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Reading Mood in the Post-Oslo Palestinian Novel: Shame, Melancholy, Hope

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To my family

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Modern Palestinian literature was born diasporic. Produced from different positions in the Palestinian diaspora, multilingual Palestinian literature maps itself onto Palestinianess as a state of mind. In dialogue with affect theory, the dissertation supplements this understanding of Palestinianness with an account of mood in post-Oslo Palestinian literature. Specifically, I analyze shame in Ayman Sikseck's Hebrew novel *Tishrin* (2016) and melancholia in Adania Shibli's Arabic novel *Minor Detail* (2020 [2017]). By "reading the mood," this dissertation examines how *iltizam* (commitment) in Palestinian literature registers the social and political ruptures that the collapse of the Oslo accords brought upon the Palestinian experience.

Preface

Historians of the Palestinian context agree that the Oslo peace process marks a historic watershed. Its failure, and the ensuing disappointment of Palestinian society with the PLO leadership, symbolized the end of the Palestinian secular/national emancipation project. This disappointment is reflected in post-Oslo Palestinian literature. Literary critics argue that, alongside a "shocked" Palestinian society, Palestinian literature found both a new language and new aesthetics to reflect the historic rupture marking the end of a Palestinian political era (Abu-Manneh 2016, Darraj 2011, El Shakry 2021).

In *Makers of Worlds, Readers of Signs: Israeli and Palestinian Literature of the Global Contemporary* (2019), Kfir Cohen Lustig relates this new literary language to a neoliberal turn. Lustig argues that, while Israel integrated into the global system sometime around 1985, Palestinians joined that system in the early 1990s, with the establishment of the Palestinian authority following the Oslo accords. This neoliberalization of Palestinian society (mainly in the West Bank, Lustig argues) broke existing bonds between the collective and the individual. In the novels written during this time, many of them dramatizing private life, this break takes center stage as a dominant new social relation. In this new literature, Lustig continues, "the literary type of the *search* begins to characterize new Palestinian imaginary worlds, and politics becomes a narrative problem" (48, emphasis added).[1] While pre-Oslo Palestinian literature was read primarily as a national allegory, political and social shifts created

[1] Lustig (2019) defines the "search" as "a broad literary type that can include several genres and literary styles in which a missing object, broadly defined, serves as the absent center around which the imaginary world is weaved" (45); the detective novel or mystery is the quintessential 'search' form. Both *Tishrin* and *Minor Detail* would be the literary type of the search in this sense.

new affective structures in the new literature, as well as new readers (locally and internationally) and new expectations. “Reading Mood in the Post-Oslo Palestinian Novel: Shame, Melancholy, Hope” starts with a survey of the arc of Palestinian literature, from Ghassan Kanafani, whose work constitutes a major exemplar of *iltizam* (commitment), to two novels published in 2016 and 2017, Ayman Sikseck’s *Tishrin* and Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail*. A dialogue with affect theory reveals patterns of narrative construction and thematic concerns that embed the affects of a disabling shame and productive melancholy, respectively. *Tishrin* was a runaway bestseller in Israel and won the author the Prime Minister’s Award for Outstanding Authors in 2017. The novel that was nominated for the Sapir Literary prize, the most prominent literary award in Israel, draws on tropes from (Palestinian and Israeli) national history to explore a family’s traumatic past. In particular, the main character of *Tishrin*, a chemistry professor from Jaffa, despairingly concludes that Hebrew has triumphed over Arabic—a mood reflected in Sikseck’s decision to write *Tishrin* in Hebrew.

Minor Detail similarly seeks to unearth the past, deploying a mood of action-producing melancholy (at both the narrative and authorial level). Drawing on a documented historical event brought to light in *Ha’aretz* by Aviv Lavie and Moshe Gorali (2003), the novel was celebrated as a “highly sophisticated narrative that pitilessly explores the limits of empathy and the desire to right ... historical wrongs by giving voice to the voiceless” (Cummins 2020). Controversy erupted when the award ceremony for the 2023 LiBeraturpries Award (following the German translation of the book) was indefinitely postponed, citing the 7 October 2023 war between Israel and Hamas. Exploring Shibli’s identity and commitments as a Palestinian author, Paul Igendaay (2023) states, based on an interview, “During the rest of the conversation, Shibli also avoided

making political, especially agitational, statements. Instead, she insisted on honoring the novel *A Minor Matter*—and writing fiction more generally—as a place for thinking about language, place and identity, which always depends on who is reading it" (1).

The two novels I analyze in chapters 2 and 3 are written with an awareness of a readership, which shares part of the post-Oslo mood that motivates their authorship. It is not, however, primarily at the meta-level of reception that one can (or should) "read for the mood" in these texts. The two novels are not merely symptomatic and reflective *of* the world; rather, they reflect *through* the world as well. The hope of art, which I address in the final chapter of this work in relation to my TV show *Madrasa*, the creative part of this dissertation, is partly to inspire change for the better—improving the lot, the opportunities, and life-chances of all people, in all situations. This minimally requires continuing to produce work, no matter the prevailing mood of often seemingly unbearable and disabling shame or action in the face of what Terry Eagleton (2015) deemed "hope without optimism." Eagleton acknowledges a critical affect identified by Raymond Williams, the "the felt loss of a future" (Eagleton 2015, i). Against that loss, Williams (1980) further diagnosed that the critical task is of "making hope practical, rather than despair convincing" (qtd. in Silva and Lee 2024, 29).

Chapter 1:

Mood in the Palestinian Novel

Saeed, the narrator in Emile Habibi's (1974) novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist,* explains how he earned the title "pessoptimist," which became part of his full name:

> Take me, for example. I don't differentiate between optimism and pessimism and am quite at a loss as to which of the two characterizes me. When I awake each morning, I thank the Lord he did not take my soul during the night. If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was no worse. So which am I, a pessimist or an optimist? (12)

Fifty years have passed since Saeed, the ill-fated pessoptimist, could not decide whether he is an optimist or a pessimist, and one can wonder what Saeed would say, had he been asked this question today. More than seventy-five years have passed since the Palestinian Nakba (Arabic "Catastrophe") and the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state, and the Palestinian question is also still far from reaching a solution. Historians dealing with the Middle East would argue that the Palestinian situation today is far worse than it has ever been, and no doubt "worse" than it was when Habibi's novel was published. Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are growing; the conflict between Hamas and Fatah is still dividing the Palestinian society; the Arab states seem to have abandoned the Palestinians; and the "international community" continues its support for Israel, while occasionally condemning (some of) its policies against Palestinians. Would Saeed of our days be hopeful, despite the political realities of our times? Can the Palestinian novel afford being melancholic? Can it "surrender," accept defeat, and give up fighting for freedom? Can the Palestinian novel afford to lose hope? I will argue that "defeat"

has not happened—or, more honestly, that what constitutes "defeat" has transformed at different times since 1948. Simultaneously, the ongoing transformations and production of the Palestinian novel, despite a melancholic mood since 1948, are still vitally evidence that the "defeat" is not settled. What has changed are the possibilities of Palestinianness, and many of those changes are historically bitter: a permanent loss of statehood, no possibility of return, only the "option" of "betrayal" (by leaving) or (attempts for) assimilation if remaining. These bitter historical facts inform the mood of the post-Oslo Palestinian novel, but the perseverance of its production is undergirded by an ineradicable hope.

As such, this dissertation draws on affect theory to "read for mood" in the post-Oslo Palestinian novel. In conversation with Jonathan Flatley's concept of "affective mapping," I examine literary moods and the ways they are attuned to the reader. Within these affective aesthetics, I trace the moods of shame, melancholy, and hope. I am interested in how these three affects relate to each other in the post-Oslo Palestinian novel, while always reading the literary aesthetic as part of the social and political Palestinian affective structures of feeling. I begin with a brief introduction tracing the trajectory of the Palestinian novel and the challenges facing its study; I then pivot to affect theory as a methodology for discussing Palestinian literature; and I subsequently frame the specific novels I analyze in the dissertation.

1.1 An Historical Outline of the Palestinian Novel

Defining the Palestinian novel might be more challenging than defining other national literary traditions, for defining Palestinianness itself can be a challenge. Being stateless, a Palestinian could be residing in (historic) Palestine as an Israeli citizen, or under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. He could be living in a refugee camp in one of the Arab

states. She may be living in Jordan as a citizen. Or they could be residing in one of the U.S. states or European countries. He can speak Arabic, Hebrew, English, or any other language. She may be a Muslim, Christian, or neither.

The challenge of defining Palestinianness only escalates when trying to define the Palestinian novel. Should the Palestinian novel be written in Arabic? Should it be published by a Palestinian publisher? Does Palestinian literature need necessarily be written by a writer of Palestinian origins or by a writer self-defined as Palestinian? [1] What about a writer of Palestinian origins who chooses not to define as Palestinian or a writer where no "sense of Palestinianness" can be tracked in his writing? Can a Palestinian novel oppose the "national aspiration" of Palestinians or must it be committed to it? Who has the authority to give a novel its Palestinian identity? Is it the writer, readers, critics, editors of anthologies of Palestinian literature, literary festivals organizers, contributors to Wikipedia, or some combination of these actors?

Despite the objective challenge to a definition, the criteria used to classify a literary work as "Palestinian" has historically been based, to a large extent, on its political dimension. In her introduction to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, published during the first Palestinian popular uprising (*Intifada),* Salma Khadra Jayyusi (1992) argues that although Palestinian literature is part of the modern Arabic literature and has participated in all the vigorous revolutionary experiments undertaken in Arabic letters, "it has shown marked differences in certain respects, especially in the treatment of place and time, of tone and attitude, and in its particular involvement with the pervasive political issue" (1992, 2). Jayyusi asserts that

[1] The Palestinian National Charter defines Palestinians as: "Arab citizens who used to reside in Palestine till 1947, … and everyone who was born of an Arab Palestinian father after this date—whether inside Palestine or outside it—is a Palestinian." For example, novels by the Lebanese writer, Elias Khoury, are considered , by some critics, to be part of the Palestinian literature.

the political burden imposes greater strain on Palestinian writers compared to other politically involved Arab writers. Unlike non-Palestinian Arab writers, the Palestinian has no choice but to be in exile or, if he has remained in his original homeland, to live as a second-class citizen in Israel or under Israeli dominion in the occupied territories. Jayyusi insists that no Palestinian can be free from the grip of the harsh Palestinian experience: "There is no escape. For the writer to contemplate an orientation completely divorced from political life is to belie reality, to deny experience; for to engross oneself for too long in 'normal' everyday experience is to betray one's own life and one's own people" (1992, 3).[2]

Jayyusi's conclusions about Palestinian literature resonate with Fredric Jameson's argument regarding so-called Third World novels being always read as *national allegory*: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (Jameson 1986, 69). While Jameson's idea was criticized by postcolonial and Marxist scholars for reducing the narrativity of the Third World novel to "national allegory" (and thus flattening its heterogeneous aesthetics) (Strongman 2008; Ahmad 1987; Lazarus 1993), it seems that such a reading is productive in the case of the Palestinian novel, for it was the concept of "committed literature" that defined Palestinian literature in the 1960s and 70s, setting it as an example of a true Arab literature.

The concept of *committed literature* emerged in Arab intellectual circles in the early 1950s. The Arab defeat in 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba exposed Arab nations' weaknesses

[2] One could note a parallel situation for Indigenous peoples experiencing settler-colonialism (especially in North America and Australia) (Bello-Bravo 2023). The urgency and existential threat of settler-colonialism can be argued as so central that disregarding it begins to constitute negligence or a betrayal. The counterargument draws on the fact that a people's Indigenous character indisputably pre-dates settler-colonial "contact" (Bello-Bravo 2019; Corntassel 2008). As such, Palestianness can be positioned as pre- or post-Occupation.

and divisions, making it impossible to reconcile history with any "romantic" vision of Arabness (Badawī 1992). In a parallel fashion, the political vision, which the so-called romantic Arabic novel during the time of its early development in the first decades of the twentieth century reflected, was exposed as weak and irresponsible. For example, Muhammad Badawī (1992) describes the turmoil in Arabic literature in the 1950:

> Against this background, the recoil from Romanticism in modern Arabic literature must be seen. The reaction was prompted by a growing painful awareness of the harsh political and social realities of the Arab world, an awareness that was later reinforced by subsequent developments ranging from the horrors of Arab-Israeli wars, the plight of the Palestinians, oppressive Arab regimes, the Iran-Iraq war, to inter-Arab strife and the civil war in the Lebanon. (22)

A possible ground for a solution to this (literary) defeat was located in Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism. Sartre's concept of the writer's *engagement,* translated to Arabic as *iltizam* (commitment), gained popularity in Arabic literary circles. Within this literature, *iltizam* was interpreted variously, at times adopting Marxist stands or expressing existentialist positions, all the while denoting a certain measure of pan-Arab solidarity or nationalism. A common denominator across all usages of *iltizam* is: "the need of a writer to have a message, instead of just delighting in creating a work of imagination" (Badawī 1972, 859).[3]

In the Arab context, literary commitment came to translate into realist literature almost exclusively. Moving between social realism and socialist realism, realism emerged as the only legitimate expression of literary commitment. Both the romanticism that preceded it and the

[3] This echoes the "Horatian platitude" that poetry should both *delight and instruct*. As often happens with Classical sources, Horace never says exactly this, but it arises by implication throughout his *Ars Poetica.* Perhaps he comes closest with the dicta that poetry should "delectando pariterque monendo" (delight and advise). In any case, the history of letters and (literary) criticism stress a continuous cultural tension that placed more or less emphasis on the "purpose" of writing as entertainment or education (Tompkins 1932). For *iltizam,* the emphasis is decidedly on the latter.

modernism that started to influence some Arabic literature by the 1960 were deemed illegitimate. Following Badawi, Joseph Farag (2016) concludes: “While romanticism was seen as overly self-indulgent for the purposes of committed literature, modernist writing was dismissed as obscurantist and inaccessible to the masses” (32).

One of the developments of committed Arab literature in the early sixties was its focus on the Palestinian tragedy of 1948, which became an inspiration for a series of literary works. Among Palestinian writers, it was Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972) who embodied commitment more than any other writer. Bashir Abu-Manneh (2016) asserts that Kanafani is the one Palestinian writer who “combined Fanon’s theoretical and political commitment with a conception of culture as combative and revolutionary, aiming to create a national struggle that is universal, internationalist, and humanist” (71).

1.1.1 Kanafani, the Committed Novelist

Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun* (1962)—subsequently anthologized in Kanafani (1999)—was celebrated by Arab critics and readers as an innovative Arabic novel and an example of a committed Palestinian novel. *Men in the Sun* describes the unbearable life, suffering, and humiliation of Palestinian refugees. A key aspect of what was called its “realism” involves an accurate reporting of events, with the implication that such testimony could motivate or inspire people politically (Badawī 1972). The novel tells the story of three Palestinian refugees who meet in the Iraqi city of Basra and are trying to cross the border into Kuwait. There, they hope to find a job in the oil-wealthy Arab state so that they can support themselves and their poor families. Kanafani describes his male characters as specifically unmasculine; they enjoy no agency and have no control over their lives and fate. In the city of Basra, the three workers are

humiliated by an Arab Iraqi smuggler, who abuses the powerless Palestinian refugees to make a profit. Desperate, they meet a Palestinian tanker truck driver who offers to smuggle them across the border by hiding them in the empty tank of his truck. Just like the helpless Palestinian refugee-workers, the driver, Abul Khaizuran, is physically emasculated as a result of a wound he suffered during the war in Palestine in 1948. He tries to forget his injury:

> Now… ten years had passed since the horrible scene. Ten years had passed since they took his manhood from him, and he had lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour. He had swallowed it with his pride, and examined it every moment of those ten years. And still he hadn't yet got used to it, he hadn't accepted it. For ten long years he had been trying to accept the situation. But what situation? To confess quite simply that he had lost his manhood while fighting for his country? And what good had it done? He had lost his manhood and his country, and damn everything in this bloody world (Kanafani 1999, 53).

Despite his promise to forget, Abul Khaizuran cannot accept his situation. He cannot forget the trauma of defeat and of refugeehood. He is constantly reminded of the loss of his homeland and his manhood. Unable to regain his loss, Abul Khaizuran becomes cynical, works as a driver for an Arab rich man, and tries to earn extra money by smuggling Palestinian refugees to Kuwait: "Let the dead bury their dead. I only want more money now, more money" (64).

Money, according to Abul Khaizuran, trumps morals when it comes to the Arab states: "I'm glad you are going to Kuwait," he tells Marwan, the young refugee, "because you will learn many things there. The first thing that you will learn is: money comes first, and then moral" (42). Through this character, Kanafani criticizes the capitalist Arab Gulf states as an obstacle to self-determination; they dehumanize the poor Palestinian refugees, leading to their death. Abul Khaizuran—who locks the three refugees in the empty burning water tank, promising to free them within 6 minutes—does not anticipate the Kuwaiti border clerks would mock and question

him at length about (supposedly) having a dancer-lover in Iraq. When the driver finally receives his permit to enter Kuwait, it is too late, and in his boiling water tank he finds three Palestinian corpses. The terrified driver waits for the night to fall so he can pull out the dead bodies from his tank and dump them on a garbage pile in the Kuwaiti desert.

Kanafani ends the story with the defeated, exhausted driver returning to his truck after taking the money from the dead men's pockets and a watch from Marwan's hand. A thought begins to hum in his mind:

> "Why didn't they knock on the side of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?"
>
> The desert suddenly began to send back the echo:
>
> "Why didn't you knock on the side of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?" (74).

The refugees do not knock because they are scared, ashamed and powerless. They choose to be silent, allegorically counting on the "mercy" of the Arab states to come to their rescue. This realistic description of the powerless, impotent, hopeless, and humiliated Palestinian refugee/worker would shift over the years of the Palestinian revolution, following the Arab armies defeat by Israel in 1967. In this period, the image of the Palestinian as a refugee shifts to the figure of the fighter. The question of "why" Palestinians do not act in *Men in the Sun* returns in Kanafani's post-1967 literature. Now the focus is on "how" the Palestinian should act.

1.1.2 Renewed Commitment: The Post-1967 Literature of Resistance

In 1967, another war shocked the Arab nations. In six days, the Israeli army swiftly defeated the combined Arab armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, occupying the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria and the remains of historic Palestine (the West Bank

and Gaza, then under Jordanian and Egyptian control). The humiliating defeat brought an end to the Nasserist idea of Arab unity and ended the dream of a pan-Arab nationalism and socialism. Arab writers were left in shock after the defeat. In an answer to a question that M. Badawī raises about the development of Arabic literature after this war, he states: "Briefly, the initial response to the disaster was one of shock and loss of balance" (Badawī 1972, 876). Verena Klemm (2000) claims that, in the political and ideological fragmentation that followed the war in 1967, many of the proponents of commitment lost their belief in the political role of the writer and the effectiveness of the literary word:

> Idealism with regard to politics and belief in the effectiveness of the literary word was simply a stage in their development. They left this stage behind and now saw things *clearly and more realistically.* Many writers outgrew the limits of literary commitment as it was propagated by political literary circles and looked for new and individual solutions to the problem, asking themselves how literary writing could be significant in the present world. (Klemm 2000, 58, italics added).

This ostensible greater realism (to write "clearly and more realistically") is no less polemic than *iltizam*. In part, it recapitulates one of the shifts of emphasis from modernism to post-modernism, signaled above all by Lyotard (1979) and the mistrust and skepticism toward lofty ideologies and grand systems. If the post-WWI mood of modernism could include (guarded) hope, along with despair and confusion, the mood post-WWII included a sense of negative reaction to the earlier optimism (Eagleton 1996). For literature itself, much had already been made in the early twentieth century about its capacity to elevate, move, and transform culture (Williams 1980 [1971]; Eagleton 1984); in the context of events post-WWII, the "romanticism" of such a view was treated skeptically if not denied outright (Eagleton 1996).

Unlike other Arab writers, Palestinian writers could not afford staying out of balance and had to rethink the purpose of their writing. On the one hand, 1967 not only deepened Palestinian

statelessness but also provided Palestinians an opportunity to decouple themselves from pan-Arabism and to imagine an alternative to the Arab loss. Rubin and Rubin (2003) characterize the history of the era in their political biography of Yasser Arafat. Palestinians, led by Arafat, quickly recovered from the Arab paralysis following the defeat. Almost immediately, Arafat infiltrated the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and sought to organize a resistance movement. The difficulties of working under Israeli control steered Arafat to Jordan, where he established a military infrastructure. In light of the stagnation of the Arab regime, Palestinian guerilla forces became a symbol of hope in the eyes of the Arab population and the Palestinian masses (Rubin and Rubin 2003). In a new political reality in which the Palestinian relies on himself to achieve liberation and freedom, Palestinians shed the image of the refugee, adapting the identity of the *fidai*—a fighter ready to sacrifice himself for the Palestinian cause.

The Palestinian literary reaction to the 1967 defeat worked in tandem with this new revolutionary spirit. Kanafani's 1968 study interpreting Palestinian literature under Israeli occupation as a literature of resistance (*Adab al-muqawama*) (Kanafani 2013) was received with enthusiasm among Arab writers and critics, who described this literature as an example of true *iltizam* and a model for every writer in the Arab world (Klemm 2000, 57). In the spirit of the literature of resistance Kanafani advocated, he published his *Returning to Haifa* in 1969 (Kanafani 2000). Here, an author can no longer rely on the pathos of the "old" realism to move and inspire; something more decisive is needed in the face of the lack of progress (or political reversals). The novel begins with Said S. and his wife Safiyya riding their car from Ramallah to Haifa a few weeks after 1967. At first, Said rejects the idea of this "visit," which he finds humiliating. He tells her:

> They opened the border as soon as they completed the occupation, suddenly and immediately. That has never happened in any war in history. You know the terrible thing that happened in April 1948, so now, why this? Just for our sakes alone? No! This is part of the war. They are saying to us, 'help yourselves, look and see how much better we are than you, how much more developed. You should accept being our servants. You should admire us.' But you've seen it yourself. Nothing's changed. It was in our power to have done much better than they did. (151)

The Israeli "invitation" to visit is seen as an act of war. For Said, contrary to Israeli reassurances, the war is not over. Moreover, at the time of being forced to leave in 1948, they were unable to take their newborn son, Khaldun, with them. Said does not accept the idea of being inferior. In his mind, Palestinians have more power, and they could have built a better place. Nonetheless, Said ultimately does not prevail over his wife's desire to return to Haifa and he travels there with her to see the former home they were forced to leave in April 1948, perhaps even to look for their lost son. The text also mentions a later son, named Khalid, who they had after the war and Said had forbidden to join the Palestinian fighters.

Said and Safiyya's son, Khaldun, has been raised and renamed Dov by Miriam and Ifrat Koshen, Holocaust survivors who arrived in Palestine as refugees one month before the Palestinian family was forced to leave the city. The childless couple had adopted the boy, who is now a soldier in the Israeli army. Khaldun/Dov's adoptive mother, Miriam, has been described as the first humanized portrait of the perceived enemy in Arabic literature: "Her story is told with impeccable honesty, in full complexity and multi-dimensionality" (Abu-Manneh 2016, 87). Miriam welcomes Said and Safiyya, saying she'd been expecting them for a long time. Said does not see Miriam or her husband as guilty. "Naturally we didn't come to tell you to get out of here. That would take a war…" (Kanafani 2000, 164), Said says to Miriam. The idea that a war, a

struggle, would have been a more appropriate way for a Palestinian to return to his home is repeated throughout the novel. Khaldun, now the proud Israeli soldier Dov, shows no empathy for his biological parents, accusing them of being cowards: “Twenty years have passed, sir! Twenty years! What did you do during that time to reclaim your son? If I were you I would’ve borne arms for that. Is there any stronger motive? You’re weak! Weak!” (Kanafani 2000, 185).

Following his son’s accusation, Said admits weakness, but argues that Palestinian weakness is not a justification for Israeli actions. For Said, the exploitation of the weakness of others is the greatest crime a human being can commit. Although Said favors a moral rather than military confrontation, in his mind, Dov’s attitude leaves Palestinians no choice other than armed struggle. Confronted by Dov, Said now feels guilty for forbidding his other son, Khalid, his wish to join Palestinian fighters. Yet, Said lies when he promises Dov that he will be meeting Khalid on the battlefield. Ending the visit to what used to be his home, Said tells Miriam and Dov: “You two may remain in our house temporarily. It will take a war to settle that” (187). Kanafani ends the novel with Said’s silent prayer during his drive back to Ramallah: “I pray that Khalid will have gone – while we were away!” (188). This suggests Said’s change of mind about resistance, a reversal of his earlier opinion that Khalid should not join the resistance (center in Jordan at that time in the 1960s). If Khalid has already done so, it will also spare Said having to admit he’d been wrong to forbid him.

If Kanafani’s committed writing in *Men in the Sun* translates into a naturalistic depiction of the powerless Palestinian refugee, suffering humiliation while mourning his lost homeland and waiting silently for the “charity” of Arab states, *Returning to Haifa* represents Kanafani’s literature of resistance, presenting a more active mode. Where “commitment” previously

emphasized being committed to "telling the truth" and bearing witness to situation of the Palestinian people (in contrast to writing "romantic" novels), this new mood more represents a commitment to depicting more self-determined action in the characters. If the former novel ends with helpless, silently suffocating Palestinians, the latter ends with a commitment to struggle and resistance in some form. Both of these are committed realisms that, after 1967, will both come to be seen as requiring some other literature "clearly and more realistically" oriented; this, in view of the ongoing reversals, Arafat's activism, and finally the collapse of the Oslo process. As such, this shift in Kanafani's writing from one type of committed literature to another is reflected in his life; that is, joined the Palestinian revolution after the Arab defeat of 1967 and became the spokesperson of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1972, he was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad in Beirut at the age of 36.

1.1.3 Committed Literature and "Experiential Realism"

Politically committed literature continued to characterize the Palestinian novel, though not only in a "realist" sense. Palestinian writers were praised in 1960s and 70s for demonstrating that modernist writing is compatible with committed political literature; in particular, this could involve more experientially complex depictions of situations and more "literariness." While critics consider the works of Palestinian writers such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Emile Habibi, Sahar Khalifa, and (the pre-1967) Kanafani as "modernist," others argue that, although Palestinian literature is influenced by modernism, it remains (mainly) realist literature in the three decades following the 1967 war.

As such, when tracing the development of the Palestinian novel, Abu-Manneh (2016) can use a Lukacsian understanding of realism as "a literary mode in which the lives of individual

characters [are] portrayed as part of a narrative which situated them within the entire historical dynamics of their society" (7). In this understanding the writer's social position and knowability become realism's main features. For Abu-Manneh, modernism rises when the link between the private and the social-historical breaks. Such a rupture signifies the breakdown of classical realism; reality becomes difficult to comprehend and becomes unknowable.

Abu-Manneh (2016) argues that realism and emancipation are born together in the Palestinian novel: realism emerged in the 1940s as a product of a society in revolt against colonial conquest, abandoned by its elite and surrounded by imperial allied Arab regimes. He rejects the model expressed in Pascale Casanova's (2004) *The World Republic of Letters,* which enjoined writers to "free" themselves from the nation and from its politics if they wished to "elevate" to the modernist emancipatory global aesthetic. In the bluntest way, this is a call to join "civilization," but a civilization already marked, understood, and enforcing its own (white imperialist hegemonic) model as the (only) appropriate norm. Abu-Manneh (2016) asserts that in the Palestinian context, "modernism is symptomatic of, yet resistant to, the failure of the possibilities of both political and human emancipation, and it is in fact, realism that is strongly connected with emancipatory desire" (Abu-Manneh 2016, 11).[4] The failure of the Arab collective project of emancipation in 1967 created the conditions for an Arab modernism. While Palestinian literature is part of Arab literature, the revolutionary spirit following 1967 deepened its literary realism and commitment. Yet, Palestinians were influenced as much by the Arab

[4] The seemingly self-evident sense or meaning of "realism" in these debates is not so self-evident. Genres like fables, myths, science fiction, and fantasy can often afford greater access to truth-bearing depictions of human experience than any realism (Lopez 1998; Todorov 1975). What Abu-Manneh (2016) appears to advocate by "realism" (or other authors in *iltizam*) is precisely this experiential truth-bearing capacity, hence a bearing witness to historical experiences (as events) and lived realities (as refugees, returnees, or residents under Occupation).

political repression in the 1970s and 80s and the victory of the Saudi-led conservative and accommodationist politics on Nasserist and on the Palestinian revolutionary models. In 1970, the Jordanian Hashemite declared war against Palestinians, forcing Palestinian fighters and the Palestinian leadership to leave for Lebanon. Here, they found themselves entangled in a civil war, followed by an Israeli invasion that exiled Palestinians to Tunis. After its 1982 defeat in Lebanon, the PLO was rendered dependent on the Gulf states for support and was forced to abandon its revolutionary politics in favor of a bureaucratic statism. This situation led to the Oslo agreement, signed with Israel in 1993, marking an end to the mass, self-organized emancipatory movement and turning the PLO into a powerless authority policing the Palestinian population, still under Israeli occupation. Edward Said (1995) described Yasser Arafat, the PLO chairman and the President of the Palestinian Authority, at that time as "a sort of Vichy government for Palestinians." He continued, "Those of us who fought for Palestine before Oslo fought for a cause that we believed would spur the emergence of just order. Never has this ideal been further from realization than today" (420). In a parallel literary argument, Abu-Manneh (2016) reads post-Oslo Palestinian modernism as the "aesthetic of defeat that both registers and resists the disintegration of praxis" (137).

Alongside this political decay, the Palestinian novel exhibits a similar stagnation. The prominent Palestinian literary scholar Faisal Darraj (2011) mourns the Palestinian literature of the 1960s and 70s and asks why Palestinian literature changed. Darraj wonders why there are no longer novelists like Kanafani, Jabra, Khalifa, and Habibi, and no poets of the stature of Mahmoud Darwish. Darraj invokes Palestinian disappointment after the Oslo accords. The Palestinian leadership proved to the Palestinians that what comes after exile does not necessarily

mean homeland, and what follows knowability is unknowability. Disappointment with a lack of collective politics, which narrowed after Oslo to become the politics of a group of individuals, made collective work less tenable. Darraj notes the absence of readers: "for there is no literature without audience, and no audience for literature without political sphere based on dialogue" (Darraj, 2011). Darraj concludes by wondering if a new generation of post-Oslo writers and thinkers might offer a new project of political culture and renew Palestinian literature.

While some scholars "mourn" the glory days of Palestinian literature, others point to a new promising generation of post-Oslo Palestinian literature. Symptomatic here is Nora Parr's (2021) argument that the new generation of Palestinian writers Darraj wished for has finally arrived. Looking at the works of recent Palestinian writers—Adania Shibli's "Maths, Under which is Love, Under which Is Language" (2000) and Maya Abu al-Hayyat's *No One Knows Their Bloodtype* (2013)—Parr asserts that the protagonists in these works kill off existing systems of representation and declare the old Palestinian symbolic system dead:

> The stories demand repudiation; a reckoning with the fact that somewhere between the Oslo Accords and the new millennium Palestine's symbolic order and its lived world ceased to cohere. Paralleling the Arab intellectual response to the military 'defeat' of 1967, 'post-millennial' Palestinian writers are also declaring symbolic language 'rotten and inadequate' (157).

In the works discussed by Parr, Abu al-Hayyat and Shibli kill the "Palestinian fighter" and "god," respectively. Parr suggests that these "killings" of an old Palestinian symbolic order signify the end of the way Palestine used to be written and create the *possibility* of a new language or symbolic order to describe present-day Palestinian reality. That is, while these works do not find or declare such a new symbolic order, they do keep language alive by "demanding

that it take shape around the 'real.'" Parr concludes: "So long as the language for describing Palestinian life is renewed, a different set of symbols can emerge" (Parr 2021, 157).

One might have reservations vis-à-vis Parr's announcement of the birth of a new generation of Palestinian literature in its generalization of both Palestinian literature and Palestinian reality.[5] While celebrating the rise of a new generation of Palestinian literature, one cannot afford to bracket out from post-millennial Palestinian texts how they remain subjected (prominently) to postcolonial theory *discursive* methods of national representation and counter-representation, sometimes only discernibly through mood.[6] Thus, when studying Palestinian literature, Refqa Abu-Remaileh (2019) emphasizes three critical enigmas haunting it: that it involves "writing a national literature without a nation-state, writing silence and nonlinearity, and writing fragmentation and wholeness" (21).

What is that symbolic order that the post-millennial writers are supposedly killing? Is it the symbolic order of the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, inside Israel, in refugee camps or in exile? Is it the symbolic order of the secular national project? Just as Palestinian identity is better understood as hybrid and hyphenated, rather than easily defined, so the Palestinian novel would seem to need to reflect those contradictions, the absurdities and the hybridity that

[5] The observation that the new literature kills off an old symbolic order without offering a new one is redolent of the post-modern condition Lyotard (1979) announces. Of more concern, the way that neoliberal post-modernism substitutes celebrity in place of solidarity (Williams 1961), even in the face of a work's content—see especially how Derrida's deconstruction (1976) was transformed from a mode of political resistance into a cudgel used against liberation (Radhakrishnan 2000), while raising Derrida to the level of an (uncomfortably apolitical) international celebrity (Barnett 1999; Hutchings 2013)—must raise caution against too-enthusiastically heralding the arrival of the needed Palestinian literature.

[6] Moore-Gilbert (1997) views the main tension in the field of postcolonialism to be between 'postcolonial theory' and 'postcolonial criticism'. The first being (mostly) discursive and based largely on French philosophy while the latter is more materialist-Marxist, offering modes of resistance and opportunities for the (neo)colonized to cultural and political resistance.

constitutes a plurality of many Palestiniannesses. The post-Oslo Palestinian literature might not be the Palestinian literature that Darraj misses, both definitely and defiantly not the committed literature of the 1960s and 1970s, but rather a literature than can be written in different languages, different locations, genres, styles, and pertaining to different Palestiniannesses realities. Whether this complexity and breadth "serves" "national" Palestine even as it represents it, or whether a "strategic essentialism" (Kanai 2015) would be needed to do so, remains an open question.

1.2 The Question of Language

Some literary scholars consider Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's (1946) *Screamers in a Long Night,* to be the first Palestinian novel (Abu-Manneh 2016, 39; Abu-Matar 1980)—in which case, the first Palestinian novel was written in English. Jabra finished writing his novel in Jerusalem in 1946, and it was published in Arabic in Bagdad nine years later. Jabra was born in 1920 in Bethlehem during the time of the British Mandate and was educated in Jerusalem and later at Cambridge University. Becoming a refugee in 1948 and settling in Baghdad, Jabra switched to writing in Arabic; "After 1948, I decided that if the Arabic language was not the vehicle of our revolutionary thinking and expression, we would be defeating our purpose" (qtd. in Bhatia 2017).

The Palestinian exodus after 1948 (and 1967)—the diaspora of Palestinian people around the Middle East and the world—created new conditions in which the Palestinian novel, though still largely written in Arabic, became multilingual. Twenty years later, the first Palestinian novel in Hebrew appeared in 1966, Atallah Mansour's *Be-Or Hadash*, and then Anton Shammas' (1986) Hebrew novel *Arabesques*, which challenged the canon of Hebrew literature and the very

idea of Hebrew as a national (Jewish) language. By then, the Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki had published, in 1972, the first Palestinian memoir written in English in the United States. With more waves of immigration and with second and third generations of Palestinians born and raised in non-Arabic speaking languages, the non-Arabic Palestinian novel could no longer be regarded as an exception. Today, it can be presumed that Palestinian literary works have overcome their limited status within the Arab realm. The continuous cultural expansion within Palestinian communities both within and beyond Israel/Palestine, spanning three generations since the pivotal displacement in 1948, is notably evident in literature. This is primarily due to the growing output of Palestinian writings in languages besides Arabic.

The fact that this Palestinian literature is no longer solely written in Arabic need not imply its exclusion from the "Arab novel." In his introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Tradition*, Wail Hassan (2017) argues that Arabness today is pan-ethnic and not based on language only, in contrast to previously, when an Arab could be defined as one who speaks Arabic as a native language.[7] Hassan prefers to use the term "Arab novel" rather than the traditional "Arabic novel" to include non-Arabic writers who claim Arabness in their writing. In a now more global context, Arab writers—ostensibly like all writers—can experience or encounter multilingualism, cultural plurality, immigration, and exile as part of their experience. But if individual experience becomes the basis for asserting culturality (or one's ethnicity), then the notion of culture itself (as a shared holding between people) disappears.

Nonetheless, Maurice Ebileeni (2017) argues that Palestinian literature cannot be circumscribed to a single lingual or cultural framework, since a global diasporic context has

[7] In terms of autochthonous self-representation, language has long been a marker of ethnicity (Martinez-Cobo 1986). In the same breath, however, "language is culture" (Tondi 2018).

made literary networking among dispersed Palestinian authors inevitable insofar as they represent an emerging phase in the Palestinian experience. Ebileeni proposes to classify Palestinian authors or authors of Palestinian descent who write in languages other than Arabic in a single category, "since they write from different yet similar positions, working out various cultural consequences of the Palestinian Nakba" (Ebileeni 2017, 22); more precisely, he would recognize that diasporic Palestinians anywhere writing in local languages (whether Hebrew, Arabic, English, Dutch, Japanese, or any other) are still producing Palestinian novels. At stake here is *who* gets to say that a work is Palestinian—a claim that at times reflects the same power dynamics that would erase historical events in Palestine per se. This is not to say that contests about *what* a Palestinian novel could or should consist of is a settled question; the literary history reflected above in Kanafani's life and work, the demand for greater realism post-1967, and the need to kill off or rework the Palestinian symbolic order post-Oslo are all part of that ongoing discussion.

1.3 The Uses of Affect

What Hassan invokes as Arabness and Ebileeni calls Palestinianness when discussing literary works, I thus identify or link to their *affective* dimension. In the case of multilingual Palestinian writing, this dimension involves the "moods" of Palestinian literature(s). Shifting the focus on the discussion of Palestinian literature to its affective aesthetics does not mean reading the texts as autonomous works of art disconnected from the social and political affective environments. On the contrary: by "reading for mood," I specifically emphasize the collective affective sphere that the texts inhabit and address. This affective lens also does not imply ignoring the "enigmas" haunting those who study Palestinian literature, but rather affords new

ways of approaching these enigmas. On the contrary, these features haunt Palestinian literature—precisely the "search" embodied in mystery that Lustig (2019) emphasizes. But affect, if it would remain grounded culturally, arises not merely from the world around it but from the "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977) that prevail in an era and area. One discerns such structures of feeling through what is and is not expressed (by people, by media produced by people) and in what ways; it illuminates the lived reality of the era and area and, in that way, is keenly sensitive to a time's mood. It supplies an analytical ground for discerning how the cultural and the individual interact, how post-colonial and affect theory intertwine. In this sense, I trace affective encounters (between the writer and the text, encounters within the text, and the encounter of the reader with the text) alongside the paradoxes implicit in Abu-Remaileh's enigmas of loss, silence, and fragmentation. This is especially well suited and necessary for discussing the "modernist" and the "experimental" post-Oslo Palestinian novel in its literary and socially affective manifestations.

In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader,* Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) ask the question of how to begin when, after all, "there is no pure or somehow no originary state for affect?" (1). They proceed to describe affect as the "forces" that arise in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. They further describe it as an impingement or extortion of intensities or forces that pass from body to body, and as visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowledge. Importantly, these are not simply emotions or feelings one experiences (or, if they are seen as such, affect theory takes account of what grounds them). Hence, affects are vital forces that can "serve to drive us towards movement, towards thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across

barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1). Similarly, Alex Houen (2020) offers an approach to affect in theory and literature that is neither strictly cognitivist nor non-cognitivist. Open to considering literary affects in terms of fusion of content and form, Houen suggests a concept of literary affect that can become "fused and transformed with language, cognition, bodily feeling and the imagination" (16). Importantly, Houen does not restrict his approach to the text but argues for the importance of the affective encounter between the text and the reader.

In turn, Sianne Ngai (2004) chooses to focus on literary "tone," describing it as an affective relay between the reader and the text that is also an affective relay between subject and object. By "tone," Ngai means "a literary or cultural artifact's feeling tone: its global or organized affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world" (28). Ngai argues that tone is not reducible to the subjective "attitude" of the text's narrator or character, since it includes the interplay of the objective features of genre, form, and style. It also cannot be reduced to the reader's personal emotional response to the text. Tone is that "betweenness" of affect.

While Ngai prefers the term "tone," Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2012) relies on the German term: *Stimmung.* Admitting that the translation of *Stimmung* would not capture its many possible meanings, Gumbrecht is specifically interested in the component of meaning that connects *Stimmung* with music and hearing. Gumbrecht suggests a "reading for *Stimmung"* that focuses on readers' encounter with the text, arguing that texts carry with them "tones," "atmospheres" (*Stimmungen)* that never exist independently of their material components. For Gumbrecht, "texts affect the 'inner feelings' of readers in the way that weather and music do" (5); "reading

for *Stimmung* always means paying attention to the textual dimension of the forms that envelop us and our bodies as a physical reality—something that can catalyze inner feelings without matters of representation necessarily being involved" (5). Gumbrecht argues that "reading for *Stimmung"* cannot mean "deciphering" atmospheres and moods, for those have no fixed signification; nor should it be reconstructing or analyzing their historical or cultural origins. Rather "reading for *Stimmung"* means "discovering sources of energy in artifacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily—yielding to them and gesturing toward them" (18).

In contrast, Jonathan Flatley (2008) prefers to translate *Stimmung* as "mood" and relates it to an affective atmosphere, "in which attentions are formed, project pursued, and particular affects can be attached to particular objects" (5). Borrowing the concept from Heidegger, Flatley describes "mood" as the way in which we are affectively oriented in the world. He relates it to collective and public phenomena, "structured and shaped by social forces and insinuations and particular to one given historical moment" (Flatley 2017, 144). This recalls Raymond Williams' work on affect (2015), in its explicit invocation of the conditions that culturally enable and shape the possibilities of moods. Flatley argues that any text that seeks to affect its reader would perform a reading for that collective affective atmosphere or "mood." Such a practice of "reading for mood" would seek to understand what mood the text is addressing itself, how it is attuned to mood in order to shift it, and what moods the text might or might not know:

> This 'reading for mood' entails a speculative recreation of the understanding of the reader's mood embedded in a given textual practice, its theory-in-practice of the mood of its readers. What is the implicit theory of the reader or viewer's mood that we can see in this work's address to these viewers and its attempt to affect them? (Flatley 2017, 150).

If "reading for mood" attributes intentionality to the text (and the writer), in his concept of "affective mapping," Flatley frames the encounter of readers with the text. He describes "affective mapping" as an aesthetic technology that represents the historicity of one's affective experience: "In mapping out one's affective life and its historicity, a political problem (such as racism or revolution) that may have been previously invisible, opaque, difficult, abstract, and above all depressing may be transformed into one that is interesting, that solicits and rewards one's attention" (Flatley 2008, 4).

In his *Affective Mapping*, Flatley (2008) focuses on melancholy as a social "loss" caused by modernity. He argues that "affective mapping" performed by the reader encountering modernist texts will lead to an experience of "self-estrangement" from their affective environment. It must be added here that for those who have lived the experience of estrangement—whether directly as refugees, indirectly as descendants of displaced people scattered to the winds, or even "third-hand" through Palestinian literature—the modernist estrangement can be comforting; that is, painful as the modernist space itself may be per se, for some readers, its depiction acknowledges their experience.

Hence, Flatley can add that melancholy as a mood does not necessarily mean ambivalence and stagnation. Experiencing self-estrangement and distancing the reader from their "familiar" affects has the agency to "put one into contact with others, a contact that is imaginary in one sense. But inasmuch as it is based on the shared historicity of that affective life, it is quite real" (84). In the case of Palestinian melancholy, the loss is national and embedded in modernity and diaspora. In what follows, I build on the concept of "mood" and "affective mapping" (resting on underlying "structures of feeling") to trace the moods of shame, melancholy, and hope

through the work discussed and the aesthetics employed to affect the mood(s) the texts are addressing.

1.4 Chapter Outline

In the following two chapters, I will "read for the mood" in two Palestinian novels. In the chapter discussing Adania Shibli's novel *Minor Detail* (2017, 2020), I read for *melancholia* in this Arabic-language novel and explore the ways in which it transforms the mood of the post-Oslo occupied West Bank era into an ethical act of resistance. The second chapter will read shame in Ayman Sikseck's Hebrew-composed *Tishrin* (2016), in a post-Oslo Israeli political context. The third chapter offers a personal, reflective essay focusing on my recent TV production, *Madrasa,* and on my ongoing (desperate) search to read for hope.

It is important to focus on these three particular affects for reasons that, on the surface, might seem obvious: the present need for hope pertaining to efforts of Palestinian resistance, undermined and impacted by a disabling sense of shame. This mood (in the theme and form of *works* considered, not necessarily or only as pertaining to the psychology of their authors) operates in the aesthetic as well as social and public sphere (Cvetkovich 2007; Berlant 2011; Ahmed 2004). Considered as public emotions, shame can be cathartic and motivate action if hope remains grounded in actionable and not "pie in the sky" ways, and when resistance is not simply fine-sounding sentiments that express desires without pathways toward them. In this sense, melancholy in the Palestinian novel can manifest as (ethical and political) refusal to accept the national loss or narratives about it. This melancholy can frame recent works of post-Oslo literature as an extension of the *iltizam* Palestinian literature generally. In the sheer production of a Palestinian novel, a melancholy hopefulness is always evident.

Chapter 2:

Shame in Ayman Sikseck's *Tishrin*

How do Palestinian writers address the Hebrew reader? Does a Palestinian write differently in Hebrew than in Arabic when addressing the Israeli reader? Why might a Palestinian writer write in Hebrew, and how does the political climate effect this decision and writing? In this chapter, I read Ayman Sikseck's (2016) Hebrew-language novel *Tishrin*, and discuss its negotiation of the "Israeli mood," specifically as the "shaming" of Palestinians, and especially the Arab male. This reading performs an affective mapping of the mood of shame inherent in the use of the Hebrew language, signaled in the novel by the protagonist's declaration of the victory of Hebrew over Arabic and the uncanny hybrid identity of the Palestinian-Arab as Israeli.

Tishrin was published thirty years after Shammas' (1986) *Arabesques.* While both authors are Arabs writing in Hebrew, in contrast to Shammas, Sikseck does not challenge Israeli nationality, does not try to destabilize it. Rather, his narrator—a Palestinian citizen of Israel who adopts Hebrew as his (step)-mother tongue at the expense of Arabic—declares Hebrew the winner over Arabic in a battle between the two languages. Echoing the "national" struggle, Sikseck's writing in *Tishrin* reflects on the struggle of his characters living between languages, rendering the "uncanniness" of the Palestinian Hebrew narrator, to borrow Yasemin Yildiz's (2012) phrase, "beyond the mother tongue." Thus, *Tishrin* may not reflect Jameson's (1986) assertion that "Third World" novels always reflect a national allegory in a narrative (historical) sense; that is, the "biography" of the characters does not analogize with the "history" of the

nation. Rather, it might be read as an allegory of historical Palestinian moods in the period depicted—for *Tishrin,* the mood of shame and adjacent affects like disgust and anxiety.

2.1 Context for the Palestinian Novel in Hebrew

Palestinians still residing in Israel represent a distinctive community, comprising the remnants of a Palestinian citizenry that, following the 1948 war, became a minority within the newly established state of Israel. Despite remaining in their homeland, this community underwent significant transformations in nearly all aspects of life. The 1948 conflict—viewed by Jewish Israelis as a war of independence and by Palestinians as the Nakba—not only required Palestinians in Israel to navigate their minority status but also to adapt to a new political reality and the encounter with a new cultural environment and a new language.[1]

After 1948, approximately 120,000 Palestinians remained in what became Israel and were declared citizens of the Jewish state. Today, approximately 18 percent of the Israeli population are Palestinians (1.5 million people). While most literary work by Israeli Palestinians is written in Arabic, a number of texts were originally composed in Hebrew. The phenomenon of bilingual writing—i.e., writing in a language not considered a writer's mother tongue—is not unusual and exists globally. However, the situation for (Israeli) Palestinians writing in Hebrew occurs against a backdrop of the Israeli occupation and the continuous Israeli-Palestinian "conflict."[2]

The Palestinian Hebrew literary space has often been characterized by scholars as a "no man's land," linked to Homi Bhabha's (2006) concept of the "third space" (Ebileeni 2017), if not

[1] See Makhoul (2020).

[2] See Elad-Bouskila (1999) and Snir and Einbinder (1991).

a “twilight zone” (Watad 2023). These notions seek to capture a hybridity prevalent in such works, occupying a liminal position between Hebrew and Arabic literatures and often reflecting the status of Palestinian Arabs within Israeli society.[3] To initiate a discussion on this literary corpus, it is essential to distinguish between two distinct periods of Palestinian Hebrew writing, roughly corresponding to two different generations, each with unique motivations and characteristics: first, the generation writing in Hebrew before the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987—including Atallah Mansour (b.1934), Naim Araidi (1950-2015), Rida Mansour (b.1965), and Anton Shammas (b.1950)—and more recent authors—Ayman Sikseck (b.1984) and perhaps my own work—who produced significant works after the first and second intifadas and whose literary trajectories are marked by a complex dialogue with their predecessors, set against the backdrop of dramatic shifts in Palestinians’ political landscapes within Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories.[4]

While Anton Shammas was not the first Palestinian to write and publish a novel in Hebrew, his *Arabesques* (1986) was the first to challenge the notion of Hebrew as the national language of Israel and an exclusive indicator of Jewish literature. For a Palestinian, writing in Hebrew is a very sensitive matter. Learning Hebrew to survive in a Hebrew-speaking state is different from using it for cultural production, especially when one is Palestinian. Arabic-language writing contributes to a pan-Arab sense of Arab identity, which includes Palestinian identity. As such, committed Palestinian literature written in Arabic addressed Arab readers—Palestinian and non-Palestinians alike, intellectuals and general readers—with the goal to promote change, modernize the Arab nations, encourage the struggle against imperialism and

[3] Ebileeni (2017).

[4] Aida Fahmawi Watad (2023) and Rachel S Harris (2014).

colonialism, and raise national and social awareness in its readership. Not utilizing Arabic risks disconnecting from any pan-Arab sense of identity, while the act of writing in Hebrew can be read as accepting the Israeli identity.

The "renewal" of the Hebrew language played major role in the formation of Zionism as a national movement. This included the long struggle between Yiddish and Hebrew, with the Israeli rejection of Yiddish and Yiddish-language literature deeming it an improper vernacular for the new state. Michael Gluzman (2003) argues that, while literature was instrumental in the time of nation-building,

> its relevance to Hebrew literature cannot be overstated, for Zionism emerged almost from the onset as a literary utopia. In the absence of both territory and self-government, the 'republic of letters' was indeed the only means by which Diaspora Jews could promote national unity (3).

It is this "republic of letters" (Casanova 2004) that Shammas challenges, not merely by writing in Hebrew (hybridized with Arabic) but also by his special treatment of the language, his innovative narration techniques, and metafictional reflections. Shammas' Hebrew-language work can be read as minor literature, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. The authors argue that "a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16, qtd in Hassan, 2011, 4). A minor literature has three characteristics: "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (Hassan, 2011, 4). Hever and Gensler (1987) read *Arabesques* as a form of protest, challenging Hebrew-speaking writers and readers; they write: "Through the special device of inter-weaving oral and folk elements into the narrative, the novel

contributes to a process of deterritorialization, challenging the long-standing total coincidence of the Hebrew language with its Jewish subject matter" (73).

2.2 The Character of Nidal ("Struggle") in Hebrew

Unlike the bilingual writing of Shammas, Sikseck writes solely in Hebrew. Born in the mixed Arab-Jewish city of Jaffa, Sikseck attended Hebrew-speaking schools and then the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he studied English and Comparative Literature. Sikseck published several short stories in Israeli newspapers and literary magazines before he published his first novel, *Jaffa* (2010). His second novel, *Tishrin* (2016), topped the bestseller list in Israel for many months and was praised by the Hebrew-language press.

Mostly narrated in third person by an omniscient narrator, the novel includes letter exchanges and lengthy phone messages written in the first person. At the center of the novel is the dysfunctional Atif family: the parents, Nawal and Ramzi, and their two sons, Zuher (the older of the two, serving a prison sentence in an Israeli jail for property offenses and drugs) and Wahid (a chemistry researcher and lecturer at the University of Haifa, married to Ranin, a social worker who works with drug addicts). The story includes flashbacks to the (solved) murder of Nawal's sister in Jaffa in 1969. As Wahid is fixing a shelf in his parents' bedroom, a photo of his aunt falls into his hand, and he feels moved to reopen the story in an attempt to understand why his aunt was killed. Wahid's parents and his jailed brother attempt to stop Wahid's inquiry into the past to protect him from being hurt, but his obsessive search for the truth gradually forces his family to confront tragedies, both past and present.

Aida Fahmawi Watad (2023)—following Fredric Jameson's assertion that the Third World novel always reads as a "national allegory" (Jameson 1986)—reads this silencing of the

murder as an allegory for the older Palestinian generations' silencing of the Nakba. In turn, Watad (2023) argues that *Tishrin* explores the continued resonances and impacts of the Nakba as shaping the everyday lives of the characters, their identity, their ideologies, and their destinies. The novel examines the collective Palestinian narrative and specifically focuses on the process of "Israelization" and the Palestinian linguistic and cultural alienation in Israel, emanating from a lack of some sense of political or national purpose. Watad (2023) suggests a metaphor for the collective situation of Sikseck's generation,

> whose ancestors believed that by remaining silent they protect their children and make it easier for them to become acclimated to life inside Israel. But this older generation did not realize that the traumas of their past would become a constant shadowy presence for their children; the *Nakba* and its repercussions would have a continuous effect on the lives of that generation, and they would one day be forced to search for the truth, in order to assume agency, reclaim their identity, or because the past would return to metaphorically slap them in the face. In fact, the silences and trauma of the earlier generation may mean that Sikseck's generation will never know the reality of the past because of the accumulated gaps in collective memory. (175)

However, while a secret silenced for decades resides at the center of the novel, it is not one directly related to the trauma of the Nakba*,* but the murder of a family member by her Palestinian-Gazan husband, Nidal:

> Nadia was the first murder victim in Jaffa because of family honor, or at least that's what people initially believed. Nevertheless, she was the last whose death sparked a real storm in the city. She disappeared from her home in Ajami at the beginning of November. The prevalent Arabic of Jaffa in 1969 was the month of Tishrin... Soon, the whole city was filled with rumors and whispers about the pregnant young woman who vanished in the middle of the night, leaving behind a bewildered husband and a small daughter. Every few days, rumors reached the ears of Nawal and her fresh husband that her wanton sister was seen in Gaza, or in Tulkarm, or in Qalqilya, each time in the company of a different man. Their father did not know what to do out of sheer shame. (Tishrin, 88-89)

If this is a national allegory, I suggest a possible reading of it, as a text written by a Palestinian in unadulterated Hebrew, as one of guilt and shame. Michael Morgan (2008) describes shame as "a complex state, emotional and evaluative and hence psychological and ethical at once. It is reflexive and yet social, requiring that we look at ourselves and at the way others view us, at once and dialectically" (14-5). While shame can be akin to guilt, Morgan asserts that the two affects are not identical. While we can be ashamed and feel guilty about what we have done, "shame is about *who we are* for having done what we did; we are ashamed for having been the one who did what we did. Guilt is related but different. We feel guilty for having done what we did but not for being who we are" (14-5).

In *Tishrin,* guilt and shame are at play at several levels of textual relationships: at the narrative level and in the relationship between the narrator and an implied Israeli-Hebrew reader. Whatever shame or guilt Sikseck's characters feel for what they did or did not do in the past or the present, for the novel's reader (but perhaps especially for an Israeli-Hebrew reader), this shame must also be read as a shaming of Palestinian society and "the Arab man" for *who we are*. In particular, by choosing this story, of all the stories one might tell (true or not) about the Palestinian experience under Occupation and the afterlife of the Nakba*,* the novel participates and even assimilates itself to the orientalist mindset that reifies the figure of the Arab, and especially the Arab man, as "aggressive," "primitive," or "wild" (Said, 1978).

Placing this sense of shame within an *affective* framework in general, Attwell, Pes and Zinato (2019) propose a phenomenological interpretative framework, arguing that affectivity is not simply resonant within postcolonial literature and its contexts, but "*consubstantial* to it and, therefore, obliquely and sometimes directly pervasive in it" (7). This follows Jean-Paul Sartre's

existential phenomenological scrutiny, which underlines the centrality of the Other and Otherness, for postcolonial literature: "a concept set off in the colonial theatre by the encounter/clash between invaders and invaded, dominators and dominated, and necessitated by their 'cohabitation' according to its various inflections and through its various dispositifs, in Foucauladian terms" (Attwell, Pes and Zinato 2019, 7). Adopting Sartre's description of a type of self-consciousness in which the Other as its condition of possibility is intersubjectively mediated, the authors argue that shame draws specifically on this sense of self-consciousness, since its content is constituted only and exclusively through the subject's encounter with the Other: "shame is shame of oneself before the other."[5] Furthermore,

> Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object, that is, of recognizing myself in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the other. Shame is the feeling of an original fall […] I have fallen into the world in the midst of things and […] I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am (Sartre 2003, p. 302 qtd. in Attwell, Pes and Zinato 2019, 7).

In the colonial context, Sartre's concept of shame recalls Frantz Fanon's analysis of the consciousness of the colonized subject:

> I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare (Fanon 2008 [1952], 18).

Fanon emphasizes that the major point is not the Other's evaluation of the colonized subject, but their endorsement of it. In the postcolonial context, shame is the emotion "that best captures and most fundamentally characterizes our relation to others" (Zahavi 2014, 218).

[5] Sartre 2003 (p. 312) qtd. in Attwell, Pes and Zinato (2019, 7).

Remarking on how the feeling of guilt lacks the social dimension required by shame, Morgan underlines the "crucial consideration" that "we feel shame only when there is such other judging of us" (Morgan 2008, 46-7).

Against this background, I argue that the (colonial) Other in Sikseck's novel is the Israeli Hebrew reader. While *Tishrin* might cause the Hebrew reader some (mild) feeling of shame, it is the multiple Arab-Palestinian narrators who feel ashamed and who, by accepting that feeling of shame, approve the judgment of the Other's shaming gaze. While the (Israeli) Other is not present as a central character in the novel, the novel's use of the Hebrew language not only ensures that the expected gaze on *Tishrin* is the implied Israeli-Hebrew reader, but that that gaze has been interiorized within the text.[6]

Shame is a central component in *Tishrin* at another level as well. For the novel's characters, both the original violence and its subsequent silencing involve the shame to the family's honor. The murder is ostensibly aimed at removing a "stain" on other family members.[7] The deaths framed as "honor killings" become warrants of Arab primitiveness and savagery. They can be used as a pretext for unlimited domination and discrimination against anyone (not just Arabs) construed as other to the colonial gaze (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Abdul JanMohamed (1985) suggests we can understand colonial discourse through analyses that map "its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices" (61),

[6] This is, of course, not a comment on the psychology of the author. *Tishrin* dramatizes the interiorization of the Other's colonial shaming gaze regardless of, perhaps even despite, any position the author might take. One can ask whether this gaze is contextually inevitable, given the current state of affairs of settler-colonial Occupation—that it is well-nigh impossible to fully, or even adequately, blunt the implications of depicting a Palestinian-Gazan honor killing in 2016, even as various framings or versions complicate the picture.

[7] It is interesting to note how a "stain" that can *adhere* to one can gradually come to seem to *inhere*; that is, it becomes integral to the shaming perception of an Other (Attwell, Pes and Zinato 2019).

operating through the economy of a *Manichean allegory*—one based on transformations of racial or ethnic difference into moral and metaphysical difference. This economy assumes the colonizer's ethical superiority and becomes the pretext for imperial occupation and exploitation.[8] In his discussion of colonial writing, JanMohamed (1985) argues that, "Even the work of some of the most enlightened and critical colonial writers eventually succumb to a narrative organization based on racial/metaphysical oppositions, whose motives remain morally fixed but whose categories flex to accommodate any situation" (61).

Importantly, in *Tishrin,* the explicit condemnation of the figure of the Arab man and implicitly of Palestinian culture is voiced in strong language by a Palestinian woman, reflecting on her father's reaction when he finally received the news that his daughter's body had been found:

> He never seemed more degraded to her than on the day they found a body in the orchard where Nidal worked, and the police suspected it was Nadia. He, who had created them of nothing and shared his food with them, fell to his knees in the backyard, kissed the ground twice, and thanked God for the mercy sent at last, because now there would be no more suspicion cast upon the modesty of his daughters. How repulsive and horrifying he seemed to her then. How she would have preferred to see him lose his livelihood. (89-90)

The same degraded, repulsive, horrifying father, eager to find suitable husbands for his daughters without delay, chooses Nidal—a Palestinian worker from Gaza, whose name means *struggle* in Arabic—for his daughter, Nadia. Rather than shame (or guilt) about her father's

[8] The mystery and tension of this involves its apparently necessary pretext to its truth. History has no shortage of unabashedly dictatorial figures who enthusiastically claimed right based on might. The shame of the colonizing cultures, in contrast, seems unable to do away with "proof" of its moral superiority. It doesn't seem this "vanity" is simply a smokescreen for *Realpolitik* among the settler-colonial population. However politically useful the Othering gaze of the settler-colonialist of the colonized may be for a given regime of power, it seems an indispensable necessary for the psychological ego of the settler.

degradation, the narration invokes disgust and thus aligns with discourse that views the cultural situation of this grieving father as repulsive and horrifying. This may be an authentic reaction of this character, but the scene also risks the implication of an interiorization and assimilation of the colonial Other's gaze.

Having staged this scene, the novel nonetheless produces a twist, an ostensible move away from "stereotypical" portrayals of Arab savagery around honor killings. It turns out that the character of Nidal has come to Jaffa ostensibly to work in the orchards, but this is a cover story. In a letter from prison, Zuher reveals to Ranin, Wahid's wife, that their aunt's husband had come to Jaffa to "restore the national feeling" among its Arab residents and was displeased to find Arabs selling their land to Jews. To stop this, Nidal (and a partner) kills Al-Yaffawi (the Jaffan), an Arab real estate agent working with the Israeli authorities and pressuring Arabs to sell their land by threating and harassing them. Disapproving of her husband's political activities, Nadia unsuccessfully seeks to persuade him to focus on family and work. When she discovers her husband's involvement in the murder of Al-Yaffawi, she threatens to expose him. Wahid's brother states:

> When she discovered his involvement in the murder of Al-Yaffawi, she assumed she had won the jackpot. With this card, she would force him to devote himself to his work in the orchard and to his family [...] She certainly didn't intend to send her husband to life imprisonment. But Nidal was forced to tell his partner in killing Al-Yaffawi, and I suppose the decision to kill her was made on the spot [...] when her body was found in the well, he confessed and said she betrayed him […] Later it was revealed that the police found at the scene of Nadia's murder the knife that stabbed Al-Yaffawi's heart. (144)

Like above—where the point of narration is seen through the revulsion and horror of a Palestinian daughter for her father—here a Palestinian older brother finally disabuses his

unwisely and naively curious younger brother about a truth—a framing of events, rather—that the entire family has conspired to keep from him. The desire to "protect" him means protecting him not so much from the "truth" of the event itself, but the shame that inheres in it. Self-consciously, the novel moves from one shameful framing of the event (as an honor killing) to another (a coldly calculated assassination of a mother and her unborn child in the name of the Palestinian national struggle).

One can sense this discomfort with reinterpretation in *Tishrin,* as it moves from one disclosure of the events to another through the introduction of the character of Huda, Nadia and Nidal's daughter. She will eventually ask, "Which truth do you want?" After the murder of her mother, Huda is relocated to Gaza and raised by Nidal's family. She grows up with stories from her grandmother about her father as "a hero who sacrificed his life for Palestine." Later, she returns at age nineteen to her mother's family in Jaffa and marries Zuher; his imprisonment subsequently leaves her to raise their two children alone. When Wahid's curiosity about Nadia's murder finally brings him to Huda, she says:

> Do you know what the truth in Gaza was? That my father was a hero who sacrificed his life for Palestine. No one ever spoke about my mother. That was the truth […] When I married Zuher I discovered a different truth, your truth. Nadiya's truth, about the mother and sister that she had been. And the truth about her murderer. No one ever called him that in my presence before I moved here. That is also the truth. Which truth do you want? (165-166)

Here, once more, by seeing the novel's events and "the truth" through a particular lens, fraught questions about memory, history, and truth lead to a false dichotomy for the reader. "Which truth do you want?": honor killing or cold-blooded assassination of (an Israeli Palestinian) mother and unborn child by a (Gazan Palestinian) nationalist? These are by no means the only two possible "truths" one might want. Thus, although *Tishrin* distinguishes

between the worldviews of Palestinian citizens of Israel and those who live in Gaza and the occupied territories of the West Bank, it is notable that when Nadia's whereabouts become unknown, rumors that circulate about "the wanton woman" are all connected to men from Tulkarm, Gaza, and Qalqilya. These are cities in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, suggesting that those are the men who would not hesitate to abuse or humiliate a Palestinian woman (citizen of Israel) from Jaffa.

While Nidal (the Gazan outsider) seeks to instill a sense of nationalism among Jaffa's residents, Nadia (a Palestinian insider) only wants to live quietly and stay away from the troubles that political activism could bring. Although the narrative refers to the Israeli-Jewish gentrification process that Jaffa undergoes and expresses—primarily through the mother who longs for the old Jaffa, where children played in orchards that no longer exist and where neighbors cared for each other—it is difficult to render Nadia's murder into a national allegory. The melancholy that this event imposes on the family members does not fit as a metaphor for the loss of Palestine and the catastrophe experienced by the Palestinian people. In the end, it is Nidal (*Struggle*), the Palestinian husband, who murders the opportunist real estate agent and Nadia, with the same knife.

If there is a national allegory at work in the novel, it has to do with shame. Interestingly, in William Faulkner's continuous engagement with history, memory, and the traumatic afterlife of war and defeat in his work, which Ebileeni (2015; 2017) connects to Palestinian themes, the U.S. author's own sense of being from the deepest backwaters (Mississippi) of a region indelibly branded by the historical enormity of the ownership of enslaved peoples may be marked in the grandeur and excess of his texts (Ebileeni 2015). In his works, over multiple novels and stories,

the "story" of the U.S. is told and retold from dozens of points of rarely consonant points of view. Here, the agonizingly painful question of *what happened*, asked by one who inherits a condition from forebears often not spoken of, or spoken of in alternatingly hushed (silencing) or defiant (cross-burning) ways, recurs and recurs and recurs, without ever settling: "Which truth do you want?"

For committed literature, whether of Kanafani's sort or the more recent iterations Parr (2021) describes the mandate for "realism" may have to avoid the luxury of such ambiguous polyvocal truth. Indeed, moving from Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* to *Return to Haifa*, the shameful humiliation of the Palestinian workers trying to slip into Kuwait contrasts with Dov's condemnation: "Twenty years have passed, sir! Twenty years! What did you do during that time to reclaim your son? If I were you I would've borne arms for that. Is there any stronger motive? You're weak! Weak!" (Kanafani 2000, 185). Against the shameful helplessness of this inaction, or Abul Khaizuran's emasculation and helpless cry of "Why?" at the end of *Men in the Sun*, we now have the image both of Nidal's murder on behalf of his national cause and Kanafani's assassination.

Against this background, Nadia's insistence on non-resistance to the political situation and her advocacy that Nidal focus on family and work is seemingly wise from one angle and plainly assimilationist on the other—remembering that "The assimilation policy is genocidal" (Watson 2001, 35). The catch-22 of the colonized is apparent in the fact that violent resistance to colonization serves as evidence of the justness of domination, but so does quietly submitting to tyranny. In this situation, any practice of "traditional masculinity" becomes problematic—either in the stereotypical and reified ways depicted in *Tishrin* or more empathetically portrayed in the

helplessness of *Men in the Sun.* This allows the affects of shame and disgust to operate at two levels: within the narrative itself and in the reader.

In *Tishrin,* shaming Arab men and the suppression of Arab women by Arabic culture constitutes a recurring motif. In another subplot, Wahid's wife, Ranin, works as a social worker treating drug addicts, but feels ashamed to admit that she despises the men who knock on the doors of her office, unwilling to cooperate, but eagerly seeking her help. Her help is the help of the State and the National Insurance Institute, which provides monthly allowances to the patients. Ranin's disgust corresponds to a common Israeli discourse, which sees Arabs as taking advantage of rights, like access to National Insurance, without contributing to the state. This discourse resembles, if it is not simply an expression of, the politically regressive neoliberalism ushered in most famously in the United States and Great Britain by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. This discourse invented the image of the "welfare queen," as women of color who illegitimately accessed public assistance (Kohler-Hausmann 2015).[9]

The novel details one case of Ranin's Arab patients, a man who presents himself as a widower and father of two children, only to extort money from the National Insurance. When the patient dies in a car accident, Ranin travels to his family's home to complete a report, only to discover that he is not a widower, but a man who abandoned his wife, Marwa, and their two children. Like Nadia, Marwa was forced to marry a man she had never met. Previously a

[9] It goes too far beyond the scope of the current discussion to explore in detail, but it can be said that among all welfare recipients, White-identified recipients and total expenditures outnumber Black-identified groups (43% vs. 26%). If one includes the pensions of former members of the military (as another form of social welfare), these numbers and absolute expenditures increase dramatically. Only 12% of ex-military servicepeople are Black-identified; the total number of exclusively White-identified benefit recipients is double the total of all other ex-military personnel combined. One can question here whether anti-Black rhetoric to end social welfare programs is aimed at all social welfare recipients or only Black-identified ones. A similar question applies to anti-Arab rhetoric around social services.

promising student in the university, she is forced to drop out to marry, raise children, and take care of a family. Ranin describes the young widow's husband's family contemptuously: "She despises the coffee they pour for her. Their blank stares at each other while she interviewed Marwa. Their success, idiots, she wanted to say to them, you killed this woman. Now she belongs to your son forever" (211). Driving back home from her visit, Ranin imagines how she would like to rescue the young widow and find her a job in Haifa, an echo (or again, a direct manifestation) of the "white savior" complex by which Arab women must be saved from Arab men by outsiders (Abu-Lughod 2013). Here, the invocation of Haifa further implies that salvation for exploited Arab woman must occur in a city under Jewish control. In the Arab village or Gaza, the possibilities of a woman's escape appear negligible; thus Wahid's mother can say, "Only death and marriage can save a woman from the a reputation of a wanton" (91).

Here, again, we are given only two truths; "which one do you want?"—a contemptible drug addict who can't take of his children or a welfare fraud who can't even drive properly? Ranin, assimilating to the discourse of the existing power regime, displays no empathy or understanding for the conditions that determine the lives of her patients. Here, again, we have Ranin imagining a constitutive (and denigrated) Other as a means for keeping her own ego intact. Her identity appears bound up in the denigration of the "shame of oneself before the other" (Sanya et al. 2018; Attwell, Pes and Zinato 2019). One could say that this affect—and its interlocking structures of feeling around disgust and shame (Watad 2023; Williams 2015)—are almost invisibly marked into the social body (Brewster 2020).

It is useful to invoke here what Bakhtin (1984) calls monoglossic (one-voiced) narration. Bakhtin explains: "a monologically understood world is an objectified world, a world

corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (Hays 2005, 7); in it, the "monologic discourse is a discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation" (5). In the novel, the reader encounters the one-voicedness of Ranin opining about the life of a widowed woman, her dead husband, his children, their family. Or a daughter's revulsion and horror toward her father. For the actual relating of the events of Nadia's murder, the novel utilizes the monologue of a letter. And even when Huda is caught in multiple narratives about her father, she only offers two (mutually exclusive) truths to choose from.

In contrast, even in Kanafani's *Men in the Sun,* the silence of the Palestinian men as they die in the truck is so loud that the predator who exploits them, who insists that nothing matters more than money, can cry out, "Why didn't *they* knock … Why didn't *you* say anything?" (emphasis added), and the *desert's echo* answers, "Why didn't *you* knock … Why didn't *you* bang?" (74). One almost misses the surreal break from *iltizam* realism here, not simply that the desert *answers* but that it does not "faithfully" echo the words and instead transforms them.[10] The changing address of these few sentences supply and sharply places the situation in a multi-voicedness (heteroglossia). Abul Khaizuran first addresses a generic *they*, as if questioning himself, but then his attention turns to the dead mean, addressing *you*. And when the desert's echo responds differently, there is a shift of perspective, as if to ask Abul Khaizuran, *why didn't you knock*.

Smartly, Kanafani repeats the question, but with different words entirely. While this makes the echo re-sound and resound, it also gives the reader a second chance to realize: *wait,*

[10] We can make this strictly realistic by imagining that Abul Khaizuran's distress is so great that he is having a moment of psychological lapse. Nevertheless, the text does not present itself as such.

why have the words changed and to appreciate that the echo is dialoging with, not parroting, Abul Khaizuran. This highlights how even a "repetition" of an utterance is not identical to what went before, rather than a more or less accurate recitation of a permanently established truth—or two mutually exclusive truths. It is quite clear that Nidal could be both a freedom fighter and an Arab man capable of honor-killing violence. Or, still again, something else entirely. In other words, the dialogic iterations at the end of *Men in the Sun* add layers to the final moment, which deepen the narrative and turn Abul Khaizuran's poignant and accumulating cry of *why, why, why* into a haunting and multi-layered callback.

Consequently, in one scene, a Jewish woman is subjected to violence by an Arab man. Wahid, a highly educated chemistry lecturer at Haifa University, encounters a young Jewish guide, Idit, in the university parking lot. He introduces himself using his imprisoned brother's name, and describes himself as a Druze doctoral student of Classical studies who served in an intelligence unit in the Israeli army. After declining Idit's first overture for coffee, he arrives unannounced late at night. Despite Idit's description as interested in a sexual relationship, Wahid experiences a sort of nervous breakdown and is incapable of recognizing or understanding his actions:

> He seized with all his might what seemed to him to be her chin, and breathed with all his might, as if his life depended on rescuing the air from its nostrils. He might have shouted. It's possible he roared, too, but his senses incapable of identifying that [...] Only when he stood at the top of the stairs, outside her door, did he see her again, this time clearly. She sat on the sofa and quickly gathered her hair, her dress still open. Only then did he notice the streak of blood running from one of her nostrils to her upper lip... (199).

Here, the "window" of the text into the room where Wahid is left purposefully opaque. The reader encounters descriptions that function as remembrances ("He might have shouted. It's

possible he roared, too.") From the beginning of what seems to be a psychological breakdown, the third-person omniscient narration itself collapses into uncertainty. The scene thus frames a gap of consciousness not just in the protagonist but in this narrative space and time. The labored and tortured language ("He seized with all his might what seemed to him to be her chin, and breathed with all his might, as if his life depended on rescuing the air from its nostrils") aptly captures a bizarre, sudden, and inexplicable burst of violence. While the line of blood from Idit's nostril is cinematic and striking, the text suggests that it is puzzling (and ominous) how it got there. It remains unclear what exactly has happened or even how much time has passed. At its most blatant, the scene depicts how Arab men, even highly educated ones lecturing at Haifa University, can be overthrown by a primordial savagery that baffles even them. The main issue here is the assumption that Arab men cannot be trusted around (Jewish) women, but adjacent are threats of imagined miscegenation, fantasies of racial and linguistic purity, and sometimes (often realized) genuine affects of relationships across otherwise prohibited lines. But the scene also allows a reading through the lens of violence per se, imagined as an outlet for the repressed rage of humiliated male pride. In literary terms, this is strikingly a monoglossic scene, whereby the filtering consciousness goes blank at the moment of maximal tension. This is not first-person narration. Third-person narration always picks and chooses its details, but the circumspection utilized here is strikingly literal. It is useless to imagine what happens in the gap. Even when the possibility of dialogue enters into the scene, with Wahid standing in the doorway and addressing the woman, the text rigorously maintains the one-voiced silence of its side of the story.

2.3 Writing the Mood in *Tishrin*

Sikseck's Hebrew-language text maps the mood of Israeli society. That is, his address to the Israeli reader in *Tishrin* requires a reading in the context of a post-Oslo political "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977). The Second Palestinian Intifada that broke out in 2000 signaled the collapse of the "peace process" and the Oslo Accords, leading to despair and a loss of faith on both sides, bringing about a drastic change in the Israeli public opinion, which shifted to the right. While violence and terrorist attacks played a significant role in this shift in public opinion, the Israeli leadership of the Labor Party, headed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, also played a central role in influencing Israeli public opinion regarding the Palestinian issue, portraying it as one not interested in peace but in violent means (Bar-Tal 2004).

One of the reasons for the lack of trust and the outbreak of the Second Intifada was the failure of the Camp David talks that began in July 2000, between the Palestinians led by Yasser Arafat and the Israelis led by Ehud Barak, who was associated with the Israeli peace camp. Following the failure of the parties to reach an agreement and the mutual accusations of failure at the conference, and with the outbreak of violent events, the slogan "There is no partner" was particularly entrenched in the Israeli peace camp. According to Barak's version after the discussions at Camp David, Israel offered everything, "but everything," to the Palestinians only for Barak to discover that there was no one to talk to, and that on the Palestinian side there was no true partner with whom to reach a compromise or an agreement that would ensure peace between the two sides. The fact that the statement "There is no one to talk to" was made at a time when the Israeli peace camp was in power caused a seismic shift within it, as opinion polls showed a manifestation of disillusionment towards the Palestinian side, implying that the gaps

between the Israeli and Palestinian sides were irreconcilable and required a forceful response. The peace camp weakened to the point of collapse and led to the rise of the extreme right-wing parties gradually gaining unprecedented power.

The portrayal of the Palestinian characters in *Tishrin* can be read as a confirmation of the common Israeli political discourse of "there is no Palestinian partner for peace." When it comes to Gaza's struggle (represented by the character of Nidal), it seems that no ethical boundaries constrain what he would do in the name of the national struggle. The Hebrew-language description of the oppression of women in Arab society nonetheless requires a different reading, more sensitive to the affective structure of Jewish-Israeli society. The shaming of Palestinian society in *Tishrin* shifts toward strong feelings of guilt and shame. Just as the novel distinguishes between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians residing in the occupied territories, it also distinguishes between two camps among Palestinian citizens within Israel: Wahid and his family (residents of Jaffa, a mixed city) and Palestinian citizens who do not reside in mixed neighborhoods (represented through the character of Ranin, Wahid's wife, born and raised in the Galilean village of Ailabun). In the contrast between Wahid and Ranin, not only feelings of shame stand out but also strong feelings of guilt.

Wahid meets his future wife Ranin when she is studying social work at Haifa University. He notices her hanging an ad on the university bulletin board titled "Discovering Arabic," offering to teach Arabic-language courses. While Wahid is more interested in Ranin than in the language courses she teaches, he admits that his Arabic is broken. In a letter to his brother Zuher, Wahid recounts his meeting with Ranin:

> I talked about Jaffa, and I could hear its knowledgeable murmur, as she said it happens a lot in mixed cities. 'The Arabic disappears.' I seized the opportunity to

> ask where she was from, and that was the first time I heard about Ayilabun. I didn't tell her that, so as not to allow her to argue that this too is a result of living in a mixed city. And actually, maybe she's right. Do you think we would have heard about Ayilabun if not for her? Who heard back then in Jaffa about Arab settlements? We were too busy polishing our [Hebrew] accent, at school, at the grocery store, in line at the clinic. And maybe that's why Arabic disappeared from us (119).[11]

In front of Ranin, Wahid reveals his feelings of guilt. He feels guilty about the Arabic clarity in his speech, about the house he grew up in, with an abundance of Arabic-language books, in contrast to the fact that "the sons and daughters of the political elite in Ayilabun read mostly in Arabic. His father has a giant portrait of Sameeh al-Kassem ordered specifically for him" (221). Language merges with national identity and political activism. The feeling of shame accompanies the guilt of what Wahid has done "to polish his accent," busily assimilating into the Jewish-Hebrew society that surrounds Jaffa and forgetting his Arabic-Palestinian national identity. Wahid tells his brother how embarrassed he felt when Ranin distributed Mahmoud Darwish's poems to her Arabic students; "I remember how embarrassed I was when she asked if anyone knew where he was born, and I was glad that until then she didn't notice my existence, and couldn't address me" (120). Darwish, considered the Palestinian national poet, was born in

[11] This passage is notable for its relatively less monologic content. While Wahid recounts his own version of a conversation with Ranin, the text nevertheless gives some space to dialogue and recognition of his limited knowledge. At the same time, the passage is presented in the form of the inserted genre of a letter, which is entirely non-monologic and has no space for dialogic response (outside of the author imagining responses from its recipient); a letter in reply is simply another instance of sequential monoglossia (Bakhtin 1981). Importantly, the form of the letter (often written from one point of view throughout in early epistolary novels) was central to the emergence of the novel as a form (Baldridge 1994). The familiarity of the letter as a cultural form, its relationship to an ostensibly realist and "true" reporting of events, and its sequentially monologic character well-afforded afforded Horace's entertaining and instructive long-form alternative to the prototypical book of truth, the Bible (Tompkins 1932). Ultimately able to absorb any genre, the novel gradually became the literary vehicle par excellence for the emergence of bourgeois identity that accompanied the rise of capitalism, imperial domination, the Industrial Revolutions, "modernity" and post-Enlightenment culture, and individualism as we now understand them (Williams 1950; Eagleton 2004; Williams 1961).

1941 in the village of Al-Birwa in the Western Galilee, a village completely destroyed in 1948, its inhabitants expelled, becoming refugees.

Sikseck's Hebrew is (almost) clean of Arabic. In contrast to Shammas, he does not implant Arabic words written in Hebrew letters and does not deliberately use literal translations or a mix of languages. Yet his reflections in *Tishrin* on the language power dynamics and the expression of both guilt and shame for adopting the Hebrew language resonates with the writing that Yasemin Yildiz (2012) describes as "writing beyond the mother tongue." Yildiz reads the modern notion of the "mother tongue" as a linguistic family romance. The "mother" in the "mother tongue" stands for the allegedly organic nature of this structure, assigned a maternal origin and a natural kinship—a notion of family that was deployed in building national sentiments. Yildiz argues that the "mother tongue" came to be "the affective knot at the center of the monolingual paradigm." She defines monolingualism as "a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as imagined collectivities such as cultures and nations" (Yildiz 2012, 2). The force of monolingualism as a structuring principle creates a range of *tensions* between multilingual linguistic realities and monolingual ideologies. It is this tension that Yildiz identifies as "postmonolingual." To view language in society through a postmonolingual paradigm means to engage with the significance of multilingualism and monolingualism and their intersection. Yildiz asserts that writing "beyond the mother tongue" does not simply mean to write in a "nonnative" language or to write in multiple languages. Rather, "it means writing beyond the *concept* of the mother tongue" (14). Though the novel might not be considered as minor literature, and the Hebrew in Sikseck's

hands is not defamiliarized, yet the novel reflects on the very use of the Hebrew by its Arab characters. In a letter to his imprisoned brother, Wahid writes about a Hebrew poetry book by the Yiddish writer Abraham Sutzkever that his wife Ranin bought him as a gift:

> I was sure she was trying to provoke me, about my broken Arabic, when she brought me Yiddish songs translated into Hebrew as a gift [...] She told me that Abraham Sutzkever wrote in Yiddish during a time when the language was fading, during the days of the establishment of the state, when even staging Yiddish plays was against the law. Those were the times when it was crucial for Hebrew to win, at any cost. And how sad and unforgivable it is in her eyes, to think of a poet witnessing his language dying in his lifetime. That there is no greater mourning than that over your mother tongue, that's what she said. I understood what she meant, and that she succeeded again in getting under my skin, just when I thought I was the one picking on her. Who would have thought that, in the end, I will read this book here, alone. Maybe Hebrew won after all. (221-222)

While Sutzkever was expected to abandon his Yiddish in favor of the Zionist-national Hebrew monolingual paradigm, Wahid is expected by Ranin (and the Palestinian novel) not to abandon Arabic—the language of the Palestinian minority in Israel—and fight to keep his mother tongue alive. Yet Hebrew has won, at least in Wahid's case, and though now he can understand what Ranin is trying to tell him, ironically via the story of Yiddish, it is too late. All Wahid can do now is feel guilty for losing the battle and express his shame, in Hebrew, as a confession to the Israeli reader.

Discussing Franz Kafka's writing "beyond the mother tongue," Yildiz employs Freud's definition of the *uncanny* as a special case of anxiety, where the familiar and unfamiliar slide disturbingly into one another and disable the otherwise comforting and clear distinction between them. This form of disturbing anxiety emerges when something perceived as familiar becomes strange, thus revealing that that which was assumed to be familiar might have been strange all

along and vice versa. It is the process of revelation that gives rise to the uncanny. In Wahid's investigation of the events regarding Nadia's murder, the narrator exposes the uncanny anxieties of the Atif family members. When Wahid visits Huda—Nadia's daughter, his cousin, and his sister-in-law—she feels sorry for him: "what a lost family, of orphaned kids, all of us, she wanted to tell him, but she kept silent and let go of his shoulders" (167). Overall, the characters in the novel are defeated, fettered, victims of larger forces, and denied true agency; as Watad (2023) notes, "their lives are marked by self-harm and self-denial, forced to choose between taking on the identity of the Israeli Jewish other and erasing it, between talking to the dead and suppressing their histories" (174). Both brothers have self-destructive impulses; Zuher attempts suicide as a teenager and, in his prison cell, he cuts his hand to feel the pain and to see the blood. "Maybe we are very similar," Wahid writes to his brother in a letter concealing the novel, "we the two boys of Atif family." Wahid suffers from occasional blackouts and panic attacks. Besides the encounter with Idit already described, he also experiences an attack while driving and crashes (reminiscent of the drug addict seeking help from Ranin) and ends up in a hospital with no memory of its details.

Wahid loses his job at the university, and his wife leaves him to move back with her family in their Galilean village. Wahid then return to Jaffa, to his parents, writing to his brother, "And now I am writing to you for the first time from our mother's and father's kitchen, to which I returned without her [Ranin] … What a deceptive way our little shames have to haunt us, after all." (222). The diminution of Wahid's personal catastrophe as "little shames" is striking against the scope of their impacts on his life.

2.4 Structure of Feeling in *Tishrin*

Under the title, "True Bravery," the Israeli scholar and literary critic Nissim Calderon reviews *Tishrin* as a "wonderful suspense novel that enfolds in it layers of fascinating humanity" (Kalderon 2016). Kalderon adds that *Tishrin* "tells one of the most complex and sophisticated plots written in Hebrew in recent years, yet this sophistication does not for a moment negate its *dark and wild essence*" (emphasis added). The bravery that Kalderon alludes to is that of a Palestinian writer "daring" to tell the "wild truth" about Arabs, his own people.[12]

Kalderon identifies three circles of conflict in the novel: "the bad blood between Arabs and Jews appears in this book and also emerges from the secret of Nadia's murder. But long before it appears, the bad blood between Wahid and his own life and, by extension, the bad blood between Wahid and his Arabness" (Kalderon 2016). In the first circle of conflict lies the unique soul of the individual, the instinct of solitude, which has driven Wahid since childhood to isolate himself from the world: "these are soul traits of a human, like all human beings, not necessarily an Arab, and not necessarily an Arab living among Israelis" (Kalderon, 2016). In the second circle lie the severe societal problems within Arab society: "problems not related to occupation or conquest. Problems of close kin marriages and marriages at a young age, and suffocating Oedipal relationships between a son and his mother, and the sanctity of family stained with lies." Only in the third and final circle, Kalderon asserts, does this novel address the "blood feud"

[12] Ironically, on the exact same day as Kalderon's review, the trope of Arab "wildness" was in the popular news; the Hebrew-language Media Review paraphrased reporting in *Yediot Aharonot*'s online *Ynet* and *Ma'ariv* that "one person was killed and 16 more injured during a mass brawl that broke out between two rival families in the Bedouin village of Kuseife in Israel's Negev Desert ... The fighting apparently broke out after youths from a family living on the outskirts of the village, *'acted wildly'* within the village and began clashing with residents. According to eyewitnesses, vehicles came and people fired a burst into the air, resulting in members of a local family gathering on the road" (Satin 2016, emphasis added).

between Jews and Arabs, the suffering it causes from generation to generation: "the veil it provides for the individual's psychological problems and the internal problems of Arab society." While Kalderon, the Israeli addressee of *Tishrin*, accepts the idea of "national suffering" (not necessarily only that of the Palestinians), he praises the novel for minimalizing the national dimension of that suffering, while blaming Arab society and its "culture" as the primary source of that suffering.

Another angle of reading would take Flatley's (2017) assertion that "reading for mood" discloses how a text attunes to the reader and reveals the moods it is aware of. Attuned to the hegemonic mood among Hebrew readers, *Tishrin* confirms, at least partially, the Palestinian ethical inferiority by shaming the figure of the Arab man, while at the same time expressing the anxiety resulting from the shame of telling the story, and narrating it in the Hebrew language. Palestinian writing (especially) in Hebrew is always aware of its limits, always aware of the risk of an Israeli eye, like Kalderon, reading the work of the Arab writer as an Arab.

When Wahid is fired from his position at the university, he writes in his last letter to his brother that "it might be for the best" (218). He expresses his feelings of shame and guilt that his research scholarship was named after a commander of Etzel, a paramilitary Zionist group operating in mandatory Palestine and viewed as a terrorist group. Wahid's official research papers describe that commander as "a hero of the battle to free Jaffa from the Arab enemy" (219). And just as Wahid the scientist is aware of the "conditions" of his academic work, with his scholarship contract reminding him who funds him, the text is aware of the conditions under which it is read, reminding the reader of who reads the work. Wahid the scientist accepts a scholarship, and while he might feel bad about it, he never protests it or rejects it. Similarly,

Wahid the narrator accepts the shame instilled in his Palestinian subjectivity, and while he might feel guilty about it, he never protests it or rejects it.

Chapter 3:

Melancholy in Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail*

Adania Shibli's Novel *Tafsīl thānawī* (2017; *Minor Detail,* translated to English by Elisabeth Jaquette, 2020) draws on the historical "event" of a Palestinian Bedouin girl's fate at the hands of Israeli soldiers in the Negev (Naqab), 1949. The novel comprises two, equal-length parts. The first, narrated in the third person, records the event itself, following the Israeli commander of the platoon stationed in the Negev (near the original site of the Nirim Kibbutz) after the establishment of the state of Israel. The second part, narrated in the first person, follows the journey of a Palestinian woman from Ramallah, who reads an article about the event, publicly detailed for the first time almost sixty years later by two Israeli journalists (Lavie and Gorali 2003).[1] The narrator testifies that there is nothing especially unusual about this article:

> especially when compared with what happens daily in a place dominated by the roar of occupation and ceaseless killing […] even rape. That doesn't only happen during war, but also in everyday life. Rape, or murder, or sometimes both; I've never been preoccupied with incidents like these before (60).

[1] This likely refers to a very detailed 2003 article in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz,* "I Saw Fit to Remove Her from the World" by Lavie and Gorali (2003). It recounts "The Nirim Affair," which occurred in the aftermath of the 1948 war. An Israeli platoon stationed in the Negev was tasked with "cleansing" the area of its remaining Bedouin population. Israel's policy at the time was to "shoot-to-kill" any Bedouin "infiltrators" (Lavie and Gorali 2003). During one of their patrols, the commanding officer and his troops encounter two Arab men and a girl; "There are different versions regarding the girl's age. According to some accounts she was a young girl aged between 10 and 15; others say she was between 15 and 20" (Lavie and Gorali 2003). After a convivial evening meal, the commanding officer offered two options: sending the girl to the kitchen or "having their way with her" (Lavie and Gorali 2003). "We want to fuck," those gathered replied (Lavie and Gorali 2003). The commanding officer then partitioned sexual access to the girl over three days to different squads; she was finally shot and buried in a shallow grave in the desert. Seventeen members of the output were subsequently court-martialed for "negligence in preventing a crime" (Lavie and Gorali 2003).

The titular "minor detail" that haunts the woman is the fact that the girl's murder coincides with her own birthday, August 13. Despite her efforts to forget the girl and the article, the woman cannot resist launching an investigative journey, in an attempt to "uncover any details about the rape and the murder as the girl experienced it, not relying only on what the soldiers who committed it disclosed, as the author of that article did" (65). In this chapter, I argue that, the death of the narrator of *Minor Detail*, which occurs in the same place where the crimes against the girl were committed more than half a century earlier, functions as a melancholy ethical act.

3.1 From Melancholizing to Melancholicizing

Nouri Gana's (2023) *Melancholy Acts: Defeat and Cultural Critique in the Arab World* describes "the agentive double thrust of melancholy, its recuperative and generative dimensions—that is, the way it reclaims, seeds, and sustains an act that would be qualified, retrospectively at least, as a melancholy act" (2023, 23).[2] Gana combines postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis to analyze post-1967 Arabic literature and examine its figuration and

[2] Over a centuries-long tradition, descriptions of melancholy's nature remained largely unchanged (Gowland 2006; Zimmerman 1995), consisting primarily of a kind of *sadness,* sometimes with a disabling mood around mourning, loss, and nostalgia (what might these days often be diagnosed as some form of depression) and other times a sort of more productive, even pleasant, wistfulness (Zimmerman 1995). Robert Burton's (1621) *Anatomy of Melancholy* compendiously assembled and delineated many of the former qualities of sadness, while the very production of his book signals the more productive mood of melancholy. Across many different frameworks (especially in queer theory), this distinction between a disabling versus productive sense of melancholy is critically emphasized in movements away from strictly psychological (usually pathologized) interpretations of the melancholic mood to sociological (often liberatory) senses of melancholy (Filocamo 2020; Davis 2023; Billings 2016). Arguably, Gana (2023) recapitulates this movement from psychoanalytical (personal) melancholizing in Tarabishi (1991) to sociological (political) melancholicizing in his work.

materialization in language, imagery and form as a *post-Naksa affect*.[3] He proposes that its "illocutionary and performative force registers a radical demand for justice and dignity that is in excess of any tokenisms or other perfunctory acts" (23). Tracing the world historical situation following the Arab defeat of 1967, which has seen the Arab world immersed in colonial and postcolonial shame and a collective disposition toward melancholy, Gana argues that this melancholy is not only a psychoaffective response to the ever-deepening crisis of the postcolonial project of national liberation and social transformation but also "a desperate or despairing response to the unyielding hegemony of the joined-up forces of local despotism, apartheid Zionism, and global neoliberal imperialism" (2).

In his seminal work on Arab thought, George Tarabishi (1991) had already psychoanalytically characterized the Arab defeat of 1967 as an event resulting in a "psychic epidemic" that "poisoned" the affective map of the Arab psyche and had a strong "pathological effect on Arab subjectivity."[4] The 1967 defeat proved to be profoundly traumatic, not only due to its complete unexpectedness—occurring at a time when victory over Israel seemed assured—but also because of its humiliating decisiveness and subsequent ripple effects. These effects continue to resonate in contemporary Arab society, highlighting the stark realization that victory has become possibly unattainable and shielding oneself from aggression has become a daunting (if not impossible) task.

[3] The Naksa, or *setback*, historically refers to the June 1967 Six Day War, in which Israel defeated the Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and expanded its territory to the West Bank, Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Egyptian Sinai Desert (returned to Egypt following the Camp David Accords in 1978). It marks a critical turning point in the regional history for the Arab world, generating a long-lasting and profound sense of loss and humiliation.

[4] Tarabishi (1991, 10), quoted in Gana (2023, 6).

Tarabishi argues that the situation unfolded as if defeat forcefully ejected Arabs from the course of history at the very moment when they were embracing ideologies of Arab nationalism and witnessing the successes of anti-colonial movements. In this light, the defeat of 1967 marked the commencement of a decline that would be further solidified by subsequent events, including the Camp David Accords, the Oslo Accords, and culminating in the now-regular Israeli assaults on Gaza. This defeat was so definitive that it seemed to extinguish any hope of a "second round." What remains traumatic is not solely the defeat itself, but the enduring aftermath in which it continues to be experienced and relived as an inescapable destiny—an ongoing re-traumatization characterized by the persistent revisiting and reenactment of the closure of potential futures—if not, even worse, the closure of the very notion of a future. According to Tarabishi (1991), this defeat effectively halted the Arab modernization process, compelling Arab intellectuals to forsake the path of modernity (*nahda*) and instead seek refuge in Islamic tradition as a means to reclaim cultural identity and national sovereignty (12).

Gana (2023) agrees that Tarabishi has properly expressed the weight of the devastating outcome of the Naksa on the Arab psyche, but argues that Tarabishi incorrectly melancholized Arab contemporaneity by reducing its complexity to a "corrosive and quasi-pathological regression that constitutes only one sub-current of melancholy" (8). Gana proposes an additional dimension to Arab melancholy, differentiating between *melancholic commitment*, which refuses to accept loss, and a *melancholite mode* that accepts loss and mourns it. This melancholic commitment can lead to "melancholic acts" that give "pride of place to the nuanced and scrupulous reading of the subtleties of psychoaffective operation against the grain of pantheonization and melancholization" (9). Notwithstanding the recondite verbiage, the

distinction Gana offers points to an ethical act of transformation, a generative movement from *melancholizing* to *melancholicizing*, as a movement from the clinical and pathological to the analytical and political. Throughout his book, Gana regularly distinguishes between,

> [S]tatic, paralyzing, compulsive, impulsive or reactionary melancholizing patterns of behavior—all of which have combined to give melancholy a bad reputation [ranging] from its routine pathologization by its detractors [and] its instrumentalization by oppressive power systems [to] self-reflective, patient and productive as well as future-oriented melancholicizing practices operative in literary, cultural, and intellectual products or in grassroots sociopolitical movements of resistance to both authoritarianism and settler colonialism (30).

Minor Detail, I argue, performs this transformation from the *melancholizing political mood* of the post-2000 Palestinian occupied territories to one of *political melancholicizing* that highlights a traumatic Palestinian continuity from the Nakba of 1948 to 1967's Naksa and into the present day. This transformation makes the novel exceptional against a trend of affect-laden representations in post-Oslo Palestinian literature that depict Palestinians as grievable subjects in order to appeal to international communities. For example, Hoda El Shakry (2021) frames Oslo as site of political crisis whereby Palestinians lost faith in the political apparatus of the Palestinian Authority and the false promises of two-state diplomacy; a condition that "ushered in a mode of Palestinian self-representation inflected by human-rights discourse that oriented itself towards international communities moved by the spectacle of suffering" (672).

3.2 Melancholy Ethics in *Minor Detail*

Shibli's novel comprises a trauma narrative paradigm, both in form and content, and uses writing strategies like anti-linearity, compulsive repetition, resistance to closure, and the

figuration of specters to illustrate the (re)eruption of past trauma into the present day of the novel. Shibli deploys these strategies to express the intersectionality of Palestinian trauma, both personal and political, historical and deeply embedded in the contemporary reality of the novel's setting in the occupied West Bank.

In its first part, the novel centers on a nameless Israeli platoon commander during the summer of 1949, leading a platoon into the Negev desert in the south of the newly established state of Israel. The platoon's mission is to establish and protect the southern border with Egypt, preventing anyone from penetrating it while combing the southwest part of the Negev and "cleansing it of any remaining Arabs" (8). The story covers five days of the platoon's routine, from August 9 to 13, 1949:

> Before the patrol, he stopped by one of the huts, which he had taken as his quarters, and began moving his belongings from the entrance, where he had stacked them, to a corner of a room. Then he took a jerry can from the stack, and poured water from it into a small tin bowl. He took a towel from his kit bag, dipped in the water he had poured into the bowl, and used it to wipe the sweat from his face. He rinsed the towel, then took off his shirt and wiped his armpits. He put his shirt back on, buttoned it up, then rinsed the towel thoroughly and hung it on one of the old nails that remained in the wall. Then he took the bowl outside, poured the dirty water onto the sand, went back into the room, put the bowl in the corner with the rest of his belongings and left. (9)

Shibli records the commander's day-to-day actions, describing them as an observer with no approach to his thoughts or feelings, focusing on the specific details of his almost obsessive order and hygienic routines and without affording him any interiority. The soldiers are similarly described in the same dry, distanced, repetitive narration, recording their actions: following their commander's orders, performing a repetitive daily routine of rebuilding trenches, readying the drill area, eating their meals in the dining room, and going for patrols in the mornings and

evenings; the everydayness of this recalls Arendt's banality of evil (Arendt 1963). This routine is disrupted on the fourth day, when the Israeli patrol encounters an unarmed band of Arabs. The soldiers open fire, and in the silence afterward, the only sound the commander can hear is a girl's weeping and a dog; he closes:

> The dog barked louder, and [the girl] wailed louder, and the sounds merged as he pushed the girl's head into the ground, clamping his right hand over her mouth, and her sticky saliva, mucus, and tears stuck to his hands. Her smell invaded his nose, forcing him to avert his head. But a moment later, he turned back toward her, then brought his other hand to his mouth, raising his index finger to his lip, and stared directly into her eyes. (25)

It is this image of silencing that the narrator in the second part tries to fight off and the voice of the Arab girl that the narrator seeks to bring to life.

3.3 "Normal" Life

Part Two of *Minor Detail* begins sixty years after the "event," during the second Palestinian intifada period in the West Bank. Narrated in the first person, the story follows a nameless Palestinian woman living in the city of Ramallah. The narrator, who has just moved to a new house and found a new job, describes her obsessive cleaning routine.

> I had spent the whole day arranging and cleaning the house; I dusted the furniture, swept the floor, and rewashed the bedsheets and towels and most of the dishes, even though, in principle, the house was clean before I began cleaning it so thoroughly; the landlord told me he had brought in woman especially […] On the whole, the house is good and the job is good and my colleagues are nice. But none of this was enough to help me overcome the anxiety and fear that the dog's endless howling awakened in me that night, not even a little (53).

This is an illusion of a "normal" life, with a good house and a good job in Ramallah. The dog, echoing the Bedouin band's dog—the only non-Israeli to witness what happens to the girl—

brings back the traumatic past and instills an anxiety and (disabling) melancholizing fear associated with the contemporary "everyday" of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. This reality includes checkpoints, military raids, and closures. The narrator describes her normal workday routine, including an encounter with a military vehicle blocking the street; "but since there was nothing out of ordinary in that" (56), she keeps walking in the other direction toward her new job, witnessing the army besieging a building nearby; "nothing struck me as unusual about this either" (57).

She continues to walk to her office, when she encounters two soldiers at the entrance of the building. One of the soldiers points his gun at her, but, here too, she finds nothing in "the situation to be unusual" (57); she simply hides behind a tree, jumps over a wall, and enters the building by a different entrance. Once finally seated at her desk, she learns from one of her colleagues that the army had informed residents in the area they would be bombing some neighboring buildings where three young men had supposedly barricaded themselves; for that reason, windows should be opened to prevent them from shattering from the explosive concussions.

Through all of this, nothing disturbs the narrator's routine until the dust from the bombing covers her desk; she reports, "I absolutely cannot stand dust, especially that kind, with its big grains that make a shuddersome sound when dusty papers rub against each other, or when one marks on them with a pen" (58). Shibli trusts her reader to be struck by how threats and (military) violence have been normalized. But she also draws uncanny parallels and differences—specifically between the obsessive cleanliness of the nameless Israeli commander and nameless narrator, and the routine character of everyday (military) operators and daily life.

But these parallels contain differences due to the change of perspective (from an Israeli to Palestinian center-of-focus). Who the target is of the normalized everyday violence is the most obvious of these distinctions, but the namelessness of the commander and the woman, and especially their obsessiveness about cleanliness are haunting. We can understand both character's desire for order and cleanliness as a response to the imminent chaos and violence that marks their everyday existence, but what constitute that chaos and disorder (ongoing military actions or a presence of Bedouins) differ radically.

In her description of the post second Intifada reality in the West Bank, Shibli joins historians and writers who understand the *Nakba* as an ongoing and recurring traumatic event that repeatedly disrupts the present (Elbaz 2023, 609), the *al-nakba al-mustamirra* (the ongoing catastrophe). Sitting in front of her new apartment drinking coffee and reading the newspaper, the narrator reads an article about the "event." Despite her generalized inurement to normalized violence, a minor detail haunts her:

> To a certain extent, the only unusual thing about this killing, which came as the final act of a gang rape, was that it happened on a morning that would coincide, exactly twenty-five years later, with the morning that I was born. That is it. Furthermore, one cannot rule out the possibility of a connection between the two events, or the existence of a hidden link, as one sometimes finds with plants, for instance, like when a clutch of grass is pulled out by the roots, and you think you've got rid of it entirely, only for grass of the exact same species to grow back in the same spot a quarter of a century later (61).

Other minor details connect the Bedouin girl and the narrator, like clutches of grass that reappear twenty-five years after being pulled up by its roots. When the platoon's commander walks to the girl, "[h]is gaze rested on a clutch of dry grass lying by the mouth of one camel; it had been ripped up by the roots, which still held suspended grains of sand" (25). The narrator

tries to let go of the idea because, "sometimes, it's inevitable for the past to be forgotten, especially if the present is no less horrific" (61). But the barks of the dogs that keep awaking her at dawn and that minor detail of her birthday makes her feel it will stay with her forever; "there may in fact be nothing more important than this little detail, if one wants to arrive at the complete truth, which by leaving out the girl's story, the article does not reveal" (61).

To arrive at the truth, the narrator decides to visit the scene of the crime in the Negev. This is a risky journey considering the fact that Ramallah is under siege and the narrator, who does not carry the right permits to allow her to exit the occupied city, borrows an ID from a colleague who lives in Jerusalem—thus exiting the West Bank on an illegal spatial and temporal journey into both Israel and the past. The narrator describes the fragmented post-Oslo Palestinian space, divided per the Oslo accords by walls, barriers and checkpoints into Areas A,B,C and D.[5] She relates these divisions to different methods of Israeli control of the Palestinian territories:

> I take the maps I brought with me out of my bag and spread them over the passenger seat and across the steering wheel. Among these maps are those produced by centers of research and political studies, which show the borders of the four Areas, the path of the wall, the construction of settlements, and checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza. Another map shows Palestine as it was until the year 1948, and another one, given to me by the rental car company and produced by the Israeli ministry of tourism, shows streets and residential areas according to the Israeli government. With shaking fingers, I try to determine my current location on that map. I haven't gone far. (70)

At first, the narrator visits an Israeli military museum in Tel-Aviv, but very soon she realizes that, "[o]fficial museums like this really have no valuable information to offer me, not even small details that could help me retell the girl's story." This might prompt a reader's

[5] It is likely accidental, but still haunting, that these divisions into capital letters are directly cited in the article by Lavie and Gorali (2003): "The commander decided on the order [of the girl's sexual assault]: Squad A on day one, Squad B on day two and Squad C on day three."

questions about what constitutes an effective archive of information or knowledge about such events. It is clear that *Minor Detail*, as a work of literature, offers itself as one such alternative. But it can also be emphasized here that the museum is tagged with the adjective *official*. This suggests the possibility that *unofficial* museums might be sources of such archival memory; such unofficial archives of trauma can come from community memory, unpublished memoirs, family stories, personal information (Cvetkovich 2003; Jones 2018), if sometimes invisible or rendered inaccessible. But archives can be relatively public as well. Despite being wrapped in a number of narrative buffers, beyond the scope of this dissertation, the article by Lavie and Gorali (2003) becomes a site where "valuable information" can be found "that could help … retell the girl's story."

Like the soldiers in the first part of the novel, the narrator opens her maps to find her next destination, this time to the south, to the Negev, the scene of the crime, where a Kibbutz has been established. Her first stop is the Kibbutz museum and archive. She is welcomed by a "lovely old member" of the Kibbutz community who is in charge of the museum and archive. He hospitably opens the doors of the small, modest building to his guest, who introduces herself as a researcher. She asks him to tell her about the history of the area as she flips through photos and documents. The man, who had immigrated from Australia in the fifties, recites to her the heroic history of the Kibbutz, how a small group of Jewish fighters fought fiercely against the greater, in numbers and equipment, Egyptian armies to push the Arab armies back. He tells the story, "in a voice so calm and clear, so untouched by stuttering, stammering, or rambling, that it feels as if he smoothly unraveling a delicate thread one that cannot easily be cut" (84). When he finishes his speech, the narrator asks him about the Kibbutz relationship with the neighboring Bedouins:

"excellent, he replies" (87). When she continues her questioning about clashes that led to a killing of a Bedouin man or woman, the Kibbutz member remembers only one incident: while volunteering in the military unit formed after the end of the war, during one a patrol, they found the body of a young Bedouin girl in nearby well; "[he] explained to me that when Arabs are suspicious about a girl's behavior, they kill her and throw her body in a well. Such a shame, he adds, that they have such customs" (87).

Like in the official museum in Tel-Aviv, the narrator gains no valuable (or only minor) details from the testimony of the old Kibbutz member and his archive. Ella Elbaz's (2023) reading of the novel suggests that "in response to the impossibility of producing [a] verifiable history that includes the experience of the victim … Shibli constructs a repository of images that shifts attention to the unverifiable narrative of both perpetrator and victim, one that prioritizes description over plot" (608). That is, *Minor Detail* rejects or avoids the idea that that truth can be found in archives or oral testimonies; rather, by fictionalizing history, an alternative archive emerges that "houses details that would (a) account for the sensory experience of the past; (b) overturn the hierarchy between major and minor details of historical events; and (c) represent the past as accessible via present experiences" (Elbaz 2023, 609). Drawing of attention to making the past accessible in the present is abundantly apt, given the manifest and deliberate parallels already noted above that Shibli provides between "then" and "now." However, the deprecation of "plot" in the service of "description" brackets out the melacholicizing mood in Shibli's novel. Plot is indispensable to the novel, even if it finally means factually nothing more than the movement from one word to the next. In that sense, description is plot, and Shibli's method is pointedly and very deliberately at a remove because, in a very genuine sense, the terrible quality

of the events speak for themselves. When the Kibbutz member laments the unfortunate practices of Arabs, no emphasis or indicator is needed to drive home the point—a point no less reflected and stated outright in the article by Lavie and Gorali (2003). Shibli employs an explicitly paratactic method, trusting the material to make its inference to the reader without having to state it expressly. Thus, even at the level of sheer juxtaposition, movements of plot (in the narrator, in the reader) occur.

The narrator learns from the Kibbutz member that, following the war of independence, a decision had been made to move the settlement twenty-five kilometers north of the original location for security reasons; in other words, she is currently not near the site where the crime occurred. Consequently, she drives closer to the crime scene, and as she does so, Shibli draws more and more parallels between herself and the girl. As the narrator arrives at what seems to be an abandoned military camp, she notices a hose running from one tree to the next, "coiled in equal-sized rings around each trunk" (90). In part one, the soldiers are directed to wash the girl. In the novel, a soldier brings the commander a hose, "wrapped around his arm in equal-sized rings" (29):

> Then staring directly into her eyes, [the commander] shouted at her, ordering her to pick up the soap, and immediately the soldiers' laughing and mutterings fell silent, leaving only the dog's panting, which chafed against the air. Slowly, the girl reached her hand toward the soap and picked it up. Water trickled down her body. She straightened slightly and began moving the soap in circles over her head, then her chest, which was soon covered with fine layer of white suds, concealing for a moment, the brown of her skin. (30)

When the commander is done washing the girl—the detail that the scent of the girl repels him so that he orders her bathed is included in (Lavie and Gorali 2003)—he orders his medic to sterilize and cut her hair, in order to prevent lice from spreading in the camp. The medic

approaches the girl with a jerry can filled with gasoline and begins pouring it over the girl's hair. In parallel, after visiting the crime scene, the narrator stops at a gas station to fill her almost empty tank. Being the first time she's filling gas, "and being so clumsy, I spill some gasoline on my hands and pants" (92). The smell of the gasoline sticks to the narrator just as it did to the girl.

Despite her visit to the crime scene also not revealing any significant details, the narrator is reluctant to leave the area and drives in circles until she decides to stay the night; "maybe if I stay here longer I'll discover something, or find a thread that could lead me to new kind of picture of what the girl endured" (91). The narrator returns to the Kibbutz, asks around, and finds a guesthouse. Just as the girl's only night at the camp is spent in a hut, the narrator rents a hut in Nirim. Trying to get of the gasoline odor, the narrator takes a long shower; "I cover my skin with a thick layer of soap suds, trying to remove the smell of gasoline and the sweat and dust, which have collected on my body over the course of the day" (94). Echoing the forced showering and sterilizing of the girl, the narrator describes a lengthy shower resembling the Muslim ritual of washing and cleansing the body before burial. When she finally decides to lie down on a hammock at the entrance of the hut, she suddenly glimpses:

> a dark black mass walking across the grass, heading toward me, and then it stops in front of the hammock. It's a dog. Immediately its presence drives fear into me. I repeatedly try to expel the dog, but it stands there motionless, while my fear intensifies, compelling me, in the end, to get off the hammock and return to the hut. Before I go inside, I look back at the dog. But there is no sign of it. It vanished completely. (94)

While dogs' barks have haunted the narrator throughout the novel, awakening her at night, it is only in Nirim that she finally encounters first the shadow and then the physical presence of a dog, now silent. This dog, of course, recalls the dog that witnessed the girl's fate,

the only "voice" protesting the crimes with his barking. But now, the dog is silent—paratactically, the same silence that falls over the digging of the girl's grave:

> The digging continued in in almost perfect silence, aside from the shovel's scraping as it lifted and tossed the sand, together with the sounds of the soldiers back in the camp, which arrived from over the hills as vague murmuring, the distance having dispelled the clarity of their voices. Suddenly a sharp scream tore through the air. The girl was wailing as she ran away, then she fell to the sand before the sound of the gunshot was heard. Silence prevailing again (50).

3.4 The Melancholy Ethic

After spending the night in a hut in a Kibbutz neighboring Gaza—listening to the sounds of the shelling, though from a distance, unlike the bombing she is familiar with in Ramallah—the sounds are not as strong or as unsettling to the narrator; rather, they are deep, heavy sounds. Consumed by anxiety and horror, the narrator wakes up to find that the smell of gasoline did not dissipate from her clothes. She leaves the hut and heads to the site of the crime again, "because I don't know where else to go" (96-97). Describing herself as someone who does not understand the meaning of borders, she also acknowledges that "[o]ne must pay attention to them, to navigate them, which ultimately protects everyone from perilous consequences" (54). Nevertheless, she does not reckon herself among the few who can navigate borders masterfully:

> as soon as I see a border, I either race toward it and leap over, or cross it stealthily, with a step. Neither of these two behaviors is conscious, or rooted in a premeditated desire to resist borders; it's more like sheer stupidity. To be quite honest, once I cross a border, I fall into a deep pit of anxiety. It's a matter, simply put, of clumsiness. (54)

Indeed, she has jumped fences on her way to work to avoid soldiers, "illegally" crossed checkpoints blocking the West Bank, ventured onto former military encampments, and ignored (on her last day) a sign warning that she is entering a military zone. Spotted by a group of

soldiers, "one of them shouts in my direction, ordering me to stop where I am, and the others raise their guns at me" (104-105). Her self-reflections then are decidedly dissociative:

> I must be overreacting. Yes, just like usual. My chewing gum. Where is it? I have to calm down. I reach my hand toward my pocket, for a pack of chewing gum.
>
> And suddenly, something like a sharp flame pierces my hand, then my chest, followed by the distant sound of gunshots. (105)

The word *gunshots* ends Shibli's novel, killing her narrator. This raises questions about who tells the story of both the girl and the narrator. The latter loses her life in a desperate attempt to bring to life the experience and the silenced pain of the girl. By having her narrator killed in the same place and presumably much in the same way that the girl was killed, Shibli inextricably and uncannily discloses the intertwining of a traumatic Palestinian past and present, the *al-nakba al-mustamirra* (the ongoing catastrophe). The impact on the reader is strong for the sheer reason that the "social contract" between authors and readers of first-person narration rarely include the narrator's death.

Revisiting the development of her character clarifies this situation. More than once, the narrator reveals that she is not a "fan" of her life or life in general. Describing her insistence on getting to work despite the military operations, she explains that others might mistakenly think that her,

> dedication to work reflects a desire to cling to life, or a love of life despite the occupation's attempts to destroy it, or the insistence that we have on this earth what makes life worth living … It's rather that I am unable to evaluate situations rationally, and I don't know what should or should not be done. (58)

Furthermore, before leaving Ramallah on her journey to try to uncover the truth of the girl's experience, the narrator wonders if her obsession over the minor detail is rooted in narcissism:

> It's completely plausible, though, for this type of narcissism to exist in someone. It's an innate tendency, one might say, toward a belief in the uniqueness of the self, toward regarding the life one leads so highly that one cannot but love life and everything about it. But since I do not love my life in particular, nor life in general, and at present any efforts on my parts are solely channeled toward staying alive, I doubt that a diagnosis of narcissism would fully apply to me. (59)

The melancholy tone of this passage—"I do not love my life in particular, nor life in general"—does not lead to inaction but action, a quest. Her impersonal descriptions imply this is not a personal matter after all (not a psychological self-involvement or narcissism), such that an inference one could draw is that it is political. Nevertheless, it is clear that she is "bracketing" this aspect out of the narration. In fact, just as the mood in *Tishrin* seems to manifest symptomatically and unconsciously in Wahid's blackouts, especially during his fraught scene with Idit, the melancholicizing mood of *Minor Detail* arguably moves the narrator to this public (political) act, even if she is not wholly aware of it.

The narrator admits in advance that she cannot find the truth; in fact, "there's absolutely no point in my feeling responsible for [the girl], feeling like she's nobody and will forever remain a nobody [who] nobody will hear" (65). Yet she cannot discount the idea that the girl's "death belongs to me, or that it should extend into my life, or that it should be my duty to retell her story" (65). The narrator has received a classic call to action from a non-personal source, such that her journey to the site of the crime—and especially to the time of the on-going catastrophe—suggests that the narrator's concerns are factual, non-coincidental, and that the girl's death in a real sense "belongs" to her. Answering that call, she leaves her normalized reality in Ramallah.

Drawing from Gana's (2023) approach could suggest that the narrator's arc, ending in her death, illustrates the transformation of pathological, disabling melancholizing into an active, political, ethical and productive melancholicizing act—one that refuses the verdict of the Palestinian condition of defeat (past and present), even when that means knowingly or instinctively disregarding warnings like checkpoints, borders, and military perimeters. As such, the narrator's actions constitute a "micronarrative of resistance" (Gana 2023, 3), which Gana frames as part of a history of suicide as an act of protest in the Arab world (and elsewhere), i.e., "embodiments of graphic materialization of a morbid affective disposition that is equally aggravated and revolted by domestic as much as by foreign acts of aggression and shaming" (3).

While this places agency for the narrator's death in her own hands and makes it a matter of ethical choice, particularly as an ethical melancholicizing as adduced by Gana (2023), the text also challenges this conclusion. Specifically, the parallels between the narrator and both the girl and the Israeli commander render the "agency" at work in the narrator's death even less certain. In its most immediate and direct parallels between the narrator and the girl, there is little question of suicide in the normal sense. Both in *Minor Detail* and in the article by Lavie and Gorali (2003), the girl is reported as shot after running; in other words, after she refuses to stay where she is told, much as the narrator describes herself. One could say of the historical girl that she recognized her hopeless situation and took a melancholicizing (productive) stance by forcing her murderers to realize what they were doing (Lavie and Gorali 2003).

The parallels between the Israeli commander and the narrator place further scare-quotes around the narrator's act as a suicide, even a melancholicizing one. Shibli draws abundant and unmistakable parallels. Like the commander, the narrator is obsessed with cleaning and

organizing her room and furniture; like him, she hears the barking dog and feels a constant need to calm herself and to regulate her breathing. While the officer is obsessed with hygiene, cleaning himself, and hunts for invisible spiders in his tent (22, 26, 39,48), the narrator needlessly cleans her house—"even though, in principle, the house was clean before [she] began cleaning it thoroughly" (53)—and perceives or imagines "what appears to be a spider begins spinning its threads around [her]" (64) as she leaves Ramallah; and again, "a torn spiderweb dances in front of my eyes" (72). Later, the narrator is "trembling nervously" (88) and "shivers grip [her] body again" (77, also 75, 79)—like the officer, who "trembles nervously" with a "violent shiver" (14, 17, 18, 23, 33, 41, 42).

In this sense, Elbaz (2023) reads these repetitive descriptions between the girl, the narrator, and the commander as a crucial narrative strategy that projects the novel as an alternative archive:

> The novel classifies all participants of the event, not privileging one component and neglecting another; it is a totalizing archive that documents all details. Furthermore, these repetitions shape the event as a continuum rather than an isolated incident; the present holds traces of the past that cannot be uprooted, and the past manifests itself in the sensory world of the present. (614).

While the similarity of the narrator with the girl ends in a (clear) shared fate, that of the killing, I argue that the narrator's death is tied also to the (always haunting fear of the) death of the Israeli commander.

3.5 Conclusion

Gana (2023) draws on Frantz Fanon to establish a nexus between melancholia and militancy. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon overturns Freud's conception of pathological and self-destructive melancholia. He points out how colonial French psychiatrists in Algeria

> were accustomed when dealing with a patient subject to melancholia to fear that he would commit suicide. Now the melancholic Algerian takes to killing. The illness of the moral consciousness, which is always accompanied by auto-accusation and auto-destructive tendencies, took on in the case of Algerians hetero-destructive forms. The melancholic Algerian does not commit suicide. He kills" (298-9).

This shift can be read as a transformation from a disabling and inwardly projected melancholizing to an agentic (not necessarily ethical) melancholicizing directed outward an act. Besides using the will to hygiene and control as symptomatic, Shibli digs under the surface despite the distance of the narration. She records—in an original detail not drawn from Lavie and Gorali (2003)—how the commander is bitten by a spider while asleep in his hut, the bite causing an injury that progressively worsens each day, posing a threat to the commander's health:

> He brought the lantern close to his thigh, where a slight burning sensation was starting to spread. Under the light, two small red dots appeared. It seemed the creature had been faster than he was, and bit him before he had cast it away (12). A slight swelling had now formed around the two dots, which had turned black and were pulsating with pain (13). His legs were the last thing he cleaned, avoiding the area around the bite, which had grown redder and more swollen […] intense cramps had begun gripping his back and shoulders […] his stomach ache had grown worse (14). He tried to draw a slow breath, but his throat abruptly released a cough and a belch, jerking his head down, and he began vomiting […] The cramps had settled into every part of his body (18,19).

Fatima Aamir (2022) argues that Shibli's "dry" and precise narration creates an alienating distance between the commander and the reader by not allowing access to his interiority.

However, like almost every minor detail in the novel, an implied interiority can be inferred in the descriptions, much as the novel achieves its effects in the first part. Moreover, this almost over-attentive degree of scrutiny mimics the commander's routine, as he surveys the girl and places his finger over his lips to silence her. This does not mean that Shibli's cinematic depiction of the commander's suffering might elicit a (voluntary or involuntary) empathy for him, which finds its limit or exhaustion in the maltreatment and execution of the girl. For the spider's poison is still there, in his blood—blood as both inherited past and living present. It threatens his being no matter what he does to cover it with bandages, clothes and try to heal it with medication. In this way, it resembles the involuntary fixation in the narrator, which ultimately results in her death. Whether through suicide or murder or something else, the situations in the novel depict a mutually interlocking violent trauma and traumatic violence that confrontation across borders and boundaries generates.

After burying the girl in the desert, the commander returns to the camp and reflects, after his evening's ablutions, as he lies in his bed: "He had nearly dozed off when his eyes, gazing dimly at the ceiling, caught some movements on his chest, and he jumped and brushed at it, but it was only a button on his shirt that had shifted with his breathing" (52). The button, as a minor detail, is not a spider, is not another "event," but the narration suggests that he will be haunted (if never visibly in public). In this way, the several traumas of the past (experienced and projected onto others) are always just beneath the surface, like the body of the girl, present in different modes and varying ways and threatening to (re)irrupt at any moment.

Although Shibli's narrator "fails" in several ways to uncover the girl's experience and make her silenced voice heard, Shibli's act of writing the novel constitutes the (ethical)

melancholicizing act that Gana (2023) advocates. This realization ultimately answers the question of who narrates the novel pursuant to the death of the narrator, even as the first-person narration is put to death. Most centrally, Shibli's poetics seems committed to offering an alternative archive to official museums, Israeli journalist reports, and unofficial and informal archives of physical memories and memoirs. In the girl's instinctive act of running away, in the woman's act of transgressing boundaries, we can see the act of survival, transgression, and transformation of post-Oslo melancholizing into an ethical melancholicizing that productively adapts the current mood, even now.

Chapter 4:

Memory and Hope

When politics—whether local, Arab, or international—provide no inspiration and no hope for a better future for Palestinians, it leans on memory, sometimes nostalgia. Some people go as far back as the days of the Prophet Muhammad. Others, like me, make do with remembering Grandmother's stories and the photographs in the book with the brown cover, where Palestine before the diaspora looked so green. Especially in black-and-white.

Kay la nansa ("lest we forget") is a slogan that adorns many Palestinian books, drawings, protest signs, graffiti and headlines. It is one of the central Palestinian national edicts: *do not forget Palestine*, the Nakba, where we came from, what happened to us, where we belong. Do not forget that we are Palestinians. In Israel, where the national mingles with the religious, the liturgical term *Yizkor* ("He shall remember") is the basis of the imperative: *remember*. In other words, while Israel enacts an affirmative command (to remember), the Palestinian counterpart is negative: *do not forget*. Israel's religious-national ethos includes numerous memorial days commemorating destruction, persecution, redemption, the Holocaust, fallen soldiers, and the state's independence. The Palestinian directive, however, is phrased as a negative because it is a response to Israel's dictate and to its religious and national memorial days, which skip from ancient to modern, from religious history and the Tanakh to the modern political nation-state, casting into oblivion the Palestinians it removed along the way. Part of the Israeli *remember* entails a forced forgetting of Palestinians. And so, whereas Israelis are instructed *to remember*, we Palestinians are commanded *to not forget*.

I first saw the motto *kay la nansa* in a book with a brown cover, which my father brought home one day and tossed on a bookshelf without saying a word. It took me a while to understand that this was my parents' way of teaching us about issues they felt uncomfortable discussing. It was not unlike the way *The Encyclopedia of the Body* had appeared on a shelf one day, leading my older brother and me to gape at it—especially the section on reproductive organs. The title of this new book with the brown cover was *Qabl al-shatat.* I understood the first word, *qabl* ("before"), but the second word, *shatat*, confused me. We usually used it to describe a person who was scatter-brained or who'd lost his mind. I did not yet know that *shatat* was the Arabic term for the Palestinian diaspora. As a citizen of the State of Israel, I'm not sure that I even understood what it meant to be Palestinian.

The picture was Walid Khalidi's (1984) *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948*. My interest in the photographs collected by the author quickly and decisively surpassed my curiosity about reproductive organs. I doubt there was any other book I flipped through so frequently and for so many years. I studied those black-and-white photos as if I were witnessing a magic trick, examining every detail. And I tried to assemble them into a single mental image of the history of a nation to which, as I began to deduce, I belonged. The pictures showed villages that no longer existed, Arab cities that looked clean and well-maintained. There was Yafa—with its beautiful port, the clock tower, the cafés, even a magnificent cinema—looking nowhere near as impoverished and dirty as the Yafa I knew in the 1980s. Grandma's descriptions of old Yafa were true, then, and so was her story about dressing up as a man so that she could go to the movies with Grandpa, occasion on which she saw city women proudly dressed in modern urban clothing. The book also had pictures of Beisan (today

Beit She'an in Hebrew), Safed (now Tzfat), Lake Tabriya (the Sea of Galilee, Tveria in Hebrew) and a nearby city with fishermen with nets in their boats. So it was all true. It was all real. There were pictures to prove it. But where was Tira, the village where I was born? Why were there no pictures of Tira before 1948? Why were my grandparents not documented in this book? At home, we had no pictures from before '48. There was just the one portrait of Grandfather, who was killed in the war. It showed his neck and head, like a passport photo, a blank expression on his face. Grandma swore it was him, but my father, who was not even a year old when his father was killed, used to tease her, "How can I be sure it's really Father? You could show me any picture and claim it was him!"

When I was little, all I knew about Palestine was that it was the answer to a frequent clue in the weekly crossword puzzle in *Al-Itihad*, the newsletter of the Communist Party in Israel. The word appeared sometimes across and sometimes down, but the clue was always "*dawla atida*," which my father explained referred to "Palestine." I did not understand the Arabic word *atida*, but, knowing some Hebrew, I assumed it must be the same as the Hebrew *atid* ("future"), and that the phrase must therefore mean "future state"—a sort of fantasy country or science fiction, like the alien planets in *Star Trek*.

At school, I never heard the word "Palestine." After 1948, the education of the Palestinians who had remained on their land was administered by Israel's Ministry of Education. The primary criterion for hiring anyone—from principals to teachers, from supervisors to janitors—was "loyalty" to the State of Israel. This was supposed to guarantee that teachers would not diverge from the textbooks, written for us in Arabic by Israelis. Rogue educators suspected of belonging to political organizations that opposed Israeli policies were dismissed.

Teachers suspected of deviating from the Ministry of Education's dictates were replaced with more loyal ones, whether they'd gone to college or not, had obtained a teaching certificate or not, or had even graduated from high school.

At my Arab-Israeli school, we sang about our love of the homeland, yet we did not know where it was. We were forced to sing songs praising the State of Israel, though we did not understand that this was the state we were honoring. "Homeland" was a vague notion that held no meaning for me as a child. Singing was simply another task I had to perform in order to get an A in both social studies and music. On Independence Day, Israeli flags were draped from the school rooftop, and we had to sing nationalist songs and be happy. And we *were* happy, because if celebrating the homeland meant we got a day off school, then long live the homeland, whatever that meant.

What's certain is that we were not taught any of the stories about war that my grandmother used to tell me. She did not know what Zionism was and never used the word. She did not know what nationalism was, though she did know how to mangle the Arabic word *ihtilaal*—occupation. She spoke about Jews, about our village, about Arabs, and about land. "There is nothing more terrible than war" was the standard opening line for her stories and the closing line, too. "May God keep you away from war and the horrors of war, my boy." And war, as Grandmother understood it, referred mostly to the Jewish militia forces' attacks against her village of Tira. She was a young woman in her twenties at the time, with four daughters and one son—my father, who was born in May of 1947.

In that terrible war, the bullets whistling past became an integral part of the family's routine, occasionally invading their house. When the fighting became intolerable, my

grandmother traveled eastward with the other women and children, seeking refuge in the hilly outskirts of Tulkarm. The men stayed behind to protect the village and fight back, and they did so heroically. Many were killed, and many of them also killed others. In Grandmother's stories, Tira's fighters were brave heroes with barely any weapons, as ammunition was hard to come by; there were days when each fighter was only supplied with two bullets. And there were days when bombardments fell from the sky like rain, and Grandmother—trying to reach the hills with her children—would lie down on top of her baby when the whistling sounds got too close, "and I knew that if a mortar shell landed, there'd be nothing left of me or the baby." Her husband, the Grandfather from the picture on the wall, was killed in one of the battles over Tira, leaving her widowed with five small children. "And we were the lucky ones," Grandmother explained, because in Tira, unlike so many other villages, the houses were not destroyed and the villagers were not doomed to become homeless, defenseless refugees. She attributed this outcome to Tira men's armed resistance, but my father said, "with all due respect to the fighters and their heroism," Tira's residents weren't deported because they signed a ceasefire agreement before the Jews could enter the village. If they had entered, as they were about to do, they would have slaughtered everyone, precisely because the villagers fought back. The cemetery in the neighboring town of Tel Mond is full of Jewish soldiers whose gravestones read: "Fell in the battle to conquer Tira." After the ceasefire, Tira became part of the newly established Jewish state, and my grandmother and her children were granted citizenship and became Israelis. Tulkarm, a city in walking distance from Tira and whose hills had offered refuge from the battles, became part of the West Bank, in Jordan: an enemy state that for twenty years we were not permitted to enter.

Al-Awda (return) has always been and still is the Palestinian dream, the most revered national aspiration. More than half of the Palestinians who lived in Mandatory Palestine lost their homes and lands and became refugees as a result of the establishment of the state of Israel. Those few, like my grandmother and her children, who remained in their villages and became part of Israel in 1948, were stunned to find themselves cut off from their people, their culture, and their language, with their lands subjected to Israeli seizure laws, and subsisting as second-class-citizens in a Jewish state. In 1967, Israel achieved full control of the remaining areas of historical Palestine when it occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There, some five million Palestinians live today under an Israeli occupation that denies their civil rights, restricts their freedom of movement, and continues its policy of land grabs and deportations, destroying villages in order to build settlements and roads for the exclusive use of the country's Jewish citizens.

The 700,000 Palestinians who were uprooted from their homes in 1948 have grown into a population of almost six million refugees (roughly half of the estimated worldwide Palestinian population today), scattered among refugee camps in the Middle East and elsewhere. Most of the Palestinians living in the occupied territories and in Arab states (with the exception of Jordan, which granted them citizenship) lack passports or a clear legal status in their countries of residence, where they are perceived as unwanted foreign transplants.

Many of those who'd fled in 1948 became refugees for the second or third time in later conflicts: the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the armed conflict known as Black September between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Jordanian forces in the early 1970s (which resulted in the deportation of PLO activists and other Palestinians from

Jordan), the civil war in Lebanon that began in 1975, or the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which led to further expulsions, this time to Tunisia. The exiles continued during the first Gulf War, when most Palestinians in Kuwait and the Gulf States were forced to leave because of Yasser Arafat's support of Saddam Hussein. In the past decade, Palestinians have once again had to seek refuge, following the civil wars in Iraq, Libya, and, worst of all, Syria.

It can be said that the figure of "the wandering Jew" has been replaced by that of "the wandering Palestinian." The stateless Jewish refugees, whose tragic plight Hannah Arendt depicted so movingly, have been supplanted by the stateless Palestinians, who similarly bear witness to the fact that a person without citizenship is a person without protection or recourse to justice. Palestinian-Israeli history has proved, ironically, that the experience of the anguish of being a refugee may not ensure sensitivity to the suffering of other refugees—not even among those who are the primary cause of the suffering. In *Crowds and Power* (1961), Nobel Prize-winning Jewish author Elias Canetti describes the personality of a "survivor" as someone who revisits their suffering upon others in response to their own. In that framework, even those who have themselves been victims fail to develop (or suppress) any special compassion; those who are responding to suffering and persecution cannot expected to subsequently pursue justice for others.

While every son or daughter of a Jewish mother may immigrate to Israel and become a naturalized Israeli citizen overnight, Palestinian refugees and their descendants are not entitled to return to their homeland, due to Israeli laws and regulations that violate international law and repeated UN resolutions. Most Palestinian refugees cannot even visit Palestine as tourists, including those who hold European or U.S. passports, except in exceptional cases. Essentially,

the only Palestinians who can exit and enter Israel are citizens of Israel, like myself. It is this rare privilege that has enabled my *voluntary* exile, one I can choose to end whenever I wish and return to inner exile in my homeland.

Like other Palestinian refugees and exiles, I, too, would like to return to the pre-Nakba Palestine that is represented in collective Palestinian memory as a lost paradise. I would love to go back to the Palestine my grandmother used to tell me about: the fields, the cattle, the harvests, the grapes and figs, the olive trees, and the lemon tree that—in Palestinian lore—stood outside every house. In this idyllic picture of Palestine, there is no poverty, no drought, no landowners exploiting farmers, no masters lording over the commoners.

I, too, would like to return to Palestine as it was depicted in the book with the brown cover, with its pictures of farmers working their fields. Perhaps the fields belonged to Arab or Ottoman landlords, who were later replaced by Jewish ones. It doesn't really matter, because you can see in the photographs that they were happy; picking oranges that shimmered even in black-and-white and packing them into wooden crates stamped with the word *Jaffa* in English. In the photographs of city-dwellers in places like al-Quds (Jerusalem), Bethlehem, and Haifa, you can see school children in uniforms, including girls with no head-coverings. Those must be the brazen urban women Grandmother had seen when she had disguised herself as a man. Significantly, the book shows Palestinian women, from before the Israeli occupation, going to school and caring for patients in clinics. The Palestine of this book was modernizing, with women getting their first taste of freedom. That development, much like Palestinian land—as the book would have it—was yet another path of progress taken from Palestinians.

But this image of a Palestine dripping with figs and pomegranates grows blurry in the consciousness of Palestinian refugees, and not only because most Palestinian villages were eradicated. What was left was populated by millions of Jews who took over Arab lands, Judaized the sites, and Hebraized the names of streets, orchards, rivers, flora, and fauna.

That picture has blurred because of the loss of a political vision and the death of a popular struggle for emancipation, a struggle that peaked in 1987, when the First Intifada erupted as an all-out national uprising. The Oslo Accords of the 1990s, which purported to offer an end to the occupation and to Palestinian suffering, ironically did more than any other factor to harm the Palestinian dream of *al-Awda*. The PLO leadership, which had for decades represented the Palestinian nation and molded its national consciousness, ultimately let down the refugees when it agreed to establish limited authority in a small area of the West Bank and Gaza, with jurisdiction primarily over policing and supervising domestic Palestinian affairs.

The PLO leadership claimed to represent all Palestinians around the world, with the refugees first and foremost, but it left them to their own devices in the refugee camps and offered little more than lip service to their rights. The refugees were not partners to the hastily signed agreement designed mainly to bolster the PLO itself as it tried to recover from the mass deportations of its members from Lebanon to Tunisia. Far away from Palestine, the PLO became essentially a bureaucratic organization. Its political and financial nadir came in the early 1990s, a phenomenon related to the Arab world's more general political decline because of creeping neoliberal values, on the one hand, and Islamist movements becoming virtually the only opposition to the Arab dictatorships that enjoy Western patronage, on the other.

For all that—and even if Palestine is not a paradise frozen in time in 1948, waiting for the refugees to reclaim their homes, villages, and fields—what alternative do they have to the dream of returning? This is especially true when it comes to the refugees living in impoverished, dilapidated, overcrowded camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza. "The elderly will die, and the young will forget," said David Ben-Gurion, who orchestrated the establishment of the Israeli state and the banishment of Palestinians from their land. True, the elderly will die—but the young cannot afford to forget. How can a young refugee forget his homeland if he lives with constant reminders that he is foreign, unwanted, even despised?

How can a Palestinian in Gaza or the West Bank, in the Galilee or the Negev, ever forget the Nakba, which has never really stopped? How can the deportations be forgotten, when Palestinians are still removed from their homes so that Jewish settlers can move in? How can the expropriation of lands be forgotten when Israel, using its own legislation as justification, continues to destroy houses, trample villages and Bedouin tribal lands, and evict their Palestinian residents? How can the oppression be forgotten when settlers prevent farmers from reaching their lands, and soldiers forbid them from leaving their towns and villages?

The Palestinian equivalent to the Israeli *Yizkor* is not a directive to remember the oppression and the destruction, because these are still alive and well. Rather, it is a command to remember that it could have been otherwise, certainly better than the present. The Palestinian equivalent to the *Yizkor* is the impulse to hope for a better life, for liberation. It is becoming increasingly difficult to uphold. Israel's enforced forgetting—which includes passing laws that forbid any mention of the Nakba, concealing evidence, failing to publish archival materials, obliterating the memory of villages—is mostly framed, to the Israeli and international public, as

an attempt to justify the Zionist project. When it comes to Palestinians, the meaning of this endeavor is: *forget about things ever getting better for you*. What Israel is trying to make people forget is not so much the past as the future. More than relegating the continuous historical nightmare into obscurity, the obliteration is aimed at the dream of a future. Ben-Gurion, then, might have more aptly claimed: "The elderly will die, and the young will lose hope."

On one of the last times I took part in a march with my late father—I can no longer remember whether it was the anniversary of the Sabra and Shatila massacre or the Kfar Qasem massacre, or International Workers Day, or Nakba Day—he drew my attention to the fact that one of the regular slogans used during the march had been slightly altered. "It used to be," said my father, who had been placed under administrative detention as a student in the late 60s because of his political activism, "'*Thawra thawra hatta al-nasr.*' 'Revolution, revolution, unto victory!' But today they shout, '*Thawra thawra hatta al-mawt*.' 'Revolution, revolution, unto death!'"

I sometimes think about Palestinian acts of resistance and wonder if they are committed out of hope or despair under this notion of revolution unto death, now that the Palestinian uprising has been emptied of meaning and has ceased to provide a source of hope or a path to victory. My father told me that, when he was young, he believed in socialism, in perpetual revolution, in universalism, and class solidarity. He knew that the struggle would be difficult but imagined that, ultimately, justice would prevail, and we would live in a fair, egalitarian society. "And today?" I asked, "what do you believe in?" He never did answer me.

During the bloody summer of 2014, I was driven to despair by the horrors of yet another war. My wife and I realized that our hopes for our children to have a better experience than ours

were false and that we had to do our best to provide them an alternative shelter, which they might one day call "home". That was a painful decision, especially because all my life I have been hearing from my grandmother and my father that being a refugee is the most horrific experience for a human being. I was taught that there is nothing more contemptible than a man who abandons his plot of land, however small it may be. He who relinquishes his land, my father liked to remind us, relinquishes his dignity: *Ily bitla min daro, yakel makdaro* goes the Arabic idiom. We, the ones left behind in what became the state of Israel, were taught that our primary purpose was simply to stay. And this national mission was given a lofty name: *Sumud*, meaning steadfastness, perseverance. *Sumud*: despite Israeli oppression and injustice, you must stay. The personal war you must wage is to remain in your home, even if it is destroyed, in the Palestine that is now Israel. *Sumud*: to stay on, like a bone lodged in their throats. If you leave, they've won. If you show weakness, they've won. If you have doubts, you've lost. If you willingly abandon your home, you are a traitor.

With that heavy feeling of being a defeated traitor, I moved with my family to the United States on a one-year visa, leaving behind our house, jobs, family and friends in Jerusalem, and moving to a new language, a new beginning, a journey into the unknown. But it was that feeling of despair that scared me most.

As a writer, I published my first article in Hebrew when I was 22 years old. Since then, I have been writing for Israeli newspapers. I published three novels in Hebrew before moving to the US and wrote shows and scripts for Israeli TV channels and production companies. I saw my work in Hebrew as political, addressing Israeli readers and viewers and providing them a different story, a story about the Palestinian experience, using satire and humor to confront the

Israeli public with a reality they are encouraged (or required) to dismiss. Aware of the limited effectiveness of cultural production, I persevered in believing—my *Sumud*—that this was my duty. I always hoped for a better future for both Palestinians and Israelis and, without much rational justification, I hoped that justice would eventually prevail. In the summer of 2014, I felt ashamed for writing in Hebrew, guilty for the "privilege" that allowed me to leave, stupid for daring to hope.

In *Hope without Optimism*, Terry Eagleton (2015) sharply distinguishes between the two terms. The latter, he argues, is more a matter of belief than of hope since, "it is based on an opinion that things tend to work out well, not on the strenuous commitment that hope involves" (1). By contrast, "authentic hope" Eagleton suggests, "needs to be underpinned by reasons" (2). One can have hope without feeling that things in general are likely to turn out well, while an optimist "is rather someone who is bullish about life simply because he is an optimist" (2). True hope, Eagleton asserts, is needed most when the situation is at its starkest, "a state of extremity that optimism is generally loath to acknowledge. One would prefer not to have to hope, since the need to do so is a sign that the unpalatable has already happened" (5).

Eagleton locates a form of hope as ideology in Gabriel Marcel's (1944) *Homo Viator*. For Marcel, "'absolute hope' is [an] infinite, unconditional capacity that exceeds all particular objects and can only be degraded by being subject to representation" (Eagleton 2015, 63). "Hope," Marcel writes, "consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all inventories and calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me" (qtd. in Eagleton 2015, 63). Marcel was writing Marcel's concept of hope was conceptualized and articulated during the Nazi occupation of France, at a time when the hope of

the populace "could easily decline into a vein of wishful thinking or dream of indomitability. It is impossible, Marcel declares, not to believe that France will one day be free, since despair would be disloyal" (Eagleton 2015, 63-64).

Just as the Palestinians are commanded to "remember," they are also commanded to always hope, since hope (in this case absolute hope) has a performative dimension as well as an optative one. Ernest Bloch regarded performative hope as true of political revolution: "Those who doubt they will recover from a grave illness are probably more likely to succumb to it than those who do not. Not to behave as though there is hope may be to ensure that there isn't. On this view, hope is not simply an anticipation of the future but an active force in its constitution" (Eagleton 2015, 84). Eagleton suggests that the intense fervor present in the exuberant philosophies of hope articulated by figures like Marcel and Bloch can be attributed, in part, to the circumstances in which they wrote—Marcel under the Nazi occupation of France in the 1940s, and Bloch in East Germany under the surveillance of the Stasi. One can add that Viktor Frankl (1946) too at a dark hour specifically saw the hope of finding meaning as essential. These thinkers crafted transcendental, unassailable visions of hope that could pierce through the darkness enveloping their surroundings. In times of dire desperation, esoteric interpretations of hope inevitably emerge, resonating with humanity's inherent longing for the possibility of transformation, even in the absence of rational justification.

Concluding his philosophical discussion of hope, Eagleton proposes that real hope should encompass a moral aspect, focusing on the greater good rather than solely on our personal interests. Additionally, it should be realistic, acknowledging the challenges and barriers that may

hinder its fulfillment in the world. [1] This hope should be relevant to the current state of affairs and remain open to the possibility of setbacks or failures. Drawing on Jonathan Lear's (2006) *Radical Hope*,[2] Eagleton suggests a type of hope that arises from tragedy:

> As the case of Plenty Coups illustrates, the most authentic kind of hope is whatever can be salvaged, stripped of guarantees, from a general dissolution. It represents an irreducible residue that refuses to give way, plucking its resilience from an openness to the possibility of unmitigated disaster. It is thus as remote from optimism as could be imagined. It also stands at a wary remove from the buoyant universe of Ernst Bloch. It is not, to be sure, that every empirical hope need be of this kind. One's hope for fine weather tomorrow is not compelled to pass through some dark night of the soul in which the possibility of a tsunami is glumly contemplated. It is rather that this mode of hope, not least when it comes to political history, is a paradigm of hope in general−which is to say, paradoxically, that the exemplary case of hope is tragedy. Or, at least, the kind of

[1] The seeming commonsense of this proposition must be treated with caution. For one, what constitutes realism is contested, as the history of the Palestinian novel illustrates from its *iltizam,* through the post-1967 rejection of an inexcusably "romantic" overemphasis. But, further, not only is what is commonly deemed realistic often only an argument against certain kinds of (political) interventions into the status quo, it is also patently the case that a great many things (like flying machines, submarines, and trips to the moon) proved to be entirely realistic once the premise of making the attempt was accepted. As Eagleton (1989) noted three decades ago, "Part of the explanatory power of historical materialism is its provisions of good reasons for why the past has taken the form it has, and its resolute opposition to all vacuous moralistic hope" (183) with respect to choosing courses of action. If realistic in Eagleton's sense embraces the kind of activist hopefulness evinced by Raymond Williams (1989), then it will seem on point. But Eagleton's (2015) invocation of realism and morality here is colored by his (regrettable, perhaps regretted) overstatement from three decades ago as well: "Moral virtue has never flourished as the decisive force in any historical society, other than briefly and untypically. The monotonous driving forces of history have indeed been enmity, appetite, and dominion (the Schopenhauerian Will); and the scandal of that sordid heritage *is that it is indeed possible to ask of the lives of innumerable individuals whether they would not in fact have been better off dead*" (Eagleton 1989, 183, emphasis added).

[2] *Radical Hope* records how Plenty Coups, the last great chief of the American Crow tribe, saw that his people's way of life was on the brink of a catastrophic collapse, and that "in order to survive—and perhaps to flourish again—the Crow had to be willing to give up almost everything they understood about the good life" with no assurance of a successful outcome. Radical hope, Lear writes, "anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it" (83). He adds, "A culture does not tend to train its young to endure its own breakdown" (83), so that an inability to conceive of its own destruction will generally be one of its blind spots.

> tragedy in which hope is a question of whatever manages to survive the general catastrophe. (Eagleton 2015, 114-115)

Coming from a lionized academic celebrity, this salutary invocation of the benefits and necessity of tragedy (under the name of inevitability) misses the point badly. For me, "what managed to survive" was a desperate faith in humanity, which I would have gladly been spared the need for (for myself and everyone involved). It took me a long time since immigrating to the Unites States to feel "ready" to address the Israeli audience, but recently I decided to write for young adults. Maybe it's the that fact that that, when I think about what gave me some hope, it was friendships with my Israeli neighbors, classmates and colleagues—and, more than anything, the community of the bi-lingual school in Jerusalem that my kids attended. This is a school where Palestinians and Jewish-Israeli kids studied together, in both Arabic and Hebrew, trying to find a common language and develop mutual understanding, but mainly building strong friendships that we, the parents, hoped would last forever and set an example of possible citizenship.

In my TV show *Madrasa,* I tried to offer hope and to suggest a possible political imaginary where Arab-Palestinians and Jewish Israelis can be equals, where kids can be kids at least until it is time to graduate, when Israeli students join the (mandatory) army, becoming soldiers, and Arabs and Jews are forced to be divided into two camps, leaving their childhood memories and friendships behind to face a cruel reality. While some of the critics reviewing the show argue that "it is hopeful" (Fox 2023), others suggest that *Madrasa* proves that there is no hope for a better future and that "coexistence is just a fantasy" (Nir 2023).

Madrasa focuses on two groups of students—high school seniors who are now conflicted and divided about their inevitable separation due to the army service and a younger group of

second graders who just want to play together and cannot differentiate between Jews and Arabs. The last episode of the first season begins with the news that the younger students' department was torched by extremists who reject the idea of Arabs and Jews studying together.[3] With the school community devastated, the younger students are sad to learn that their end-of-year gala, which they have been anticipating, must be cancelled. It is in that dark moment that the (divided) seniors realize that they cannot afford such a thing, and the Arab and Jewish senior students join together silently to repair the classrooms and to make sure that the younger students will have their end-of-year celebration. The students understand this desperate action toward an impossible hope as a moral duty that they owe the next generation.

[3] The story draws on an actual event from 2014, when two classes in a bi-lingual school in Jerusalem were torched by Israeli right-wing extremists (NBC News 2014).

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