they killed him under torture?" (15). If the "hero" was killed, it would leave Salim to take over the role, despite Yasin's objections. In the end, horrifically, the actor takes the "hero's" life himself, under the cover of Israeli gunfire at the outbreak of the Second Intifada. But Yasin's life's work continues, as the reader discovers in a final chapter that takes place at once before and after the returnee's death. The chapter repeats, almost verbatim, a scene in the village where his aunt Umm Walid lives but tracks a change in his family's behavior that shows they have managed to break out of the logic of occupation and have embraced the possibility of an open and changing interpretation of their lives. In the end, Yasin did not write an open ending on paper or with texts but has inscribed the value on life itself.

Under the Midmorning Sun's final chapter is symbolically titled "After the End" (176) and repeats in its setting and much of its dialogue the first scene of the first chapter of the novel, titled "Before the Beginning" (5). Both relate the village where Yasin's aunt Umm Walid lives with her husband and family. Where often the repetition of a scene indicates the fulfillment of telos, in this case it tracks change, in particular, the change that Yasin has had on the Ramallah to which he returned, determined to continue living. The twin chapters are set some seven years apart, and while everything in the village has changed, it has also stayed the same. Umm Walid is in the house, the birds are chirping, and the men of the neighborhood are sitting on plastic chairs around a small earthen square. The square, site of Salim's first performance of the monologue, is also where the men gather and where the children play football and which, in the intervening years, has become skirted with new homes for the new children. The description of the scene is at times repeated word for word from the first chapter, but phrases are inserted to mark the change that has taken place over time. In the passage below, the text appearing at both the opening and the close of the novel appears as regular script, and the phrases that only appear in the closing chapter are underlined.

> Under the midmorning sun, and in front of the two walnut trees that shaded the lower field, and in the view of sparrows and nightingales . . . (5)

> Under the midmorning sun, which was peeking out through the clouds, and in front of the two walnut trees that shaded the ruined lower field, and in the view of sparrows that opened their wings to cross the field with caution and nightingales . . . (176)

The words, like the scene, are the same and yet different. There is a continuity in the village but one that makes room for the new texts that have subtly changed its rhythms, for the birth of the children described playing soccer in the field, and for the death of Yasin. The scene is set for the appearance, in both cases, of Umm Walid.

Under the gray clouds, in front of two walnut trees, Umm Walid sees an Israeli military patrol approaching the village. She yells out to her husband, "Abu Walid!," and in both passages the men sitting in the square turn their heads. Abu Walid, repeating the lines from the first passage, replies, "What is it?" Umm Walid yells out, "I love you Abu Walid, I love you!" Where in the first passage, the man had rolled his eyes and cursed Yasin for driving his wife mad, this time there is a change:

> Abu Walid nodded his head, squinted his eyes a little more sparkling than usual, and he looked at the faces of the men who were with him. He raised his head tall and the children stopped their football game in the square, and the sparrows didn't know which way to look. He let out a sigh . . . and yelled: I love you Umm Walid!
>
> What did you say? She yelled back, even though she had heard clearly. She replied because she wanted to hear it over and over again. (178)

Where once Abu Walid had blushed, this time he holds his head high, and the children pay attention. They at once know this is the legacy of Yasin and their own weapon as an alternative way of reading dominant narratives. The logic that Yasin followed persists; he has taught a whole village to see past the rules of occupation and to subsume that structure of power under a larger and wider Palestinian experience. The occupation no longer dictates the possibilities of Palestine. The final chapter is only another beginning, as Yasin had earlier insisted to Salim, when the playwright first asked him to "tell his story."

> The story doesn't end when it ends, it starts and when it does the beginning must continue until a new beginning. . . . I don't see an ending at all, I see only a chain of beginnings. The ending is many beginnings: so where to start? (145)

The mirrored chapters, the acceptance of change, and the conceptualization of both the self and the nation as an assembly of beginnings create a narrative structure in the novel that is able to accommodate the realities of an open text.

While the life of Yasin ends and the pages of *Under the Midmorning Sun* run out, his story continues through the imagined life of his family members and all those he touched in Ramallah. The vision of the writerly citizen creates its own open text, eschewing the very idea of beginnings or endings and their closing telos, and embracing delirium, if only for a moment. Yasin presents a personal agency toward his own life that mirrors the work of other characters who had endeavored to keep others' lives open and undetermined by the forces that would quash them. The writerly citizen, criticizing established forms, ever alert to the problems of writing, is a personal embodiment of the rules of the Palestine Project. It was, perhaps, what Darwish himself imagined when he wrote one of the last poems in his final collection, "*Lā urīdu li-hādhī al-qaṣīda an tantahī*" (I do not want this Qasida to end), one verse of which reads thus:

> I do not want this Qasida to end
> I do not want it to have a clear goal
> I do not want it to be a map of exile
> And not of a country
> I do not want this Qasida to end[19]

In giving up "a clear goal," the telos of the state is erased, and the "map of exile" becomes a chart of a nation-constellation, where each element is recognized as wholly and fully national. In this way an image of Palestine is not a map "of a country" but the story of an ongoing series, and of a *qaṣīda* without end. So long as the citizen—as open-ended and delirious—is the active agent who produces the nation, then neither citizen nor nation can be limited.

(Not a) Conclusion

An Imaginative Universe

The Palestine brought forth in Nasrallah's linked series tears apart colonial and administrative logics and refashions their elements, reorienting constitutive parts, reshaping some, redefining others, and utterly reimagining how they fit together. In rewriting the nature of the relationships between space, time, and individuals in the service of telling the story of Palestine, Nasrallah works out a novel set of parameters for the representation of its lived experience outside of bounded space and linear time. His Palestine Project ultimately offers a new container for national relationships and allows, as nationally meaningful, many of the realities of Palestine that are informally or begrudgingly acknowledged but in practice marginalized—often because they threaten mainstream or dominant narratives. While the parts and chapters of the analysis presented here separated different structural elements of Nasrallah's representation, the elements, more broadly speaking, work in concert. Having looked at each element up close, this conclusion offers an opportunity to briefly explore how they can work together in a few different configurations.

This conclusion takes three examples. These are drawn from themes and ideas developed in the works of the Palestine Project and put in the larger context of political and historical discourse. Using the vocabulary set out in the preceding chapters, the first example shows how the Intifada can be read as a conceptual container much like the works of the Palestine Project. The Intifada, constituted by the action of individuals and communities that took up common cause across discrete locations, was held and claimed when useful by Palestinians in other times and places. It is—this reading will show—an example of a series, of *al-muthannā*, of delirium and the mobilization of the position of the balcony. The second example here is the Nakba. Thinking through the lens of the series/*al-muthannā*, with a view from the balcony and a sense of delirium, the many coexisting meaning horizons of the Nakba can be reconciled. This vision of the Nakba can account for and witness as valid all the different harms associated with Palestinian dispossession. Finally, returning to the discursive field of literature and the study of Palestinian writing, the last example shows that the language of Nasrallah's linked series offers a vision of literary heritage that upends the national-genealogical approach to reading Arabic fiction. Instead of a field of writing set out in the same logical terms as that of the nation-state, the Palestine Project offers an expansive vision of literary influence that moves across and beyond national or temporal boundaries.

INTIFADA

Almost invisibly, the raging of the Second Intifada shaped the lives of characters in *Amina's Weddings* and *Under the Midmorning Sun.*[1] It was the reality of increased Israeli military repression and the attempt to remove any possible political actors from the streets that saw protagonist-hero Yasin's (re)arrest. This removal from the streets also allowed Salim to stage his monologue without its muse's permission. It was the Israeli invasion of Ramallah and its attempt to stifle Palestinian political leadership that provided a cover for Salim's murder of Yasin. In Gaza, it was the bullets exchanged by organized resistance and Israeli forces that killed Lamis, and nervous Israeli soldiers manning a checkpoint who gunned down the child whose death Lamis witnessed. That Amina and tens of other women could mourn a presumed dead husband/beloved/son/brother was because so many men were involved in the uprising and slept away from home to avoid capture. The lives of the characters across both novels are shaped by the context of repression and its mass refusal that marked the Intifadas. Not only did this context dictate the possibilities of the stories told and the lives of the characters, but in the background of the works the idea and function of the Intifada as a national phenomenon was being explored. A closer look shows how Intifada (as a phenomenon) operates in and through *al-muthannā*, functions as a series, opens a space of delirium, and offers a chance from the position of the balcony to challenge visible structures of oppression and limitation.

Where the analysis in chapter 2 looked at *Amina's Weddings* and *Under the Midmorning Sun* for the ways and means of developing relationships between individuals and community, this return to the works uses a now-established vocabulary to understand Intifada. In the same way that *al-muthannā* was developed through the example of twin sisters, then doubled characters, then collectives, civil rebellion and its violent suppression took shape as Intifada—one thing across twin geographies. This "thing," this event, became available for a collective to claim and create meaning within/through. In the characters of Randa and Lamis, *Amina's Weddings* developed the idea of an indelible connection across discrete bodies. Lamis could be more than Lamis because after her death Randa could conjure her forth. The body left, but the entity that it created remained. The same can be said of the making of Intifada: though the rising up against oppression happened in discrete sites in the West Bank and Gaza, the thing—the phenomenon—that was generated through this action was something that both (and indeed other) places (via the people in them) could claim.

In fact, Intifada had already been established as *al-muthannā*, in what was retrospectively called the First Intifada. This, even more than the second (when the twin texts were set), was a phenomenon shaped by the actions of discrete communities who were connected in a common cause but not organizationally (or politically or geographically) linked.[2] In drawing attention to the repetition of the phenomenon, the language of the Palestine Project makes Intifada readable not only as *al-muthannā*, but as a series. Intifada is not a collection of discrete bodies/locations; it is something beyond time and place, and its power continues. Beyond the novels, we can see the mobilization of Intifada as a powerful phenomenon generated across and between discrete places and times. This phenomenon—like the identity of the hero—can be claimed as and when it serves the realization of the aims of citizens (as defined in part 3). Each time Intifada is claimed, the meaning of the phenomenon opens and expands further. But like the novels of the two linked series, the founding ideals and representations remain. The core ethos of collective action and demand for change remains (and remains powerful), even as the shape and function of its mobilization shifts. A brief look at mobilization illustrates the point.

By 2000, when the Second Intifada was declared, those who proclaimed it were very aware of the power of the word. This is perhaps what made the claim of a second so powerful: it invoked the power of people to disrupt systems of oppression and to effect a change in circumstance. Indeed, the collective action of the "First" Intifada not only forged strong community ties, mechanisms of withstanding and subverting Israeli military restrictions, and drew global attention to the damages to life and dignity that the military occupation perpetrated, but it was also credited with creating the pressure necessary to force a change in the status quo.[3] This took the form of peace talks through the 1990s and into the 2000s. The Second Intifada has been interpreted as a mobilization of people demanding a revision of the problematic agreement that was produced by the never really concluded talks. Beyond a revision of the problematic peace deal, the Second Intifada would broaden the scope of Palestinian demands—not only against dispossession, occupation, and oppression at the hands of Israeli military forces backed up by an international community, but also the shape and form of Palestinian leadership that was created in the Oslo Accords. The meaning of Intifada expanded and yet did not really change at its core. This would not be the last time the idea was mobilized.

Most recently, Intifada was invoked to unite a long series of what Israeli and US media outlets called "lone wolf" knife attacks that took place between 2015 and 2016.[4] Describing these instead as part of a "knife intifada" became a rhetorical way of drawing attention to the larger forces that pushed young men (and very occasionally women) to act.[5] It also put their actions on a collective plane instead of an individual one. These single acts could be, through Intifada, understood as a united reaction to the shifting methods of oppression and occupation. This is where Intifada becomes a tool of balconic perception. In the changed mobilization of the word (no longer describing direct and organized community action), a parallel change in the operation of delimiting power structures can be interpreted. In other words, if Intifada is a word describing a collective response to oppression, than the particulars of Intifada can also be used to understand the particulars of that oppression. Where in the 1980s Intifada was in principle a rising up against issues of taxation without representation and the sheer inequality of occupation through tax and labor strikes, as well as stone throwing and guerrilla tactics,[6] the Second Intifada was a rising up against a changed set of circumstances. While it was called Intifada, the rising up of the 2000s was different.

The more explosive tactics of the Second Intifada drew attention to the increased militarization and separation of populations as well as the personal agony that sustained oppression produced across generations. If the children of the 1980s threw stones, the youth of the new millennium strapped explosives to their chests and walked into key sites of Israeli military control.[7] These were different tactics to respond to different tools of oppression. The "knife intifada," saw a wave of stabbings that one analyst described as "characterized by random individual action," whose effectiveness was precisely in its random nature.[8] Many of the knife carriers were killed during or shortly after the attacks, and some, anticipating the lethal response, had written notes to their families. These individual—yet also collective—moments of confrontation again speak to the changed context. In the mid-2010s Palestinians under Israeli occupation were subject to increased surveillance, segmentation, repression of political organization, and securitization. From collective action to using bodies as ordnances to wielding often simple kitchen knives—all of these were claimed as Intifada because they were each the same logical response to oppression. The sense was that no matter how tightly controlled Palestinians might be, ways and means of rising up would be found.

As something that is redefined as it responds to shifting mechanisms of control and delimitation, when it is invoked, Intifada acts as a sort of pathway of delirium, or a ready orientation to Palestinian "being" in a context that so readily denies it. This is because Intifada is a calling out of power, and a way of concretely working to push this power back to make room for Palestinian trajectories. Of course, like all symbols—and similar to the discussions of the figure of the fighter and the hero-poet above—it is not a thing to inhabit. While Intifada has been invoked countless times over the years, it is not a permanent state and does not cover all actions of a person, a place, or a community at all times. It does not, on its own, realize Palestine or Palestinian being. It is adopted as and when it can effect change. Intifada is thus a series, with many beginnings and an ongoing story; something that can be mobilized beyond these spaces within which it takes shape; and something that can be invoked by Palestinians wherever they may be.

NAKBA

The Nakba is a trauma of multiplicities. While there are many different existing ways of articulating what it was, what it is, and what it means, none of these on their own is sufficient to communicate its scope and scale. This was made fully clear in the writing and reception of Nasrallah's *Eraser Child*. While *Time of White Horses* was praised as *the* story of the "tragedy of his people,"[9] it was rather this earlier work that showed the hidden mechanisms of dispossession of Palestine. *Eraser Child* was the story of the Nakba as it had not yet been told. It was not the story of tents and refugees but of social and administrative failures. These failures are almost imperceptible when the story of the Nakba is told as one of dispossession, where families, like those in *Time of White Horses*, were left "curled up into a ball like an unclaimed bundle of clothes, a bundle that had found itself in a truck whose destination no one knew."[10] In its focus on Fouad and the Arab Liberation Army, *Eraser Child* shifted representation of the Palestinian catastrophe. The Nakba, it showed, was not only something experienced by Palestinians; it was the result of structures well beyond Palestinian control. Reading the two texts as different ways of understanding what the Nakba was requires analysis from the position of the balcony—a simultaneous view of what the Nakba meant to Palestinians at the time and what was happening elsewhere that meant there was no one coming to protect them. This Nakba is both an experience (many experiences) and its architexts.

That the Nakba is many things at once is not in itself a new idea. In *The Palestine Nakba*, the historian Nur Masalha drew out four conceptual approaches to understanding the Nakba and how the word has taken on meaning.[11] Each different understanding has its own structure of meaning and therefore its own limitations to what can be included and how harm can be understood. Reading the many definitions, mobilizations, and understandings of Nakba through the terms of the Palestine Project, these limitations begin to dissolve. The idea of the series, and the stance of the balcony, can absorb different articulations of the meaning of the Nakba, make sense of their limitations, and see—like the story of Salwa—what all the texts have so far managed to leave out.

In Masalha's four definitions are understandings of catastrophe that fit into two dominant and familiar frameworks and two more open-ended models. First, the Nakba is understood as an event in a linear Palestinian history. As Masalha describes it in the first pages of his work, Nakba is "the turning point in the modern history of Palestine—that year over 500 villages and towns and a whole country and its people disappeared from international maps and dictionaries."[12] This construction presumes a linear history of Palestine from past to future that was violently disrupted. It allows one to imagine a present Palestine that had not been erased but makes less room for the many trajectories that Palestinians have journeyed (and would bring with them on an eventual return). Maurice Elbelini, in his work on Palestinian fiction written in English, Spanish, Hebrew, and Danish, has neatly drawn out some of the pitfalls of this structure of imagination.[13] "We should acknowledge the emergence of several epistemic Palestines," he writes, and the problems of reconciling these into typical national (linear) frameworks.

Second, Masalha, citing Ilan Pape, recounts how Nakba was conceived and constructed to operate as a "counter [to] the moral weight" of the Holocaust.[14] This meant articulating what happened in and around 1948 using the same narrative structure as that used to tell the story of the Holocaust. The two terms could then be used in conversation, comparing apples to apples. For example, both Ethel Manin and Elias Khoury—two of three non-Palestinians who have been hailed for writing *the* story of the Nakba—wrote about the massacre at Lydda.[15] The destruction of the city, the massacre of hundreds of the population's men, the creation of a ghetto, the looting of houses, the forcing of Palestinians to burn and bury their dead—this experience shares so many horrific hallmarks of the Holocaust that it is difficult not to make parallels.[16] But this story of Lydda has been narrated more than other stories because it offers such a striking parallel. This way of structuring the Nakba narrative, however, limits the Nakba to something that happened (in the past tense). It papers over the many differences between the Nakba and the Holocaust, and it puts emphasis on a particular kind of Nakba experience. It also, as Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg write in their *Holocaust and the Nakba*, sets the stage for a "global clash between the two metanarratives."[17]

Better, perhaps, to understand these two ways of telling the Nakba through the lens of delirium. This makes room for the renegotiation of tropes, which then go from limiting to open-ended. Like the trope of the fighter or the mother of the martyr, these articulations of Nakba can be inhabited and mobilized to make the experience readable within dominant frameworks. These articulations are by all accounts true; they are just not complete and risk doing damage when they are understood to be the only way of articulating the Palestinian catastrophe. Delirium, further, must be engaged to see how these narratives are created as ways of making sense within (and speaking to) existing structures of power. One way of achieving this is through the device of the series. In seeing these two narrative types as examples of a larger whole, we can identify their generic structure, see that structure as a text in its own right, and understand that this structure and the story it tells are all part of a larger story called Nakba.

Other articulations of the Nakba innovate alternative structures of telling. As Masalha noted, Nakba has become what Pierre Nora called a "site of memory," a focal point that collects diverse memories and can act as a site or location where remembrance—individual and collective—can take place.[18] While Nora developed his idea around a physical site (Flanders fields, Auschwitz, the 9/11 monuments), Masalha claims that—much like Intifada above—Nakba as an idea (as a memory) has become a vessel for all kinds of different narratives, different experiences. In this articulation, every experience of Nakba is a valid one. Stories of massacre, of exodus, but also of remaining, of alienation, or feelings of guilt about what was not lost. Nakba in this sense of the term can incorporate multiplicity and remains—

like the idea of the series—open to collecting as-yet-unheard stories. This way of imagining deploys what has here has been called a chronotope of accumulation. Used to understand how places and times were taken up into the network of Palestine, stories of the Nakba are verified through that same paradigm of witness outlined in chapter 3. Something is part of the Nakba because Palestinians witness and acknowledge it to be so.

As a "site of memory," the Nakba can also be understood as *al-muthannā*. The often-discrete experiences of different villages, cities, and geographies (inland vs. coastal, etc.) together generate a sense of the diversities of violence enacted and the different tactics of dispossession deployed across different strategically important (or not important but no less valid) locations. All of these different events, all of the experiences of them, constitute the larger notion of Nakba. The focus of Nakba as a site of memory, however, is a focus on events and experiences. The structures of power—that which made the dispossession of a People thinkable, and indeed achievable—are generally lost. Another open-ended notion of Nakba, however, puts precisely these structures in the spotlight. Citing Elias Khoury, the fourth articulation of Nakba that Masalha mentions in his work is the notion that catastrophe is ongoing.[19] The forces that make Nakba possible, this way of thinking illuminates, are still in play—and they can be seen to have started well before 1948. European colonialism, racism, Zionism, ethnonationalism—all of these structures are what made it possible to dispossess Palestinians of their homes and villages, and they are structures that continue to do violence today.

Understanding Nakba as an ongoing process allows the architexts of Palestine's destruction to be made visible. We can also begin to parse the relationships between these structures of power and understand how they worked at once together and for their own ends. This is where the story of Fouad and the Arab Liberation Army come in: corruption, misogyny, and the problem of a sense of inevitable victory all played—and in many ways have continue to play—a part in the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians. The danger here, of course, is that all violences become Nakba violences, and it is harder to trace and understand the long-term impact, indeed the compounding of harms, when they are all lumped together. For example, Salwa's rape can be traced to some of the same forces that made the Nakba possible, but does calling her assault part of the Nakba obscure the particular harm she has experienced? When violence is seen as a process, the harms of its duration can be obscured. Ultimately, as Masalha observed, the meaning of the Nakba has been shaped by all of these different articulations. What using the language of Nasrallah's linked series does is hold all of these different notions together, allowing insights of one to be read into, or alongside, another. It also allows the gaps of one structure of telling to be filled in by another and can read and evaluate different structures based on their relationship to power.

Something of how this combined approach functions can be seen when we read Nasrallah's linked series as *the* story of the Nakba (instead of just *Time of*

White Horses, as critics have tended to do). Looking at the cumulative project, the Nakba takes on a more delicate texture. For example, we might say that Fouad introduces structures of power that perpetrated the Nakba and have been hitherto unaccounted for; these are structures we see again generations later in the story of Yasin when he "returns" to Ramallah. The story of the village of Hadia and its destruction shows how forces of dispossession reached at least into the Ottoman era in its linear historical-style narrative, while Salwa shows how the harms of dispossession can ripple across time, creating vulnerabilities that leave Palestine and Palestinians open to new harms. The Balconies, for their part, explore the new, old, and persisting structures of harm that Palestinians are faced with on a daily basis—some the same forces as those that allowed the Nakba to happen, others novel powers that perpetrate new harms. The Balconies make visible the relationships between these structures of harm (new and old), allowing for a more precise tracing of the ongoing Nakba and its linked forms of violence.

LITERARY HERITAGE

Tucked in the back matter of the Palestine Comedies is a ten-line quote of sorts from Ibn Manẓur's thirteenth-century *Lisān al-ʿarab.*[20] The lines are set out in the shape of a poem and given the title, "Of *al-Malhāt* and Its Roots." Each line presents one of the meanings of words stemming from the root *l-h-w*.[21] *L-h-w* is the foundation of the word *malhāt* (comedies, as in the Palestine Comedies), but in different forms and conjugations, it takes on a host of other meanings. The entry is credited to the *Lisān al-ʿarab*, a compendium that collected all known references to a root and its words from across religious, historical, juridical, and poetic texts. The twenty-volume work is seen as an authority on the meaning of words. In citing the *Lisān al-ʿarab*, the back matter of the Palestine Comedies gives an authoritative definition of just what the project means by "comedies." In the most basic sense, given the series title "The Palestine Comedies," this is also defining Palestine—or at least the elements of Palestine that the series will touch on. The excerpt and its definitions do define Palestine (in a sense, as a reading shows below), but the *Lisān* excerpt is a fake: it is not a direct quote. This definition is based on a traditional authority of language that is in fact a rewritten version of that authoritative text. The site of authority is thus obscured. And this is precisely the point. The example offers a rewriting of tradition and a redefinition of the ways and means of relationships between texts, so that any author can call on any set of works and claim these as their literary heritage. A close reading shows how.

The Palestine Comedies' ten-line back matter is closer to a total rewriting of the *Lisān al-ʿarab* entry for *l-h-w*. It takes the six pages of text from the *Lisān* and narrowly selects eight usages that boil down to four definitions, or components, of the term: comedies as Nasrallah defines it means love (*ḥubb*), distraction (*ghafal*), complete attachment (*lā yufāriq*), and "a gift" (*ʿaṭiyya*). This is Palestine, the intimation goes, a beloved, something not to be distracted from, something to form a complete attachment to, "the best and most generous of any giving." In this sense it is rather straightforward. But to get here Nasrallah has entirely rewritten a source text of Arabic literary heritage. This rewriting forges an idea of literary tradition that breaks with existing formulations and rescripts the relationship between (and indeed the authority of) the literary past and its imagined relationship to the present. The lines and a translation are as follows:

في الملهاة وجذورها
لها بالشيء، لهوا: أولع به.
لهَا، لِهيانا عن: إذا سلوت عنه وتركت ذكره وإذا غفلت عنه.
ولهت المرأة إلى حديث المرأة أنست به وأعجبها. قال تعالى (لاهية قلوبهم) أي متشاغلة عما.يُدعون إليه.
وقال (وأنت عنه تلهى) أي تتشاغل وتلاهوا: أي لها بعضهم ببعض.
ولهوت به أحببته. والإنسان اللاهي إلى الشيء الذي لا يفارقه.
وقال: لاهى الشيء أي داناه وقاربه ولاهى الغلام الفطام إذا دنا منه.
واللهوةُ واللُّهيةُ: العَطِيَّة. وقيل: أفضل العطايا وأجزلها

To be distracted by something
To be impassioned by it
If you forget it and cease to mention it, and if you turn a blind eye and neglect it
A woman is entertained with the goings-on of women: She is amused and absorbed by it
God almighty said: (their hearts are distracted from what they are asked to do)
And he said: To him, you pretend to be busy
They are occupied with each other
I loved him.
The person who is *lāhī* towards something, is inseparable from it.
Someone [can] *lāhā* an object: To bring it closer
The boy is getting closer to weaning
An offering. And it is said that it is the best and most generous of any giving

Just what these new relationships are will now be a familiar pattern. Reading literary history through the tools of the Palestine Project opens closed narratives. The closed narrative in this case is the linear and retrospective story told of Palestinian (and Arabic and much of "world") literature. In all cases, the literary past of a nation or a language is presented as a relentless march forward, moving from oral poetry to prose to the short story to the novel. This development happens in either linguistic or national silos. It is the Palestinian silo, where folk poetry gave way to the short story, that was slowly moving toward the novel when the Nakba interrupted the process. Here the story takes its familiar turn, and authors of the Nakba generation were charged with writing the way back to the homeland and reconstituting a Palestinian people in exile—something later generations were understood to be unable to achieve. It is this broad-strokes narrative that made Nasrallah and his work invisible in the first place, lost between the Nakba and the post-Oslo generations.

It is perhaps fitting, then, that this last example suggests a vision of literary heritage that breaks down the lines and silos. For this vision is as expansive as the Palestine that Nasrallah's works imagined: it is composed of countless spaces, times, and agents. In this model, literary movements do not develop in lines, do not draw on texts produced only in one language, place, or time. While the relationships—real and through reading—forged between Palestinian and Arab writers and texts remain valid, and an important point of reference, this is, as it were, as one series in a project containing several. Literary heritage, like the excerpt from the *Lisān al-ʿarab*, is instead a carefully selected amalgamation of traces and influences—both imposed and specially identified—from a host of possible (and available) sources. Literature in this figuration exists in something like what Kristeva in her theory of intertextuality described as a sort of literary ether.[22] For Kristeva this was the idea of a sort of oxygen that writers breathed that held in it the traces of every literary utterance that came before. Breathing this air, she wrote, meant that every work was in a sense intertextual because it recirculated all that which came before. The vision here is almost as expansive.

In the works of the Palestine Project Nasrallah demonstrates the operation of this vision of literary heritage. He quite literally put the works he was breathing on the pages of the novels, like when Salwa was browsing the shelves of her teacher, or as the reader encounters the lines of Xuedou's tenth-century Chinese poem, or when Fouad recalls reading *Gulliver's Travels*, or al-Duktūr's Brecht. Add to this Nasrallah's claim as the inheritor of Habibi, Jabra, and Kanafani and his use of news images from Abu Ghraib and video stills from Forrest Gump. The literary heritage—the works of the ether—on display in the novels is diverse across time, genre, and space. Also brought through are the architexts of many of these global texts. The world that Kanafani or Jabra or Habibi wrote—the structures of power, the contexts of writing—is claimed in the works of the Palestine Project just as much as the themes and tropes of these authors' works. In a different way, it is also the world that produced the images at Abu Ghraib that forms this literary heritage. The violence of 9/11 and Abu Ghraib, as *Balcony of Delirium* so clearly showed, is in the air—and it must (the project intimates) be accounted for.

Beginning with Kristeva's notion of a sort of literary ether as a way of imagining intertextuality, imagining this reconfigured literary heritage might also lean on Walter Benjamin's idea of the constellation. In Benjamin's figuration of relationships, discrete happenings—phenomena that are independent of each other—can be read together and understood to have formed something larger than its parts.[23] The constellation is what allows particular happenings (or in this case, particular texts) across space and time to be understood as elements of a singular phenomenon. Like the Big Dipper, which can be picked out amid billions of stars in the night sky, Nasrallah is part of a literary heritage that is more like a universe—a universe from which texts are chosen or imposed and brought into conversation to tell a larger story. Literary heritage in Nasrallah's works (as indeed Palestine) operate like a constellation: forces and experiences gathered together out of so many stars in the sky.

Nasrallah, then, gives tools for redefining the spheres of criticism that leave him neglected as an author. His works make their own case for inclusion in a much-expanded sense of not only Palestinian writing but also Palestine. This literary language, and the imaginative universe that it conjures forth, makes it very difficult to criticize the author for his prolificacy. For in this vision of Palestine, one must keep writing. And as perhaps a relief for the reader, one must not—because almost by concept one cannot—read it all, for this Palestine is as infinite as Borges's Library of Babel. To be complete, the Palestine Project must write all formulations of experience, across all of Palestine's locations, and grapple with every single structure of power that limits life, dignity, and freedom. It is, perhaps, enough to know that this is the Palestine for which the linked series create imaginative space. Of course, even if, one day, the series do come to a close, the literary universe that takes shape within them can continue to proliferate through the exercise of the citizen writer, whose work it is to persist in the observation and collection of texts of the nation.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Epigraphs: Said and Mohr, *After the Last Sky*, 20–21; Ghassan Kanafani, introduction to *All That's Left to You*; Nasrallah, *Olives of the Streets*.

1. Naṣrallāh, *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*, 63.

2. Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, 35. For more on this, see the introduction to part 2.

3. It has become quite common to call Palestine a "nation of fragments" and to talk about its fragmentation since 1988. See, e.g., its first articulation in English (at least as I've been able to track down specifically for "nation in fragments"), Johnson, "Living Together in a Nation of Fragments," in *Living Palestine*, ed. Taraki; but the term "fragmentation" and referring to Palestine, and Palestinians, as fragmented has been popular much longer, as in Naga, "Makdisi's War Memoir"; ʿAbād, "Al-Iḥṣāʾ wa al-baḥth al-Ijiimāʿayfī al-ʿarḍ al-muḥtala 1967," 63–81; Hovsepian, "Desecularization of the Palestinian Imagination?," 1379–94. This focus, scholars warn, is dangerous since it prioritizes the achievements and practices of colonization at the expense of a focus on Palestinian desires. See, e.g., Hanieh, "Development as Struggle," 32–47; Peteet, "Unsettling the Categories of Displacement," 2–9.

4. Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones*, 86.

5. See, e.g., Tartir, "Criminalizing Resistance: Security Sector Reform and Palestinian Authoritarianism," in *Palestine and Rule of Power*, ed. Tartir and Seidel, 205–26; Parsons, "The Palestinian Authority Security Apparatus: Biopolitics, Surveillance, and Resistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories," in *Surveillance and Control in Israel/Palestine*, ed. E. Zureik, D. Lyon, and Y. Abu-Laban.

6. Nasrallah, *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*, 63.

7. Hitchcock, *The Long Space*, 2.

8. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel*; Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging*.

9. Majaj et al., *Intersections*; Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967*; ElSadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel*; Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*.

10. Ghanayim, *The Quest for a Lost Identity: Palestinian Fiction in Israel*; Taha, *The Palestinian Novel: A Communication Study*; Hafiz, *The Quest for Identities*.

11. Neuwirth et al., *Arabic Literature*; Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel*; Ouyang, *Politics of Love in the Arabic Novel*; Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel*.

12. Deheuvels et al., *Intertextuality in Modern Arabic Literature since 1967*.

13. Nasrallah, "History, Orality, Narrative," lecture, November 19, 2012, translated transcript from the author.

14. Muhawi and Suleiman, *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, 209.

15. See, e.g., Salameh, *Modern Jordanian Fiction*, especially the chapter on Nasrallah.

16. Jayyusi, "Barārī al-ḥummā"; Darrāj, "Mujarad 2 faqaṭ li-Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh."

17. ʿAbd āl-Qādr, "Abd al- Qādr: Qanadīl malak al-jalil."

18. Reviews of his work appeared in, to name a few, *Al-Karmal* (Palestine), *Al-Ādāb* (Lebanon), *Al-Āqlām* (Iraq), *Al-Maʿrifa* (Egypt), and *Awān* (Bahrain) in the 1980s and 1990s, and he regularly published poetry and occasionally commentary on other writers and works here and elsewhere in Arabic.

19. Nasrallah, *Prairies of Fever*.

20. An excerpt of *Prairies of Fever* appeared in Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Modern Arabic Fiction: An Anthology* (2008) and Denys Johnson-Davies's *The Anchor Book of Modern Arabic Fiction* (2010), and some of his poetry appeared in Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992).

21. His work was briefly mentioned by Barbra Harlow in the article "Narrative in Prison: Stories from the Palestinian 'Intifada.'" *Prairies of Fever* was also mentioned in a report on the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, in *MELA Notes* and *World Literature Today* in 1994.

22. Nasrallah, *Inside the Night*, trans. Bakr Abbas.

23. See "Publications Received," *Middle East Report*, no. 183, 1993, 48; Amireh, *World Literature Today*, 419; "Front Matter," *Middle East Report*, no. 186, 1994, 27–31; Allen, "PROTA: The Project for the Translation of Arabic."

24. Early works on Arabic literature from Ali Jad (*Form and Technique in the Egyptian Novel, 1912–1971*), Hamdi Sakkut (*The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends from 1913 to 1952*), and Sabry Hafez (*The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*) and perhaps culminating in Roger Allen's *Modern Arabic Literature* (1987) or Muhammad Badawi's 1985 work of the same title have sought to trace the origins and "development" of Arabic letters from the pre-Islamic period and its poetic norms to the modern novel. This is usually carried out on the bases of national literatures, so that Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, etc., have their own national trajectories, generally beginning with metered poetry and culminating in the national novel. Reaching the developmental stage of the novel is generally posited as the "arrival" of Arabic letters in the modern period, with later editions showing how Arabic literature has "kept up" with transformations in form from postmodernism to surrealism. Meyer's *The Experimental Arabic Novel*, positioned as a postcolonial study, falls precisely into the trap of periodization and comparison that it claims to avoid. As the blurb on its back cover boasts, "This approach to postcolonial literature offers a way to compare and contrast it meaningfully with Western literature without relying on inherently Western literary models," but the work essentially traces "modernism" in a linear fashion through historical time.

25. Nasrallah, "[Interview] al-malhāt al-filasṭīniyya wa *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*," 32.

26. al-Ḥurūb, "'*Al-malhāt al-filasṭīniyya*' li-Ibrāhīm Naṣrāllah," 128–35.

27. Nashwān, "Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh jāmaʾ al-nuṣ," 184–90.

28. Nasrallah, "[Interview] al-malhāt al-filasṭīniyya wa *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*," 32.

29. Ibid.

30. He referenced the same quote at a London book launch in 2012.

31. Nasrallah, "[Interview] al-malhāt al-filasṭīniyya wa *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*," 32. Wide use of the phrase was challenged by Zionist lobbying groups, casting doubt on the exact wording of the phrase. For an overview of the debate, see Winstanley, "'The Old Will Die and the Young Will Forget'—Did Ben-Gurion Say It?"

32. Obaid and Albayati, *Al-Kawn al-ruwāʾī*, 17. The authors traced themes of self and other, enumerated the types and forms of intertextuality, and looked at the meaning of character names across the first five of the Palestine Comedies. They also identified the Palestine Comedies as a "narrative universe," which is a theme that this project picks up on—exploring what that idea means and how that meaning is established.

33. Darraj, "Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh fī *Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ*."

34. See, e.g., the special issue of *Al-Ufuq al-Jadīd* 4, no. 1 (January 1965), on Nakba literature.

35. *Time of White Horses* was the sixth depending on how you count. See chapter 1 for more on different ways of "ordering" the works.

36. See, e.g., Nasrallah, "Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh."

37. After the attention that *Time of White Horses* received among both Arabic and English reading publics, the work was translated into English. This spurred a wave of translations and relaunched international interest on new terms. Translated since the first IPAF nomination (all by Nancy Roberts): *Time of White Horses*, 2012; *Lanterns of the King of Galilee: A Novel of 18th-Century Palestine*, 2015; *Gaza Weddings: A Novel*, 2017. A similar pattern of publication in translation, though of a lesser total of works, can be observed in Italian (the only language into which Nasrallah's poetry has been extensively translated), Danish, and Turkish.

38. The IPAF coverage of Nasrallah's works is an accessible case in point. There is no mention of a series, not in the prize's coverage in English or in Arabic. See https://www.arabicfiction.org/ar/node/126, accessed January 30, 2023.

39. For one example, see https://opensyllabus.org. The OS has compiled more than 7 million syllabi and has a searchable database indicating where and how often texts are taught. One recorded syllabus teaches Nasrallah's *Prairies of Fever.*

40. Besides my own writing, there are five academic articles in English that reference Nasrallah. See Mattar, "Out of Time"; El-Mansi, "Resisting the Zionist Grand Narrative and Defying the Palestinian/Arab Metanarrative in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Time of White Horses*"; Boyalı, "Wanted Dead or Alive"; Moore "'Keys to Paradise'"; Amireh, "Constructions of Masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa," in *Constructions of Masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Kahf and Sinno, 39–45.

41. Abu Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*, 13.

42. See note 3 above.

43. See "Dead-End Heroes" in chapter 6 for a full treatment of Brecht and Palestine.

44. While readers and critics believed Jabra was born in Bethlehem in 1919, records show that he was born in Adana (modern Turkey) and came to Bethlehem with his family as an infant. For the fascinating story, see Tamplin, "The Other Wells."

45. See, e.g., Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual.*

46. Timūr, “Ḥiwār ḥawl adab al-nakba.”

47. Cited in Amireh, “Of Heroes and Men,” in *Constructions of Masculinity in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Kahf and Sinno, 49.

48. See Abu ʿAlī, “Sīmīyāʾīya al-ʿanwān fī al-qiṣa al-qaṣīra fī filisṭīn baʿda ittifāqīya uslū,” 69–113; Al-Ṣalīby, *Al-riwāya al-Filisṭiyniyya wa tajlīāthā al-funīa wa al-mawḍūʿaīa fī al-arḍ al-muḥtala bʿad ʾUslū (1992)*; Rafīdy, *Al-Taḥwlāt fī al-makāna al-ijtimāʿīya fī al-riwāya al-filasṭīniyya al-maʿāṣra*; Gottesfield, “‘Mirrors of Alienation,’” 22–40.

49. Rahman, *In the Wake of the Poetic.*

50. See Fox and Qabaha, eds., *Post-Millennial Palestine.*

51. In particular, their works Shibli, *Kullunā ba‘īd bi-dhāt al-miqdār ‘an al-ḥubb*, trans. Paul Starkey as *We Are All Equally far from Love*; Abū al-Ḥayyāt, *Lā aḥad ya‘rif zumrah damihu riwāyah*, translation from Jamjoum forthcoming from CSU Poetry Center; Maʿrūf *Nukāt lil-musallaḥīn*, trans. Jonathan Wright as *Jokes for the Gunmen*; Bsharāt, *Ashjār lil-nās al-ghā'ibiyn*, trans. Ahmedzai Kemp and Copeland as *Trees for the Absentees*; Kayāl, *Al-mawt fī Ḥaīfā*. An excerpt from the work can be found in Ghalayini, ed., *Palestine+100*.

52. Of course, Nakba generation authors did all of the same things but are rather read for their national symbolism.

53. Timūr, “Ḥiwār ḥawl adab al-nakba.”

54. See, e.g., Rahman, *In the Wake of the Poetic*, “Introduction.”

55. He is not the only author “between” these generations. Writers like Hussein al-Barghouthi (b. 1954, Kobr; d. 2001, Ramallah), who died before his writing career took off, and Mahmoud Shukair (b. 1941, Jerusalem) are also similarly critical of but emerge from within the system that produced the canon. Shukair, of course, was born before 1948 so should by all accounts be considered part of the canon, but he began publishing later in life, along with Nasrallah and al-Barghouthi.

56. See Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Atlas of Palestine* (2009).

57. al-‘Amary, “Filasṭīnīūn 1948,” 100.

58. Salam, “Bayn al-‘awda wa al-tawṭīn,” 29.

59. UNRWA, *UNRWA Statistics 2010*, 5.

PART 1. INTERTEXTUAL PALESTINE: INTRODUCTION

Epigraphs: Quoted in Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile*, 145; al-Dīk, “Al-tanaṣ al-usṭūrī fī jidārīya Maḥmūd Darwīsh,” 5; Biseisu, “Bayn al-Sunbula wa al-Qanbula,” *Kitab Lawts*, 65, quoted in Abu Samra, “Tawẓif al-turāth fī diwān *al-Ashajār tumūt waquifian*,” 69.

1. Biseisu, “Bayn al-Sunbula wa al-Qanbula,” *Kitab Lawts*, 65, quoted in Abu Samra, “Tawẓif al-turāth fī diwān *al-Ashajār tumūt waquifian*,” 69.

2. Genette, *Palimpsests*, 1.

3. There is less work on intertextuality and Arabic literature in English. There is one collected volume (Deheuvels, ed., *Intertextuality in Modern Arabic Literature since 1967*), though the phenomenon is also remarked on elsewhere (and often by those who contributed to the volume, including Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel*; Assadi and Na‘amneh, *The Road to Self-Revival*; Allen, *Selected Studies in Modern Arabic Narrative*; Hartman, *Jesus, Joseph and Job.*

4. al-Dīk, "Al-tnāṣ al-usṭuryfī," 2.
5. Ibid.
6. Abu Samra, "Tawẓif al-turāth," 9.
7. al-Dīk, "Al-tnāṣ al-usṭury," 4.
8. Ibid., 5.
9. Mūsa, "Ashkāl al-tanās al-sh'abī fī sh'ar Tawfīq Ziyād," 76.
10. al-Mabḥuḥ, *Al-tanāṣ fī diwān li-ajlk ghaza*, 2.
11. Said and Mohr, *After the Last Sky*, 33.

1. PALESTINE AS SERIES

1. Some basic facts and an untold number of details are not autobiographical. For example, Nasrallah's protagonist was born in a refugee camp near Bethlehem and then moved to Wihdat in the 1950s, while Nasrallah was born in Wihdat.

2. Nasrallah, *Ṭifl al-mimḥāt*, 47.

3. Obaid and Albayat, *Al-Kawn al-ruwā ʾ ī*, 17.

4. One novel of the series, *Time of White Horses*, is set in a fictional village that is loosely based on Nasrallah's ancestral village in the Galilee. With a fictional place, however, the work—which tells the story of the people's displacement from the village—is able to weave fiction with history and bring in the testimony of Palestinians displaced from across historic Palestine.

5. Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 86.

6. Nasrallah, *Mujarrad 2 faqaṭ*, translated 2007 as *Inside the Night*.

7. al-Ḥurūb, "'Al-malhāt al-filasṭīniyya' li-Ibrāhīm Naṣrāllah."

8. Nasrallah, *Taḥta shams*, 145.

9. Nasrallah, *Ẓalāl al-mufātīḥ; Sīrat al-ʿain; Dabāba taḥt shajara ʿīd al-milād*.

10. Nasrallah, *Qanādīl malik al-jalīl*, translated 2012 as *Lanterns of the King of Galilee*.

11. Except, of course, of Kilimanjaro. Naṣrallāh, *Arwaḥ Kilīmanjārū*.

12. Genette, *Paratexts*, 220.

13. Genette, *Palimpsests*, 2.

14. For example, the fifth, *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniya*, which earned the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2018.

15. al-Ṣalḥūt, "Al-milhāt al-filasṭīniyya *zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍā*."

16. Nasrallah, *Shurfat al-hadhayān*.

17. Nasrallah, *Shurfat rajul al-thalj*.

18. Nasrallah, *Shurfat al- ʿār*

19. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 26.

20. Khoury, *Awlād al-ghitū: Ismī Adam*, translated as *My Name Is Adam: Children of the Ghetto*. The second volume was published later that year as *Awlād al-ghitū: Nijmat al-Baḥr*.

21. Khoury, "Episode 1—Trauma and the Nakba with Elias Khoury and Nora Parr," accessed November 3, 2019, https://soundcloud.com/arabicfortrauma/e1-eliaskhoury-ghetto-noraparr.

22. Ibid.

23. Mahfouz, *Al-sukkarīya; Bayna al-qaṣrayn; Qaṣr al-shawq*.

24. ElSadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel*, 9.

25. "Author Profile: Naguib Mahfouz," *World Literature Today*, 45.

26. Hitchcock, *The Long Space*, 2.

27. Ibid.

28. Mortimer, "Assia Djebar's 'Algerian Quartet,'" 102.

29. Hitchcock, *Long Space*, 112.

30. Guzmán, "Book Review: Granada," 129. Ashour built the story of loss into the always victorious rhetoric of Arab nationalism.

31. Hitchcock, *The Long Space*, 2.

32. Sayigh, "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," 100.

33. Jacoff, "Introduction to *Paradiso*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Jacoff, 143.

34. The translations used here are from Dante, *The Divine Comedy: The Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*, trans. Norton.

35. Pertile, "Introduction to *Inferno*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Jacoff, 69.

36. See, e.g., the overview in Foster, "Dante's Vision of God," 21–39.

37. Jacoff, *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 35.

38. Guy, *Divine Dialectic*; see in particular chap. 9, "The Poet's Incarnate Word."

39. Ibid.

40. Genette, *Paratexts*, 21.

41. Ibid., 23.

2. *AL-MUTHANNĀ*

Epigraph: Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*, 31.

1. Abu-Remaileh, "The Three Enigmas of Palestinian Literature," 21.

2. Shibli, *Journey of Ideas Across*.

3. Said, *Out of Place*.

4. Nasrallah, *A ʻrās āmina*.

5. Shibli, *Journey of Ideas Across*.

6. Nasrallah, *A ʻrās āmina*.

7. Nasrallah, interview, conducted by Nora Parr, January 2016.

8. "*Fūl* bean" refers to the fava bean, a ubiquitous food in Palestine and other parts of the Arab world.

9. Kanafānī, "Ka-ʾinany aʾysh tafāṣīl dhalik al-yawm," 219.

10. Snir, *Palestinian Theatre,* 141.

11. Brecht and Willett, *Brecht on Theatre*, 136.

12. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, chap. 6, "Guerrillas and Martyrs: The Evolution of National 'Heroes.'"

3. ACCUMULATING MEANING

1. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, "Forms of Time," 84.

2. Ibid.

3. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 610.

4. Kanafani, foreword to first edition of *Mā tabaq'a likum*, titled "A Clarification," as translated by Roger Allen, in Wild, *Ghassan Kanafani*, xxi.
5. Tawil-Souri, "Qalandia Checkpoint as Space and Nonplace," 5.
6. Kanafani, "A Clarification," in Wild, *Ghassan Kanafani*, xxi.
7. Allen, Preface to Wild, *Ghassan Kanafani*, xxi.
8. Nasrallah, *Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar*, 10.
9. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 610.
10. The reasons for this are not given in the text.
11. Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan, 1948–1957*, 56.
12. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* "Forms of Time," 247.
13. Balibar, "The Nation Form," 86.
14. See, e.g., Himmat Zubi, "The Ongoing Nakba," in *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*, ed. Abdo-Zubi and Masalha.
15. Messick, *The Calligraphic State*, 207.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 47.
21. Ibid.
22. Khoury, "Rethinking the Nakba," 264.

PART 2. SEEING, TELLING, POWER: INTRODUCTION

Epigraphs: Nasrallah, *Tifl al-mimḥāt*, 57; Said and Mohr, *After the Last Sky*, 11; Darraj, comments on the cover of Nasrallah, *Zaytūn al-shawāriʿ*, 2002 edition.

1. "3.2 Archaeology and Genealogy," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
2. Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 2.
3. Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, 35.
4. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 209.
5. Robinson, *The Terms of Order*, 77.
6. Hawari et al., "Seeing Israel through Palestine," 155.
7. Ibid.
8. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 34.
9. Ibid., 13.
10. Robinson, *Terms of Order*, 202.
11. Ibid., 204.
12. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 253.
13. Genette, *The Architext*, 7.

4. BALCONY AS VANTAGE

1. Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern*, 56.
2. Ibid.

3. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

4. Chapter 13 of Aḥmad Farīs Shidyāq's *Sāq ʿala al-sāq* is also composed entirely of ellipses. See Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, trans. Humphrey Davies.

5. Borges, "Library of Babel," trans. Andrew Hurley, in *Collected Fictions*, 112.

6. Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 11.

7. Nasrallah, interview, conducted by Nora Parr, November 2012.

8. From the reader Ali AlShewail at Goodreads, accessed July 12, 2022, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7953792.

9. Nasrallah uses a similar technique in a later Balconies novel: *Shurfat al-firdaus*.

10. Reynolds and Brustad, *Interpreting the Self*, 90.

11. CNN International, May 2, 2003, accessed October 23, 2013, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/05/01/bush.transcript/.

12. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.

13. Ibid., 110.

14. Simpson, "Re-Raising the Flags of Our Fathers," in *Culture as Text, Text as Culture*, ed. Lafitte, Wall, and Wittrock, 89.

15. Horstkotte and Pedri, "Introduction: Photographic Interventions," 3.

16. This is not entirely unique as a practice in fiction. In the works of the German writer W. G. Sebald (who uses intertexts to explore the trauma and present-past of World War II in Europe), for example, Maron and Horstkotte analyze a similar function of image as a way to destabilize a narrative arc. See Horstkotte and Maron, "Photo-Text Topographies," 53.

17. Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, 15.

18. Ibid., 135.

19. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," 474.

20. See also Jad, "The Post-Oslo Palestine and Gendering Palestinian Citizenship," 360–72.

21. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʻarab*.

22. Ibid., 2302.

23. A very literal translation of the passage reads, with major themes in square brackets at the start of each shift from theme to theme:

> [Place in the family] And it said: He is my brother, a piece (*shiqqun*) of myself, and so he is part (*shaqīqun*) of me, the plural of sibling (*al-shaqīq*), is siblings (*ʾashshiqā*), and this part (*shaqīq*) of me, as if it were cleft (*ʻinshaqqa*) into two halves, each of them a art (*shaqīq*) of the other, al of them brothers. And ʻAbū Zubīd al-ṭāʼy said:
>
> > Oh son of my mother, oh part (*shaqīq*) of myself
> > You are from inside me, inescapably
>
> [Relationship with brother] And it said: Women are the siblings (*shaqāʼiq*) of men, their isotopes, their equals in orality, an imprint, is as though the sisters (*shuqiqna*) are pieces of them. And the clouds split (*shaqāʼiq*), followed by inundating rain. And al-Hudhaly said:
>
> > And so I said to her, what is comforting like a garden
> > Is softened in growing, becoming good to she that is cleft (*shaqāʼiq*)
>
> [Ominous warning; fertility] And shawīqa means: a wide rain, because the darkness is split (*ʻinshaqqa*) from it, like the *shaqāʼiq nuʼmān* [the anemone] is a plant whose singular is shaqīqa, called by that name for its redness, like a bolt of lightning

> (*shaqīqat al-birq*). [Violence, war, double meanings] And it is said that it is named thus also for Nu'mān (Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir) because he fell upon a cleft (*shaqā'iq*) of sand in which those red offshoots had grown. The flower was praised and protected, and it is said that Nu'mān is the name of blood! And the Anemone (*al-shaqīqa*) is named for its pieces, they are pieces of him, so its redness became the red of blood. So his anemone (*shaqā'iq-hu*) is a piece of him, which looks like its redness, the redness of blood. [Rebirth of symbols] And though this flower is named the Anemone (*shaqā'iq*) of Nu'mān, the name of Anemone dominated; the flower (*al-shaqīqa*) appearing in the grass is the Anemone (*al-shaqīqa*). And so Abū Ḥanīfa said: Through any course earth the Anemone (*al-shaqīqa)* soars.

24. Al-Shidyāq, *Al-Jāsūs ʿalā al-qāmūs*, 4, quoted in Sacks, "Falling into Pieces, or Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and Literary History," 322.

25. Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language*, 89.

26. For more on the *nahda* as a narrowing of meaning, and also an expansive criticism of the evolution of the idea of nahda as renaissance, see Hanssen and Weiss, *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age*.

27. This rearranged excerpt appeared in works published in the Comedies series from 2000 to 2012.

28. For a fuller treatment of this excerpt, see the final section of the conclusion in this work.

29. This sort of redefinition through the many events and experiences portrayed across the Balconies and Comedies also participates in a cumulative reinscription of meaning. Take the anemone, featured in Manar's rescripting of *sh-q-q* above. It is a symbol long associated with Palestine and was taken up by the national cause (indeed, the poppy/anemone is the national flower of Palestine). In the Comedies, the symbol is frequently used—all in cases that parallel Manar's. Those marked with the symbol of the flower all die before being able to realize or live within the Palestine that they create. *Hanūn*, the Palestinian colloquial word for anemone, is the name of the slain beloved in *Birds of Caution* (1996), the novel that began the Comedies. Hanun leaves the Duheisheh camp for Wihdat just before the protagonist and is killed in the lead-up up to Black September. She signifies not only the loss of Palestine, but the boy's eternal connection to love and to nation. In *Under the Midmorning Sun* (2004), the adopted son of the aging fighter Yasin is named Numan, from *shaqāʾiq nuʿmān*, the full and formal name for the anemone. The boy is killed tragically amid the violence of the Second Intifada. In *Time of White Horses* (2006), an anemone grows in the open grave of the village leader Abu Khalid, who had been shot by the British and presumed dead but makes a miraculous recovery. In drawing on the anemone, the symbol of the martyr, national imagery is drawn upon and Manar is put among the ranks of those on whom the systems of power have foreclosed. She has been martyred by the very structures through which Palestinians at one point sought liberation.

30. Darwish, *Dhākirah lil-nisyān*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi as *Memory for Forgetfulness.*

5. POWER AS GEOGRAPHY (POWER AS TEXT)

1. The work is remarkable for many reasons, not least of which is its place in a series about Palestine as a nation and its near-total absence of Palestinian characters. For more on narratives and discursive frames of the Nakba, see the second section of the work's conclusion.

2. Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, 6.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 47.

6. Genette, *Paratexts*, 199.

7. Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, 21. While Giddens explicitly says this type of authority is exercised over a particular territory, the architexts presume a territory that does not in fact exist.

8. Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military in Jordan*, 5.

9. Ibid., 32.

10. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Pan-Arabism.”

11. Morris, *1948*, 73.

12. Ibid.

13. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 308.

14. Ibid., 123.

15. I distinguish here the system that Fouad grows up in from a wider system of patriarchy that can also be seen to permeate the British Legion, which has a provenance that is distinct from that described here.

16. See Barthes’s discussion in “From Work to Text,” in *Image, Music, Text*, 157, where the author engages in a discussion to define the work as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,” as opposed to a text, which acts as a small subdivision of the work that is imaginatively self-contained but not delimited (see p. 157).

17. Genette, *Palimpsests*, 40.

PART 3. NOVEL CITIZEN: INTRODUCTION

Epigraphs: Khoury, “Ḥiwār maʿa Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā,” *Shuʿūn filasṭīniyya* 77 (1978), quoted in Mejcher-Atassi, “The Arabic Novel between Aesthetic Concerns and the Causes of Man,” in *Commitment and Beyond*, ed. Pannewick and Albers, 181; Khalifeh, *Bab Al-Saha*, trans. Sawad Hussein as *Passage to the Plaza* (quote from the translation), 155; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 132.

1. Of course, the reasons and processes that created these limitations are ugly and myriad and are by and large the same structures that impede Palestinian life and community in the first place. For an excellent introduction on the colonial origins of the idea of citizenship in Egypt, see Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity*.

2. Whereas previously it was Ottoman subjecthood. See Banko, *The Invention of Palestinian Citizenship*, 8.

3. Plonski, *Palestinian Citizens of Israel*.

4. Salam, “Bayn al-ʻawda wa al-tawṭiin,” 29.

5. Erekat, *Justice for Some*, 29.

6. Khalil, “Palestinian Nationality and Citizenship.”

7. Even this construction presumes that being Palestinian in the Palestinian camps of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon somehow more easily constitutes the individual as Palestinian. See Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, 197.

8. Said and Mohr, *After the Last Sky*, 12.

9. Ihmoud, in Suleiman, *Being Palestinian*, 197.

10. Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 109.

11. Ibid.

12. Quoted in Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 93; emphasis added. See also Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 38.

13. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 3.

14. Ibid., 6.

15. Ebileeni, *Being There, Being Here*, 6.

16. Bishara, "Al-ʿaqalīya al-filasṭīniyya fīʿ isrʾāil," 15.

6. BEING VERSUS BECOMING: HERO, MOTHER, CHILD

1. Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," 26.

2. This will be addressed shortly in the section on women as successful models.

3. Barghouti, *Ra'aytu Rāmallāh*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif as *I Saw Ramallah*, 143 (wording is from the translation).

4. Note that this and all other references to the novel are to the translation *Time of White Horses* by Nancy Roberts, 2012, 182.

5. Darwish, "Letter to the Palestine Literature Festival."

6. Darwish, "Interview with Mahmoud Darwish," in *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile's Poet*, ed. Rahman and Nassar, 126.

7. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 134.

8. Ibid., 189.

9. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," 483

10. Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return," 26.

11. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," 468

12. Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*, 156.

13. Performed in the 1970s and 1980s in the West Bank and Israel, revived in the 2010s (see Snir, *Palestinian Theatre*; Mee, "The Cultural Intifada," 170). The play is also referenced later in Nasrallah's *Shurfat al-hadhayān* (2005) and is used as common political parlance to describe the Palestinian situation (see Turki, "To Be a Palestinian"; or even Hanafi, "Framing Arab Socio-Political Space").

14. Anders, "Being without Time," in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Esslin, 146.

15. This title in particular comes from the eponymous story in Campbell's *Tales from the Arab Tribes*, 110–25. The Jerusalemite author Mohamed Ali Saeid put it precisely in his short story, "Hayat: A Short Story": "his mustache, the symbol of his manliness?" See Ibrāhīm et al., *Father and Son*, 106. The linkage of facial hair and masculinity of course has been traced more broadly in Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, and is mentioned as well in Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.

16. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," 462.

17. Guth, in *Commitment and Beyond*, ed. Pannewick, Khalil, and Albers, 126.

18. From the "Group of Twenty" petition, 1999, as quoted in Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority*, 161.

19. Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*, 33.

20. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 89.

21. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 259.

22. Kanafani, *ʿAn al-rijāl wa al-banādiq*, trans. Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley as *Palestine's Children*.

23. Ibid., 9.

24. Harlow, "Introduction," in *Palestine's Children*, 4.

25. Ibid.

26. Khalifeh, *Bab Al-Saha*, trans. Sawad Hussein as *Passage to the Plaza* (quote from translation), 157.

27. Baron, *Egypt as Woman*, 7.

28. Ibid., 40.

29. Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 25.

30. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 153. Cited in Kanaaneh, *Birthing the Nation*, 25.

31. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," 483.

32. Ibid.

33. Kanafani, *Umm Saʿd: Riwāyah*.

34. ʿAshūr, *Al-Tariq ʾila al-khayma al-ukhra*, 130–31, as cited in Coffin, "Engendering Resistance in the Work of Ghassan Kanafan," 100.

35. Kanafani, "Introduction" to *Umm Saʿd*. In his preface to the novella, Kanafani describes Umm Saʿd as a character with "strength greater than a rock and patience more than endurance itself" (15). He also readily admits that she is meant to represent all Palestinian mothers. As he explains, Umm Saʿd is a "real woman, whom I know well, whom I see regularly and to whom I am somehow related. . . . [N]evertheless, Umm Saʿd is not an individual woman."

36. Coffin, "Engendering Resistance," 104.

37. Kanafani, in Coffin, "Engendering Resistance," 104.

38. Ibid.

7. PALESTINIAN ORIENTATION

1. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 6.

2. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 12.

3. Ibid., 113.

4. Ibid.

5. Stephan, "Lunacy in Palestinian Folklore," 1.

6. Salīm, "Ḥikma fī al-janūn," 141.

7. El-Enany, "The Madness of Non-Conformity," 381.

8. Ibid.

9. See Dols, *Majnūn*, 12–14.

10. Ibid., 12.

11. Habibi, *Waqāʿī al-gharībah*, trans. Trevor LeGassick and Salma Khadra Jayyusi as *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* (quote from translation), 162.

12. Ibid., 163.

13. Morris, *1948*, 127–28.

14. Ibid., 129.

15. Zemeckis, *Forrest Gump*.

16. Ibid.

17. Lean, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

18. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Alastair Hannay.

19. This is not the first time an element of this debate between Hegel and Kierkegaard has appeared in Palestinian literature. In Jabra Ibahim Jabra's *Yawmiyyāt Sarab ʿAffān*, characters engage in the same debate of the "one problem two problem" nature. This this time it is not Kieerkgaard but Hegel's formulation that they are emulating.

20. "Søren Kierkegaard," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

21. Law, "Kierkegaard," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. Fergusson, 97.

22. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 151.

23. Nasrallah, *Ṭuyūr al-ḥadhar*, 145.

24. Westfal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Hannay and Marino, 102.

25. Carlisle, "Kierkegaard's World, Part 2."

26. Ibid.

8. CITIZEN WRITER

1. Reynolds, *Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes*, 72–73.

2. Halabi, *The Unmaking of the Arab Intellectual*, 2. See also Abu-Remaileh, "The Afterlives of Iltizam," in *Commitment and Beyond*, ed. Pannewick, Khalil, and Albers, 180, who notes that Darwish himself observed that Palestinians "have no mercy for their writers[;] . . . [they demand a] model nationalism and subservience of steel."

3. Chea, *Spectral Nationality*, 259.

4. Ibid.

5. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 253.

6. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 235.

7. Habibi, "The Odds-and-Ends Woman," in *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, ed. Jayyusi, 459.

8. Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.

9. Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 62–78.

10. Ibid., 189.

11. Said, *Orientalism*, 37.

12. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

13. Ibid., 181–86. See also Loidolt, "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Actualized Plurality," in *The Phenomenology of Sociality*, ed. Szanto and Moran, 42–55.

14. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

15. Guth, "Between Commitment and Marginalization: Generation of the Sixties in the Sadat Era," in *Commitment and Beyond*, ed. Pannewick, Khalil, and Albers, 127.

16. Ibid., 126.

17. Khalili and Humphries, "Gender of Nakba Memory," in *Nakba*, ed. Saʿdi and Abu-Lughod, 209.

18. Al-Musawi, "Scheherazade's Nonverbal Narratives," 338.

19. Darwish, *Lā urīdu li-hādhī al-qaṣīda an tantahī*, 74.

(NOT A) CONCLUSION: AN IMAGINATIVE UNIVERSE

1. The two novels were first published together in a single volume.

2. See, e.g., Johnson and Kuttab, "Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone?," 26–28; Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, chap. 2, "Historical Background."

3. See Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* and his chapter, "The Intifada and Beyond."

4. See, e.g., the summary coverage in Israel's newspaper of record, *Haaretz*: Sokol, "Israel's Latest Wave of Palestinian Lone Wolf Attacks: A Timeline."

5. See Jarābi'a, "Intifāḍat al-sakākīn," 2–4.

6. See Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, chap. 2, "Historical Background."

7. See Norman, "Civil Resistance in the Second Intifada," in *The Second Palestinian Intifada*.

8. See Jarābi'a, "Intifāḍat al-sakākīn," 2–4.

9. Darraj, "Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh fī *Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍāʾ*."

10. Nasrallah, *Time of White Horses*, 640.

11. Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, 7–11.

12. Ibid., 3.

13. Ebileeni, "Conclusion," in *Being There, Being Here*.

14. Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, xvi, cited in Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, 11.

15. Writing in 1963, Ethel Manin narrated the exodus from Lydda and the attempts of *Road to Bersheeba*'s protagonist to return to Palestine. The work was almost immediately hailed as *the* story of the Nakba (see Ghada al-Samman and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra in the 1965 special issue of *Al-Ufuq al-Jadīd* on Nakba literature, 36–49, ed. Shunnār). The Lebanese author, public intellectual, and PLO member Elias Khoury has written two instant classics on the fallout of 1948 in his *Bāb al-shams: Riwāya* and *Awlād al-ghetu: Ismī Adam*. The second also treats the events of Lydda. The Israeli writer S. Yizhar narrates a similar dispossession but of a small unnamed village from the perspective of a Haganah fighter in *Khirbet Khizeh* (Hebrew, 1950), trans. Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck.

16. Morris, *1948*, 287–89.

17. Bashir and Goldberg, *The Holocaust and the Nakba*, 5.

18. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7–24. See also Abu-Lughod and Nayil, "Return to Half-Ruins," 217–49.

19. Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, 10.

20. The most recent editions of the series have dropped the excerpt. Works published between 2000 and 2012 (and all of those under consideration here) have included the identical back matter.

21. Like most semitic languages, Arabic words are developed around a root system. In a simple instance, the root *d-r-s* can mean to study (d̲ar̲as̲a), a school (mad̲r̲as̲a), or a lesson (d̲ar̲s̲).

22. Kristeva, "The Bounded Text," in *Desire in Language*, 36.

23. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, 35. See also Salzani, *Constellations of Reading*, 219–25; Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin, Critical Constellations*, 6, 234.

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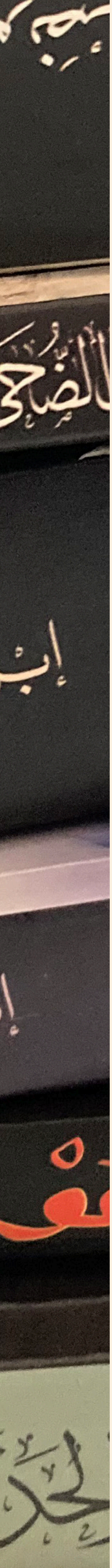

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