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PALESTINIAN CULTURE AND THE NAKBA

BEARING WITNESS

Hania A.M. Nashef

Palestinian Culture and the Nakba

The *Nakba* not only resulted in the loss of the homeland, but also caused the dispersal and ruin of entire Palestinian communities. Even though the term *Nakba* refers to a singular historic event, the consequence of 1948 has symptomatically become part of Palestinian identity, and the element that demarcates who the Palestinian is. Palestinian exile and loss have evolved into cultural symbols that at once help define the person and allow the person to remember the loss. Although accounts of the Palestinians' experience of the expulsion from the land are similar, the emblems that provoke these particular memories differ. Certain mementos, memories or objects help in commemorating the homeland.

This book looks at the icons, narratives and symbols that have become synonymous with Palestinian identity and culture and which have, in the absence of a homeland, become a source of memory. It discusses how these icons have come into being and how they have evolved into sites of power which help to keep the story and identity of the Palestinians alive. The book looks at examples from Palestinian caricature, film, literature, poetry and painting, to see how these works ignite memories of the homeland and help reinforce the diasporic identity. It also argues that the creators of these narratives or emblems have themselves become cultural icons within the collective Palestinian recollection.

By introducing the *Nakba* as a lived experience, this book will appeal to students and scholars of Middle East Studies, Cultural Studies, Literature and Media Studies.

Hania A.M. Nashef is an associate professor at the American University of Sharjah, UAE.

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In memory of my parents who survived the Nakba to tell the story

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Introduction

Much has been written about the Nakba and its political ramifications and impact on Palestinians in Arabic and other languages. The majority of the work is mainly concerned either with historical events or attempts at writing back the Palestinian into history against a powerful story of erasure propagated by a Zionist settler project and a myth of a promised land. Having been denied an audience by powerful nations along with the failure of international bodies to grant them rights,"many Palestinian refugees of the Nakba generation told their stories over and over, to their children and to each other" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 11). So much of Palestinian history has been negated as Palestinians were often paradoxically seen as the "invisible people" or "citizen strangers" (Said, *Culture* 20, Robinson 68).[1]

The effects of the Nakba on the lives of individuals, society and Palestinian culture are subjects that have been studied in depth. In the English language, "the Nakba of 1948 became plausible […] only after it was articulated by colonizers," and the scholarship that has been designated as new is a repeat of what Arab intellectuals and historians have communicated all along (al-Hardan 46). Of late, even though a small body of interdisciplinary literature has started to evolve (al-Hardan 45), there remains a need to study the cultural manifestation of the Catastrophe on Palestinians living in exile. The Catastrophe not only resulted in the loss of the homeland but has also caused the "destruction and dispersal of entire communities, as well as the annihilation of half of Palestinian society as it had once existed" (al-Hardan 52). With the Palestinian case specifically, the "aesthetics and politics are intertwined," because of "the ever-present repression and blockage of life […] the dispossession of an entire nation, and the sense that [the Palestinians] are a nation of exiles" (Said, *Culture* 164).

Since the events of 1948, the Nakba has progressed to denote the essence of what being a Palestinian entails. Even though the term refers to a singular historic event, the consequence of 1948 and the events that superseded that year have rendered the term elastic, as the Nakba is a lived past experience and a nagging reminder of a loss that still pervades the lives of generations of Palestinians. It is the beginning of a long line of catastrophes for the people of Palestine, and the "consequences of the Nakba, or the ongoing Israeli

system of settler-colonial rule over historic Palestine, are therefore realities of the present and not merely the past" (al-Hardan 48). The Nakba "continues in the form of refugees, dispossession, exclusion from the homeland, occupation and military domination [and] continues as a point of origin rather than a beginning in as much as it continues to dominate what derives from it" (Makhoul and Hon 9). The date 1948 has evolved into "pure memory," which continually evokes the event (Ricoeur 154). In an interview with Tahrir Hamdi, Palestinian author and poet Mourid Barghouti describes the Palestinian condition as "not normal"; he says:

> When you lose your country by force to your enemies, you are deprived of what can never be forgotten forever, which is your worth. You feel that your worth is in restoring this land that you have lost. Until it is restored, you are not normal. You don't lead a normal life wherever you go. And in Palestine, the Palestinian [is treated like he/she has] no history; it cuts across all strata of Palestinian society.
>
> (Barghouti and Hamdi 663)

The Nakba has symptomatically not only become part of the Palestinian identity but has also evolved to be the very factor that defines who the Palestinian is. Moreover, in general "the cultural records of Palestine only reflected its political horrors, with occupation, exile, loss, [and] violence" (Tawil-Souri 138).

The late Palestinian intellectual Edward W. Said has argued that even though the Palestinians have experienced the Nakba differently,

> […] no single Palestinian can be said to feel what most other Palestinians feel: Ours [the Palestinians' experience] has been too various and scattered a fate for that sort of correspondence. But there is no doubt that we [the Palestinians] form a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile […] The thing about our exile is that much of it is invisible and entirely special to us.
>
> (*After the Last Sky* 5–6)

Palestinian exile and loss, which have long marked the individual, have evolved into cultural symbols that at once help define the person and allow the person to remember the ongoing loss, which began with the Nakba. On another note, Pierre Nora argues that over time concrete objects, images or even gestures aid memory in taking root (9). One such object for Palestinians, which embodies the loss itself, is the house key, whether it is the rusty key of the old home occupying a prominent position on a wall or as a piece of jewelry. Nearly every exiled Palestinian family treasures the old key, an emblem of the lost nation that is passed on from one generation to the next. During the 68th commemoration of the anniversary of the Nakba in the Qatari capital, Doha, the largest key to date was unveiled in Katara Cultural Village amphitheater (Saad).[2] For Palestinian families, the act of holding on to the

original house key is not merely an exercise in nostalgia but also stands for a continual reminder of the loss and the story of that loss that has to be told and retold, as memory has to rely "on the materiality of the trace […] the visibility of the image" (Nora 13). The key also denotes the right of return and the right of entry into one's ancestral home, which has long been denied. Omayya Joha, a prominent cartoonist from Gaza, affirms the significance of the key in her cartoons, as her leading character Abu A'id (the Father of Return) carries around his neck the key to his ancestral home (Lynfield). The Israeli censors, meanwhile, do not allow the key to appear in the print editions of the newspapers, as for "them the key is like a knife" (Lynfield). In one of Ghassan Kanafani's short stories, "The Child Discovers that the Key Looks Like an Axe," the author uses the key to bridge the gap between 1948, 1967 and the years that followed. The boy in the story recalls, "the key had a whole collection of virtues […] it was the only key which time had not been able to destroy" (Kanafani 108).

In *After the Last Sky*, Said describes a feeble old man from Haifa on his deathbed in Beirut:

> A frail, very old man from Haifa, he had spent his last thirty-four years in Beirut in a state of agitated disbelief at the loss of his house and property. Now he murmured to his children the final faltering words of a penniless, helpless patriarch. 'Hold on to the keys and the deeds,' he told them.
>
> (*After the Last Sky* 14)

The above scene repeats itself ad infinitum. For Palestinians in the diaspora, the key and other objects have evolved into icons, reminding them of that loss while keeping alive the hope of return. The old man is at once transforming the objects and the memory of the loss, "from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to rememoration" to stress the identity itself and the relevance of the past (Nora 15). Memory of a time when one experienced loss not only re-evokes grief but also provides modes of resilience as it inhabits the place of personal history in which one has tried to overcome loss (Campbell 364). Moreover, an object attains the status of an icon through its materiality and its symbolic power (Alexander and Bartmański 1).

As seventy years have passed since the Nakba, "Palestinian loss of their homeland extends to the fourth and fifth generations, [and the] desire to claim connection with the land and its fragmented people" has intensified (Sayigh, "Oral History" 194). The term homeland is "a term constituted within nationalist discourse," and is the place in which the person "imagines his or her identity becoming fully realised" (Bowman, "Country of Words" 139). The objects become part of the process of creating an identity in exile; a being is constructed "through representation, and such construction assumes a use to which that entity will be put or a relationship which might be established with that entity" (Bowman, "Migrant Labour" 448).

The mementos that Palestinians hold on to not only help them establish a relationship with these objects but also form part of the constructed identity in exile. Icons can allow the person "to experience meaning sensuously" (Alexander and Bartmański 3). Generally speaking, artifacts that people treasure belong to homes that may still be standing; these objects embody ties "to loved ones and kin, and memories of significant life events" (Connerton 20). With Palestinians, the homes have been erased or usurped, and new relics had to be created and signified. Initially, objects and practices, "which emerge from a *habitus* are not the same as identities," but with time one assigns a role to these representations (Bowman, "Migrant Labour" 449). These icons not only testify to the loss but also keep the latter alive through the narratives and testimonies; they appear and reappear "at the level of the representation of the past through narrative, rhetorical devices, and images" even though they exist at "the margin of historiography" (Ricoeur 161). In addition, over time one articulates an identity by choosing from a "dense fabric of interwoven elements certain figures, symbols, activities or entities that will serve as vehicles for saying 'this is who we are'" and these metonyms or parts of them "come to stand for the whole" (Bowman, "Migrant Labour" 449). Ultimately, icons have the power to transmit experience (Alexander and Bartmański 3). Said suggests:

> These intimate mementos of a past irrevocably lost circulate among [the Palestinians], like the genealogies and fables of a wandering singer of tales. Photographs, dresses, objects severed from their original locale […] Much reproduced, enlarged, thematized, embroidered, and passed around, they are strands in the web of affiliations [the Palestinians] use to tie [themselves] to [their] identity and to each other.
>
> (*After the Last Sky* 14)

Although Benedict Anderson argues that nationality itself is a cultural artifact (4), the Palestinian treasured objects have evolved to represent the nation as it came into being at the very time of its loss. More importantly, these objects or relics arouse deep attachments within the Palestinian culture as they occupy prominent places in homes, obstinately attesting to that loss and memory of the homeland. Eventually, these relics are "projected onto the generalizing screen of the 'national imaginary' as fetishes of the nation which *stand in* for the thing itself" (Bowman, "Country of Words" 142). Being a Palestinian has become "a state of mind," and this is one of the reasons why Palestinians hold on to objects that have acquired the position of heirlooms (Owaineh 30). The keys, for example, along with other mementos, have become icons that symbolically challenge the erasure of the nation and the people of historic Palestine. These emblems are handed down from one generation to the next. In addition, they help the exiled combine the fragmented narratives of a people of a lost nation. These mementos keep alive a "culture of return,"

which ignites "particular discourses around memory" itself (al-Hardan 83). They at once reconstruct the past and resurrect it (Ricoeur 499).

Ability to remember is dependent on society (Halbwachs 54). Memory and recollections are social processes, and help in the preservation of history and creating a collective memory of a people. In this imagined society created in exile and within the discourse around memory, and when language fails or physical presence in the homeland is denied, these artifacts and recollections help create the Palestinian collective community or nation, and ultimately the identity. These triggers of memory address the "nemesis of memory, 'forgetfulness'" (al-Hardan 85). They bear witness at once to the erasure and the promise of return. The culture of return is predicated upon the imperative of remembering; it also "emphasizes the direct relationship between the threat of forgetfulness and the creative use of memories to combat this threat" (al-Hardan 85, 86). The year 1948 is the year which the Palestinians have marked as the beginning of that erasure, even though the ethnic cleansing of Palestine began earlier with the arrival of the first settler Zionists.[3]

Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that silencing of history involves four crucial moments:

> Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).
>
> (Trouillot 26)

As Palestinian history has been distorted and expunged, beginnings and retellings are essential. Hence, 1948 has become the pivotal year that is synonymous with the identity itself. It is the year that has to be commemorated and remembered and its memory kept alive.

Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, suggests that the term Nakba or Catastrophe is elusive as it only refers to the disaster of 1948. The term not only ignores the perpetrators of the events that led to 1948 but also suggests that Palestinian loss is contained within that year. Unfortunately, the Nakba is unending. It was born in a red house in Tel Aviv, in which the architects of Plan Dalet (Plan D) finalized the strategy for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in March 1947. According to Pappé, Plan D formed the cornerstone of the master plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and was conceived by the high command of the then Jewish underground movement, the Haganah, at the time under the directive of David Ben-Gurion, the founder and later prime minister of the state of Israel (*Forgotten Palestinians* 36–37). An integral part of Plan D was the use of terror and massacres to evict the original inhabitants of the land, of which the April 1948 Deir Yasin massacre was one of the most brutal (Masalha 37–38). Atrocities such as massacres and threats became more common in the later

stages of the war, forcing more people to flee (Schulz and Hammer 32). Calling the events that led to the erasure of Palestine, with the destruction of 531 villages, a minimum of twelve towns and urban centers, and the eviction of nearly one million Palestinians from their homes, a catastrophe is an oversimplification.[4] According to Pappé, over a period of six months, 531 villages and eleven urban neighborhoods and towns were completely destroyed (*Ethnic Cleansing* 82). Erasing the villages cannot erase the memory itself; the act of destruction is retained by those who once lived in these villages. The act and the memory are invariably passed on. Therefore, the destructive act is in itself tenuous (Salaita, Seikaly and Griffin).

However, the Catastrophe or the Nakba has not only been eradicated from collective world memory but has also been erased from the conscience of the world (Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing* 9). The country's name was changed, and the "renaming of Palestine as Israel by the European Jewish settler colonists was not only of symbolic value, rather it involved (and still involves) a geographic overhauling of the entire country" (Massad 36). 1948 is the year that marks the beginning of a suspended existence, ruined by traumatic events that survive in the memories of generations forming an integral part of the current Palestinian identity and narrative. Barghouti believes that the Catastrophe survives in people's imagination because the state of Israel works against itself by continually igniting the wounds through its atrocities (Barghouti and Hamdi 663). The Nakba cannot be reduced to 1948 but extends to the years that follow. Constantin Zureiq, the late Syrian scholar and intellectual, is often credited with coining the term 'Nakba' to refer to the eviction of the Palestinians from their lands. He used the term in the title of his book *Ma'na al Nakba* (*The Meaning of Nakba*).[5] The word Nakba is one of the world's greatest disasters, according to the classical Arabic dictionary, *Lisan al Arab*, which "implies that Nakba is a Disaster of huge dimensions that falls on man, society, or nature" (Ghanim 26). Egyptian intellectuals also used the term earlier in 1945 to describe the tragic events that were unfolding in Palestine (Webman 28).[6] To the Palestinians, the Nakba evokes a multitude of emotions, namely, defeat, displacement, dispossession, exile, insecurity, lack of statehood and the continual struggle for survival whether within the borders of historic Palestine or in the diaspora (Webman 29). Nakba can also indicate a fall into chaos, damage and complete destruction, as the descriptions associated with it are borrowed from the dictionary of natural disasters (Ghanim 27). The shared story of exile and pain, which began in 1948, began to reconstruct a collective identity for the Palestinians, gradually replacing old identities, such as family, religion, village or city (Webman 30).

In the collective memory and narratives that followed 1948, Palestine was often remembered as the lost paradise, "stories of the sweetest grapes and figs, the most beautiful orange and lemon trees, the amazing seashores," while the Nakba invokes the loss of the homeland and dignity (Hammer 50). For many, the memory of the homeland:

> […] incorporates the Mediterranean coast from Egypt to Lebanon, dotted with the important ports of Jaffa, Haifa and Acca […] then follows the borders of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan back down to Egypt. In its centre is Jerusalem. This is the shape of Palestine as it appears on key rings and nationalist knick-knacks, as well as in many Palestinian works of art from the early paintings of Shammout to the films of Suleiman.
>
> (Makhoul and Hon 190)

In spite of the erasure of the country, Palestinians hold on to the memory of the lost homeland. The colonialism and subsequent occupation did not only mean "political domination and negation of self-determination but [also] a dramatic human degradation" (Abu-Manneh 16). In spite of their poverty, peasant life for Palestinians was often perceived as good as their lands provided them with their needs (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 10). In the beginning, memories of Palestine have tended to be those of the land itself and its produce, and "the beauty of the land but not of actual people living on these lands" (Nashef 62). Having been stripped of the land, the Palestinians have long identified with the physical aspects of their farms and the fields they ploughed (Nashef 62). The clan, the land, and the village gave Palestinians a sense of rootedness and belonging (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 10).

With the ongoing trauma, Palestinians were initially reluctant to narrate their memories of the loss. However, with the passage of time, many Palestinians have started to record the events of what transpired in 1948 and the years that followed. The Nakba itself brings to life traces of the actual event and the object that was lost during the event (Gertz and Khleifi 106). Written recollections of pre-1948 life started to appear post the 1980s (Nashef 62); an example of such writings are the "village memorial books," which were written by Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank (Davis 55, 54). These books not only highlighted "a discourse of the glorification of the peasant life, of living closely attached to the land" (Davis 54), but also memories of a pre-1948 utopia that later formed the Palestinian nationalist discourse (Nashef 63).[7] A culture of return can only survive if there exists an imperative to remember, which grants memory a central place in individuals' "mobilization-derived memory discourses" (al-Hardan 85). Palestinian exilic memories tended at the beginning towards "an overriding sense of localism," without a clear understanding of the "onslaught that affected Palestine as a whole" (Tamari 102). Even though the narrators were aware that "the *Nakba* happened across the country," the protocols of their narrations and their retold stories did not reflect this consciousness (Tamari 102). Nonetheless, memory and recollections are perhaps the only "weapons available to those against whom the tide of history has turned" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 6). In the camps, the Palestinians tried to continue grouping according to their villages, and the conversations nearly always reverted back to the homeland (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 10). Keeping the Nakba alive through narration empowers those who tell its story; "[it]

is possible to read [the catastrophic event] as representing the power of the social structures and hierarchies, but the future is open to the possibilities of human agency, action, and resistance" (Ghanim 33).

Although accounts of the Palestinian experience of the expulsion from the land are similar, the emblems that provoke these particular memories differ. In some ways, the homeland and the event are linked to certain mementos, particular memories or objects that assume significance that help in commemorating the homeland. These objects evolve as relics of agency and defiance in the hands of individuals, especially "when memory is no longer everywhere" (Nora 16).

As "Palestinians still lack the fundamental contemporary political condition of a nation-state," and because to date they continue to live in exile, "in refugee camps, or in Bantustans surrounded by walls and checkpoints," there has been very little study done on their culture per se, often taking a back seat to what is considered "more important" political issues (Tawil-Souri 139). In this book, I consider some of the icons, narratives, and symbols that have become representations of the Palestinians' identity and their culture, which have temporarily replaced the homeland whether as a source of memory or a future promise of return. I also examine some of the artists and authors who helped keep this memory alive, and who became icons in their own right. Their cultural creations persist. In the absence of the homeland, the nation becomes "diluted and fragmented […] the nation [becomes] present in every cultural product" (Abu-Manneh 14). When the real essence of the being is threatened, identity is articulated as "the negation of a threatened negation," and these emblems and literary productions are instrumental in challenging this negation (Bowman, "Exilic Imagination" 55). For Palestinians in the occupied territories or historic Palestine, preserving memories became a laborious task as these are suppressed by "Israeli policies [that] aim not just at forcibly suppressing memories of revolt but at ideologically defacing and denigrating that symbol of national resistance" (Swedenburg 268). Against marginalization and an overbearing historical discourse of erasure, these "lieux de mémoire" have acquired significance beyond the symbolic.

My approach in this book is interdisciplinary as I look closely at different cultural productions, and their creators, which uncannily invoke a unity within the diasporic Palestinian populations. I choose examples from Palestinian caricature, film, literature and painting, to see whether in part, or in unison, these emblems that ignite the memories in these works have helped reinforce the Palestinian identity in exile. In addition, the creators of these emblems or narratives:

> […] have been so influential in Arab thought and sensibilities that they have arguably become cultural icons, in the sense that their work provides an aesthetic language through which the diverse historical memory of the Arab twentieth century is articulated and negotiated.
>
> (Haugbolle 232)

Stuart Hall argues that culture is not only a practice or a description of the sum of mores or folkways of societies but is also interwoven in all social practices (Hall 60). Cultural mementos have helped the Palestinians preserve the past and "reproduce its images and its discourse […] simultaneously represent[ing] and recreat[ing] the present, whether in exile, in refugee camps, in ghettos or open-air prisons" (Tawil-Souri 152). Although "the imaginings of Palestine by Palestinians located within the various sites of the diaspora […] differ substantially," these cultural icons and productions have progressed to become important components in the homes of Palestinians, whether in historic Palestine or in exile (Bowman, "Country of Words" 142). Moreover, through time these icons have "proven to be a powerful and resilient culture structure," and at times containers "for sacred meanings" (Alexander and Bartmański 2). These secular icons have become simulacra of lived experiences or events "imbued with (secularized) religious significance" (Haugbolle 234). They also appropriate the notion of an archive in the sense of what is to be preserved and valued, a direct challenge to authority (Campbell 376).

In my work, I rely on a close analysis and reading of the cultural productions of six prominent Palestinians, a cartoonist, a film director, a poet, a novelist and two artists, whose works are internationally acclaimed and who are considered major figures in Arabic and Palestinian culture and literature. I discuss the roles these artists and authors have played in forging the Palestinian identity in exile. My choice is by no means exhaustive; many others of the same stature exist. The book is divided into five main chapters, focusing on each artist or author individually.

In my first chapter, "Hanthala: the immortal child," I examine in detail the work of the late artist Naji al-Ali and his creation, Hanthala. The little boy is now synonymous with Palestine, and stands as a symbol of unyielding defiance and a silent observer and chronicler of the struggle of his people and the trodden. The young child, Hanthala, not only refuses to grow up but has also become eternal, surviving his creator through unceasing reproductions of him in popular culture. Hanthala remains as popular and as relevant today as the day he was created by Naji al-Ali.

In the second chapter, "Nazareth: icon of a lost homeland in Elia Suleiman's film trilogy," I argue how, through the medium of film, Palestinians have found a space to address the paradox of being an invisible people or present absentees. Elia Suleiman's films provide them with a space in which they resist marginalization, non-presence, and address the concept of humiliation due to the loss of their homeland. The family of Palestinian director Suleiman, who were able to remain in their hometown, provides an example of an overbearing sense of alienation. Suleiman has chosen to contest the marginalization of his people through his silent presence. In the films, the character E.S. (the director who plays himself) observes from the sideline, as he chronicles the events that are unfolding around him. His mute presence develops into an icon for those who wait. In addition, through his portrayal of Nazareth, he

renders his hometown the same iconic status, being the Palestinian city that resists negation as it holds on to the remnants of its Arab culture.

My third chapter, "Mahmoud Darwish: the storyteller of Palestine," looks at the memory triggers of the night of expulsion in 1948 in the works of the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. I discuss various accounts of that arduous and painful experience along with the sites of memory that prompt this recollection of loss and exile in his poetic anthology *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*, while drawing on his prose narratives *In the Presence of Absence*, and *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*. The night that is remembered is the night the young child along with his family was exiled, a banishment that disrupted their lives forever. Darwish's work not only conjures up the experience of loss by repeatedly returning to it in his oeuvre but also the poet metaphorically invokes the memory of his village and a symbolic return to it through his words. His work fills the gap between the various diasporic experiences of Palestinians, elevating the writer to an iconic status, that of the storyteller of his people.

As with Darwish, the Nakba and its consequences pervade the writings of the late Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani. His novels and short stories have played a significant role in defining how the Palestinian experience was understood after the Nakba. In the fourth chapter, "Ghassan Kanafani: the clock, the orange and what remains of the homeland," I discuss how the homeland and memories of its loss have been morphed into objects, such as a clock, an orange and a can of lentils, in a number of his short stories. These objects evolve to become triggers of the memory of loss. As with al-Ali and Darwish, Kanafani was born in mandate Palestine and vividly remembers the night of expulsion.

My final chapter, "Ismael Shammout and Tamam al-Akhal: *The Exodus and The Odyssey*," argues how the late Palestinian painter Ismail Shammout and his wife Tamam al-Akhal have for years told the Palestinian story through their paintings, which are considered for the most part visual renditions of the trials of their people. Through their art, they have vividly depicted the suffering, struggle and hope of the Palestinians. Their paintings provide a visual interpretation of objects and themes that stem from their own memories and have evolved to become part of the collective cultural memory of Palestinians of their hometowns. As with al-Ali, Darwish and Kanafani, symbols of Palestine emerge in their work to tell the story of exile, loss and humiliation. In this chapter, I specifically examine their shared project, *Palestine*: *The Exodus and The Odyssey*, a collection of murals that narrate the Palestinian saga. In their work, we see how the icons that were portrayed in caricature (Naji al-Ali), and text (Mahmoud Darwish and Ghassan Kanafani), emerge visually through their canvases, constructing the Palestinian collective memory. In conclusion, as the year 2018 commemorates seventy years of the Nakba, I discuss whether these cultural icons remain as powerful as they once were even though the hope for the homeland is diminishing by the day.

Notes

1 Robinson suggests: "In the scope of international law, however, it was an entirely different matter to proclaim a largely immigrant society to be "homeborn," to the exclusion of most of its actual legal natives. Indeed to call the Arabs of Palestine *zarim*—strangers, aliens—as Israeli leaders so often did, reflected a political and cultural aspiration rather than a legal reality" (68–69).
2 A large key, known as the key of return, hangs on top of the entrance of Aida Camp in the West Bank. The refugee camp is two kilometers away from the city of Bethlehem.
3 For more details, please refer to the book by Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.
4 This number includes the Palestinians who were exiled to neighboring countries and those who became internal exiles within the boundaries of Palestine.
5 Anaheed al-Hardan writes: "Constantine Zurayk is often credited with first using the term *nakba* to describe the then-ongoing war on the Palestinians and its outcomes in his *Ma'na al Nakba* (*The Meaning of the Catastrophe*) ([1948] 2001, 1956). Zurayk was a historian, an educator, and an interwar-generation Arab nationalist thinker whose intellectual legacy includes a large number of books, edited collections, translations, and articles" (28).
6 Al-Hardan adds, "The term is also used in relation to the Arabs' consequent colossal failure and the human and material losses and loss of morale as manifested in, inter alia, the dispossession of the inhabitants of Palestine. The gravity of the Catastrophe for Zurayk is further compounded by the Arab states' inability to thwart the Zionist movement despite the justness of the Palestinian cause" (29). The Nakba was always used to describe Palestinian migration (al-Hardan 35).
7 The June 1967 war partially eclipsed the discourse on the Nakba in the Arab world, as the new defeat referred to as al-Naksa took precedence (al-Hardan 27).

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1 Hanthala
The immortal child

Hanthala represents the Palestinian people. He is us
(Sacco vii)[1]

Introduction: the short life of the artist

The defiant and vulnerable little boy, who gazes at scenes of oppression, hypocrisy, injustice, and war, was born in Kuwait in 1969.[2] His creator Naji al-Ali was born circa 1936 in al-Shajara (The Tree) in northern Palestine, a village believed to have acquired its name because the Messiah rested under its trees.[3] In 1948, Naji al-Ali's family was expelled to Lebanon to begin a life of exile in Ein el-Helweh Refugee Camp.[4] The camp, according to UNRWA, "was established near the city of Sidon in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross to accommodate refugees from Amqa, Saffourieh, Shaab, Taitaba, Manshieh, al-Simireh, al-Nahr, al-Sofsaf, Hitten, Ras al-Ahmar, al-Tiereh and Tarshiha in northern Palestine" (Ein el Hilweh). In the camp, al-Ali and his family lived in a tent that was less than ten square meters.[5] The tents, which were composed of cloth, became the canvas onto which al-Ali drew his first illustrations.[6] The Palestinian author and journalist Ghassan Kanafani discovered al-Ali's talent when he saw the latter's drawings on the walls of the refugee camp;[7] Kanafani later published al-Ali's cartoons in *Al-Huriyya* literary magazine.[8] This was the beginning of a career that took the artist to Kuwait, Lebanon and finally the United Kingdom. His satirical drawings attacking corruption, abuses of human rights, injustice, and lack of democracy were published in both the right and left-wing press (Abid).[9] His life ended when a lone assailant shot him in the head as he was heading to his office in the London bureau of *Al-Qabas* newspaper in 1987.[10] His cartoons sadly paved the way to his untimely death.[11]

American journalist Victor Navasky writes that he initially dismissed "cartoons and caricatures as fundamentally 'not serious;' 'inconsequential,' 'irrelevant,' 'marginal,' 'harmless,' 'frivolous,' 'a benign—even childish—indulgence,'" but having witnessed people's reactions to them changed his mind, and he understood their power (xiv). Caricatures in effect can interpret "nations, figures and events," by helping to "supplement the news presentation" with

"statements of 'meaning'" by putting everything in context (Streicher 438). The assassination of al-Ali was in essence "to silence the witness and extinguish flames of resistance," as like his fellow compatriots who succumbed to the same fate, al-Ali had taken it upon himself not only to bear witness to "an unspeakable past," but also to resist the dominant history of silencing (Hamdi 23).[12] His cartoons gave the downtrodden agency. Not only did al-Ali construct the refugee narrative successfully but he also "transformed the image of Palestinian refugees from helpless destitute people, who lived in tents and shacks and depended on United Nations rations for survival, into revolutionaries who took their fate into their own hands" (Najjar 258). The cartoonist achieved the latter through the help of his creation, Hanthala. His cartoons avoided clichés, as he held on to the broken image of the little boy inside of him, and the memory of the time the child and his family were expelled from Palestine (Haugbolle 232).

Hanthala: birth of the eternal boy

Even after the assassination of al-Ali, Hanthala continues to tell the Palestinian story (Hamdi 30), reproduced and given a new lease on life with every new artifact or drawing that bears his name. To the cartoonist, Palestine became a symbol for any human being seeking democracy, freedom and justice (al-Ali, "Interview 2"). Al-Ali had an unflinching belief in freedom, and he compared the lack of freedom to living in a matchbox, often questioning how an artist is capable of breathing in a place that is so small (Abid). Through his drawings, he felt he has been in every Arab prison and wondered what else awaited him (Abid). His creations grew out of an uneasy space that he and his people were forced to occupy, from one exile to another, resulting in the uncomfortable juxtaposition of the inner self and the banished self (Boujdidi 196). In some respect, his illustrations occupied a place in the public sphere, "a warning system with sensors" that not only detected societal ills but also amplified them (Habermas 359). He effectively used the public sphere by creating "a network for communicating information and points" through his cartoons (Habermas 360).

Jürgen Habermas argues that the public possesses the final authority, for it "is *constitutive* for the internal structure and reproduction of the public sphere, the only place where actors can appear" and there "can be no public sphere without a public" (364). Al-Ali's cartoons struck a chord with the Arab masses because if communication is to be effective it has to encompass "*those who are potentially affected*" (Habermas 365; emphasis in original). Moreover, al-Ali's work has successfully managed to brand "its subject" and float it "into the public sphere" (Navasky 35). By being in every al-Ali cartoon since his inception, Hanthala occupies the space that allows him to engage with the public sphere. Hanthala evolved into the boy whom everyone cherished and waited for in every morning paper. Through his observation and silent comments, he dared to pinpoint the injustices towards the Palestinians

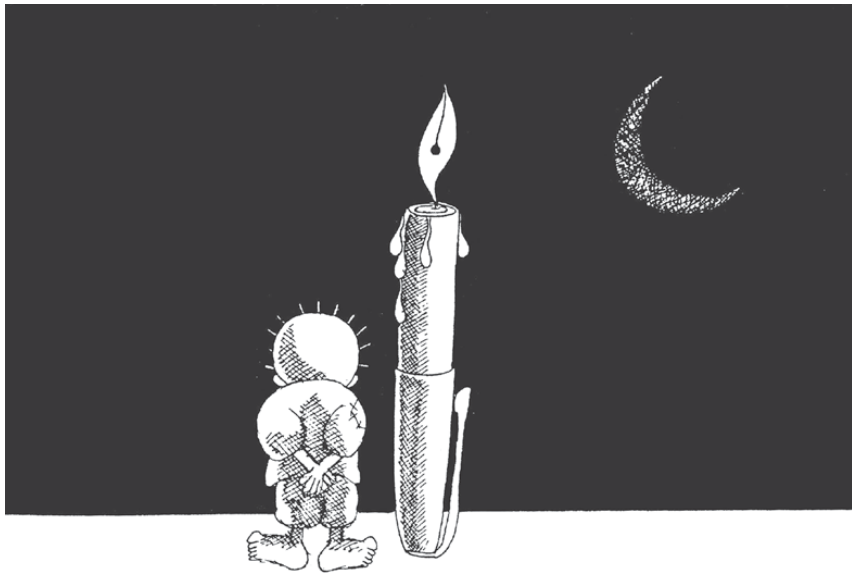

Figure 1.1 Hanthala and the Pen
(October 13, 1982)

in particular, the subaltern in general and the overall failures of humanity. In Figure 1.1, for instance, Hanthala, in his usual defiant position, looks at a very black sky; the only hope in this gloom lies with the checkered crescent on the right-hand side of the illustration. The black and white squares, which are also the colors of the Palestinian headdress, evoke the unattainable homeland. The pen next to Hanthala stands nearly double the size of the little boy, with its nib in the shape of a candle flame, pointing to the sky. The flame drips on the sides of the pen in the shape of tears; both Hanthala's feet and the pen are anchored in the white background, indicating that they not only occupy the only bright space of the cartoon but are also the only hope in this darkness. The dark sky envelops all, and Hanthala along with his creator are the two that are challenging this metaphysical gloom.[13]

Al-Ali's public comprises the poor, trodden and marginalized people in the Arab world. His cartoons were also an unwelcome reminder to some whom he criticized often in his work. As his illustrations voiced the disenchantment of millions, simply by mirroring their "personal life experiences," their problems became eerily visible in his creations (Habermas 365). His brainchild Hanthala evolved to become "the conscience of Palestine" (Masalha 128). In addition, the sum of the artist's work showed "how political events morphed Palestinians from refugees to revolutionaries"; he gave them dignity (Najjar 256). The cartoons of the Palestinian artist also represented public opinion

in the Arab world. Al-Ali's cartoons, which "were full of hopes, dreams, and a vision for a better life for the Palestinians in particular and for the Arab people in general […] were made for the ordinary Arab person, whether highly educated or illiterate" (Zanetti). The cartoons were published in Kuwait, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom; some were:

> […] reproduced in the newspapers *al-Mithaq*, *al-Quds*, and *al-Nahar*, but his daily cartoon in *al-Safir* or *al-Qabbas*, available to an Arab audience in London, Paris, Amman, Beirut, and other capitals, had to be collected out-side Palestine, copied, and distributed through personal channels. Reading Naji al-Ali therefore became a game of collecting, which was possible for those in the right circles and those who were able to travel, but for others remained very difficult. Nevertheless, drawings did circulate and hence became a way to establish social and political connections. (Haugbolle 244)

The cartoons themselves are still as relevant as the day they were published, and Hanthala remains the observer to the trials of his people and the rest of the Arab world. The iconic and symbolic reproductions of the little boy continue to give him life, a new birth with every replica. The little boy is not only the silent witness to the ordeals of the Palestinians but also the companion to many as he epitomizes their hope and resistance. In June 2012, the Ghassan Kanafani Group from the city of Acre ('Akka) created Hanthala statues in the sand and set up an exhibition of the cartoons to introduce the little boy to young Palestinian children; the event was filmed on the beach of Acre while the editing was done in the refugee camp of al-Dheisheh, which is located south of the city of Bethlehem in the West Bank ("Handala 'Akka"). Hanthala's model was carved face down in the sand as he was paired with a map of the city of Acre. Another place in which Hanthala thrives is in the drawings of the refugees on the walls of al-Dheisheh refugee camp; the walls are adorned with reproductions of al-Ali's cartoons as a way to keep the memory of Hanthala and Palestine alive (Dheisheh-al-Ali). In one of the drawings, however, Hanthala is now an old man holding the hands of two young Hanthalas symbolically facing the separation wall ("Handala Painting"). They are at once looking and leading the old Hanthala to his homeland in Galilee. Likewise in the occupied West Bank, owning a collection of al-Ali cartoons distinguished the person; and the "*jouissance*, enjoyment, surrounding al-Ali consisted equally in the collecting, the comparing, and the quoting of his cartoons, as well as the feelings of familiarity and proud *sumud* that his work stoked in people" (Haugbolle 245; emphasis in original). The little boy proceeded to become the property of Palestinians everywhere (Haugbolle 245).

In al-Ali's work, Hanthala is always depicted as the ten or eleven-year-old boy who refuses to grow up, as according to his creator, "the rules of nature do not apply" to him (al-Ali, "Birth of Hanthala" 21). The little boy was created

to "memorialize the moment" of the Nakba (Haugbolle 231). Hanthala, who evolved to become the icon that represents every Palestinian refugee as well as the voice of the disenfranchised being, has, since his birth in Kuwait, bore witness to the unfolding events of his people's suffering. Hanthala is "a witness, in Arabic shahid, to decades of Palestinian dispossession, bitterness, anger, defiance and resistance. The Arabic word Shahid derives from the same trilateral root, Shahadah which in Arabic means both martyrdom as well as the act of witnessing" (Masalha 128). The child's "innocence confronted the grim realities of a region racked by war, corruption, inequality and cynicism – and whose oil wealth did little for its suffering masses" (Black). Al-Ali created him as a reminder to himself lest he forget himself, and become a "tanbal" (the lazy person without will):

> I had friends with whom I shared my work, protests, and prison days until one day they became "tanabel" running businesses and buying stocks. I was worried about myself from turning to a "tanbal" too and being consumed. In the Gulf I gave birth to this child and offered him to the people. He is committed to the people that will cherish him. I drew him as an ugly child, with hedgehog-like hair because the hedgehog uses its hair as a weapon.
>
> (al-Ali, "Signature")

The child with the unruly spiky hair matured as the consciousness of generations of Arabs, becoming a symbol of and for Palestine and the Palestinians. He told the story of his people on most occasions silently. Al-Ali says that having been a refugee he is always on the "side of the poor" (Abid). In an interview with Kuwait Television, the Palestinian artist said that he was not a fighter, loved everyone while at the same time he hated those who were corrupt (al-Ali, "Interview 1"). In another rare interview circa 1980 with the same station, al-Ali said that his cartoons drew on issues that had a political dimension, as he did not have the luxury of drawing lighter rib-tickling cartoons, as the atmosphere in the camps did not lend itself to such topics (al-Ali, "Interview 2").

Henri Bergson argues that the comic itself is not always inherent in the drawing (30). Al-Ali's cartoons were bleak, black, piercing with dry humor, in order to shock the readers as they drink their morning coffee (al-Ali, "Interview 2"). The word caricature was initially derived from the "Italian verb *caricare* ("to load," "to surcharge" as with exaggerated detail)" (Ames). In addition, generally speaking, the "graphic caricatures ridicule pictorially," representing a figurative image of a person or human groups, while at times it "may also be a symbolic representation of a nation, political party, idea or social issue" (Streicher 431). While the "term 'caricature' has been employed to indicate exaggerated representation of the most characteristic features of persons or things […] in a satirical manner […] The terms 'cartoon', 'cartooning', may be said to refer to both 'build-up' and 'debunking' techniques

of graphic presentations" (Streicher 431). Subsequently, the caricature is both a cartoon and an image but with a difference that lies in its double-ness (Navasky 33). It is at once recognized as real and at the same time a distortion of reality, "sometimes grotesquely so, simultaneously like and unlike its subject, and the unlike part can involve either idealization or deformation, if not defamation debunking, and downgrading" (Navasky 33). As the terms caricature and cartoon are often used interchangeably (Streicher 432), I will do the same in this chapter.

While the exaggeration is mainly missing in al-Ali's cartoons, the charging of emotions is always present. Bergson argues that in caricatures that do not rely on exaggeration, a process of distortion becomes "the moment of interest," and this helps the artist to make a certain issue or trait visible (27, 26). Al-Ali often felt he had to scream at people, agitate and outrage them, as to him "our destiny was frightening" (al-Ali, "Interview 2").[14] Navasky "believed in satire as a particularly effective instrument of social criticism" (xvi), a belief also shared by al-Ali. In addition, the political cartoon "with or without words, is an argument," and once released it has the potential to become "a totem and as such is uncontrollable" (Navasky 51). The little boy, the alter ego of his creator, is consequently screaming at the readers every morning. His uncontrollable scream is still heard. He emphatically presented the political and societal flaws without any excuse or shrouding of the facts. Caricatures or cartoons have a "unique emotional power and capacity to enrage, [and] upset" (Navasky xxi). The little boy represents what al-Ali is and what he believes in (Abid). He created Hanthala as a constant reminder of who he is and where he came from (Abid). He wants Palestine and the Palestinians to remain in people's minds. The little boy who has his back to us could be fixating his gaze towards the homeland, in the hope that he may return one day.

Fatima: the quintessential Palestinian woman

In Palestinian consciousness, Palestine is often represented as a woman. This is also evident in al-Ali's cartoons. Palestine is both the woman and the Madonna with child. Al-Ali appropriately called his Madonna, Fatima; the name itself is of the one who weans and the one who shines. As with the land, she is the giver of life. Al-Ali's Madonna also represents the honest Palestinian peasant who is attached to the land; she is the homeland. To al-Ali and the Arab masses, Fatima, who is believed to have been modeled after his aunt Hanifah, "represents the land and his belonging to it [and] is the wise woman [who] has a wisdom that wells from the depth of a beaten-down woman. She is a universal figure that represents peasant goodness" (Najjar 269). Fatima, who is often portrayed wearing the traditional *Thobe*, is also the custodian of the key to the homeland, and she embodies within her the right of return.[15] In the following cartoons, Figures 1.2 and 1.3, this peasant woman, who stands for other Palestinian women, wears the key on her chest as a necklace. Even though black is the dominant background color on this dark night, the crescent moon

sparkles brightly. The male refugees are sitting in contemplation of their fate, marginalized and powerless. They embody the character of az-Zalama, the common man, who is usually portrayed "a thin, miserable-looking man […] victim of Israeli oppression and other hostile forces. He also represents the poor, the oppressed, the refugees and the abused citizens of the Arab world" (Totry and Medzini 29).[16] The latter is part of al-Ali's trajectory, which on the one hand includes the obese persona that stands for the corrupt regimes, while az-Zalama, Fatima and Hanthala symbolize the trodden (Kallam 61). In Figure 1.2, Fatima stands upright, in her Palestinian *Thobe* and a black key hanging down her chest. The barbed wires behind the characters forbid them entry into their homeland. The key on Fatima's chest not only emphasizes the right of return but also the emblem that keeps the memory of the homeland alive.

In Figure 1.3, Fatima is also wearing the key around her neck but her tears are in the shape of locks as she cries for her lost homeland.[17] The background in this cartoon is white, barring the black tunnel surrounded by barbed wires, which in turn prevent her from returning home.

In Figure 1.4, which is another depiction of the symbolic key, Hanthala is reminiscing over his homeland; he stares at the keys hanging on the barbed wire and beyond, as he is denied entry.

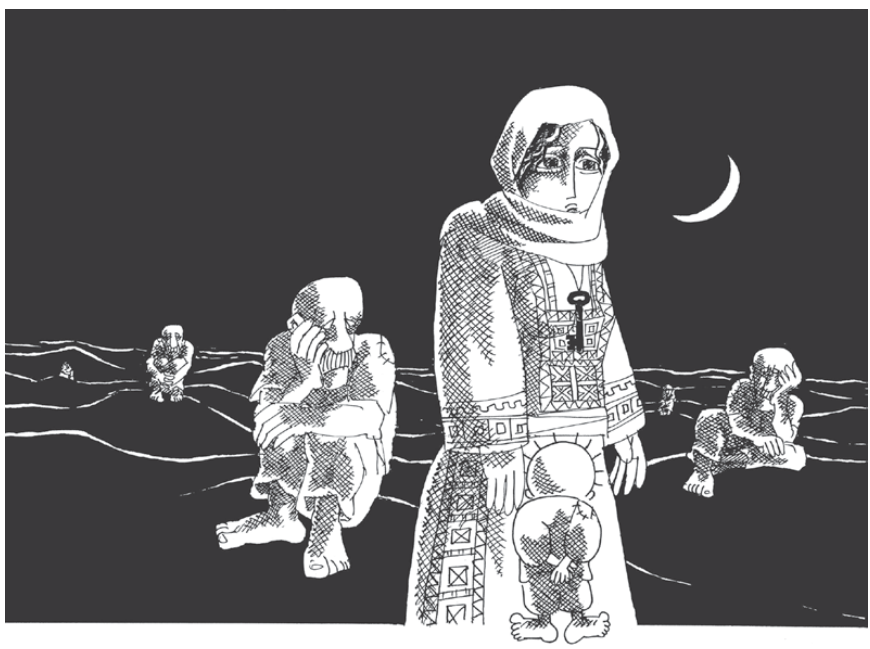

Figure 1.2 Fatima and az-Zalama
(February 13, 1986)

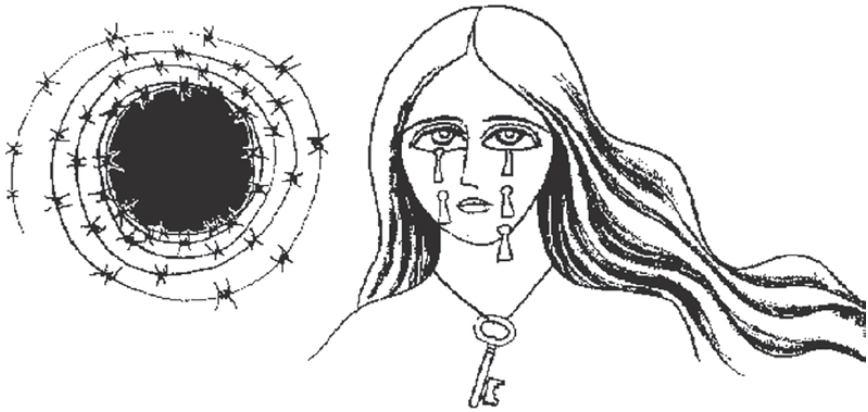

Figure 1.3 Palestinian woman (Fatima) and the key
(December 30, 1974)

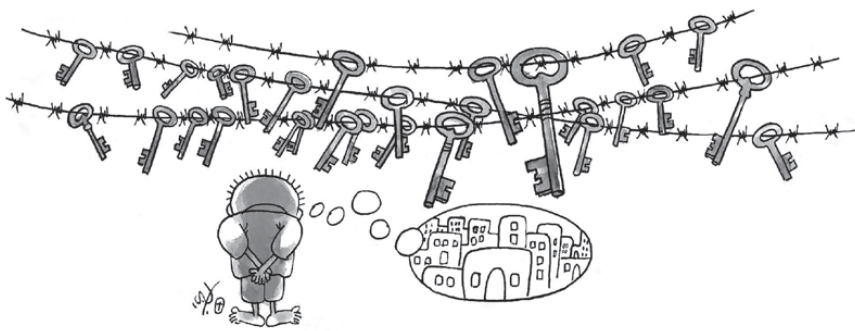

Figure 1.4 Keys on a barbed wire
(November 1, 1974)

As with the Madonna, al-Ali uses Christian symbolism as a parallel for the suffering "of Palestinians and the trials of Christ" (al-Ali, *Child* 7). To the artist, the Messiah is a symbol of sacrifice and the trodden (Kallam 64). The crucifixion is often likened to the anguish of the Palestinian people and to their aspirations of returning to their homeland. In one of the cartoons, Jesus stretches his arms in the shape of the crucifix, and with his tormented facial expression faces Hanthala (see Figure 1.5). The crown of thorns on his head resembles the barbed wire often depicted in al-Ali's cartoons, and so does the necklace around his neck on which hangs the key to his home. The balloon is the word Bethlehem, and like every Palestinian, Christ is wishing that he

Figure 1.5 The crucified Messiah wearing a key chain
Text: "Bethlehem"
(November 13, 1985)

could return home. The Messiah has become a stranger, another Palestinian exile; this theme pervades al-Ali's work (Haugbolle 239). Behind him is a black background, but Hanthala, who is in the foreground, is enveloped in the whiteness of Jesus' body.

Al-Ali's cartoons do not distinguish between the suffering of Christian and and Moslem Palestinians. In Figure 1.6, Hanthala observes a woman with tears in her eyes, as she holds in her arms a baby wrapped in a Palestinian headdress. Behind the woman is the word Palestine with its "I" turned into the crucifix; the crescent is drawn on the right of the illustration to face the Messiah. Little Hanthala is shaded in the same manner, looking and partaking in the scene. The illustration uncannily reeks of death, as her tears fall on the ailing infant.

And in another cartoon (Figure 1.7) featuring a similar theme, a Palestinian mother holds her child who has been mutilated by an Israeli raid; and as her tears fall on his maimed arm, three leaves grow out of what seems to be an olive branch. Meanwhile, Hanthala is on the side of the frame, his hands raised to the heavens in both defiance and helplessness.

Sune Haugbolle argues:

> [A]l-Ali secularized the redemptive significations of both Christian and Muslim symbols by drawing on them to express the aspirations

Figure 1.6 Woman in tears and infant
Naji al-Ali Exhibition (Feb. 1985), Kuwait

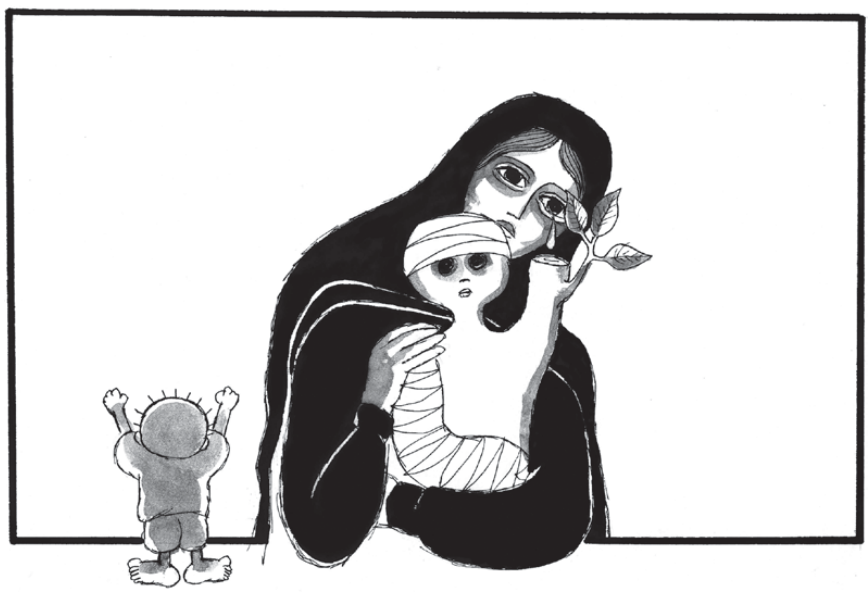

Figure 1.7 Woman with her injured child
(July 21, 1981)

> of Palestinians and Arabs as a whole. In his work, they become *cultural* symbols in line with the kaffiyeh, the peasant dress, the key to abandoned houses in Palestine, the moustache, and Handhala for that matter.
>
> (Haugbolle 256)

As with Hanthala, the *Thobe*, and the key, these religious symbols have evolved into icons that represent Palestine.

Hanthala: the icon that transcends space

Creating the little boy who has transcended his little space in the cartoon to become a cultural icon must have sobered the artist "who saw Hanthala as a separate moral entity" (Sacco viii). The character came out of his life in the camp, "a typical child … barefoot, destitute, and deprived" (Abid). The Palestinian cartoonist often described his creation as "hungry, dazed and barefoot […] full of humiliation" and "ruled by poverty and despair" (Abid). The humiliation at losing the land has defined the existence of the refugees. As none of the Arab regimes nor their media or cultural industries admitted to defeat, the public expression of humiliation was left to popular media, and al-Ali's work was one that gave this humiliation an expression (Haugbolle 237). In Chapter 5, I discuss how Ismail Shammout and Tamam al-Akhal represented the theme of humiliation visually in their paintings. A Palestinian exile from Nahr al-Bared Refugee Camp in Lebanon says that official history has often ignored the history of the peasant turned refugee (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 11). He adds:

> The problem is that there is a break between Palestinian traditions and us. I am a Palestinian, yet if you want me to remember Palestinian traditions, it's very little. *Between my reality and the false history they've taught us there's no connection*.
>
> (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 11; emphasis in original)

For the Palestinian peasants, village life provided "the frame of reference of all experience, and the loss of that frame effectively led to the disintegration not only of their world but of their conceptions of self as well" (Bowman 148). Hanthala ignites and preserves memories of the self. Through the little boy, al-Ali is forcing us to remember by connecting the gaps in history. Al-Ali reflects on his own situation as a refugee in the camp:

> When I left Palestine and lived in the refugee camp [,] Ein Al-Hilwe, [our obsession] was returning to Palestine. We were children and that did not prohibit us from thinking about our cause and think of the ways of which we would be able to return one day. Any artist will die, whenever he is placed out of his home. The artist that does not resume his work with the

> people will not reach his goal. I am a man who carries his tent on his back and my people are the poor.
>
> (al-Ali, "Signature")

Al-Ali's symbolic tent has been handed over to Hanthala, as well as his memory as a Palestinian refugee. This child does not forget. He has metaphorically breathed life into his creator. He doggedly stands in the cartoons continuously reminding us of the events, the ever-present conscience of the Arab masses lest they choose to forget. From the side of the frame, occupying a small space, he tells them that he sees and remembers. Hanthala observes the unfolding of history and the cartoons become the official chronicle of the events. Al-Ali's cartoons also recorded the Lebanese Civil War, the Israeli invasion and the peace talks among other political and social issues.[18]

The artist has often said that he remembered the details of his village, which was made real through the senses (Sacco 1). The children's recollections in the camps were often of the fragrance from the citrus trees, images of the stone houses and the fields of the peasants (Sacco 2). As with the other exiled children growing up in the refugee camps, al-Ali had to become conscious of the political events around him. The man from Nahr al-Bared [referred to a few lines earlier] not only remembered vividly the details of his village but also how the conversations in the camp made him politically aware (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 11). He said:

> If you ask me about my village, I can remember the most important things, and even the small ones. I think the reason for this is deprivation. Second, our families would always talk about the past, and about their land, so that these things are impressed on the mind of the Palestinian child. He feels the difference between that life and this. He longs for that life to continue, and to make his own life a part of that country (Palestine).
>
> (Sayigh, *Palestinians* 11)

The late Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, always returned to his village in both his prose and poetry, and specifically to the night when he and his family were evicted from their homeland; I will discuss this memory in depth in Chapter 3. The inhabitants of Ein el-Helweh camp were mostly farmers who lived off their own produce; in the camp, they became refugees awaiting food portions and aid from donors. The concept of Hanthala, which quickly "drifted into the Palestinian [and Arab] psyche" (Hamdi 26), reminded the poor Palestinians of themselves, "impoverished, unwanted, the orphans of the Middle East" (Sacco viii). They affectionately embraced him as a symbol (Sacco viii). And this symbol grew out of the Palestinian camps to become the symbol of those who wait for the day they return to their homeland; in the meantime, his stance tells them, "*Don't mind me. I'm off to the side. Watching. Recording. And I know exactly what you are doing*" (Sacco viii; emphasis in original). Yet, Arabs and Palestinians minded him as he bore witness to their ugly reality. He made them uncomfortable (Sacco 2).

The name Hanthala is derived from the bitter plant, hanthal, emphasizing the acrid Palestinian life in exile and its bitterness. The deeply rooted plant itself is resilient, as it always grows back, even when plucked. The plant, in spite of its bitter taste, has many medicinal properties, while the name itself is steeped in Arabic history, a symbol of resistance. Moreover, al-Ali reminds us, "truth is always bitter" (al-Ali, "Interview 2"). Iraqi poet Ahmed Mattar described al-Ali as a compass that is always veering towards the truth, and ultimately Palestine (Abid). The compass does not change (Abid).

Hanthala: the courageous child

In the documentary titled *Handala*, Israeli member of the Committee Against Home Demolitions, Lucia Pizarro, says the biggest fear that Israelis have resides with the Palestinian child (Beach). This is affirmed on a number of occasions in the cartoons of al-Ali; when the Israelis invaded Lebanon, the artist saw how afraid the soldiers were of the children, and how a ten or eleven-year-old child was trained enough to stand up to the soldiers (al-Ali, "Ein Al-Helwa"). Hanthala is the child who dares to face up to the injustices of the Arab world. With the invasion, the line dividing life and death has been erased (al-Ali, "Ein Al-Helwa"). In one of his cartoons depicting the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut, Hanthala stands defiant, unflinching in his courage and somewhat oblivious to the ruin. Beirut is presented as a defeated and sad young Madonna, peering from the ruins (Figure 1.8), her eyes looking down, as her hands support the wall. The girl, who resembles al-Ali's Palestinian Fatima, is probably his age. Barefoot Hanthala with his Palestinian black and white kufiyya (headdress), wrapped around his neck, a symbol that binds him to Palestine, stands facing the young girl. A piece of shrapnel from an Israeli rocket is by his side; he holds a sunflower in his hand, as he bids her "good morning Beirut." The background behind the girl is completely black, while the young boy's is white. The girl is reluctant to take the flower.

This cartoon points to a specific night on July 31 during the 1982 invasion and siege of west Beirut by the Israeli army and the Phalange militias. The enormity of the bombing on that night left "the western part of the city without water or electricity," disrupting the lives of all citizens (Nashef, "Two Memories" 223). Journalist Robin Wright of the *New Yorker* quoted a cable by Robert Dillon, who was at the time the US ambassador to Lebanon, in which he said, "Simply put, tonight's saturation shelling was as intense as anything we have seen. There was no 'pinpoint accuracy' against targets in 'open spaces.' It was not a response to Palestinian fire. This was a blitz against West Beirut" (Wright). Meanwhile, British journalist and Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk described the same night:

> We were awed by it. We would find no other word for it. The air raids were awesome. They inspired the most basic fear; of total, sudden,

Figure 1.8 Good morning Beirut (1)
Text: Good morning Beirut
(August 5, 1982)

> inescapable annihilation. Often we never saw the planes because they flew too fast. In the sweaty mornings, with the smell of burning garbage drifting over the city, we heard them coming in a crescendo of sound. Hardly ever did we see the bombs they dropped […] did they not know – that they were killing thousands of civilians, smashing families between the walls, floors and furniture of their homes with such total violence that their corpses often emerged from the rubble flattened into huge shadows, their bodies only an inch or two thick, their heads broken open like eggs?
>
> (Fisk 306)

Figure 1.9 Good morning Beirut (2)
Text: Good morning Beirut
Naji al-Ali Exhibition (Feb. 1985)

Amidst the ruins, fright and helplessness, Hanthala extends a flower to the little girl, telling her that life will go on. In a similar cartoon, Hanthala stands on an empty rocket shell in order that he may reach the girl (Figure 1.9). Near the rocket, the artist has added some rocks, indicative of the ruins; they are also objects that will later play a role in the Palestinian Intifada, a premonition of the coming events. Out of the ruin comes life.

In the "Good morning Beirut" cartoons, (Figures 1.8 and 1.9), Hanthala does not give up, as he wants to tell the girl that both Palestinians and Lebanese share the same predicament, both victims of the same forces. The

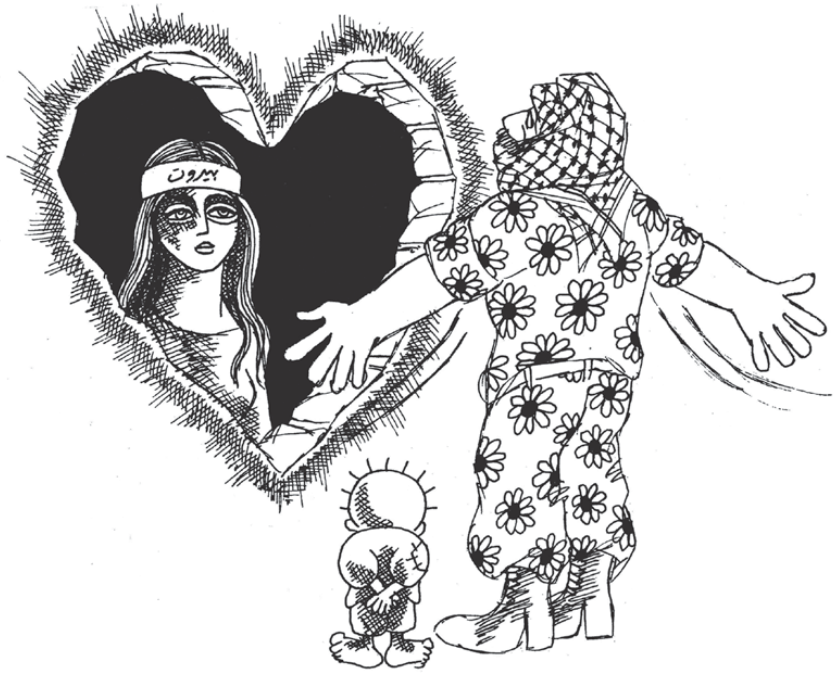

Figure 1.10 Good morning Beirut (3)
(August 6, 1982)

little balloons showing his words change to little hearts, as he is now within reach of the young girl. He is still holding on to the flower but her sad eyes are now looking at his. The hole in the wall is now in the shape of a heart. His kufiyya is gone as he tells her there is still hope. He is now the stateless Hanthala who embodies the innocence and optimism of a child. In this utter destruction, there is still life, and he insists on it. As with the girl, Hanthala stands for thousands of children "whose growth has been stunted by war, poverty, and natural disaster" and has only the power to bear witness, hand over a flower or throw a rock (DeVoir 46). In Figure 1.10, Hanthala returns with a Palestinian fighter with sunflowers itched in his army fatigue; the fighter holds his arms open to the Lebanese girl. Both the little boy and the fighter stand in the light while the background behind the girl is pitch dark; the hole in the wall is once again in the shape of a heart. Figures 1.9 and 1.10 could also be seen as a yearning by the cartoonist for Lebanon from his place of exile in Kuwait.

Al-Ali has often combined Palestinian and Lebanese suffering; in one of the cartoons, a Lebanese woman who has been made a refugee by war carries her bundle on her head, as she looks for shelter, an act that resonates with earlier

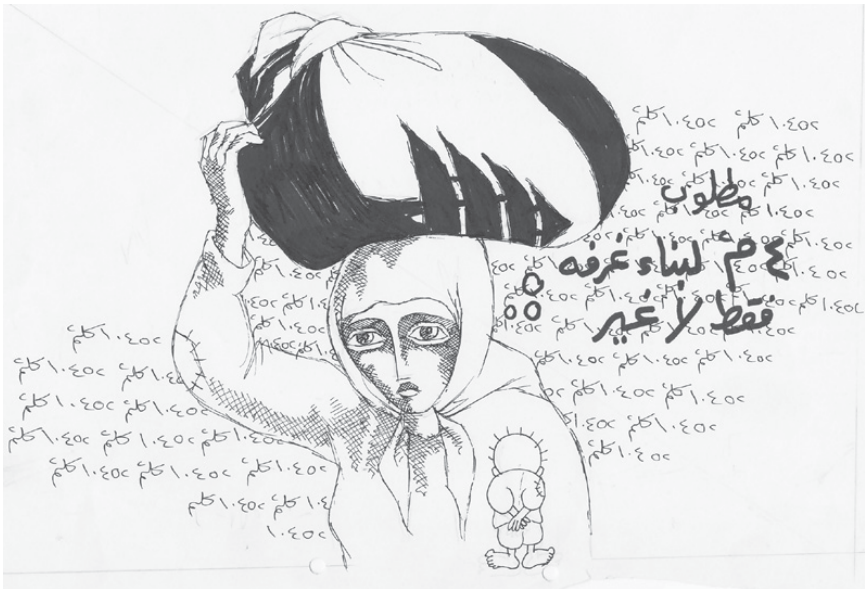

Figure 1.11 Lebanese refugee woman with a bundle
Text: "Wanted four meters to build a room, nothing more." Background text: 10,452km^2 (the size of Lebanon)
(October 17, 1982)

scenes of Palestinian refugees (Figure 1.11). The Lebanese flag is the cloth that covers her bundle, as her distraught face stares at Hanthala. The words reflecting her state of mind say, "wanted four meters to build a room, nothing more," the size of the tents that were allocated to Palestinian refugees in 1948.

The interaction of the words with the image "can transcend the communicative potential of either" (Navasky 17). The power of such a cartoon lies in the condensed argument it provides along with the image itself (Navasky 18). In another cartoon about the Lebanese Civil War, Hanthala stands amidst the ruins, his face unexpectedly turned towards us with an angry expression as he waves both the Lebanese and Palestinian flags (Figure 1.12). He is telling the viewer that together they can face the Israeli aggressor. He stands with his bare feet on top of branches from which new leaves are sprouting. Around his neck is the Palestinian kufiyya and on the right-hand side the crescent moon is evident against the pitch black of the sky.

In another of his Palestinian cartoons, Figure 1.13, Hanthala's face is once again turned sideways to face the reader; he is seen pulling the plough, which is in the shape of an AK-47. His expression is one of determination, even though the facial features are not very clear. His spiky hair renders his round face in the shape of the sun, suggesting a new beginning. Barefoot, the Palestinian man and woman are sowing seeds in the shape of hearts. The land

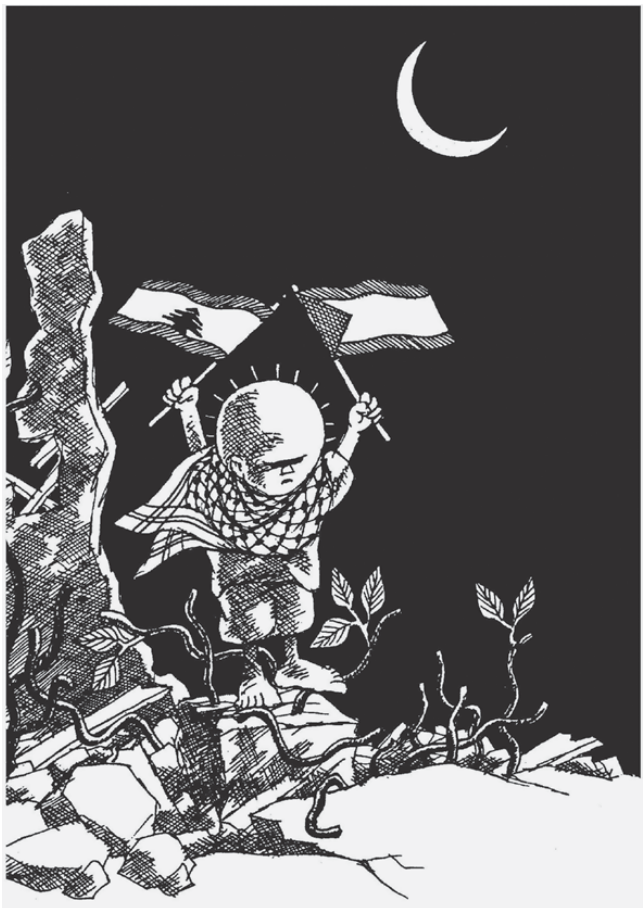

Figure 1.12 Hanthala facing us waving the Lebanese and Palestinian flags (July 26, 1982)

itself is cracked and dry, marked by the Star of David. The parched land may be an indication that Palestine is dying and that its people are being killed while the world watches (Gandolfo 61); however, the crescent brightly shines in the very dark sky; behind them a wheat stalk sprouts from the arid land. The caricature not only symbolizes "devotion, belonging, and resistance" but also a touch of optimism and pride (al-Ali, *Child* 20). In this instance, Hanthala has turned his face sideways because part of his pride has been restored through his being in Palestine.

In 1983, when al-Ali returned to Kuwait, his drawings became bitter; after the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon, he said, "I cried for being a Palestinian" (Abid). His criticism of the Palestinian leadership

Figure 1.13 Hanthala facing us pulling a plough
(April 1, 1987)

became fiercer, telling the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, "I don't bad-mouth my people. I represent [them]" (Abid).

The makers of the film *Handala* state that they named the work after the little boy, precisely because of the meaning of his name, to turn their "backs in bitterness on false peace that aims to separate Palestine into pieces and create a sham Palestinian state" (Beach). The film celebrates acts of non-violent resistance of those who wait and watch, an act akin to Hanthala's who has bore witness to the tragic events in recent Palestinian and Arab history. In another short documentary, *The Icon*, Hanaa al-Ramli interviews Palestinian exiles in Jordan, asking them what Hanthala means to them. Not only is the little boy's presence pervasive and ubiquitous, in their offices, in their rooms, on their walls, around their necks, but to them he also signifies life in its unpleasantness, ugliness and beauty as his aura challenges the circumstances of their existence (al-Ramli).[19]

The tokens made in the image of Hanthala have even gained some religious quality, as people carried them as signs for protection and strength (Yusef 60). In the film, Hanthala, the character, repeats al-Ali's words, telling us that his father's name is superfluous and his mother's name is al-Nakba, and his date of birth is al-Naksa (al-Ramli). He identifies himself as a child without identity, simply an innocent Arab child who will never grow up (al-Ramli); al-Ali introduced his little creation to the world in the first person pronoun: "allow me to introduce myself … my name is Hanthala … my father's name is irrelevant. My mother's name is Al Nakba … I am not Palestinian, not Jordanian, not Kuwaiti, not Lebanese, not Egyptian … in short, I don't have an identity

and won't be seeking one … I am merely an Arab" (al-Ali, "Hanthala"). Like Palestine, Hanthala will remain with us, the key of our return (al-Ramli). Towards the end of *The Icon*, the film's Hanthala, who has evolved to represent the human soul, stands staring at the separation wall, one of the latest crimes committed in al-Ali's homeland (al-Ramli).

It is believed that al-Ali composed around 15,000 cartoons. In his oeuvre, as someone who witnessed the unfolding history of the Arab world, al-Ali has "encapsulated […] his people's suffering, documenting it and producing an archive" (Hamdi 23). As with al-Ali's cartoons, political caricatures have evolved as a "unique class of pictorial representations," which can be "compared to newsreels, photographs and paintings" (Streicher 432). Through his drawings he mocked Arab and Western leaders, as he exposed the hypocrisy of the rich, by inviting thousands of readers to get a glimpse into the life of the poorest and most helpless in society (Haugbolle 233).[20] In Figure 1.14, Hanthala stands in solidarity looking at the nameless Arab masses that are denied basic human rights and are criminalized by their respective regimes. Al-Ali's illustrations have the "ability either to mobilize the masses or to reflect broader oppositional efforts" (Stein and Swedenburg 7). The Arab masses' portrait hangs on the wall with the label "wanted." White is the dominant color here, with black used thinly to sketch their faces. Bold indecipherable script is used for the words on the two banners in mid-frame. Hanthala is typically giving us his back with his arms crossed behind him; he stands in the portrait and as with the masses, we do not see his legs. A female face occupies the middle of the frame.

Figure 1.14 Wanted I
(July 1980)

Figure 1.15 Wanted II
(September 1980)

In another caricature (Figure 1.15), an elderly man voluntarily frames his face as a portrait, which is also labeled "wanted." The man holds the frame with both his arms as he looks at Hanthala.

According to Mahmoud A. Kallam, this cartoon was presented as part of an exhibition in Damascus, in which four drawings of al-Ali were shown in the collection labeled mirrors (99). Al-Ali wanted us all to look into the mirror, as every one of us is guilty in some respect (Kallam 100). The little boy and the man are partially greyed, indicating their shared predicament. In 1985 in a similar exhibition in Kuwait, the word "wanted" was written on top, prompting the viewer to look at his or her reflection in a mirror; with the second frame, meanwhile, you see yourself behind bars, while in the third one you are behind bars with a corner black ribbon drawn across them, indicating your demise.

This visual recording of the Palestinian ongoing catastrophe is directed "at not only the victimizer but also the victimised" (Hamdi 24). Al-Ali used his pen not only to criticize Israel but also "complacent Arab regimes and leaders" (Hamdi 26). The cartoons themselves tended to use text that would either convey common Palestinian idioms or proverbs in a satirical way or repeat the political jargon of the day. Overall, the caricaturist's words, whether coming

Figure 1.16 Palestinian traveling document
Text: "Palestinian laissez-passer; Arab government officials and their representatives abroad are kindly requested to allow the holder of this document, whilst extending all their help, to allow this person to pass away; may God have mercy on him, and for us long life. All Arab countries: The holder of this document is granted the right of enforced residency. He is not allowed to work, to breathe and no one knows in which land a person will die." Minister of Interior and cemeteries. Date of Birth; date of extermination
(June 23, 1986)

out of the subjects' mouths in the shape of balloons or inscribed, impart the subjects' life and reality (Streicher 438). In Figure 1.16, Hanthala looks at a laissez-passer document that is given to the Palestinian refugees. The actual document grants them no rights. The photo of the common Palestinian male refugee is draped in black confirming the position of the Palestinian in the world, the dead in life. The text highlights the contradiction of the Palestinian position in the Arab world; Arab countries that claim they support the Palestinian cause partially allow the Palestinians entry but deny them basic human rights. The cartoon states that the person will be entitled to house arrest, denied work, forbidden to breathe, and officials are requested to assist

the person to die. The child's head obstructs the date of birth, and the date of death, which is written as the date of extermination. When one is deprived of basic rights, these dates are superfluous. The undersigned is the Ministry of Interior and Cemeteries.

Talal Salman, founder of the Lebanese *as-Safir* newspaper, in which al-Ali worked in 1974, described the latter's cartoons as simple creations that border on a naïveté that hurts, are self-explanatory and not in need of a mediator, making the most complex ideology simple (Abid). The artist's son, Khalid Naji al-Ali, says:

> It is also worth noting that during his lifetime he had dealt with all the major events that were occurring in the region such as the Lebanese civil war, the Camp David agreement, the first Gulf War, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, etc. In short, the Palestinian refugee, for him, was not confined to a specific geographical area but transcended into the whole of the oppressed Arab masses.
>
> (Sikora)

In nearly all of the cartoons that feature Hanthala, the refugee boy turns his back to us, crosses his hands behind his back in defiance and in opposition to "historical forces opposing Palestinian liberation and of Arab complicity, lethargy and impotence" (Hamdi 26).[21] Hanthala arrived and stood in this position looking at Palestine and the obstructions between him and his homeland; the reader stands behind him witnessing what the little boy is seeing, but at times lacking the knowledge or wisdom of the boy. Hanthala, as with Palestine, is both absent and present. The Arab reader will be allowed to stand in front of Hanthala once he gains insight. Al-Ali drew Hanthala's hands,

> […] clasped behind his back as a sign of rejection during a phase that this region is undergoing with "solutions" offered by the US and "the system". I made the shape of his hands after the October war when I smelt the scent of developments in Kissinger's briefcase.
>
> (al-Ali, "Signature")

Even though Hanthala is unable to confront the submissive attitudes sweeping the region, as they crush any opposition in their path, he can challenge them by recording his presence daily, to caution and resist (al-Ali, "Interview 2"). Through Hanthala, al-Ali was able to defy injustice; and he was quoted as saying that he is prepared to die in defense of his drawings, as each drawing is like a drop of water making its way to the minds of the people (Abid).

Hanthala: the child with a small imprint yet great resonance

The young boy discreetly occupies a little space in the corner of most of his creator's cartoons; marginalized in the frame like other refugees, he boldly asserts

his presence through his turning away from us, denying us the privilege of the gaze. His method of watching, of looking on, is forcing us to see the world from his perspective. We observe the recounting of the events through his eyes, which we are unable to see. Palestinian refugees have long been denied their history, and at best have become alien and marginal, faceless victims in refugee camps that forbid them entry into their homeland and the host country in which they find themselves (Schulz and Hammer 113). Humanitarian and relief organizations have often erased the Palestinian connection to their land by labeling them Arab refugees. Moreover, the Palestinians who have been "excluded from history as the remnant of a nation whose right to independence, statehood, and even existence was denied [they] were seen, at best, as a humanitarian case, deserving what they often experienced as the demeaning support of UN agencies" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 4). In addition, in the Zionist discourse, the Palestinian was often presented as an obstacle, stupid or morally indecent and is "not to be heard from directly" (Said, *Question* 29). Hanthala is demanding that we hear from him directly. In addition, "the late 1960s and 1970s saw the production of more subjective, more 'nativist' material, in the form of research oriented towards re-inserting the Palestinian voice in history" (Sayigh, "Oral History" 195). Due to violence and war, the refugees have often found themselves evicted from their camps, one displacement leading to another. Yet, Hanthala persists, stubbornly affirming his presence from the side, a reminder of "the story of *sumud* or steadfastness under the most difficult of conditions" (Hamdi 26). He is telling us that even though we may not want to hear, I will challenge you by my presence, which haunts every cartoon.

Al-Ali has often considered the little boy, the alter ego of the child from northern Palestine who was evicted from his homeland in 1948, eternal:

> The young, barefoot Hanthala was a symbol of my childhood. He was the age I was when I had left Palestine and, in a sense, I am still that age today. Even though this all happened 35 years ago, the details of that phase in my life are still fully present to my mind. I feel that I can recall and sense every bush, every stone, every house and every tree I passed when I was a child in Palestine […] That child was like a splash of fresh water on my forehead, bringing me to attention and keeping me from error and loss. He was the arrow of the compass, pointing steadily towards Palestine. Not just Palestine in geographical terms, but Palestine in its humanitarian sense.
>
> (al-Ali, "Signature")

Hanthala is not beautiful, nor pampered nor well fed, and like others in the refugee camps he is barefoot, in fact "ugly and no woman would wish to have a child like him" (al-Ali, "Signature"). Yet, this obstinate child has been adopted by many in the Arab world, simply because "he is affectionate, honest, outspoken, and a bum" (al-Ali, "Signature"). Hanthala has become a mainstay in popular Arab culture (Haugbolle 237). The bare feet force

Hanthala to continually be part of the earth, grounded in its soil, so as not to lose his bearings. The fact that he will never grow up into a man is just as unnatural as losing one's homeland.

Hanthala: the child who prefers not to

His back turned away from us in a gesture of rebellion and his forever-unruly hair awards Hanthala the privilege of becoming immortal through potentiality. Potentiality allows him the possibility of turning around once he deems it necessary or desirable to do so. On a few occasions, he unclasps his hands to take action or he turns his face to reveal a featureless visage, expressionless yet obstinate.[22] Nonetheless, his choice of inaction is what prevails in the cartoons. The action, which is often not taken, freezes the child in time; he remains alive through his suspension in time and place. His rejection is akin to Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, the scrivener, who refuses to make a copy when asked by his employer, saying, "I would prefer not to" (11). Giorgio Agamben contends that Bartleby is here experimenting with "issues of will, power, being, and potential" (Watkin 123). The same holds true for Hanthala; he wills not to turn around, and he will achieve his full potential and being, once "Arab dignity will be unthreatened, and regained its freedom and humanity" (al-Ali, "Signature"). His survival is conditional upon his inaction, and like Bartleby who "won the right to survive," by choosing not to act, Hanthala survives through his potential (Deleuze 71). Agamben argues, "all potentiality is based on a choice not to do, so that potentiality is not simply actuality to be but also the refusal to actuate one's potential" (Watkin 64). As with Bartleby who has chosen to remain the tabula rasa by choosing not to write while maintaining his potentiality for writing, al-Ali's creation remains in his position even though he has the potential of acting or facing us (Agamben 36.7). He chooses not to.

Hanthala's struggle lies in his ability to continue in spite of all the contradictions surrounding him (al-Ali, "Signature"). He remains the witness of a generation that has refused to die inasmuch he will not leave life (al-Ali, "Signature"). The cartoonist writes: "Hanthala, who I created, will not end after my end. I hope that this is not an exaggeration when I say that I will continue to live with Hanthala, even after I die" (al-Ali, "Signature"). Al-Ali always wished he had the ability to protect one child (al-Ali, "Ein Al-Helwa"), and Hanthala is that child whom he saved, as he continues to live on in people's memories and cultural productions. This eternal child will remain a witness and observer of the world around him, reproduced in various shapes ad infinitum (Mustafa).

Al-Ali saw with each cartoon he drew, a "preaching [announcing] the birth of a new Arab human being" (al-Ali, "Signature"). For the artists:

> Caricatures set life bare in front of it, spreads life on strings in the open air, public street, capturing life wherever found and taking it to the surface for the world to see where there is no opportunity to hide the gaps

> and flaws of life. In my opinion, caricatures preach hope, revolution and the birth of a new person.
>
> (al-Ali, "Signature")

In spite of Hanthala's inaction in the majority of the drawings, and in spite of the desperate situation of the Palestinians, al-Ali's cartoons were rarely cynical, and at times had elements of hope and resistance in them (Snaije). Al-Ali has often described the feelings of sorrow in the eyes of the exiled parents, and how the sorrow became the language of anger through which they learnt about the world of dejection once they became refugees in Ein el-Helweh camp (al-Ali, "Ein Al-Helwa"). In the camp, like Hanthala they would cast their eyes beyond what felt like a prison, observing a world that is far from their reach (al-Ali, "Ein Al-Helwa").

In Figure 1.17, Hanthala stands behind a barbed wire, dreaming of Galilee, and the right of return to Palestine, which is represented as a stalk of wheat that grows out of the cable. It is the one that broke away, stretching towards the homeland. Hope is possible as well as the potentiality of the homeland.

In his caricatures, al-Ali only used black, white and shades of grey. Fellow Palestinian artist, Abdul Rahman Katanani, argues that al-Ali restricted the use of color in order to denote space and place in his cartoons, as well as emphasizing shadow and light (Al-Shaikh 25). In addition, the contrast between black and white adds a vicious dramatic element that signifies the continuous tragedies inflicted upon the Palestinians (Al-Shaikh 25). The

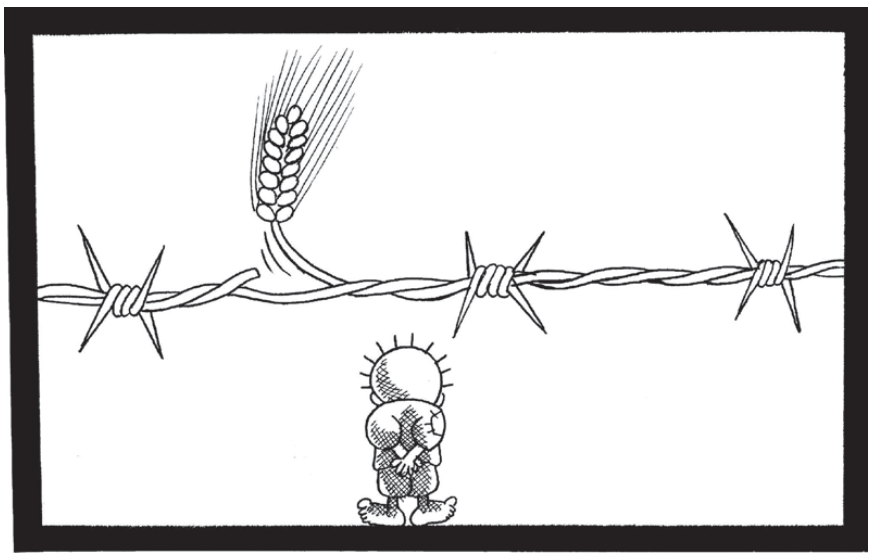

Figure 1.17 The wheat stalk
(March 16, 1981)

contrast also helped him work with the "clarity" he sought in his life, without subordination to others, as he believed this was his right as a human being (al-Ali, "Interview 2"). In his later cartoons, he combined the bold and fat black fonts along with smaller less defined ones in his script to give some words prominence (Boujdidi 197). Al-Ali drew the camp with its alleys, shops, tents, children and desolation in black and white, as he did with all his illustrations. The black and white are also the colors of the Palestinian headdress, *kufiyya*. With the passing of the years, al-Ali's lines became simpler and more reductionistic, adding to the symbolic nature of his creations and ultimately the mass popularity of his cartoons (Al-Shaikh 25). Through his cartoons, he was able to free the message, stripping it to its basic elements (Sikora). His cartoons held a mirror to society, rather than a blunt comment on the events. Al-Ali believed that the caricature's role is to expose society's faults, as it should express the conscience of the people (al-Dabik 20). He often said that when he draws, he is expressing a human condition (al-Dabik 26).

Hanthala: the child who connects Palestinians in exile

Palestinian exiles experienced the Nakba differently, and this impacted the way they perceived themselves and their identity. The Catastrophe "was subjectively adopted, evaded or modified by Palestinians of different classes and in different regions" (Sayigh, "Unexplored Problems" 248). Bowman suggests:

> […] in a situation like that of contemporary Palestinians, where the national community is spread all over the world in a number of relatively autonomous enclaves, the nebulousness of the term 'Palestinian', which enables it to serve as a label of identity for all Palestinians, simultaneously renders it incapable of providing any sense of the distinguishing characteristics which would allow Palestinians in milieus where they suffer from particular antagonisms to recognize their situation as 'like' that of other Palestinians in different situations.
>
> (Bowman 146)

However, Hanthala was someone all Palestinians and Arabs could identify with, even though they may have not experienced the refugee camp. Reminiscing and nostalgia for the lost homeland is in itself not sufficient to "provide a foundation for national identity," especially given that the majority of villages were eradicated (Bowman 148). In one of the cartoons, Hanthala stands at the edge of a graveyard on which rests a suitcase, which has also evolved into a symbol of Palestinian banishment. He is a witness to the diasporic death of all Palestinians; the cemetery's name is exile (see Figure 1.18). The sunflowers sprout from the rocks astride the grave, as the crescent moon shines brightly against a pitch-black sky providing a glimmer of hope. The suitcase on top of the grave could also be seen as the death of exile, a return to the place of birth.

Figure 1.18 Exiles' cemetery and the suitcase
Text: The cemetery of the exiled
(July 26, 1986)

Said writes: "The Palestinian is very much a person in transit: Suitcase or bundle of possessions in hand, each family vacates territory left behind for others" (*After* 130). Hanthala is anticipating the end to dispossession. In his work, Darwish often likened the homeland to a suitcase, which he resented as "having become a metaphor of a transit existence" (Nashef, "Challenging the Myth" 407). He writes:

> How often did you ask: How many times must I travel, migrate, or depart? And for your fate the distinction between traveling, migration, and departure never became clear, because words can encompass so much of the illusion of synonyms, and because metaphor is often subject to transformation: from "my homeland is not a suitcase" to "my homeland is a suitcase."
>
> (Darwish, *In the Presence* 83)

Providing a burial place for the suitcase is in itself a paradox, as it could signify the end of the homeland that has morphed into a suitcase or an end of exile that is epitomized by the suitcase. Al-Ali has always believed he had a date with destiny; he anticipated his early death not only because he received many death threats during his life but also because through his razor-edge pen he became the living conscience of the Arab masses and feared no one. In Figure 1.19, Hanthala lies on the pavement face down having been hit by

Figure 1.19 Hanthala hit by an arrow, apple on his side
Al-Qabas newspaper
(April 29, 1987)

an arrow in the foot, which left him bleeding and his blood spluttered on the concrete. At an arm's length is an apple with a promise of a better life but the sky is pitch black.

The boy, as with his creator, was not corruptible and had to be silenced.[23] Hanthala refused to compromise. Al-Ali said whoever chooses to write or draw about Palestine should realize that he or she is already dead, but "I'll never give up my principles," in spite of the danger (*al-Jazeera, Who Killed Naji al-Ali? Part 1*). Al-Ali believed that one day the sons of the camps, the exiled, and the ones who have been killed would meet, with an image in their heart (Abid). Like Hanthala, they will continue to raise the Palestinian flag (Abid).

Conclusion: Hanthala, the secular prophetic child

Al-Ali predicted the first Palestinian Intifada (1987–93). The latter became evident in a number of his cartoons that were published in the eighties. In one of the most poignant illustrations of the crucifixion, Jesus is seen freeing one of his hands from the cross and hurling a stone at the darkness, an act seen as a premonition of the first Intifada (Figure 1.20).

The use of the Messiah adds sanctity to the 1987 Intifada in Gaza and the West Bank. Hanthala standing behind the cross cheerily imitates Jesus' action and throws a second stone. The white stone illuminates the very black sky. In a later cartoon circa 1986 (Figure 1.21), Christ removes his nailed foot to strike an Israeli soldier, while at the same time his tormented face looks towards Hanthala. The text explicitly reads "The Intifada of the West Bank

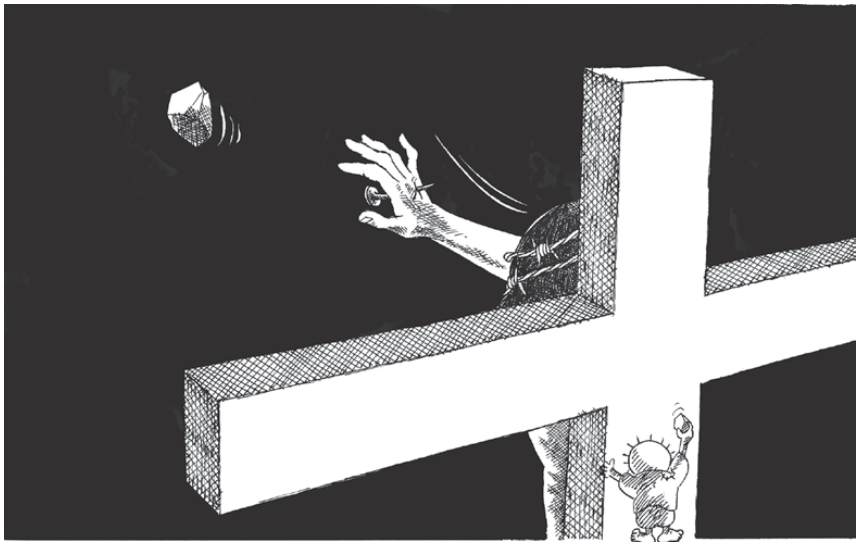

Figure 1.20 The crucified Messiah throwing a stone
(April 1982)

Figure 1.21 The Crucifixion and the Intifada
Text: "The Intifada of the West Bank and Gaza"
(December 24, 1986)

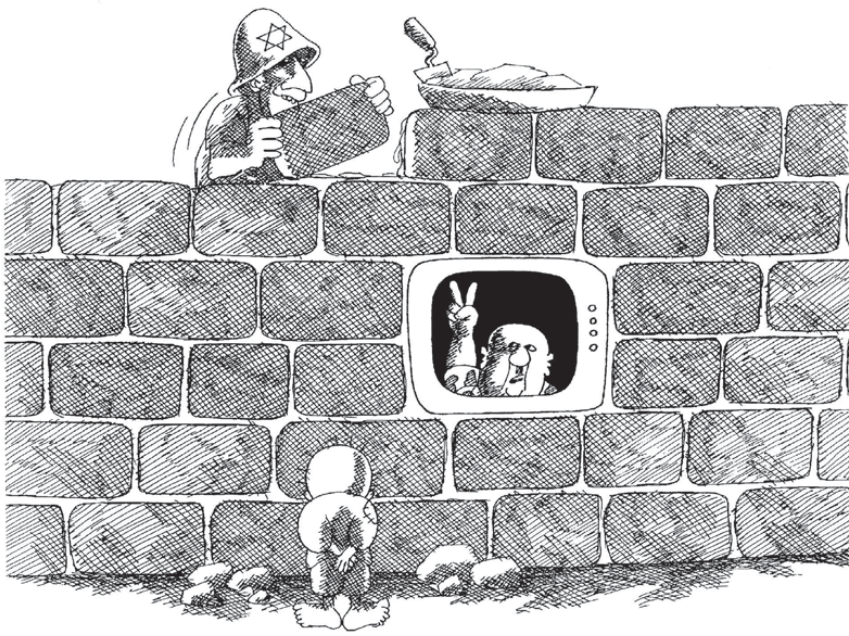

Figure 1.22 Building an Israeli settlement
(November 10, 1985)

and Gaza." The stone-throwing Hanthala appears in a number of cartoons during the eighties. The little boy is symbolically signaling the beginning of the first uprising.

As with the uprising, al-Ali foresaw the building of the separation wall.[24] In Figure 1.22, Hanthala watches as Israeli soldiers are building settlements, which nowadays could be construed as the apartheid wall, while a Palestinian official is idiotically signaling victory on a television channel.

Currently, drawings of Hanthala can be found on the separation wall, and as always the ubiquitous Hanthala has his back turned to us. Eyal Weizman writes of the wall:

> [the fact that] a barrier constructed through the entire West Bank to separate Jewish settlements and Israeli cities from Palestinian towns and villages was not designed by any pedigreed architect does not mean, however, that it has no architecture. The components that alternately or simultaneously comprise the Wall – 8-metre-high concrete slabs, electronic fences, barbed wire, radar, cameras, deep trenches, observation posts and patrol roads.
>
> (Weizman 161)

Ironically, another wall is also being constructed around Ein el-Helweh Refugee Camp in southern Lebanon; its primary aim is to restrict the movement of Palestinians. I wonder if al-Ali foresaw this one. In his eulogy of Naji al-Ali, the late Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim questions if Hanthala is actually dead: "Are you dead now/Hanthala," while his poem ends with a couplet that reads "You are deserving of death/Hanthala/You are deserving of death" (al-Qasim). Al-Qasim contends that we have given him the name Naji (survivor) but he ridiculed us and chose the name Hanthala; the artist may have died but his creation lives on (al-Qasim). Hanthala, "the beautiful child in ugly times," who may be eligible to die is paradoxically eternal though his principles (al-Qasim).

Darwish likened al-Ali's earth to a round crucifix, his universe smaller than Palestine, and Palestine is the camp; yet, he does not take the camp to the universe, but confines the world in a Palestinian refugee camp, in order that they both suffocate (Kallam 120).[25] In his drawings, al-Ali wanted to transport the readers into the frame, so they could closely bear witness to the events around them (al-Dabik 30). If Hanthala is the icon that will preserve his soul, the reader standing alongside the child is unconsciously saving part of al-Ali's soul, as he or she assumes the role of the symbolic witness (al-Dabik 39, 41).

Notes

1 The name has a variation of spellings in English, Handala is one; for my text, I will use Hanthala as it is closer to the Arab pronunciation of the word, حنظلة.
2 The information was kindly confirmed by Naji al-Ali's son, Khalid, during a meeting in Manama, Bahrain, on June 6, 2017.
3 Al-Shajara was one of the first villages in the Galilee to be destroyed. Ilan Pappé notes: "Judging by the end result of this stage, namely April–May 1948, this advice was not to spare a single village. Whereas the official Plan Dalet gave the villages the option to surrender, the operational orders did not exempt any village for any reason. With this the blueprint was converted into military order to begin destroying villages. The dates differed according to the geography: the Alexandroni Brigade, which would storm the coast with its tens of villages, leaving only two behind them, received its orders towards the end of April; the instruction to cleanse the Eastern Galilee arrived at the Golani Brigade headquarters on 6 May 1948, and the next day the first village in their 'area', Shajara, was cleansed" (88).
4 Different spellings for the camp exist in English. I will use Ein el-Helweh in my text.
5 Al-Ali's brother Jawhar recalls that the tent number was either 13 or 14 (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali? Part 1*).
6 Abu Maher al-Yamani, the teacher at the camp and later Palestinian activist, advised young al-Ali to continue drawing but his drawings should always be about the homeland (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali? Part 1*).
7 Al-Ali said, "I kept on drawing on the walls of the camp; I drew everything I remembered about the homeland, and the repressed emotions and pain in the eyes of the people in the camp" (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali? Part 1*).
8 The first cartoons were published in issue 88 of *al-Huriyya* on September 25, 1961 (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali? Part 1*).

9 Haugbolle notes: "Inside Israel his drawings were forbidden, which of course only added to their popularity" (244).
10 For details of Naji al-Ali's life, please refer to Joe Sacco's introduction to *A Child in Palestine*: *The Cartoons of Naji al-Ali* and *Naji al-Ali*: 1985–1987, which was published in Arabic by Dar al Farabi in 2012, in Beirut, Lebanon.
11 A number of Arab poets wrote eulogies for Naji al-Ali including the late Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim, Iraqi poets Ahmed Mattar and Muthafar al-Nawwab, the late Egyptian vernacular poet Abdul-Rahman al-Abnoudi, Palestinian poet and writer Mourid Barghouti, and Palestinian poet and author Mohammad al-As'ad.
12 In 1988, Naji al-Ali was awarded the Golden Pen of Freedom award posthumously; the annual award by WAN-IFRA recognizes "the outstanding action, in writing or deed, of an individual, a group or an institution in the cause of press freedom" (WAN-IFRA).
13 Captions used in this chapter are my own and not the artist's.
14 My translation.
15 Please refer to Chapter 5 for a definition of *Thobe*.
16 Syrian political cartoonist, Ali Farzat, compared al-Ali's caricature to a stage on which the players represented certain beliefs and political stances (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali Part 2*). According to Khalid Naji al-Ali, it is believed that al-Ali drew between 12,000 to 15,000 cartoons. Eight thousand were published (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali Part 2*).
17 As Hanthala is not present in this illustration, one can assume it was drawn prior to his "birth."
18 Giulia Zanetti summarizes, "As a Palestinian, Handhala was faithful to the cause of Palestine, to the refugee camps, to the Palestinian people, and to the poor and the oppressed. As an Arab, he advocated democracy, human rights, opportunity for all, freedom of expression, Arab unity, and protecting the Arabs' natural resources. His role in the cartoons was also to expose the brutality of the oppressor, whether it was the Israeli occupation, the dictatorship of the Arab regimes, or the hypocrisy of the Palestinian leadership" (12).
19 Palestinian author and journalist, Rashad Abu Shawar, remarked that one would never find Hanthala in the homes of those who are corrupt (al-Jazeera, *Who Killed Naji al-Ali Part 2*).
20 Haugbolle states, in "Ali's cartoons … a rotund conservative Arab leader or businessman […] is sometimes rendered without any feet, as a slug-like, cross-eyed creature with an affable smile. He is often paired with *al-Zalame* (the fellow/guy), the archetypical poor refugee" (238).
21 Zanetti writes: "From 1973 onward, Handhala turned his face completely away from the reader and clasped his hands together behind his back. After the October war of 1973 and the events that led to the end of the war and the agreements brokered by Henry Kissinger, al-'Ali predicted unjust solutions that would be imposed on the Arab side" (Zanetti). Hanthala did turn his face away from the reader for the most part, but in a few later cartoons, we did see his face. This was especially evident in the cartoon when the young child is seen carrying the Palestinian and Lebanese flags. Please refer to his 1982 cartoon following the Israeli invasion in *A Child in Palestine* (al-Ali, *Child* 83). Another example is when he is helping the Palestinian peasants plough their land (al-Ali, *Child* 20).

22 The Iraqi artist, Dia Azzawi, created a three-dimensional metallic rendition of Hanthala, which enables us to see the face of the ten-year-old child. The child is carrying a flower as in the "good morning Beirut cartoons." Even though the child's face is exposed, his eyes remain vacant and expressionless; he is still the silent observer of the events around him. The large size of the sculptor denotes the importance of the creator of Hanthala (@SultanAlQassemi).

23 The apple and the child motif is also a direct reference to the William Tell folk story; Tell was arrested for refusing to bow to a pole with the hoisted hat of the newly appointed Austrian Vogt, Albrecht Gessler. The latter ordered Tell to aim at an apple placed on his son's head with a single bolt from his crossbow.

24 Raja Shehadeh notes: "In 2002 Israel began building a wall to separate Israel and the Palestinians. But rather than follow the 1967 border, a large proportion of the wall has been built inside the West Bank, annexing over 10 percent of the West Bank to Israel. In an Orwellian twist, Israel calls this four-metre high concrete wall a fence, and in doing so misappropriates the poet Robert Frost's line about good fences making good neighbours. In separating the Palestinian community from their fellow Palestinian neighbours, the wall is a bold symbol of the hegemony of the Israeli side, its hunger for annexing more Palestinian land and exerting more control over the Palestinian population" (47).

25 Arabic script:

"احذروا ناجي فإن الكرة الأرضية عنده صليب دائري الشكل..والكون عنده أصغر من فلسطين. وفلسطين عنده هي المخيم. إنه لا يأخذ المخيم إلى العالم، ولكنه يأسر العالم في مخيم فلسطيني ليضيق الاثنان معاً." (Kallam 120).

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2 Nazareth

Icon of a lost homeland in Elia Suleiman's film trilogy

> Here on a hill slope facing the sunset and the wide-gaping gun barrel of time
> near orchards of severed shadows we do as prisoners and the unemployed
> do: we nurse hope
>
> (Darwish, *Siege* 3).

Introduction: the silent director

In Chapter 1, I argued how Hanthala, the silent ten-year-old barefoot child, has evolved to become a witness for Palestinians and Arabs, defiantly giving his back to us throughout the years. The little boy has not only outlived his creator Naji al-Ali, but has also become one of the eternal icons of Palestine, cherished by generations of Arabs and Palestinians alike. Hanthala survived through the power of his silent observation, which stood as a reminder of the injustices committed against the Palestinians and the trodden. The stoic child's presence prodded the reader as he stood with unrelenting honesty representing the consciousness of those who have been victimized. Those who had no voice welcomed his daily presence, while to some the little boy became an unwanted *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 7). Nonetheless, the fact remains that Hanthala is just as relevant today as the day he was created.

Erasure of history and silencing of the people are predicaments that have plagued the Palestinians since 1948.[1] The world has simply refused to listen. In a novel by Palestinian author, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Wadi, one of the main protagonists, says, "We spoke the truth till our throats grew hoarse, and we ended up as refugees in tents. We fancied the world community cherished the truth, and turned out to be the victims of our naiveté" (19–20). Exiled from historical Palestine and ending up for the most part as refugees in camps in neighboring countries, the people of Palestine were left with their memories to try to understand the implication of their forced exodus, and their newly acquired status as refugees. For others who managed to remain in the newly established Jewish state, they either became strangers in their land or "present absentees."[2] For the Palestinian, the memory of the homeland is not only one of nostalgia for a lost past or even a perceived distant utopia but is also an essential exercise in recollection, which is vital for survival. For a long time, memories remained as stories handed down orally from one generation to the

next, resisting documentation. This was markedly broken fifty years after the Nakba or Catastrophe (Tamari, "Narratives" 101). One can only speculate why the Palestinians took such a long time to break the silence. The most obvious reason lies in the fact that the trauma was and is ongoing; "it is still with us, pulsating with life and coursing through history by piling up more calamities upon the Palestinian people" (Masalha, *Palestine Nakba* 43). The initial trauma cannot have been forgotten, as Palestinians are continuously reminded of it through a violent cycle of repetitions and a difficult present (Gertz and Khleifi, "Bleeding" 106).

In December 2011, the US Republican presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich claimed in an interview with the Jewish Channel that the Palestinians are an "invented people" (Gingrich). The myth of the invented or even the non-existent Palestinian has also been echoed by Israeli politicians since the inception of the Jewish state, and has for the most part remained uncontested by the West. In 1969, the former prime minister of Israel, Golda Meir, told the London *Sunday Times*: "It is not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them, they did not exist" (Meir). Negating the existence of the Palestinian people has been an essential component of the Zionist project, which succeeded in creating a homeland for the Jewish people in historic Palestine. Plan Dalet, which was completed in 1947, stipulated the systematic and total expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland (Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing* xii–xiii, 28). In "pre-1948 classical Zionist discourse, Arabs were rarely even mentioned and such a term would have been unthinkable. The land, after all, was basically 'empty,' and the task was therefore to colonize. Only a few overtly acknowledged that colonization required removal of the local population" (Pappé, "The Vicissitudes" 14).

The myth of the land without a people, or more recently the invented people, has rendered the task of documenting the memories of the homeland more daunting. The latter myths have unfortunately persisted to this day, and against such a myth the Palestinians had to resituate themselves a priori in their land by resisting eviction, by attempting to preserve their history. The late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes: "He who was born in a country that does not exist … does not exist either" (*In the Presence* 52). The Israeli narrative has removed the Palestinian entity from its cities, towns and villages (Gertz and Khleifi, "Bleeding" 105). With the passage of time, the need to narrate the story has become more pressing. With the passing of the years and the realization that there is no viable solution to the Palestinian question, the Palestinians acknowledged the importance of documenting their stories. The Palestinian has to resist being fossilized as a refugee or an absentee in his or her own homeland. Signaling 1948 or the Nakba as the decisive date when the story begins is in itself significant.[3] 1948 "is the date on which their search for self-determination begins. It doesn't begin in 1967. That simply completed the Israeli conquest" (Said, *Culture & Resistance* 32).

The Nakba does not only represent a past loss but also the denial of the cultural and home space, hindering the self's ability to be constructed through a resource of memories (Saloul 69). In 1948, "the Palestinians were dispersed, and what few of them remained in their historic *patrie* were submerged in a new state decidedly *not* theirs" (Said, *Question* xxix; emphasis in original). The loss of the homeland, which is closely linked to the loss of honor, brought along with it humiliation at having been defeated, forcibly exiled or rendered an absentee in one's own land. This in turn led to a "*humiliated silence* […] brought on by a particular kind of collective shame" (Connerton, *Mourning* 46; emphasis in original). Through the medium of film, however, Palestinians have found a space to address this shame as they renegotiate their existence as a people who once had a homeland. The medium grants them a visual presence, a space in which they continue to resist eviction as in the case of the West Bank and Gaza or transfer if the Jewish state may no longer accommodate the non-Jewish citizens who earlier resisted the 1948 expulsion. Through the visual medium, they address the humiliation of losing their homeland.[4] The nuclear family of Palestinian director, Elia Suleiman, is one who were able to remain in their hometown, Nazareth. Suleiman has chosen to contest this marginalization through his own silent presence in his work. Suleiman's presence in his films is "the introvert spectator," as if "modeled on the figure of the ghost," mute, located at the edge of the frame, and watching hauntingly (Hochberg 58). The actor/director remains invisible to the Israelis, but from his "position of invisibility he continues to watch" (Hochberg 58). Given that the Palestinian identity is suppressed in daily life, images, narrative and silence become a place of refuge and expression (Abu-Remaileh, "Narratives in Conflict" 86–87). In the films, the character E.S. (the director who plays himself) observes from the sidelines, as he chronicles the events that are unfolding around him. His film presence is akin to that of Hanthala's in al-Ali's illustrations; with his subdued haunting presence, Suleiman marks events silently. Hamid Dabashi describes Suleiman as a "filmmaker of ingenious creative frivolity" (Dabashi 134). Dabashi adds:

> […] the closest language corresponding to the barefaced *obscenity* of the Zionist armed robbery of a nation of its territory was in fact *frivolity*. I thought if *obscenity* was the will to power and domination undoing reason *ad nauseam*, then *frivolity* was taking that *ad nauseam* transgression of reason and turning it, *ad absurdum*, to a will to resist power.
>
> (Dabashi 134; emphasis in original)

Through his films, E.S. becomes the icon of the Palestinian who laboriously waits, refusing to go away, his films insisting on "the visual register as the primary mechanism for expression, relegating verbal discourse to secondary status" (Massad 40). Through the decentralization of the colonizer's role through humor (Salaita, Seikaly and Griffin, "Dreaming Palestine"), the Palestinian in Suleiman's films demands that s/he be seen.[5] Similarly, through

his portrayal of Nazareth, he renders his hometown the same iconic status, being the Palestinian city that resists negation as it holds on to the remnants of its Arab culture. In this chapter, I mainly focus on Suleiman's loose film trilogy, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), *Divine Intervention* (2002), and *The Time that Remains* (2009), maintaining that these works have become icons of Palestinian cinema and ultimately the homeland.[6]

Chronicle of presence and non-presence: *Chronicle of a Disappearance*

Suleiman is a Palestinian actor and director, born in 1960 in Nazareth. As with his compatriot, Nazareth-born Hani Abu-Assad, Suleiman's films have participated in international film festivals, at times winning awards (Nashef 84). He belongs to the group of Palestinian directors who have lived in various cultures; his films, funded by various resources, have catered to diverse audiences (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 5). Ever since the 1980s, Suleiman has been regarded as one of the major directors of Palestinian cinema, and his films are generally referred to as independent cinema (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 33). Nazareth, which has featured in nearly all of his films, comprises the largest Arab population within Israel. Suleiman has often described his hometown as a ghetto, a provincial city, and has expressed on occasions hatred towards it (Stutesman and Suleiman 93).[7] In it, the director says the people are "depressed, frustrated, unemployed, vicious, and they unleash that against each other" (Stutesman and Suleiman 93). J. Hoberman suggests that Nazareth remains "a place of pervasive entropy" due to the absence of "a Palestinian civil society" (133). In addition, the current architecture of the city has the makings of an architectural, cultural and social ghetto (Srouji 355).[8] Even new buildings by its Palestinian citizens began to mimic the "conqueror," and are "misdirected act[s] of resistance" (Srouji 367).

In Suleiman's films, Nazareth is home, hive and tribe but in complete statis (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 77). It is also the city in which his parents live and his cousin owns a tourist shop, but everything in it represents death and decomposition, albeit closely and tenderly portrayed (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 77). The Israeli Jew, the IDF and Hebrew are generally absent from Suleiman's portrayal of the city (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 77). Suleiman's Nazareth is both Arab and Christian, signaling to "a tangible piece of the lost past, a frame grabbed out of time" (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 77). In the appointment scene with Taha Mohammad Ali, the Palestinian poet recounts a memory of his grandfather who repeatedly told the same story about Istanbul and the dish of lamb he enjoyed during the time he was serving in the Ottoman army; the poet tells us how his grandfather always repeated the same story when prompted to talk about the city, even when he visited them in Nazareth four years after he was exiled to Lebanon.[9] The poet recalls his grandfather's eyes: "I looked into his

eyes … human eyes never change … everything about him had changed but not his eyes," (Suleiman, *Chronicle*). The grandfather is constantly returning to a pre-1948 Ottoman Palestine, and his eyes remain fixated on a time when Palestine existed. The poet, meanwhile, insists on repeating his grandfather's memory rather than discussing his current situation in Nazareth.

Suleiman's films accurately and with unrelenting honestly depict both the phobic existence of Nazareth's citizens and the frustrations that they direct at one another. This inward violence is, according to Frantz Fanon, the colonized victim's way of striving for freedom (68). Although a son of this homeland, Suleiman argues that as citizens of the town, the Palestinian Arabs always felt "the sense of an inferior 'otherness' vis-à-vis the ones who dominated [them]," adding that they always felt intimidated when they left Nazareth or visited any Jewish city, stressing that they felt like visitors in their own land (Butler and Suleiman 67).[10] Nonetheless, the past of this Palestinian-Arab Christian town tenaciously lingers on in Suleiman's films—Palestine becomes the specter that in Derridean terms comes and comes again with no possibility of dying. In the director's vision, the personal and the political concerns collide (Ball 16). Suleiman says:

> I only reflect and sponge and experience, and that happens to be as a Palestinian Diasporic — or everyday reality. An occupation of some sorts. A different kind of an occupation. An occupation of the geography of Palestine, and an occupation of the souls of those who live there.
>
> (Suleiman, "Different Kind of Occupation")

Through his films, Suleiman presents us with a people who doggedly hold on to what remains of their past homeland; they go on with their little traditions and customs, however prosaic they may be. The banal scenes of life and the repetitive gestures defy the impact of marginalization or occupation on the people (Junka-Aikio 408). Suleiman presents the viewer with images that relate to reality, then proceeds to deconstruct them, turning them into parodies before reconstructing them again (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 172). The church bells, which are heard in the background of a number of scenes in the film, and the occasional Adhan or call to prayer, testify to a pre-1948 Nazareth.

Suleiman's hometown is the largest center of Palestinian life within the state of Israel; in his films, it is also a tangible piece of history grabbed as a frame from its past (Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifac" 172). Edward Said argues that in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) Israel's discrimination against the Palestinians is visible, while in Israel the "discrimination takes subtler no less severe forms" (Said, *Search*). He adds that 92 percent of the land is designated for Jews, and as a consequence Palestinians are not allowed to buy or lease it, but any Jew from anywhere in the world is given the right to it (Said, *Search*). As with the Palestinian who is both absent and present, Nazareth is the Palestinian-Arab town that is both there and not

there. The city with its 64,000 Arab population remains the largest Palestinian urban center within the state of Israel. In 1948, or during the Nakba, when Palestine was erased from world maps, the population of Nazareth was around 15,000 inhabitants, over 60 percent of which was Christian and the rest Moslem.[11] In 1957, the Jewish settlement of Nazareth-Illit was established on confiscated land east of the city, and according to Srouji the settlement, which housed 52,000 Jewish residents, threatens to devour the old city (356). As with its people, the Arab-Palestinian part is slowly disappearing as new Jewish neighborhoods are encroaching on the Arab section, in turn adding to the ghetto-like feeling within it. An Orthodox priest (Leonid Alexeenko) describes in Suleiman's film the change that the land has witnessed around Lake Tiberias:

> I'm encircled by giant buildings and kibbutzes. As if that was not enough, my collar is choking me. An odd bond unites me to those people, like an arranged marriage, with this lake as a wedding ring. Not long ago, those hills were deserted, at night, when I gazed at the hills from the monastery. I contemplated a particular spot, the darkest on the hills. Fear would grab me, a fear with a religious feeling, as if this black spot were the source of my faith […] Then, they settled on those hills, and illuminated the whole place; that was the end for me, I began losing faith […] I feared nothing any longer, now my world is small […] They have expanded their world, and mine has shrunk.
>
> (Suleiman, *Chronicle*)

The tourists' excrement has polluted the lake to an extent that anyone can walk on its water, an allusion to the dying Christianity in Nazareth. The land is no longer familiar, and the priest adds that the more Kibbutzim and high

Figure 2.1 The Orthodox Priest

rises infringe onto the place, the more he loses his own faith (Figure 2.1); his world diminishes while theirs expands (Suleiman, *Chronicle*).

The subsequent growth of the settlements has also had an impact on the livelihood of the old town's economy, and urban identity (Srouji 356). Not only has the presence of the old town been constricted but also its future has been usurped (Srouji 356). The sense of alienation and marginalization pervades Suleiman's films; on their own lands, the Palestinians are essentially absent. Suleiman describes his own use of framing to emphasize this sense of a being at once lacking presence and authority: "Look at my being in the frame. It's completely marginalized. I am almost a present absentee or an absent presentee" (Stutesman and Suleiman 92). Although Suleiman is here referring to his not wanting to claim authority over the events that unfold in his films but allow the viewers to have a "democratic reading" of his films, one cannot help but notice that being sidelined in the frame is indicative of the situation of the Palestinian Arab within the state of Israel (Stutesman and Suleiman 92). All Palestinian histories, whether of the elite or marginalized, are subaltern "in relation to the dominant narrative of Zionist discourse" (Saloul 4), or in an "interstitial state of living between the cracks" (Abu-Remaileh, "Narratives in Conflict" 87). Nonetheless, Suleiman creates a tableau with a vacuum to be filled in by the spectator and by that haunting absence (Stutesman and Suleiman 87). Ultimately, this space has to be filled by the original inhabitants of the land. With Suleiman, the Palestinian story is told through the intersections of multiple meanings, a narrative that cannot be told but is recounted (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 172). Through his vignettes, the Palestinian is visually present.

Charting the face; mapping the land

Chronicle of a Disappearance begins with a dim image, exposed in fragments, before the camera settles on the face of an old man (Fuad Suleiman) who is dozing off and breathing heavily. We later learn that the elderly man is Suleiman's father. The pre-title sequence introduces the film's theme as the camera maps the face of the old man, as it appears to travel over dark and rocky terrain (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 75). We have two journeys, one over a human face and a poetic one over Palestine (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 75). The camera is not simply traveling over a geographical area but also an historical area as it maps over a face of an elderly Palestinian who has lived through the 1948 Catastrophe, and continues to witness the disappearance of his country. The Catastrophe is etched in the folds of the old man's skin. Along with the father, a number of his family members star in the film.

Chronicle, however, does not follow a chronological sequence of events, nor does it offer a conventional narrative. As Palestinians have been ghettoized both geographically and historically, Suleiman argues that this metaphor

requires "a nonlinear cinematographic narrative structure […] Opting for nonlinearity in the film's narrative mode fits in a perfect synchronization with my intention to challenge the linearity of the story of Palestine" (Bourlond and Suleiman 97). Therefore, the film, which is divided into three sections, "Personal Diary," set in Nazareth, "Political Diary," set in Jerusalem, and the "The Promised Land," set in Jericho and Nazareth, comprises a series of tableaux and vignettes, which are loosely connected through the main character that haunts the film by his silent presence within or outside of the frame.[12] Suleiman is the mature adult man "with eyes wide open in a troubling meditative gaze, who witnesses in silence" (Salti 52).[13] The film is concerned with the "liminality of loss and disappearance – of count of the people, of the self […] Using a diary format, the film tells the story of a visit to Palestine by a film director" (Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifac" 170). Suleiman's presence in all of his films has often been compared to Jacques Tati's own presence as protagonist in his films, but with Suleiman, the character remains the silent observer, through whose eyes the events of the films unfold (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 41).

Michel Foucault argues that with discontinuity, ruptures and breaks, a new kind of history can be developed (6). The nonlinear narratives and vignettes in Suleiman's film allow for this kind of history to be written; his narrations transfer the "ruptures" and "displacement of the discontinuous […] from [being] obstacle[s]" to assume an important part of "the work itself" (Foucault 10). They help tell the history of his people, keeping it "living and continuous" and "the subject in question, a place of rest, certainty [and perhaps] reconciliation" (Foucault 16). Suleiman confines himself to the use of laconic inter-titles, which offer us information and astonishingly reflect on the practice itself (Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifac" 170). In all his films, a critical distance is always kept between the various frames to enable the director to tell a story from an angle that is neither too close nor far (Abu-Remaileh, "Narrating Space" 83). The outside unfolds in fragments and is generally dark, always disjointed and divided, "reminiscent of *film noir*" (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 175). Suleiman argues that the moment you glance inward, you become aware of all the layers that you need to maneuver within the self, and once you start on this voyage you begin to appreciate the potentiality that allows you to arrive at a moment of sincerity (Suleiman, "Séminaire").

In the film, the protagonist E.S. returns to his homeland shortly after the Oslo Accord, having spent twelve years in voluntary exile in New York.[14] E.S. is completely silent; he observes and records the events without any form of commentary on them. His silent gaze guides the viewer to witness the unfolding catastrophe played out on our screens. The depth of the silence is one of horror, despair and indicative of the muteness of the Palestinian people (Salti 52). It also connects the collective, the many faces of Palestinians presented in Suleiman's films (Himada 84). The few occasions that we see him or his face in the frame, he is expressionless. A large

number of the scenes in the film are shot through door or window frames, emphasizing the distance between the onlooker E.S. and the subjects, and ultimately us, the viewers. E.S.'s presence in the film functions as one who is at once an insider, being the son of the land, and the outsider who is documenting what has become of his occupied and fragmented country; consequently, Palestine is presented in three sections in the film—Nazareth which was occupied in 1948, Jerusalem, which was completely occupied in 1967, and Jericho, which was given some form of autonomy following the Oslo Accord. For those who live on this land, these lines are real. Cinematically, Suleiman can negotiate these political divisions with E.S.'s omnipresence as a scribe of Palestinian history.[15]

Confined to physical or imaginary boundaries as in the case of Nazareth creates a claustrophobic existence for the citizens of the town; the frustration of its inhabitants can only be projected onto others in the community as this becomes the only feasible outlet. On his first morning, E.S. wakes up to what appears to be a monologue by his aunt (Juliet Mazzawi) who is waiting to go with his mother (Nazira Suleiman) to offer condolences. As she waits, the viewer hears a harangue of useless gossip, namely negative comments about people the aunt knows who are not even part of the film; these "direct-to-camera comments, all filmed by a fixed camera, are particularly revealing" of the dysfunction of the Nazarene society (Armes 255). Suleiman's father is in turn playing backgammon on a computer, smoking, oblivious to his surroundings.

There is a paucity of dialogue in the film; if there is a conversation, the topics are generally banal. In the restaurant scene with two friends who are supposedly welcoming E.S. back, one friend talks of a theory that claims that early humans had tails, and that's why they keep on shaking their back side. In the background, we hear a couplet from Asmahan's song "Layal al Uns," (Pleasurable nights), in which she sings, "Imagination is but an illusion, and a shadow of dreams//why are you patient with the days and why are you silent," an implicit comment on Suleiman (Asmahan).[16] In the kitchen scene in Suleiman's house, a group of women talk of different ways of peeling garlic; there is no dialogue or discussion on the method, but all the women are talking at the same time, and no one is listening. They are asserting their presence at once. For the most part, there is no communication in the film; if anything, it is miscommunication. In the fish-cleaning scene, his parents are busy scraping the fish, silently. As with the garlic scene, people are preoccupied "with the skin of things [… as when] both parents are preparing an enormous pile of little fish for dinner, by scraping their skin" (Bresheeth, "Segell Ikhtifac" 171). Skin could also be viewed as a metaphor for occupation, a layer that has to be removed. The father does have conversations with his pet canary and his dog; those interactions are through a cage and a fence; all forms of communication between humans are thwarted before they begin.

The vignettes and statements in the film do not constitute an evolving narrative, and are separated by the same title "The Day After" (Armes 255).

Figure 2.2 The Besharat Fish Store

Suleiman uses silence in his films to demonstrate this breakdown of communication; "it fits the idea of Nazareth as a ghetto" (Butler and Suleiman 68). On the other hand, in the garage scene early on in the film, the mechanics examine a green BMW car with extreme tenderness. When the camera shifts to the entrance of the shop, where on the side of the doorway we see the back of E.S. who is staring at the open space in front of him, Samira Saeed's song "Yes, I Miss You Sometimes" provides the background music, an implicit comment on the director's state of missing his hometown. Tenderness or relationships are to be had from animals, inanimate objects, songs, or radio talk shows; in the kitchen scene, we only see E.S.'s legs, as he reads a newspaper while an announcer on the radio talks about love. In this part of the trilogy, family life or even normal life is missing (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 175). On a number of occasions, people fight for no apparent reason, as with the passengers in the cars that stop in front of the Besharat Fish store; the scene repeats itself three times but each time with different people and cars (Figure 2.2).

Towards the end of the film, two people arrive in front of the fish store again, only to get out and exchange places, and then leave without a fight to the surprise of those in the shop who were anticipating a fight that they need to break up. Hope is still possible. Actions in this claustrophobic place do not make sense; the people of the town continue with their own rituals and habits, even though the world around them has changed. The one certainty is a disappearing existence, and the little that remains is what they hold on to, amidst this shrinking homeland. Furthermore, it is a town in which nothing

Figure 2.3 E.S. and his cousin sit idle in front of the souvenir shop

happens, except for the occasional group of tourists who come but do not see, pass by the tourist shop and don't even enter. In a land in which no logic applies, it does not matter. E.S.'s cousin fills his holy water bottles from the tap. The postcard rack squeaks to the wind, and instead of buying postcards the tourists decide to take photos of E.S. and his cousin, a suggestion that they are etched into the fabric of this ancient land, Palestinian relics to be cherished, even though silenced and forgotten. The postcards themselves are telling a story of another land, a simulacrum rendering the original homeland absent (Figure 2.3).

At best, they are commodities reducing the land into an empty representation (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 185). The scenes in which E.S. sits in absolute silence with his cousin, both smoking, in front of the Holyland shop denote the endless waiting and inaction that permeate the film. Even when a youth hangs an obituary notice on the pole near them, they do not move. It is as if death has already arrived, and no notice is needed. However, there are little glimpses of hope, such as the wedding procession, which is an indication that in spite of everything life will go on. Although the film is full of scenes in which passivity dominates, signaling no hope, the presence of the Palestinians in Nazareth getting on with their daily lives, their small eccentricities, and inconsequential dialogues, are proof that they are not going anywhere.

Waiting is a theme that dominates Suleiman's films. In "Diary of a Beginner," a segment he directed as part of a longer film, *7 Days in Havana*, Suleiman also draws on themes of tenderness, identity and waiting. The director, E.S., is in Havana to conduct an interview with a prominent Cuban figure (Suleiman,

7 Days). As he waits for Castro's speech to end, he wanders the city observing Havana (Suleiman, *7 Days*). Throughout his wait, his own Palestinian identity is revealed through his two visits to the Palestinian Embassy, as he stares at some of the symbolism which is associated with Palestine, and his recognition of the symbolism attached to waiting within a restricted place, such as Cuba (Suleiman, "Diary"). In his discussion with Cuban novelist and journalist, Leonardo Padura, he describes Havana as a Gazan place, as he observed something very Palestinian about the city: "people can turn their despair into inventions, reinventing everything from nothing," along with the kindness that caught him as he watched them in their daily lives (Suleiman and Padura Leonardo, *Havana Confidential*). People's daily activities not only evoke tenderness but also perseverance.

In the night fishing scene in *Chronicle*, one of the men enquires of his friend if he is related to some Nazarene families by listing them, before cursing them. The dialogue in itself sounds trivial, but listing the family names of Nazareth is one way of ascertaining their historical presence in the city, which spans centuries; the near monologue functions like a registry of names. The projection of some of the images as slides against a wall before "The Political Diary" scene, which takes place in Jerusalem, is yet another form of documenting the presence of the people of Nazareth and affirming E.S.'s role as an onlooker, the record-keeper of his people. Suleiman emphasizes that his "films are not documentaries," but as he works from "personal notes, using kind of autobiographical portraits or sketches, [his] films can be seen as documents" (Butler and Suleiman 64). The first section of the film ends with his parents sleeping on a couch and a chair in their living room, respectively. E.S. once again is standing with his back to us on the right-hand side of the frame, a pose reminiscent of Hanthala's, observing silently.

Nigel C. Hunt writes:

> Our identities are tied up with memory and history. Without memory we have no identity. In order to create our identities we draw on cultural memories and historical understanding of our cultures. Remembrance of the past is important in terms of our socialization into our culture. Family traditions are also important in this.
>
> (Hunt 106)

In essence, Suleiman's films are trying to preserve what is left of the Palestinian identity; Suleiman does not "want to tell the story of Palestine; [he] want[s] to open the way to multiple spaces that lend themselves to different readings" (Bourlond and Suleiman 98). Suleiman also wants to create "an image that transcends the ideological definition of what it means to be a Palestinian, an image far from the stereotype" (Bourlond and Suleiman 98).

"Jerusalem: A Political Diary" begins with a car making its way to Jerusalem. There is an openness in the second part that was lacking in the first section of the film (Armes 255). In Nazareth, the director's view was

often blocked by laundry, someone's head or a closed window, and the scene was often divided and disjointed, apprehended in fragments, a minaret, a tree, etc., which was also dissected further by the editing process (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 175). Natacha Atlas' song "Why we fight," ironically, provides the background music, the implication being that the Oslo Accords have delivered on their promise. The director tells us that he "moved to Jerusalem to be closer to the airport/[he] moved to a new space to have more time" (Suleiman, *Chronicle*). His house in Jerusalem is as claustrophobic as his parents' home in Nazareth, but here the oppression is associated with the Israeli occupation (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 174). On the surface, time appears to be the one commodity that is available. In a real estate office, E.S. hears the agent making a pass at ʿA'dan (Ula Tabari), a young Palestinian woman who has come to look for an apartment. The real estate agent claims he has her best interest at heart, stating that Palestinian traditions do not allow her to live alone. Here, Suleiman is presenting us with the negative stereotype of the patriarchal Palestinian man who pretends to care; this man is essentially a predator. In all of his films, Suleiman's presentation of the Palestinian is not only realistic but it also resists romanticizing the Palestinians by seeing them through the Orientalist eyes or fixating them in the role of the victim. This scene is followed by ʿA'dan's attempt at finding a flat in the western part of the city; when the Jewish agents find out that she is Arab, they patronizingly tell her that she does not sound like one, even though they complement her on her Hebrew. ʿA'dan is denied a place of residence in her own city.

In Jerusalem, we see the Israeli occupation, which has been absent in Nazareth, in its military form. Suleiman describes the 1948 occupation of Palestine, which is "no longer militaristic, [as] there's no longer a military government with tanks and soldiers in the streets and all that. It's become psychological, economic, denial of rights, humiliation in all its forms and it's manifested [in his films] by the ghetto atmosphere" (Butler and Suleiman 70). Historically, a colony was regarded as a special kind of place, in which "all conceptions of citizenship as universal entitlement" were abolished (Gilroy 49). Even though the Palestinians within the state of Israel carry the Israeli nationality, they are not granted the same rights or status as Jewish Israelis. Essentially, the Palestinians are not recognized as human beings. For them to be recognized as such, they have to be granted "an authentic kind of historic being" (Gilroy 32). Their history has been erased by a much stronger myth, and they are looked at as aberrations within an invented history of another.

As with the film's earlier Nazarene section, in Jerusalem, Suleiman also presents us with absurd scenes; one example is a man who is practicing his martial arts skills against the windowpane of Suleiman's car. Once again, we fail to see an expression on E.S.'s face, as he looks out from the house. The silence that permeates the film extends to the silencing of the director by a microphone. During an event, in which he is supposed to lecture in front of

Figure 2.4 Israeli soldiers relieve themselves against a wall

an *eager* audience who are welcoming back the Palestinian director from exile, he is unable to utter a word, due to the squeaking of the microphone. As Oslo promises have been aborted as soon as they were made, likewise his speech cannot be delivered. Even those in the audience do not convey a real interest; one man in the audience tells a caller when his mobile phone rings that he is out having dinner with friends. People have long lost hope of anything changing; daily life continues because it has to. The previous scene and the one in which ʿA'dan is unable to rent an apartment in Jerusalem are "barometers of a greater political malaise" (Porton and Suleiman 24). The film itself is composed of disruptions, albeit minor, such as the light fixtures that turn on and off on their own accord, the "souvenirs that keep falling down on the shelf, scenic water fountains that won't spray when Suleiman is present but start up again when he leaves" (Klawans 35). These minor interruptions add to the dark and absurd humor that pervades the film, such as when the Israeli policemen, who appear as clones, rush to stand against a most likely Palestinian wall to relieve themselves (Figure 2.4).[17]

At the heart of all Suleiman's cinema:

> […] dwells a dark humor, the frivolity of a pointed anger mutated into laughter […] uplifted to the creative core of a visual artistry [Suleiman's frivolity is] sardonic, bitter and biting, angry but subdued, mordant yet meandering, scornful but not in a defeated way. It is defiantly sarcastic, creatively derisive, joyously flamboyant.
>
> (Dabashi 135)

When two Israeli security policemen invade the privacy of his home, break a window even though he does not resist them, and search every room but find nothing, E.S. is sidelined; he walks behind them, sometimes leading the way as they inspect the premises. To them he is non-existent, and this becomes apparent when the report is heard on the walkie-talkie describing everything that they have found in the house, including detailed descriptions of paintings, chairs, the Arab singers' names on the tapes (which they seem to know), etc., but the man in the pajamas is listed last. Even though E.S. is ignored, his silent observation of the security policemen rummaging through his apartment allows him to emerge as an icon of struggle, at once mute and present. While the Palestinian is once again denied his or her ontological presence, the Israeli security men are inadvertently documenting the Arab-Palestinian side. Prior to their breaking into his house, E.S. types "Jerusalem—to be or not to be/Jerusalem—to be a Palestinian or not to be" on the computer screen. The Palestinians in Suleiman's film "are shown as static, almost to the point of disappearance," while the Israelis "are seen to evaporate through manic and absurd hyperactivity" (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 76). This juxtaposition does indeed add to the passivity of E.S. and his family but it is difficult to ascertain that the Palestinian is disappearing anytime soon or for that matter the Israeli.

The Palestinians in Suleiman's films appear "as utterly seductive and belonging to our age. Israel, in contrast, is clumsy, ossified, heavy and stuck in the past" (Junka-Aikio 410). This absurd situation cannot be sustained. The Palestinian enjoys the paradoxical situation of being both present and absent in Israel/Palestine. Although the pre-1948 Palestine has for the most part disappeared, any existence in Israel/Palestine is a double one, as Israeli settlements have been built on the remains of Arab-Palestinian villages (Bresheeth, "Symphony of Absence" 84). These destroyed villages continue to haunt, and persist in the memory of those who once lived in them through the narrative that is being passed down; even the plants that have remained in those villages testify to that history.[18] Ultimately, the imposed top layer has failed to erase the layer below.

Palestine of the future, however, is yet to be born; its citizens like Samuel Beckett's tramps are waiting for their own Godot, involved in their own petty discussions or have their own carrots or turnips to contend with; they continue to exist in this diminishing country. It is not perchance that on the wall of the room with the theater props hangs a poster of an Arab performance of *Waiting for Godot*. The section that is labeled the "Promised Land" exposes a barren land as the car makes its way towards Jericho, one of the products of the Oslo Accords, another indication that the latter have failed to deliver on any of their promises. The background song is paradoxically Atlas' song. "Let's return to peace." In Jericho, E.S. is the only customer at the club; he swims alone, sits alone in a café, the lights go on for no logical reason, and verses from *The Qur'an* are heard in the background, a custom usually exercised during an Islamic condolence gathering. A photo of the late Palestinian

leader, Yasser Arafat, looms large. E.S. is attempting to mourn that which has been lost, while at the same time he exudes melancholia.

Mourning and inability to mourn the lost country function as the unifying theme of the film. This oxymoronic existence of the country is the reason behind the people's inability to mourn, for the simple reason that even though Palestine as a country has ceased to exist, it still exists in fragments and through those who remained on the land, and others who carried their memories and stories of it in exile. Melancholia, according to Sigmund Freud, is the loss of the object, while with mourning, one is consciously aware of the death of the object; not being able to identify the loss causes paralysis within the individual, and the individual may even exhibit apathy towards the object of loss (245–46). Melancholia develops into a destructive pain that cannot go away, especially as with each day, more loss is incurred. The scenes in which people wait and smoke in Suleiman's films demonstrate this feeling of inertia and inaction, as do the petty fighting episodes. The tensions that exist in Suleiman's films are products of both holding on and an enforced stagnancy (Dickinson 104). The Palestinian, especially in Nazareth, can become "habitually invested … in the minutiae of a shrunken daily repertoire" (Dickinson 104). Suleiman's characters are often sitting squarely in static frames, not moving (Dickinson 104). Action comes from watching.

The Dabke scene, which E.S. watches in his home in Jerusalem, is taken from a 1976 Syrian play titled *Ghorba* (Exile), which discusses the plight of Arab workers who leave their countries to work in the West (Lahham and Al Maghout). The womenfolk tend the village in their absence but on their return, the men learn that during their absence the matriarchal figure of the village has passed away. This piece of homecoming news prompts the men to dance the Dabke, a folkloric dance, languidly, in her memory and ultimately in the memory of the homeland. Although the song itself talks of regret, loss of honor, its words insist that in spite of the loss the homeland remains. Exile, according to Said, is mute and destructive, and "like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography" (*Reflections* 138). The Palestinian exile is not simply "metaphorical or existential, but rather as physical and actual condition of forced displacement that is connected to the cultural logic subtending the historical catastrophe of 1948" (Saloul 5). With exile, whether internal or external, a proper "homecoming is out of the question," as the original homeland has been lost (Said, *Reflections* 142). At best, exile paralyzes.

In Suleiman's films, it is the women who seem to initiate action. In *Chronicle*, the actor/director is the one who passively observes and documents, but it is his friend ʿA'dan who tries to act against the occupation. He only listens to the walkie-talkie he picks up from the street while she uses it to give instructions to the Israeli forces to congregate or to vacate areas. At the end, she tells them to vacate Jerusalem, as the city is no longer united; she issues the instruction as she sings the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah, in order to represent "an identity and a country that [she and] the people in the film have no access to"

(Naaman 511). When the Israeli soldiers arrive to arrest ʿA'dan, they pick up a mannequin dressed in a Palestinian *Thobe* without realizing the difference.[19] The real ʿA'dan resists arrest while the Israeli police walk away with a replica. The simulacrum becomes more real than the real, the Palestinian *Thobe* representing the country. As the Israeli narrative has long negated the Palestinians' existence, it makes no difference whether the mannequin or ʿA'dan is arrested; according to them, neither exists, but both can potentially become a threat. Through fantasy this yet to be Palestine can exist, even fleetingly. The boundaries between the image or its representation and the truth become blurred. ʿA'dan is in effect enacting a fantasy in which the Palestinian is dictating the orders, and in this make-believe world the eastern part of Jerusalem is back in Palestinian Arab hands.

In *Divine Intervention*, Palestinians are in the process of becoming (Himada 84). They are constantly inventing and reinventing themselves in relation to the absurdity that surrounds them. Said argues that for years, the Palestinians have also been trying to formulate a Palestinian national identity in exile, as with the poem by Darwish who tries to come to grips with his new identity and introduces himself "I am the exile" (Said, *Reflections* 142). The term exile becomes the quality that defines the Palestinian whether inside the geographic area of mandate Palestine or as an exile in another land. In the formative years, post-1948, the conditions and prospects of the Palestinians who remained were very dim (Tamari, "Local and National" 4–5). Not only were they forgotten but "rendered an abstract object of glorification and heroism […] a remnant of a people whose real place was in the Diaspora" (Tamari, "Local and National" 4–5).

A number of scenes are filmed in E.S.'s home, stiflingly embodying the remnant of the country. The house "is a medium of representation, and, as such, can be read effectively as a mnemonic system" (Connerton, *Modernity* 19). Houses are also "spatial texts" that act as "cultural representations in the form of metaphors" (Connerton, *Modernity* 19). E.S.'s family home is the place from which memory of the homeland can be salvaged. It represents a Palestine that refuses to die, and functions as an "aide-mémoire" (Connerton, *Modernity* 18). The history of the house "is interwoven with the life history of the body" (Connerton, *Modernity* 20). To Suleiman, the final trace of the lost homeland is embodied by and through his parents; the film ends with his parents sleeping in the living room with the television left on. The "Promised Land" ironically comes through the announcer's voice that claims that all Israel's prayers have been answered, and then the broadcast ends with the Israeli national anthem. E.S., who has just walked in, is leaning against the door frame, while three Israeli flags flutter on the television screen. Israel's presence in Suleiman's Nazareth is virtual and projected through media. The final words of the film are a tribute to his parents: "To my mother and father, the last homeland."

As I have mentioned earlier, throughout the film, E.S. remains silent; the director attributes his silence to being influenced by Maurice Blanchot's

The Writing of the Disaster, in which the French theorist argues how with silence, one is still speaking, if not revealing more (10–11). The actor/director's resistance is through his reluctance to speak, while ʿA'dan's resistance to the occupation is through the comic scene she has created. Suleiman tells us that *Chronicle* depicts the "calm before the storm," and in spite of the tension throughout the film, "there's still sweetness and tender moments" (Butler and Suleiman 64). The façade of calm and the resolute silence are also carried through the second part of the trilogy in spite of all the frustrations that Suleiman faces. Suleiman argues: "silence is very political—what it conveys depends on how you use it. Silence is a place where the poetic can reign […] silence is a real magnifier of poetic space. So obviously it's extremely political" (Butler and Suleiman 68). In *Chronicle*, non-activity is total; while in *Divine Intervention*, there is an activity, even if the latter exists within the fantasy realm (Butler and Suleiman 65). Not defining the lines between the real and the unreal is Suleiman's way of giving the imagined a potential reality (Butler and Suleiman 69). In addition, the journeys taken by the director in the film can provide a trip through mandate Palestine, charting "a map of the land from north to south, and from east to west," but this map is one of an absent land (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 176).

Arrested love at the checkpoint: *Divine Intervention*

Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain, the second film in this loose trilogy, takes place between Suleiman's hometown, Nazareth, East Jerusalem, and al-Ram checkpoint, which separates the West Bank city of Ramallah from Jerusalem (*Divine Intervention*). By winning the Judge's Choice Award in the 2002 Cannes Festival for this film, the second most important prize at the festival after the Golden Palm, Suleiman's position as one of the top Palestinian directors was secured (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 43). As with *Chronicle*, the film is also composed of vignettes, which on the surface appear to be unrelated. Suleiman once again plays the central character, and it is through him that the plot is connected. He is the person who is able to enter the divided land, and in some ways becomes the unifying figure of the various segments of the Palestinian existence, pre-1948 and post-1967 communities. The film is able to surpass visually the occupation and borders by transcending the ghettos of Nazareth and the political quagmire of Jerusalem and the future idea of statehood (Abu-Remaileh, "Narratives in Conflict" 96).

As with his previous work, Suleiman is the silent observer in the film; and if activity is to be had it is once again through his woman friend and in the fantastical scenes of the film. In this film, however, there are more episodes of disgruntled neighbors, as evidenced by pettiness, and hurtful actions by the inhabitants against one another, specifically in his hometown, Nazareth. The settler's violence has become one's own (Fanon 15). Suleiman's vision of Nazareth is one of a society made up of grumpy old men, children who are no longer innocent and who delight in violence (Ball 16). The film opens with

the scene of a bunch of boys chasing Santa Claus (George Ibrahim) who has been stabbed. He tries to avoid them by distributing the presents but this does not deter the chase.

Given that pre-1948 Nazareth was a predominately Palestinian-Arab Christian town, the stabbing of one of the symbols of Christianity is symptomatic of the town's crumbling culture, just as indicative of the scene that follows, which is of a deserted Christian shrine or church. Nonetheless, later in a hospital scene, we see Santa in a wheelchair, having survived the incident, a hint at persistence. Suleiman argues that Santa to him represents "a nauseating sweetness," and every year "Santa Claus comes with his jingle bells and the world is going to its doom" (Porton and Suleiman 25). He adds that in today's Nazareth, the children have lost their innocence and this scene presets "the breakdown of the communication that comes later in the film" (Porton and Suleiman 25). In one of the first scenes, we see his father (Nayef Fahoum Daher) driving his car, cursing everyone in the street, while raising his arm to greet nearly every pedestrian he comes across. Suleiman describes the community in his hometown as "extremely angry and frustrated. They're not nice to each other and there's no tenderness whatsoever or hint of harmonious community" (Porton and Suleiman 25). Hunt notes that a traumatized person is usually one who cannot separate "the traumatic situation from the normal environment" (Hunt 61). Hence, reactions to everyday occurrences are not commensurate with the events, but signs of a dysfunctional society, and under "the guise of normalcy, the town embraces folly" (Abdel-Malek 120). Even the streets of Nazareth are evocative of a place that suffocates its people who are constantly infringing on each other's territory (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 178).

Other examples of scenes that are also indicative of the breakdown within the society, and which at times are repeated more than once in the film, are of the man throwing his garbage in his neighbor's garden only to object when she throws his bags back at him, and the puncturing of the boys' football, which lands on the rooftop of an old man who collects bottles. The reaction of the garbage man to his neighbor was "why didn't you confront me, didn't God give us tongues?" (Suleiman, *Divine Intervention*). The silenced are mute. The father of the boy, on the other hand, walks into his neighbor's house and beats him. As with all the scenes involving violence, the viewer only hears what's happening rather than being allowed to see the violence.[20] Another scene shows the old man destroying the curb that municipal workers have repaired, measuring his handiwork to check the dimensions of his property, collecting bottles on his rooftop, and throwing them at the police who come to arrest him. In a later scene, a man refuses to remove his car, which is blocking a neighbor's, and when asked to do so by the neighbor, he bombards him with senseless questions as he barbecues on the balcony. In turn, the neighbor goes off the set, and we are left with the empty street, but hear the bashing of the car, before he reenters the frame and reads the number off the car plate before tossing it in the street.

In *Divine Intervention*, violence becomes the common denominator that links the fragments together (Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema* 186). Suleiman believes that one can only hint at "the extent of pain and violence within the frame […] but as soon as you contain it within the frame, there is an assumption that you know its extent" (Porton and Suleiman 25). Suleiman also argues that reducing violence to images makes it banal (Porton and Suleiman 26). Violence within the frame deconstructs the action into its elements, and denies it the implication of what lies behind the violence. The actions in the film may point to the end of hope, but people have not given up. In the scene at the bus stop in which a young man is waiting for a bus that will never come, and even though he is reminded of this daily by his neighbor, he continues to wait. Ultimately, it is a Beckettian kind of wait; we know that which we are waiting for will not materialize; yet, we persist in our wait. The graffiti on the wall near the bus stop reads "I'm crazy because I love you," and it is the same phrase that E.S. chooses to inscribe on his car's windowpane when he meets his female friend (Manal Khader) at the Ram checkpoint. They can only meet in this barren and cruel landscape on the barrier that separates their two cities, and the fragments of their country. They don't utter a word in their meetings, but touch hands (Figure 2.5).[21]

The film's vignettes may be disparate but are thinly tied together by the scenes in which the Palestinian couple meets (Abdel-Malek 134). However, the silent stares are interrupted by the actions of the Israeli security forces, as the couple's eyes inevitably drift towards them. Even through these awkward meetings in the car, the Israelis are an unwelcome intrusion, sometimes providing a form of entertainment. In most instances, the actions of

Figure 2.5 Meeting at al-Ram checkpoint

Figure 2.6 Manal Khadr crosses the checkpoint

the Israeli soldiers are not justified, bordering on the hysterical. At times, people are asked to step out of cars, beaten for no reason, left at the checkpoint, swapped with other passengers in other cars, stripped, allowed entry, denied entry, scenes that could be part of an absurdist play or a Kafkaesque novel. Other examples are when three soldiers step out of a speeding car, only to polish their shoes, and in the night scene when his friend does not make it, and he watches an Israeli soldier hysterically singing and dancing, as he checks people's papers, only to let them all pass at the end.[22] Suleiman is bearing witness to the humiliation of his people (Yaqub 306). The Palestinian cars end up driving in circles around the checkpoint. Occupation tarnishes all those who are exposed to it. In this illogical world, and in one of Suleiman's most iconic scenes to date, his female friend, dressed seductively, manages to cross the checkpoint on foot, defy the guards, and destroy the tower (Figure 2.6).

To Suleiman, this feminine beauty is one "that is so aesthetic and can violently transgress [… with its fluidity]" (Stutesman and Suleiman 87). Spatial reclamation is the prerogative of the female (Ball 18). In the fantasy ninja scene, it is the female who kills the soldiers who were practicing targets against the Palestinian female whose face but for the eyes is shielded by the Palestinian headdress (Figure 2.7). Here, this feminine beauty stands in for the occupied nation that is still resisting (Naaman 518).

The female fights:

> […] as a crucified Jesus with an aura of deferred golden bullets around her head (Christianity); with a golden star and crescent that pierce the

Figure 2.7 The ninja scene

> enemy's chest (Islam); with a golden map of Palestine which acts as a shield against the enemy's bullets (secular nationalism); with a golden hand grenade which blows the enemy away (the Palestinian guerrilla fighter); and with a slingshot that she wields perfectly (the children of the First Intifada).
>
> (Junka-Aikio 408)

Divine Intervention introduces the entire inventory of symbols used by the Palestinian culture (Khleifi and Gertz 328). Suleiman adds that he is playing on binary opposites; he, the male, is on the one hand experiencing paralysis or even impotence while this imagined female other "manages to win them all" (Stutesman and Suleiman 87–88). As with al-Ali's Fatima, the Palestinian female represents the nation. Nevertheless, it is E.S. who releases the red balloon with Arafat's picture on it, so that his female friend can surreptitiously enter into Jerusalem. In the scene, the soldiers panic and do not know how to react to Arafat's smile looming above them.[23] It is also E.S. who unintentionally causes the symbolic explosion of the Israeli tank by casually tossing the apricot stone out of the car window, even though with Suleiman activity is mostly enacted through the female.

Divine Intervention exposes a desperate melancholic existence with sardonic humor. When E.S.'s father has a heart attack and is recuperating in hospital, nearly all the patients, nurses and doctors are seen smoking in the corridor. They are not really concerned about their health; this lack of concern is the despair that stems from the helplessness of the situation. In spite of

this, people go on. Just before the death of his father, Suleiman plays an old Arabic song through a pair of earphones to his father. The lyrics of the song that was first sung by the late Lebanese singer Nuralhuda are:

> Let's sing for hope and romance
> We've suffered enough separation and loss
> Come to me before youth disappears, our love dies, and our hope evaporates
> You're my love
> You're all I wish for
> My life is you, sacrificed for you
> Tomorrow's world is made of dreams, kisses, and hope (Nuralhuda).[24]

Hope in the film comes in the actual act of waiting. In two satirical scenes, which involve an investigation by the Israeli police into a grenade-throwing incident at a collaborator's house, a French tourist (Emma Boltanski) asks two days in a row of the same Israeli policeman in the van directions to get to the Holy Sepulcher Church and the Dome of the Rock. The Israeli soldier, who is unable to guide her, as he fails to recognize both places, has to ask the blindfolded Palestinian prisoner at the back of the van to give her directions. On both occasions, the blindfolded Palestinian is not only able to guide her but is also able to point her to the directions of these two holy sites. The red balloon that Suleiman releases in the film first lands on the Holy Sepulcher Church before settling on the Dome of the Rock.[25]

On more than one occasion, we see E.S. organizing index cards or memos on a wall in his apartment; it is the director's way of showing us that he is working on a scenario (Butler and Suleiman 69). The film itself is still in the making, as with the country. A literal translation of the film title in Arabic is a divine hand; this invisible hand has to intervene to put an end to the living absurdity of the Palestinians. The silent resistance, which is embodied best by E.S., becomes the silence that can no longer be sustained. The silence is what holds the film together (Himada 83). This silence is essentially in response to that which cannot be understood, that which cannot continue. In Beckett's novel, *The Unnamable*, the "I" tells us that when all fails, "it will be the silence, full of murmurs, distant cries, the usual silence, spent listening, spent waiting" as the "I" is unable to go on, yet must go on (Beckett 413–44). The father dies in the film, and as E.S. and his mother (Nazira Suleiman) sit side by side on the sofa staring at a pressure cooker that is on the verge of exploding, we realize that the situation cannot be sustained much longer, but as with the Unnamable, *they have to go on*. His mother tells him, "it finished, enough." The "it" is the situation in Nazareth, which cannot be tolerated. The film ends with the phrase "to my father's memory" (Suleiman, *Divine Intervention*).

The home: the last homeland

The Time that Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee completes Suleiman's loose trilogy as the film spans four distinct periods of both the history of the director's family and his homeland; some of the earlier scenes are constructed from his father's diaries; these early scenes exhibit brutality, which was exercised against the inhabitants of Palestine in 1948 as the nascent state of Israel was being born (Suleiman, *Time*).[26] The film "is based on diaries and letters written by Suleiman's parents, an activist and a teacher to whom the film is dedicated, as well as memories (his own and others') of life under Israeli rule, filtered through the director's irreverent imagination" (Taylor). In contrast to the earlier films, some violent scenes are presented through the frame, as when the Palestinian woman who greets the Israeli attackers camouflaged with Palestinian headdresses is shot dead, or when E.S.'s father (Saleh Bakri) is rounded up along with others, and then badly beaten before being thrown off a cliff. In another scene, a man (Alex Bakri) shoots himself in front of the Israeli commander after reciting lines from a poem by Palestinian poet, Abdul-Rahim Mahmoud, who was killed in Al-Shajara battle on July 13, 1948. The poem in essence states that life without dignity is not worth living.[27]

Unlike his earlier work, there is an urgency that not much time remains, and that what is left of the country or the self has to be somehow preserved. As with the previous films, the older E.S. is the silent observer; in contrast, the younger E.S. (Ayman Espanioli) is actively involved in the film. On two occasions, the very young E.S. (Zuhair Abu Hanna) is reprimanded by the school's principal for saying that the USA is an imperialist nation, while the seventeen year old burns the Israeli flag on Land Day, an action which leads to his exile. The subtitle of the film invokes Darwish's prose work, *In the Presence of Absence*, in which the poet discusses the contradictory position of the Palestinian who is at once absent and present in his or her state of endemic exile; the latter situation is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said, *Reflections* 173).

The pre-title scene begins with an Israeli cab driver (Menashe Noy) putting E.S.'s suitcase in the trunk of his car. Two posters with the phrase "Eretz Acheret," which literally means a different place, are hanging on the wall. "Eretz Acheret" is an Israeli NGO, whose role it claims is to find a common social agenda for all the segments of Israeli society; it also publishes a magazine with the same title in both Hebrew and English. In this different place, the Palestinian is missing. In the cab, E.S. sits silently overshadowed by the dark night, as the Israeli cab driver embarks on the long journey. When a storm starts, the driver not only loses the way but also is unable to recognize the landscape; he starts wondering as to where all the Kibbutzim and collective farms are, and questions if the land has swallowed them. He calls his firm in panic saying, "What's this place … we lost our way… how am I going to get home?" (Suleiman, *Time*). The driver's question has Biblical connotations, an Armageddon of sorts: "where am I? Where are you?" (Suleiman, "Un plan

Figure 2.8 E.S. sits in the back of the taxi

de"). Moreover, his name is a derivative of God in Hebrew (Suleiman, "Un plan de"). The director is here merging the religious and the political to stress that the story began in 1948 (Suleiman, "Un plan de"). In this poignant scene in the taxi, the long journey mentioned by the cab driver is in effect two journeys: the journey of the Palestinian who does recognize the land but has long been denied his homeland and silenced by history, and the journey of the Israeli who is foreign to it and is yet to understand it (Figure 2.8).

For the most part, unlike the previous films, *The Time that Remains* follows a linear progression, although the scene with the Israeli cab driver is repeated when E.S. visits his mother (Shafika Bajjali) in hospital towards the end of the film. The black humor that pervades the film is Suleiman's way of resisting the occupation and attempting to preserve what is left.

Although the first scene after the titles takes place in the same square in Nazareth, which we have seen in the earlier films, the year is 1948. Palestinian-Arab fighters, including E.S.'s father, Fuad, leisurely sitting with their guns in a café called satirically "Reda" (Acceptance), question a passing Iraqi Arab Salvation Army soldier (Baher Agbariya) about his intended destination (Figure 2.9).

The Iraqi soldier, who has no idea where to go, is told by them not to waste his time, and is then invited to join them.[28] In a later scene when Fuad is blindfolded and beaten, he is still capable of seeing his homeland but at the same time he realizes that it is for the last time. Suleiman says, "The fact is that this is Palestine that now is being, at this very moment, lost, and Fuad can see it and is saying at the same time farewell to it for the last time," as "Palestine exists even if he doesn't see it" (White and Suleiman 45). Failing to understand the implications of how it was possible for the Palestinians to

Figure 2.9 Freedom fighters at al-Rida Café

lose their country somehow stuns them. The inactivity in Suleiman's films also stems from this lack of understanding how such a thing could actually happen. Overnight the country disappears from the world map.

In the following scene, Israeli planes begin distributing pamphlets to Palestinians who resisted the ethnic cleansing in 1948; the leaflets tell them that the Hagana army has crushed the "rebels," and all citizens are asked to hand over their arms, and raise the white flags in surrender. The Iraqi soldier is the only one who picks up a pamphlet. In the following scene, the same plane is pursuing the mayor's (George Khleifi) car, which is raising a white flag that ends up obstructing the windowpane and ultimately the vision of the driver and the passenger, an indication of the bleak future that lies ahead. This is confirmed in the signing ceremony that follows when the Nazarene mayor is coerced into signing the official surrender; in the frame, a Christian and a Moslem clergyman surround him; the date he is told is July 16, 1948, by one of the Israelis (Figure 2.10). When the photographer takes a photo, the viewers' vision is obstructed by the backside of the photographer, an action that points to the city's Palestinian notables, another premonition of what the future holds in store for them. Following the surrender, Suleiman's camera depicts violence on the screen, which is in contrast to his earlier films (Figure 2.11). In one poignant scene, an elderly Palestinian woman cheers a group of Irgun fighters disguised as Arab soldiers only to be shot dead by them.[29]

The Palestinians who remained within the geographical area of historic Palestine can never be at home in their own lands; they have become the present absentees.[30] At best, everything that concerns them defies logic. This becomes evident throughout. During the night fishing scenes, an Israeli army

Figure 2.10 The mayor and the notables of Nazareth are forced into surrender

Figure 2.11 1948 – Palestinian men rounded up

patrol jeep points a spotlight at Fuad and his friend, an action that not only repeats itself but also is a replica of an interrogation scene. Another time is when an Arab school wins a Hebrew song contest about Israel's independence. Events repeat themselves but never exactly in the same way. Feeling alien in one's land is depicted by the actions of many in the film, notwithstanding the dark humor that underscores most of the scenes. The elderly neighbor

(Tarik Kopty), who most of the time is drunk, comes up with absurd theories, such as Lebanon and France being two cheeks of the same backside in one underwear, or the reason for the Arabs' loss is because they were not drunk enough. When sober, however, the old neighbor finds life unbearable and tries to self-immolate, but Fuad is always there to take the matchstick away from him. This man's action is a desperate call for help, a half-hearted attempt at escaping into the nostalgic past.

The songs in the film are reminders of the lost and less cruel past. In the looting scene early on in the film, Israeli soldiers play the record on the stolen phonograph as they select items from their booty. Leila Murad's voice is heard singing "My heart is my guide," and the song's lyrics compare love to a song. This scene follows the one when Fuad's sister (Yasmine Haj) reads him Thuraya's (Leila Muammar) letter informing him that their relationship is over, because she has to flee with her parents to Amman. It is also the final song that Fuad listens to when E.S. leaves him in the car as he buys him his medicine at a pharmacy. The songs in all of Suleiman's films play a pivotal role. Not only, as with the radio programs from stations such as Sawt al Arab (The Voice of the Arabs), are they markers of the passing years but also reflections of an Arab culture that prevails in Nazareth, and refuses to die (Figure 2.12).

There is no dialogue between the older E.S. and the other characters, and this is painfully felt during the scenes with his mother. Suleiman rarely looks at his mother, and if per chance their eyes meet, his mother quickly averts her gaze. The tension within this averted gaze is one of having been defeated, and in the face of defeat, there is nothing left to tell. Nonetheless, there is warmth to be had between them, as when he places the speakers on the balcony and plays Najat al-Saghira's song, "I adore the sea." He is pleased to see that his

Figure 2.12 Fuad listens to the broadcast announcing the death of Jamal Abdul-Nasser

mother reacts to the music, by tapping her foot. The song is a reminder of a past that doggedly survives. In a night scene in the same location, his mother adamantly refuses to watch the fireworks celebrating Israeli national day.

In all of the later scenes in the film and in contrast to his earlier films, E.S.'s position in the frame has shifted to occupy center stage; examples are when he stands watching the Filipina woman and a male relative cleaning the house in robotic fashion, the time he hears her singing Celine Dion's song "My heart will go on," and when he watches his mother on the balcony through the window. He may be the silent observer but he is no longer on the periphery. In some respects, this shift in position within the frame tells the viewer that the Palestinian can no longer afford to be marginalized, as what remains of time is very little. E.S., although silent, listens attentively to the policeman updating him on the deteriorating situation within Nazareth, drug-related violence, and impatient, trigger-happy people. Even the circus elephant was not spared; someone painted it lilac and stole it, hoping that no one will recognize it; moreover, when the municipality decides to build a nativity scene to encourage tourism, people steal the sheep and barbecue them.[31] The quarrels and the tension felt in Nazareth are signs of a bleak future; if change were to be had, it would be for the worst. In contrast, Suleiman sees more hope in the West Bank: "Here's a greater sense of togetherness in the West Bank. Despite everything, there is more hope. I mean, people have resisted very hard and stood their ground, and so far Israel has not succeeded in its aims" (Butler and Suleiman 71).

Before he leaves for Ramallah in the West Bank, the background song's lyrics demand that one should be free to go wherever one desires. The song continues as we see E.S. in a shared taxi; a young Palestinian woman with black hair (Maisa Abd Elhadi) gets on and squeezes against him to make space for another male passenger. His eyes drift towards her, and for the first time in the film, we don't see that vacant expression on his face that has dominated most of the film so far. When he gets off, we hear Najwa Karam's voice singing, "I'm infatuated with the dark man who has left me." At night, the police sirens do not allow him to sleep; he gets up and watches a demonstration, part of the Intifada against the Israeli soldiers; a soldier orders a woman pushing a pram to go home, but she defiantly tells him to go home himself and continues on her way. In another scene, a young man (Ehab Assal) comes out of a building to throw the garbage; when his mobile phone rings, he steps back on the street while discussing with a friend the latest music he has acquired, and informs him of the party they are holding that night. All this time, an Israeli tank follows him with its gun, as he walks up and down the street, completely oblivious to its presence. The scene is evocative of an occupied nation that wants to go on, "to have a certain joy. Joy becomes a pleasure … a certain moment of resistance" (Suleiman, "Un plan de-2"). In the next scene, a group of young people dances to YAS's Ma Rida song, as a soldier in an Israeli jeep tries to impose a curfew. They don't respond, but instead the Israeli soldier sways to their music.

E.S. returns to Nazareth when his mother is admitted to hospital. In her hospital bed, his mother is still holding onto the photo of her late husband

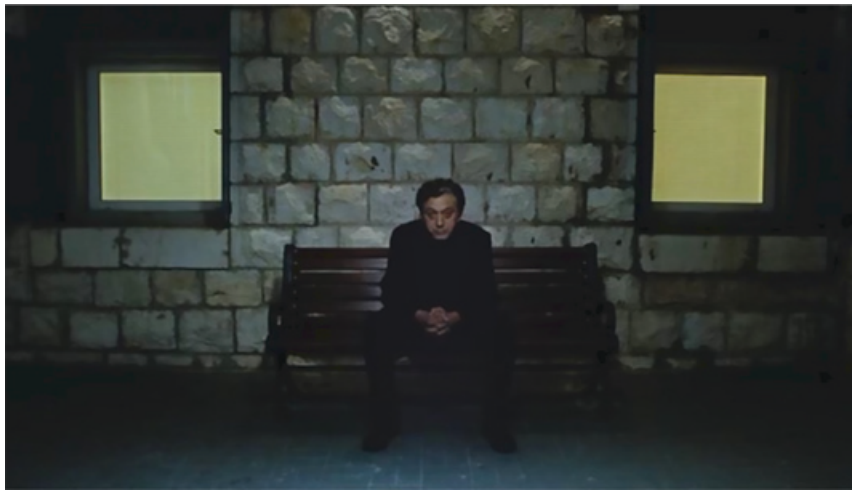

Figure 2.13 E.S. sits outside the hospital

sitting on the balcony, with his eyes fixated on a distant horizon. This time, she does not avert her gaze; instead, the mother's eyes stare at the camera in defiance, and the clenched photo becomes another symbolic hint at a past that refuses to die. E.S. removes his mother's glasses, and places them on the statue of the Virgin Mary by her bed, a symbolic gesture that even religion is blind to their plight. The film ends with his mother's death. He sits on a bench in the hospital watching scenarios of a degenerating culture as people injured in brawls, and handcuffed patients, are brought in (Figure 2.13). In the final scene, the camera rests on three hooded youth, huddled next to one another, and the song playing in the background is "Staying alive." The film ends with a dedication to the memory of his father and mother, emblems of the lost homeland and the last bastion of memories.

Conclusion: the little that remains

In this fictional world of film, Suleiman has challenged the persistent myth of the non-existent Palestinian. Hunt states that without history a people does not exist, and where "there is no remembered past there is no present, because the present cannot be interpreted without knowledge of the past"; moreover, "without history, a society does not exist" (100). Suleiman's films are documentations and testimonies to a history and a homeland that once existed and in spite of everything continues to exist. Moreover, Suleiman's films expose the tensions between affirmations of identity on the one side and the globalized representation of such an identity on the other (Rahman 65). His expression of identity, which escapes the limitation of a nationalistic

representation, manages to articulate the self in the face of powerful negation (Rahman 69). If "the narration of 'Palestine' depends heavily on the expressions that occur despite official representations—the unofficial, vernacular, fragmentary performances of Palestinians," Suleiman's films provide a record of a people who have resisted being fossilized as refugees in diaspora or absentees within their historic land (Marks 59). Moreover, his trilogy bolsters the Palestinian presence in Nazareth, and affirms the identity of its original inhabitants. His hometown becomes the icon of steadfastness for those who remained behind.

The Palestinian actor/director tells the:

> […] Palestinian tale of dispossession and despair without interruption or denial, with a hope that peaks of hopelessness, with a laughter that hides the anger, a serious frivolity that overcomes the somber hilarity of robbing people blind and terrorizing a people out of their homeland and then calling them violent and terrorist.
>
> (Dabashi 134)

Suleiman's frivolity substitutes for the traditional narrative, a form of storytelling when all else has failed (Dabashi 136). After all, Suleiman continues to make films, as he believes the one thing that remains is hope, a concept I will return to in the next chapter on the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (Suleiman, "Different Kind of Occupation"). This is evident in the fantastical scene when towards the end of the final film in the trilogy, E.S. pole vaults over the apartheid wall negating the borders created by the occupation, nursing hope (Figure 2.14), even though he believes "he jumps over the wall because there is no exit" (White and Suleiman 45).

Figure 2.14 E.S. pole vaults over the separation wall

Notes

1 The Zionist colonial project in Palestine was effective in silencing the Palestinians; Nur Masalha writes: "Zionist colonisation of Palestine has taken place in four distinct phases: the first, 1882–1918, began on a small scale under Ottoman rule; the second (important) phase, 1918–48, took place under British imperial protection; the third, 1948–67, was characterised by 'internal colonisation' and Judaisation within the Green Line; the fourth began in 1967 and is still going on today" (Masalha, *Palestine Nakba* 38).

2 Uri Davis notes: "Some 25 per cent of the total of one million Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, approximately 250,000 are 'present absentees'. Once classified as 'present absentee' under Israeli law, one is destined to remain a 'present absentee'. It is important to note that the status of 'absentee' is inherited" (100). Nur Masalha writes: "In 1950 the internally displaced Palestinians in Israel were considered as 'Present Absentees' (nifkadim nokhahin) under the Absentees' Property Law […] Acquiring the paradoxical title of 'present absentees', the internally displaced had their property and homes taken by the state, making them refugees within their own country" (Masalha, *Politics of Denial* 143).

3 For some the fight for the land began earlier, but 1948 is the date when the word Palestine was wiped off the map.

4 The debate on who is Jewish, and if Israel should only be a state for the Jews, has been raging since the creation of Israel. Palestinian-Arabs living in the state of Israel fear transfer.

5 Gil Z. Hochberg suggests: "Suleiman's films explicitly deal with the invisibility of Palestinians living within the Jewish state of Israel and annexed Jerusalem, where Palestinians citizens of Israel make for over 20 percent of the state's population and the approximately 375,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem with the status of 'permanent residents' make for another 4.4 percent" (57).

6 Jenny Chamrette writes: "The complexity and subversive nature of Suleiman's filmmaking is intimately tied up with the prominence of Suleiman himself as a central figure within them: a mute avatar named ES, who has inhabited all of his films, both feature length and short" (87).

7 Srouji suggests that most of Nazareth's Arab residents have "a paradoxical relationship to their city – fanatically proud of it and loving to hate it" (356).

8 Srouji argues: "In contrast to the previous architecture of Nazareth, which followed the form of its rolling hills, [the] new complexes cut into the hills in militaristic formations on a disproportionate scale. The old Nazarenes beheld a new landscape violently scarred by structures determined to assert their superiority, power and the denial of the Palestinians" (361–62).

9 In 1948, Taha Muhammad Ali (1931–2011) fled from Saffuriyya when the Hagana brigade bombed their village heavily. He and his family became exiles in Lebanon but later returned to Nazareth.

10 Steven Salaita writes: "Inside Israel, the Palestinians comprise approximately 20 percent of the population. They too are subject to institutionalized discrimination in the areas of housing, movement, and employment. This community, which effectively occupies a second-class status, also experiences calls for forcible deportation by politicians and religious demagogues" (*Dead Soul* 6).

11 Hochberg suggests "that Suleiman mobilizes the tension between visibility and invisibility in order to achieve two things at once: to visualize the invisible status

of Palestinians, and to deny his cinematic subjects a so-called proper or restorative representation. Furthermore, Suleiman's cinema manages to bring the question of Palestine into the visible realm as a narrative, a historical position, and a political reality by focusing on the least visible Palestinian or on the most invisible figure of this conflict, namely the Palestinian citizen of Israel" (59).

12 In *Just Tell the Truth*: *A Conversation between Elia Suleiman and John Berger*, Suleiman explains his use of vignettes as a form of narration: "I try to maximize in my narrative film the tableau … reduce as much as possible the continuity shots so that again the aesthetics take on another form" (Suleiman and Berger, *Just Tell the Truth*).

13 Rasha Salti compares Suleiman to Naji al-Ali's Hanthala, the barefoot Palestinian child, in tattered clothes, his back forever turned (52).

14 "The Oslo Accord called for the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and affirmed a Palestinian right of self-government within those areas through the creation of a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority. Palestinian rule was to last for a five-year interim period during which 'permanent status negotiations' would commence—no later than May 1996" (Oslo Accords). The self-government turned out to be no more than municipal duties—nothing of the accord has been implemented.

15 Most Palestinians are denied access to their homeland; their movement within historic Palestine is restricted and near impossible; Kay Dickinson notes: "The occupation curtailed Palestinian exiles' right of return, constrained leadership to guarded compounds and rendered travel within the West Bank and Gaza (and outside them) near impossible through a complex set-up of barriers, checkpoints, roadblocks, curfews, borders and the newly built Wall. Fresh infringements in the name of transport infrastructure vigorously supported Israeli assertions to the land through the building of extraterritorial Israeli-only road networks that furthered occupation and curbed Palestinian movement on their own land. The tension between travelling and settling remains a fraught one." (84).

16 My translation—the Arabic lines:

خيال ساري مع الأوهام/وطيف جاري مع الأحلام/وليه تصبر على الأيام تفوت/من غير ما نتهنى
(Asmahan)

17 Bresheeth describes the scene: "In an iconic scene, a police van careens wildly into an alleyway, emptying its cargo of robotic police clones, who immediately line up meticulously along a wall, and piss in total unison, again leaving their mark on Arab Jerusalem" ("Symphony of Absence" 78).

18 In *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*, Rochelle A. Davis includes Palestinian accounts of plants and the tombs that existed in the villages not only "to verify that these events happened, but rather to show how Palestinians, in continuity with previous eras, invest both built places and elements of the natural environment with the power to resist" (176). Plants are also markers of places in the village.

19 The Thobe is an embroidered garment in the shape of a long dress worn by Palestinian women; the embroidery reflects the village the wearer comes from. Please refer to Chapter 5 for more detail.

20 Suleiman prefers to show the suffering or the violence; most painful or violent episodes take place off screen. Like Blanchot he believes we can never know the intensity of somebody's pain, and as Blanchot said disaster always takes place outside of experience; and, as it happens afterwards it cannot be experienced (28).

21 Abu-Remaileh writes that the checkpoint scenes are a stark contrast to the claustrophobic vignettes of Nazareth; "[u]nlike the static framing in the Nazareth scenes, here we get a beautiful crane shot, reaching as high as the tower and descending to ground level by the foot of the car" ("Palestinian anti-narratives" 4).

22 In "'Divine Intervention', Palestinian director, writer and actor Elia Suleiman devises a scene that can be read as an inverted remake of Pontecorvo's famous checkpoint sequences" (Fieni 14).

23 Please see Chamrette's "Absurd Avatars, Transcultural Relations: Elia Suleiman, Franco-Palestinian filmmaking and Beyond" for the balloon scene's affinity with other scenes in cinema (94–95).

24 My translation. Arabic lyrics:

تعالى نشدو المنى والغرام
كفانا البعد هيام
تعالى قبل انقضاء الشباب وموت الحب وانقطاع الرجاء
أنت الهوى أنت ملئ الامانى
حياتى أنت فداك أنت
دنيا الغد الاحلام والغزل والقبل وكل الامل
(Nuralhuda)

25 Suleiman has often cited the influence of Taiwanese and Japanese cinema on his work: "I watched a film by Japanese film director Yasujirō Ozu, I think *Tokyo Story*. I felt as if the people in the film were from Nazareth, and I felt the way they were filmed was the way I normally see things. After that, I developed a strong interest in cinema from … Japan and Taiwan. I was influenced by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-Hsein" (Choukr and Suleiman). In Hsiao-Hsein's *Flight of the Red Balloon*, a strange red balloon follows a child and his babysitter.

26 Suleiman described the film as semi-autobiographical: "*The Time That Remains* is a semi-biographical film, in four historic episodes, about a family—my family—spanning from 1948 until recent times. The film is inspired by my father' s diaries of his personal accounts, starting from when he was a resistance fighter in 1948, and by my mother's letters to family members forced to leave the country since then. Combined with my intimate memories of them, the film attempts to portray the daily life of those Palestinians, who remained in their land and were labeled "Israeli-Arabs," living as a minority in their own homeland" (Armes 259).

27 "The Martyr," by Abdul-Rahim Mahmoud, states: "My soul I shall carry on my palm/and throw it into the valley of death//For it is either a life that pleases a friend/or a death that the enemy it shall infuriate//Two aims the nobleman's soul has/Approaching fate and reaching destiny//What is life for if dreaded not is/my presence, and inviolability is my fame" (Mahmoud).

28 Palestinians who witnessed the Nakba and the defeat of the Arab Salvation Army often said the Iraqi battalion came to fight in Palestine, but did not even have maps of the land.

29 In her biography, Tamam al-Akhal recalls a similar scene of Irgun fighters who disguised themselves as Jordanian soldiers; when the people approached them cheering, tens were shot dead (26).

30 Martin Paul Eve suggests: "The implied oxymoronic 'collapsed distance' in the term 'present absentee' marks the Cartesian inner and outer on which scenes of sustained silence rely, yet then destroy; a refutation of the existence of 'private' experience" (148).

31 Suleiman believes that both silence and humor are tools of resistance (White and Suleiman 44).

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3 Mahmoud Darwish
The storyteller of Palestine

> "Where shall we go when there's no land there, and no sky?"
> (Darwish, *A River Dies of Thirst* 39)[1]

Introduction: the night we fled

In his first interview with an Israeli newspaper, *Zo Haderech*, in 1969, Mahmoud Darwish recounted to Israeli Jewish journalist, Joseph Algazy, in minute detail the night the peasants of al-Birweh were evicted from their village by Zionist gangs.[2] The Palestinian poet told his interviewer how this expulsion had a lasting impact on his life, and the memory of that particular night is essential to his writing; hence, I quote it in depth:

> I remember myself at six years old. I was living in the beautiful and peaceful village of al-Birweh, which lies on a green hill facing the plane of Acre. I was the son of a simple agricultural family. At seven years of age, the games of childhood came to a halt… and I remember how this happened… I remember clearly. One summer night, whilst the villagers slept on rooftops as they often did, my mother aroused me suddenly from my sleep, and I found myself along with hundreds from the village running towards the forests. Bullets were flying around our heads, and I did not understand what was going on. After a night of escape and fleeing, I along with one of my lost relatives, who by now have been scattered in all directions, arrived at a strange village, home to other children, and I naively asked, where am I? And, I heard for the first time the word: Lebanon […] I imagine that this night abruptly and violently ended my childhood; a childhood devoid of trouble was over. I suddenly felt that I belonged to the world of adults […] I will never forget being introduced to the word homeland.
>
> (al-Naqqash 99–100)[3]

This night that Darwish remembers vividly is one that will nag him incessantly throughout his life. The poet repeatedly returns to the memory of this night in his prose, poetry and interviews. For the poet, it was an experience

that ruined his childhood and thrust him on the road to adulthood; in addition, "that personal story became important because it was connected to the exodus from the land" (Said and Darwish, *Search*). This loss catalyzes the poet's first encounter with the concept of the word homeland. From that day on, not only does the experience itself become synonymous with the absence of the homeland but it also circumscribes the burden that henceforth became associated with the word itself. Memory of loss reignites grief and provides resilience "as it takes its place in a personal history where one has struggled to overcome loss" (Campbell 364). Faced with this loss, Darwish's writing endures against the disappearance of the home and the fragmentation of the being (Rahman, *Wake* 20). Darwish was a prolific poet. With every new erasure of his culture and threat to his people, he became more rooted in his language, defending it adamantly against extinction. In his June 3, 1985 reflections on the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon, Darwish wrote:

> The corpse of the Palestinian must first disappear completely from the stage, so that factions can again play their roles with more spontaneity, create their new scripts, continue their historic traditions of vengeance and reprisal, and divide the mysterious booty. Has any other nation ever known so many expulsions, passed through so many exiles, or faced so many massacres without being rewarded with a homeland […] I mean its own homeland? Or without being recognized or being given a promise by a new Lord Balfour?
>
> ("Madness" 139)

Writing was Darwish's only weapon against the annihilation of his people and the rest of his homeland. Through poetic and lyrical means, Darwish not only became a cultural icon for Palestinians but also of their unity (Abu-Eid 67). The night that is remembered is the night the young child along with his family was exiled, and this banishment disrupted their lives forever. Darwish's work not only conjures up the experience of loss by repeatedly returning to it in his oeuvre but also the poet metaphorically invokes the memory of his village and a symbolic return to it through his words. The Palestinian poet believed that even though poetry itself distorts, it has "the power to transform the unreal into the real, and the real into the imaginary. It has the power to build a world that is at odds with the world in which we live" (Darwish, "Return").

Darwish often used symbolism to recall his village, drawing on three mythical icons: basil, olive trees, and azure mist (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 26). The olive tree is embedded in the soil, and its seeds can sprout more trees (Ahmed and Hashim 103). The poet's work "registers the broader idea that transcends the actual size of the nation-state and becomes the expansive, homeless idea of humanity, which is palpably denied to the Palestinians, given the conditions of injustice in which they are mired" (al-Shaer 159). Darwish's work does not simply reflect on the pre-existing cultural discourse on Palestine

but "proactively contributes to the negotiation of the [Palestinian] cultural memory" (Neumann 335). His work fills the gap between the various diasporic experiences of Palestinians (Abu-Eid 59), elevating the writer to an iconic status. Palestine for Darwish was a personal matter; it was either life or death (Athamneh 189).

In this chapter, I will be looking at the triggers of this particular night of expulsion for Darwish in 1948 that rendered the poet and his people exiles. I discuss various accounts of that arduous and painful experience along with the sites of memory that prompt this recollection of loss and exile in his poetic anthology *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* (لماذا تركت الحصان وحيدا/Li-mādhā tarakta al-ḥiṣān waḥīdan?) while drawing on his prose narratives *In the Presence of Absence* (Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb/في حضرة الغياب), and *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* (Yawmīyyāt al-huzn al-'ādī/يوميات الحزن العادي).[4]

The moon and the raven along the trail of exile

According to Judith Butler, the forcibly exiled or dispossessed being encompasses:

> […] the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one's being dispossessed […] by another: one is moved to the other by the other […] The subject comes to "exist" by installing within itself lost objects […] being dispossessed refers to processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility and that regulate the distribution of vulnerability: loss of land and community.
>
> (Butler 1–2)

Objects connected to the self and within the self's domain begin to acquire significance. The objects and the recollection of the enforced exile for Darwish in particular and Palestinians in general are the places that are left and can no longer be inhabited. Although metaphors for migration and exile pervade Darwish's poetry, traversing places, cultures, epochs and landscapes, the return remains bitter (Voskeritchian). Homecoming is predicated on being granted permission to return to the original place (Asfour 53). Denied the right of a physical return, certain objects, such as the moon and the horse, become associated with the 1948 event of expulsion. With Darwish, the memory of the nocturnal journey personifies both exile and loss, and evolves from becoming the personal Nakba of the poet into the symbol that describes the fate of the Palestinians as a whole. It is also a desire for the homeland that cannot be realized. Memory allows one to speak as "having-been [part] of the remembered past," "making present" that which is no longer present (Ricoeur 48). Darwish becomes the "pre-eminent poetic voice" of the Palestinian tragedy, its "poetic chronicler … in all its dimensions" (al-Shaer 146–47). In

his autobiographical prose work, *In the Presence of Absence*, the adult poet returns to this night of exile. He writes:

> Night is yours over this valley, so swoop down quicker than a frightened mountain quail. The air is still. It does not ruffle a feather. There is no clearer guide for your departure than a raven accompanying those migrating to the borders of the night.
>
> Night is yours, and there is no longer a place for us, or for you, to remain beneath the olive trees […] Night is a barrage of megaphones. Night is echo's drum. You have a roaring night, so be calm. Your little name and all of our names are preparing to take off for their random fates in the chaos of genesis.
>
> (*In the Presence* 33)[5]

On that fretful night, the young child is forced by circumstance to leave his childhood behind. Darwish as with the other villagers is forcibly removed from his homeland. The barrage of bullets compels the villagers to walk along a dirt road towards Lebanon. This evolves into a banishment from which there is no possibility of return, "setting off on a trail of tears towards the Lebanese border" (Srouji 77). The night of expulsion haunts Darwish's work, and through his memory of tangible and non-tangible objects in nature he reconnects with the homeland. Even though "exile weighs heavily on Darwish […] he does not let it crush him or his memories, and he does not allow it to kill his hope of returning to Palestine and resuming a normal life on its soil" (Boullata, "Mahmud Darwish" 164). Exile has taught the child the meaning of homeland. Darwish questions the meaning of the word "homeland" in *In the Presence of Absence*: "What is the meaning of 'homeland'? They will say: The house, the mulberry tree, the chicken coop, the beehive, the smell of bread, and the first sky" (*In the Presence* 42).[6] The detailed memories of the lived domestic life are essential, as they lie within the proximity of that which is forbidden (Campbell 372). Abstracting and objectifying the homeland is acknowledging that one is no longer there; the essence of the being becomes the homeland (Parmenter 96). In one of the accounts of the Nakba, Darwish describes how the homeland has been reduced to a pillow when a fleeing woman mistook it for her child:

> The guns attacked her home, and she grabbed something she thought was her baby and rushed into the nearest boat in terror. While on the sea to Acre she discovered that the baby was only a pillow, and from that day she lost her mind. How many infants became pillows? And how many pillows were taken for infants? So, what is a homeland? The homeland of a mother is her child, and the homeland of a child is the mother.
>
> (*Journal* 28–29)[7]

The first casualty of the Nakba was the word Palestine itself (Bresheeth 179). The Hebrew expansionist phrase *Eretz Israel* meticulously replaced the historical term Palestine, leading to the erasure of Palestine as a country with its own history, and a people with their own language (Bresheeth 179). By evoking the beginning of time and the origins of being, Darwish reinserts the singular name of his country in his verse. In "On this Earth," he writes:

> […] the Lady
> of Earth,
> […] She was called Palestine. Her name
> later became
> Palestine.
>
> (Darwish, *Unfortunately* 6)

> […سَيِّدَةُ
> الأَرْضِ […] كَانَتْ تُسَمَّى فِلِسْطِين. صَارَتْ تُسَمَّى
> فلسْطِين.]
>
> (Darwish, *Al-Diwan* 3 112)

The word Palestine itself became an interpretation, rather than the name of the country (Said, *Question* 10). A mechanism was conceived to link a future with a past dream, eradicating "the realities lying between past and future," and the word Israel was created to provide the continuity to bridge the gap, which in essence removes the word Palestine from the historical narration (Said, *Question* 10). In his book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Ilan Pappé referred to the physical and cultural erasure of Palestine as "memoricide" (160).[8] The narrator in *In the Presence of Absence* urges the poet to memorize "this night of hurt by heart" by becoming the narrator, the narrative and the narrated, and not dwell on antiquity (Darwish 37).[9] Poetry that is based on memory is often "characterized by a pronounced heteroreferentiality and thus spurs a fictitious collective audience to recall fateful events of the shared past, [and because of poetry's] specific metrics and often rhymes, poems are particularly apt to affect and shape cultural memory" (Neumann 340). Darwish uses his verse to recall the event of expulsion on the night and bring to mind similar fates of his fellow Palestinians. The narrator is pressing the poet to write himself back as a complete presence because it was he, not his ghost, who was driven away on that night (Darwish, *In the Presence* 35). The "he" is the little child, who experienced the event, and who "as a passing thought," to whom life came to rather shyly, is "like a concubine whose fees have been paid; difficult, sweet, and very obstinate" (Darwish, *In the Presence* 21).[10] With poetry, the "temporal event of writing" remains unfinished at times of destruction and loss (Sacks 23). It is only through the creative use of memory that the threat of forgetfulness can be combated and a culture of return is retained (al-Hardan 86). Darwish's longing for his homeland is often linked to the process of remembering, thus giving rise "to a duality of

memory and erasure, memory of the past and erasure of the present […] The inflated past as represented by childhood brings about a reduction of the present, from which one flees" (Hamzah 167). The child has to remain alive in the memory and words of the adult.

On a number of occasions in his work, Darwish refers to pebbles and rocks; these concrete objects act as simulacra standing for pieces of the land and the self that were lost. In the first part of *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, the young child, whose family have recently become refugees in Lebanon, questions his father's action of gathering pebbles from the ground.[11] The father replies: "I'm searching for my heart, which fell away that night" (Darwish, *Journal* 3).[12] The night in question is the one of expulsion from the homeland, when in one "ill-fated hour, history entered like a bold thief through a door as the present flew out through a window. With a massacre or two, the country's name, our country, became another. Reality became an idea and history became memory" (Darwish, *In the Presence* 46).[13] The father is trying to salvage the fragments of his lost nation, an act mimicking the peasant women's (fellahin) actions of picking up olives one at a time during the harvest (Darwish, *Journal* 3).

Memory of the flight from the homeland is recalled in detail; Darwish remembers the barking of a dog accompanying them on their road to exile. Nature bore witness to the events that ensued. When the child first heard the gunshots, he was surprised as to why the villagers were celebrating a wedding at this hour (Darwish, *Journal* 4). The skies were clear as the child recalls the moon, which he tells us was higher than his forehead, yet closer to him than his grandfather's tall mulberry tree (Darwish, *Journal* 4). Exile is imagined as a path of stones and longing, in which the adult poet searches for the child and the mulberry tree, but only finds the shell of a church bell (Darwish, *Journal* 17). For his father who has become a refugee, the act of picking up the pebbles is "a good exercise for memory and perception," and these pebbles evolve into "petrified pieces" of a wounded heart (Darwish, *Journal* 3). The pebbles become emblems of resistance that ignite the memory of what has been lost. The father in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* is adamant not to lose himself in this loss (Darwish, *Journal* 4). Darwish has often invoked his father in his writing; the father symbolizes exile and loss, the person sacrificing the future for the past, and "the mother is continuously associated with remaining whereas the father is associated with departure" (Rahman, "Longing" 43, Rahman, "Writing Absence" 89). Yet, the father attempts to hold on to the remnants. Here, the father hopes that the pebbles that resemble fragments of his heart can be transformed into words that will put him in touch with "the distant homeland" (Darwish, *Journal* 4).

Palestine exists in exile merely "as a signifier whose signified does not match its shape and magnitude" (Muhawi 31). Darwish's insistence on remembering his village with its narrow alleys in minute detail helps in counteracting the silencing rendered by "the thundering story of Zionism" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 6). It is worth noting that a memory of a lived house is rather telling

(Ricoeur 148). Memory of environment and place is invariably linked with the bodily space (Ricoeur 148). The body becomes part of the space, and from this evolves a collective and shared memory (Ricoeur 148, 149). To lose the space is frightening and devastating for the individual, and cognition of the lost home creates uneasiness "joined to the feeling of not being in one's place," which is haunting and generates a sense of emptiness within the individual (Ricoeur 149).

European Jewish immigrants were settled on Arab lands and in confiscated Arab homes, those that were not destroyed; this led to massive looting and willful destruction of Arab property. The absence of the original inhabitants of these houses is uncanny. The spectres remain testifying to this absence, as all the "houses Israelis live in are inhabited by ghosts" (Darwish, *Journal* 32). The emptiness is two-fold, the home emptied of its owners and the emptiness within the self created by the loss. The annihilation of the presence of the original inhabitants not only denied them access to their homes and livelihood but also to the history of belonging to the land. The emerging Israeli nation passed the Absentee Property Regulations of 1948 law "to confiscate all Arab homes," including the looted contents of these homes (Krystall 15). In a dialogue between the poet and an Israeli man at a restaurant, the latter boasted about how they destroyed al-Birweh: "You won't find it on this earth," he said. "We blew it up, raked the stones out of its earth, then plowed it until it disappeared under the trees" (Darwish, *Journal* 13).[14] The narrator in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* tells us: "The declaration of the birth of Israel is at the same time the declaration of the death of Palestine" (Darwish, *Journal* 37).[15] As with the person who is in perpetual exile, memory is held hostage to exile both in the locality and within the self (Saloul 70). Darwish's recollections testify to what has been lost and can only be recovered through his words and memory (Abdel-Malek, *Rhetoric of Violence* 59). Darwish is ultimately worried as to "Who will tell [his people's] story? [His people], who walk upon this night, driven out of place and myth" (*In the Presence* 34).[16]

The raven accompanies the expelled on their journey. In Arabic culture the presence of a raven usually signals impending doom. In the third poem in part II of *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*, the poet returns to the raven in "The Raven's Ink." Darwish quotes from "Surat al Ma'ida" in the *The Qu'ran* in which the raven returns to earth in order to help Cain bury the body of his brother Abel:

> The *Qu'ran* illuminates you:
> "Then God sent forth a raven, scratching into the earth,
> to show him how he might conceal his brother's corpse. He said
> Woe is me! Am I unable to be like this raven?"
> The *Qu'ran* illuminates you.
> Search for our resurrection, and hover, oh raven!
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 56–58)

ويضيئك القرآنُ:
(فَبَعَثَ اُلله غراباً يبحث في الأرض لِيُرِيَهُ كيف يواري سوءة أخيه، قال:
يا ويلتي أَعجزت أن أكون مثل هذا الغراب)
ويضيئك القرآنُ،
فابحثْ عن قيامتنا ، وحَلِّقْ يا غُرَابُ!
(Darwish, *Why?* 57, 59)

As in the opening of a pre-Islamic poem, which summons the memory of the remains of an encampment in a Jahili ode, the poet aspires to return to the remnants of his village, imploring the raven to return to the site of loss (Sacks 27). There is a duality of voice in this poem. The "I" speaks in the first person, as the words are addressed to the raven, which is asked to search for the site in which Cain can bury the body of his brother Abel; the poetic subject is also the voice of the brother who died (Sacks 27). The raven will only "find solitude in the desolate carob tree," because nothing else remains (*Why?* 54). During an interview with a Finnish writer, Darwish learns that the journalist left Kibbutz Ya'sur after having lived there for ten years when he discovered that the carob tree was planted by the original inhabitants of the land (Darwish and Al-Qasim, *Letters* 43–44). The solitary carob testifies to the destruction of the poet's village (Darwish and Al-Qasim, *Letters* 45). The narrator urges the raven to sit upon its branch, because earth has brought back Abel: "Earth brings me back/as a carob tree, for you to sit upon my branch, oh raven" /يُرْجِعُني الترابُ /إليكَ خَرُّوباً لتجلسَ فوق غُصْني يا غراب/ (Darwish, *Why?* 56–57).

The raven is to bear witness and guard the little that remains of the desolate place, as the original village, which no longer exists, is buried under the rubble. The villagers of al-Birweh, along with peasants from nearby villages, resisted Israeli occupation at the beginning, and this resulted in the complete destruction of their village and the expulsion of its people (al-Naqqash 98). Kibbutz Ya'sur stands on the ruins of the village (Sacks 44). In 1963, Darwish visited al-Birweh only to find part of the Church tower standing, and thorns covering the demolished homes, the only testimonies that it ever existed (al-Naqqash 108). Al-Birweh fell in May, and the rubble of the village, including the church, now lies beneath the cultivated land of the Jewish settlement Ahihud (Pappé 217).[17] Darwish's work not only testifies to the loss of the past but also opens the "register of absence" from the homeland and the self (Rahman, "Literary" xviii). Repeatedly, Darwish returns to the night of expulsion in his work, the child within the self continuously reminding the adult of the child's experience. The adult Darwish recalls the child's awareness of that inauspicious night as he instructs the young boy not to "forget this narrow winding road that carries you, and that you carry, toward the boisterous unknown, that will cast doubts upon you and your people" (Darwish, *In the Presence* 38).[18] Identity has to be "constructed and reconstructed by acts of memory, by remembering who one was and by setting this past Self in relation to the present Self" (Erll 6). Remembering the Nakba is "one of

main bulwarks against historical erasure. It is a means of resistance" (Said, *Culture* 183). On the road to exile, the moon guides the villagers. The moon for Darwish has a double role. As a child, it protected him from falling in the depth of the well. The well became something to be feared. At the same time, the well was the water source for the village, its lifeline.[19] In *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, Darwish writes:

> If it weren't for the moon, I would've become an orphan before my time. It hadn't yet fallen into the well. It was higher than my forehead and closer than the mulberry tree in the middle of my grandfather's yard. The dog used to bark when the full moon rose. When the first shots rang out, I was surprised that a wedding celebration should be taking place that evening. And when they led me away to join the long caravan,[20] the moon was our companion on a road that later I understood was the road of exile. And if it weren't for the moon – as I just said – I would've been separated from my father.
>
> (*Journal* 4–5)[21]

The moon guides the expelled and protects, but with every full moon the memory of loss is revived. Furthermore, in Darwish's early poetry, the moon represented the tension between staying and leaving, and the struggle for identity (al-Sheikh, "Staying"). In "A Cloud in my Hand," the father engages the reference to the well that is lit by two moons to reassure the young boy:

> […] My father
> drew water from his well. Don't dry up, he
> told it. He took me by the hand
> to see how I'd grow like rose moss…
> I walk at the edge of the well: I have two moons
> one above
> and another in the water, swimming … I have two moons
> each certain
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 12–14).

> [يَسْحَبُ الماءَ من بئرِهِ ويقولُ
> لهُ: لا تجفَّ. ويأخذني من يَدي
> لأرى كيف أكبُرُ كالفَرْفَحِينَة…
> أَمشي على حافَّة البئر: لِيَ قَمَرانْ
> واحدٌ في الأعالي
> وآخرُ في الماء يسبَحُ … لِي قمرانْ
> واثقين]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 13–15)

The division of the moon, enunciated twice in the poem, points to the forefathers and usually occurs in relation to time and death (Sacks 36). In addition, the moon in the occupied land is oft sad while the moon of exile is connected to dreams and the possibility of return (Ahmed and Hashim 98). The moon's meaning is closely linked to the physical location of *here* vis-à-vis the *there*. It is a reminder of that which cannot be reclaimed.

The ghost, the phoenix and the trucks: links to the mother and homeland

The poem, "I See my Ghost Coming from a Distance,"/ "أرى شَبَحي قادماً من بعيد" serves as a prologue to the anthology. Under the weight of history's oppression, the poet returns in the form of a ghost to reflect on the developments in his homeland. As with the phoenix, the poet hopes that both he and his country will rise again from the ashes: "What will happen … What will happen after the ashes? / I look out on my body, afraid, from a distance … / I look out like a balcony on what I want" [… ماذا سيحدث ماذا سيحدث بعد الرماد؟/أُطلُّ على جَسَدي خائفاً من بعيدْ…/أُطلُّ, كَشُرْفَةِ بيتٍ, على ما أُريدْ] (*Why?* 6–7). The use of the verb attullu / أطلّ (look out) turns the poet into the witness of the homeland, loss and the people. From his place in exile, the poet observes the successive historical events that serve to eradicate his country (Hamdan). Darwish's poems repeat the events that shaped his homeland, questioning history itself, and "bear[ing] witness to" that history (Sacks 34, 38). In a direct reference to al-Anqa'a/ العنقاء, the mythical bird that will rise from the ashes, the narrator is hoping that he will also be resurrected from the ashes (al-Jabr 1137).

In this volume, Darwish is concerned that he will not be allowed to return to his homeland, and will not be able to tell the story of his people (al-Jabr 1154). The poet contends that his people "are not only banished from their birthplace but also from world attention; both their land and their historical role as victims have been usurped" (Abdel-Malek, "Living on Borderlines" 189). He identifies with the hoopoe, which according to myth is the visionary bird that accompanies travelers on their voyages (Bu-Aqdiyya). In this poem, the "hoopoe [is] sapped from the king's reprimand/ أطلُّ على هُدْهُدٍ مُجْهَدٍ من عتاب الملكْ" (Darwish, *Why?* 4–5). Darwish's ghost is the "poetic gaze itself" (Rahman, "Literary" 86). Through it, the poet is looking at the *here*, which is denied him, as he exists in the *there*. At once, he retrieves the individual and collective memory of his people (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 25). The poet's vision is merely to look on and not to reexamine or reformulate events, as he recalls parts of his life (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 25). The ghost is his and his paternal father's who departed from this place (Rahman, "Literary" 86). In "A Cloud in my Hand," the ghost is the unknown fate or the savior that awaits them after the villagers saddled the horses:

They saddled the horses
They didn't know why

But they saddled the horses
at the end of the night, and waited
for a ghost rising from the cracks of the place …

(Darwish, *Why?* 14).

[أَسْرَجُواالخيل،
لا يعرفون لماذا،
ولكنهُمْ أسرجوا الخيل
في آخر الليل, وانتظروا
شَبَحاً طالعاً من شُقوق المكانْ …]

(Darwish, *Why?* 15)

Darwish is the credible witness, who speaks with the voice of the visionary who has lived the Palestinian experience (Urban 88). He resurrects the past through his memories. His writing becomes a witness (shahid) to that which is already gone (Abdel-Malek, "Living on Borderlines" 187). In addition:

> A tragedy of the magnitude of the Palestinian narrative is a poignant example of the absolute necessity of an inward witness because, unlike other tragedies, the abysmal truth has been intentionally concealed or distorted. Thus, a witness writer or truth bearer, such as Mahmoud Darwish, is not only *writing himself* but also *writing his people*.
>
> (Hamdi, "Bearing Witness" 24)

In "A Cloud in my Hand," the seagull and the trucks represent a departure for the Palestinians who were forcefully removed, and an arrival for the European Jews who were transported in the ships arriving at Palestine's shores; arrivals which eventually led to the eviction of the original inhabitants from the land. The poet says: "I look out on a sea gull and on the trucks of soldiers/ changing the trees of this place/ [أُطلُّ على نَوْرَسٍ, وعلى شحنات جُنُودْ/تُغَيِّرُ أَشجارَ هذا المكان] (*Why?* 2–3). The trucks, which also bore the soldiers, also combine two departures, one through land and another via the sea (Hamdan). The seagull may venture out to sea but will always return to the land; the seagull, which is tied to the sea, signifies steadfastness (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 25). The poet will also return from exile, in the form of a prophet or a child. He asks, "Is there a new prophet/for this new time?" […] "What would happen, were [he] to return/to childhood? And [he] to you [the homeland]… and you to [him]"

[وأَسْأَلُ: هَلْ من نَبيٍّ جديد/ لهذا الزمان الجديدْ؟
[...]
ماذا
سيحدث لو عُدْتُ
طفلًا؟ وعدتُ إليكِ … وعدتِ إليَّ]

(Darwish, *Why?* 4–5)

Darwish returns in his poem carrying his mother's scarf, a wishful indication of being restored to the homeland and to the mother. In his poetry, the mother is often the giver linked to the earth (*Why?* 4):

> I know the house from the fluttering scarves. The first of the
> doves cries on my shoulders. Beneath the sky
> of the Gospels a child runs aimlessly. Water
> runs. The pines run. The wind runs in
> the wind.
>
> [أَعرف البيت من خَفَقان المناديلِ. أُولى
> الحمامات تبكي على كتفيَّ. وتحت سماءِ
> الأناجيلِ يركضُ طفلٌ بلا سَبَبٍ. يركُضُ
> الماءُ، والسروُ يركضُ، والريحُ تركُضُ في الريح]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 50–51)

Even though the memory of arrival is through his mother's fluttering kerchiefs, the child runs aimlessly as nothing remains of the village, and no one arrives at the demolished site. The villagers have become strangers who have lost their way (*Why?* 52). For Darwish, the mother is often associated with bread/wheat. She is often silent, sad, proud, a character with historical dimension and almost mythical (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 28). As with Naji al-Ali's Fatima, Darwish's mother is the Madonna who protects the child. She also personifies the homeland. In "Huriyya's Teachings," he tells his mother:

> I'm still alive in your ocean. You didn't tell me what
> a mother tells her sick son. I fell ill from the copper
> moon on the Bedouin's tent. Do you remember
> the road of our exile to Lebanon, where you forgot me
> and the bag of bread?
>
> [ما زلتُ حيًّا في خِضَمِّكِ.
> لم تَقُول الْأُمُّ للوَلَدِ المريضِ مَرِضْتُ من قَمَرِ النحاس على خيامِ البْدوِ.
> هل تتذكرين طريق هجرتنا إلى لبنان، حَيْثُ نسيتني ونسيتِ كيسَ الخُبْز]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 84–85)

The bread, the mother and the homeland are one. Frantz Fanon suggests: "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land, which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (34). Associating the mother with bread and the homeland brings dignity to the exiled poet. In addition, Huriyya is portrayed as Anat, the goddess of fertility and war; she is the figure that "lights the last stars of Canaan" (Darwish, *Why?* 86). Through this connection with Canaanite myth, Darwish's mother becomes one with Anat, connecting the Palestinian past with the present (Hamdi 103). For Darwish,

Anat is a "liberating unearthly force of fertility and ferocious power as opposed to the arid patriarchal sterility of the Palestinian present" (Hamdi 103). Darwish's rewriting of the myth "depends on fissures in national myths, and it focuses on past spaces of heterogeneity that have been erased" (Mattawa 126).

Darwish returns to the trucks in two other poems, "Innocent Villagers [قُرويُّون منْ غَيْر سُوء]" and "Night of the Owl [لَيْلَة البُوم]. He was still a child when the lorries came: "I still didn't know my mother's customs or those of her family/when the trucks came from the sea," and the village was peaceful then, as "The place didn't have nails stronger than the chinaberry/when the trucks came from the sea" (Why? 16–18).[22]

لم أكن بعد أعرف عادات أمي، ولا أهلها
عندما جاءت الشاحنات من البحر
[…]
لم تكن للمكان مسامير أقوى من الزنزلخت
عندما جاءت الشاحنات من البحر
(Darwish, *Why?* 17–18)

Nonetheless, they "also got on the trucks," which signified exile and a life of destitution "When/we looked at the trucks. We saw absence/heaping up its selected things and pitching/its eternal tent around us" / (*Why?* 18, 22).

وحين
التَفَتْنَا إلى الشاحنات رأينا الغيابَ
يُكَدِّسُ أَشْياء المُنْتَقَاةَ ، وينصبُ
خيمَتَهُ الأبديَّةَ من حولنا
(Darwish, *Why?* 23)

In "Innocent Villagers," the narrator is certain that they will return to the lost paradise:

> We'll return
> In a little while, to our house … when the trucks empty
> their extra load! (Darwish, *Why?* 20)

[سوف نرجع
عمَّا قليل إلى بيتنا… عندما تُفْرِغُ الشاحناتُ
حُمُولَتَها الزائدةْ!]
(Darwish, *Why?* 21)

In Arabic culture, the owl is a bad omen. The word itself "points to the act and event of expulsion" from Palestine (Sacks 34). Darwish appeals to the poetic tradition of listening aurally (Sacks 35). In essence, he is the

storyteller of his people, and he is asking us to listen to their story. As a poet, Darwish managed to capture "the essence of the Palestinian experience," because he was able to understand the psyche of his fellow compatriots (Hamdi, "Bearing Witness" 31). In *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, the author tells us that those who tried to return to Palestine "were herded in trucks then dumped like damaged merchandise on the border" (Darwish 14). A large number of Palestinians were forced onto trucks and expelled to neighboring countries; the trucks also brought in the Jewish immigrants from Europe:[23]

> We also got on the trucks. The glow of emeralds
> spoke to us through the night of our olive tree. The barking of
> dogs at a fleeting moon over the church tower
> But we weren't afraid. Because our childhood didn't
> come with us.
>
> [نحن أَيضاً صعدنا إلى الشاحنات. يُسَامِرُنا
> لَمَعانُ الزُمُرُّدِ في لَيْلِ زَيْتُونِنا، ونُباحُ
> كلابٍ على قَمَرٍ عابرٍ فوق بُرْجِ الكنيسةِ.
> لكننا لم نكن خائفين. لأن طفولتنا لم
> تجئْ معنا.]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 18–20)

As with the carob tree, the olive tree adds concreteness to the memory of the adult. Darwish often remembers Palestine through "its lakes and rivers, its mountains and plains, its sea and shores, its fauna and flora, its olives and oranges, its trees and birds, its folk and folklore" (Boullata, "Concept of Homeland" 66). Palestine was always a metaphysical reality to be lived and experienced through the senses. Darwish's "poems do not deliver mere images and metaphors but deliver landscapes, villages, and fields, deliver a place" (Bitton and Sanbar). Palestinian identity is sown and manifested through the representations of trees, light, valleys and water (Ahmed and Hashim 91). Darwish has often celebrated pre-1948 Palestinian life and folk culture, and the hope of returning to the ancestral soil is deeply rooted in both his poetry and prose (Boullata, "Mahmud Darwish" 164). The attention to detail strengthens the right of the exile to the land. The word Palestine conjures up at once exile, home, and a struggle for justice (Farsakh 103). The return to Palestine, for Darwish, exists as a return to an idea (Salaita, Seikaly and Griffin). In *Mural* [Jidāriya / جدارية], the poet says:

> One day I'll become what I want
> One day I will become a thought
> that no sword or book can dispatch to the wasteland
> A thought equal to rain on the mountain split open by a
> blade of grass

where power will not triumph
and justice is not fugitive.

(Darwish, *Mural* 10)

[سأصيرُ يوماً ما أُريد
..
سأَصيرُ يوماً فكرةً . لا سَيْفَ يحملُها
إلى الأرضِ اليبابِ ، ولا كتاَب
كأنَّها مَطَرٌ على جَبَلٍ تَصَدَّعَ من
تَفَتُّح عُشْبَة
لا القُوَّةُ انتصرت
ولا العَدْلُ الشريد]

(Darwish, *The Latest Works* 444)

His country will become eternal through thoughts carried by his words; the latter will also emphasize his right as a human being living on this earth, and his entitlement to his homeland.

Al-bayt: twenty-five houses in exile

As I have mentioned earlier, the flight during the night pervades Darwish's work. *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?*, a work the poet referred to as "an individual and collective biography," is considered a departure for him, as at the time of its publication it was a work that was mostly personal (*Presence* ch. XVI). In it, the poet introduces self-observation, "giving his own ego pride of place" (Jubran 83).[24] The work presents the "poet's subjectivity, the complexity of his relationship with his various self-constructs, with history, time, and space" (Hadidi 99). It is also a biography of his soul and a map of his recollections that paint the tragedy of his people in lyrical imagery (Boullata, "Review" 70). This work is the story of his people, to be told through the self, the homeland and the Nakba (Ramadan). The autobiographical anthology, which he dedicates to those who have departed, his grandparents and father, and to his mother Huriyya, is divided into a prologue and six sections (*Icons of the Place's Crystal*, *Abel's Space*, *Chaos at Resurrection's Gate*, *A Room to Talk to Oneself*, *Rain on the Church Tower*, and *The Curtain Falls*) comprising the poet's life, as he becomes the storyteller of his people and country.[25] The moment of leaving is metaphorically depicted as someone who is exiled from the familiar homeland to an unfamiliar space (Ghanim 31). The poet's childhood home haunts the entire oeuvre. In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, Darwish writes: "I had become a poet searching for the boy that used to be in him, whom he had left behind some place and forgotten. The poet had grown older and didn't permit the forgotten boy to grow up" (87). As with al-Ali's Hanthala, the child remained ageless to narrate the story of the night they became exiles. He wants to speak "in the name of the one who is absent, who is the poet of Troy" who can "speak the unspoken, say things that haven't been said" (Yeshurun 65–66).

Through the six sections, Darwish journeys to other places, rendering the first place more remote (Rahman, "Literary" 86). Here, Darwish chooses the characters that he had previously used from the 1960s onward, but they have evolved to convey greater wisdom and tranquility (Zaqtan 36). Said suggests: "In Darwish, the personal and the public are always in an uneasy relationship, the force and passion of the former ill-suited to the tests of political correctness and policy required by the latter" (Said, "Darwish" 113). Yet, he has succeeded in becoming the voice of his people. The disrupted childhood, the loss of the home and the homeland and the extended family, as well as the individual loss are the stories of all Palestinians (Dyer 1459). The Nakba in 1948:

> […] meant the destruction and dispersal of entire communities, as well as the annihilation of half of Palestinian society as it had once existed. The most basic social unit of the family was itself uprooted and scattered. Different family members sought refuge in various states and acquired different political and legal statuses, many never to see each other again.
> (al-Hardan 52)

The familial home and its occupants were eradicated. Darwish reflects on his personal experience, which reverberates with all Palestinians:

> The 6-year-old child did not need someone to write his history, to understand the implications of the mysterious futures to which this road leads in this long night stretching from a village on one of the hills in Galilee to the north lit by a Bedouin moon poised on the mountains: a whole nation was being uprooted from its hot bread, from its living present to be thrust into an ominous past. There […] in south Lebanon, they set up coarse tents for us, and from this moment, our names will change. We will become one, no distinguishing features […] refugees.
>
> - What does a refugee mean, father?
> - Nothing, nothing, you won't understand.
> - What is a refugee grandfather, I want to understand.
> - From now on, you can no longer be a child.
>
> (*Homecomer* 40)[26]

No longer the child, Darwish will have to look after himself; he writes: "Perhaps I'll look after myself here. Perhaps/I'll give birth, now, to myself, with myself/and choose for my name vertical letters …" (*Why?* 22).[27] Darwish addresses "the travails of the individual Palestinian and offers appropriate metaphors and personae to serve as symbolic representations of transformation and empowerment" (Mattawa 39). The child is continually resurrected in his work to tell the story of his people; in this case, his name will be written vertically to announce the rebirth of the child and storyteller.

The first section of the anthology, *Icons of the Place's Crystal*, concerns itself with accounts of the expulsion from Palestine, with implicit references to animals, plants, and the old family home that not only act as painful reminders of that date but also continually evoke the memory of the homeland. Memories are continually reproduced to give the person a sense of identity (Halbwachs 47). These references also permeate the other writings by Darwish, having become synonymous with the forced expulsion from the homeland and life-long exile. In a letter to the late Palestinian poet, Samih al-Qasim, dated September 22, 1986, Darwish wrote that he would begin composing this semi-autobiographical book that would tell the story of all the houses he has lived in, at home and in exile, and even though he has occupied more than twenty-five houses, he has neither an address nor a home (Darwish and Al-Qasim, *Letters* 102). In the anthology, the poet also dwells on our inner exile and loneliness amidst others (Farsakh 103). In Arabic, the word *bayt* can refer to a home or a verse in poetry. According to Darwish, a person can dwell in a line of poetry (Bitton and Sanbar 1998). In poetry, Darwish can establish a space in which he can exist, a place for survival and through which there is a possibility for a better future (Rahman, *Wake* 19, Rahman, "Literary" 43). According to Rehnuma Sazzad, the "homeless, peripheral and nomadic exiles find a surrogate home in their arts … [and Darwish's] exile-infused words both immortalize his homeland and transcend it through a universal longing for truth, beauty and love" (*Said's Concept of Exile* 90).

Darwish's destroyed home evolves into the house that epitomizes all other houses in which he dwelt and are symbolically created in his poetic verse. For the exile, "homes are always provisional," and an exile is the person who crosses "borders, breaks[s] barriers of thought and experience" (Said, *Reflections* 185). Exile is in itself multifaceted, physical and psychological. In *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno sarcastically writes: "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live," and through the text, the writer sets up a house in which his papers, books and writing tools become "pieces of furniture" (87). The poem, on the other hand, is capable of creating villages, fields and a place, thus allowing the one who is absent from its geography to live in the poems, as if living on the land (Bitton and Sanbar 1998). Even though Darwish returns to his ancestral home repeatedly in both his poetry and prose work, he can only inhabit the bayt of the poem. In his poem, "al-Mutannabi's Voyage to Egypt [ry ḥlat a-Mutannabi ʾilā Ma ṣr/ رحلة المتنبي إلى مصر]," the poet states and then questions if the homeland has become a poem:

> My homeland is my new poem
> …
> My homeland is my new poem
> …
> Is my homeland my new poem?

[وطني قصيدْتيَ الجديدةُ
...
وطني قصيدتيَ الجديدةُ
...
هل وطني قصيدتي الجديدةُ؟]
(Darwish, *Diwan* 422–423)

The poem has become the place in which the poet lives, but his final question is whether that will become the only place in which he can live.

For a Palestinian, having lost the ancestral home translates into "a marginal existence, with no center to it" (Said, *Politics of Dispossession* 114). Paul Ricoeur suggests that the correlation between inhabiting and constructing a lived space takes place in a third space, and through it one can superimpose other localities (150). Darwish's poetic verse assumes the position of the third space through which the poet can invoke other homes in exile. Of the original recollection of the place, he notes:

> I remember the mulberry tree in the courtyard of our home. It led us to my grandfather's house. We left everything as is: the horse, the lamb, the ox, the open doors, the hot dinner, Al Isha call to prayer, the only radio […] and we descended the steep valley heading towards the south east facing the well […]
>
> (Darwish and Al-Qasim, *Letters* 45)[28]

The recollection of what was is forever linked to the memory of the house that is no longer there. Nonetheless, the use of the imagery of the place helps Palestinians maintain a sense of belonging and emphasizes the close link the Palestinian has to the land (Parmenter 77). In Arab culture, the land is female. Darwish has often eroticized the land in order that he may provide a "metaphor for belonging that approximates the intimacy, passion, and emotional turmoil of romantic relationships" (Mattawa 50).

In "The Eternity of Cactus," the young boy asks his father: "Where are you taking me, father?" (*Why?* 28). To which the father responds: "Where the wind takes us, my son…" (*Why?* 28). The father is inadvertently telling his son that a forced expulsion from the homeland is banishment to nowhere (Hamdan). The optimism of the early Darwish vanishes in this poem (Darraj 67). The temporary becomes permanent, and people can only construct their nation out of words and memories (Khoury). The necessity of the circumstances that rendered the nation non-existent predicated that the poet carries his "community with him as an imagined construct … beyond geography and the nation" (Mena 112–13). Nakba brought with it the destruction and elimination of Palestinian culture, which included language, monuments, traditions, and historical records (Masalha, *Nakba* 11). Darwish often writes that his language has given birth to him (Saleh 337). In "Rhyme for the Mu'allaqat

[qafiya min ʾajl al-mualaqaat/]," Darwish emphasizes the importance of language as a source of his identity:

> Who am I? This
> […] I am my own language,
> I am a mu'allaqa… two mu'allaqas… ten, This is my language
> I am my language.
> […]
> I am what
> I said to the words: Be a meeting point of my body and eternal desert
> Be so that I may be as I say!
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 130)

> [من أنا؟ هذا
> [...] أنا لغتي أنا،
> وأنا معلقة... معلقتان... عشر، هذه لغتي
> .أنا لغتي
> […]
> أنا ما
> قلت للكلمات: كوني ملتقي جسدي مع
> الأبدية الصحراء. كوني كي أكون كما أقول!]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 131)

In "Poetic Arrangements/تدابير شعرية," the poet ponders the same question:

> The poem is in my hands. It is able
> to arrange the affairs of myths
> with the work of hands. But I
> when I found the poem, dispossessed my self
> and I asked it:
> Who am I?
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 112)

> [ألقصيدة بين يدي، وفي وسعها
> أن تدير شؤون الأساطير،
> بالعمل اليدوي، ولكنني
> مذ وجدت القصيدة شردت نفسي
> وساءلتها:
> من أنا؟]
>
> (Darwish, *Why?* 113)

On their route to Lebanon, the father passes onto the son part of the history of the homeland lest it is lost; he points to the city of Acre known for its resistance to Napoleon:

As the two were leaving the plain where
Bonaparte's soldiers surveyed
the shadows on the old wall of Acre–
a father said to his son: […] Don't
be afraid of the drone of bullets!

[…وَهُما يَخْرُجانِ مِنَ السَهْل، حَيْثُ
أَقام جنودُ بونابرتَ تلّا لِرَصْدِ
الظلال على سور عَكَّا القديم –
يقولُ أَبٌ لابنِهِ:[…] لا
تَخَفْ من أَزيز الرصاص!]
(Darwish, *Why?* 28–29)

The father also recounts to his son the history of their family, when "the British crucified" the father "on the thorns of a cactus for two nights/and he didn't confess" (*Why?* 28).[29] The cactus here is indicative of the rooting in the land; cacti are stubborn and cannot be easily destroyed. Palestinians marked the boundaries of their homes and farms with cacti, the prickly and foreboding plant (Bu-Aqdiyya). The Arabic meaning also means patience and steadfastness (Sumud صمود). The crucifixion with its Biblical connotation also carries within its fold the frightened child who senses that the father may not be able to protect him. The father is the person who exiles and who sacrifices the future (Rahman, "Longing" 43).[30] The boy will grow up to tell the story of his people, inadvertently signifying the birth of the poet (*Why?* 28).

The poem is the story of a self, a homeland and the loss of the homeland that has to be passed on in the form of commandments from father to son (Ramadan). Darwish's work gathers the remnants of what has been destroyed and lost by unfolding a personal history that echoes the grief of his people (Rahman, *Wake* 21). Darwish's poetics can be viewed as "historical *mise en abyme*, a form of poetic historical mirroring, a reproduction of the 'is'" (Sylvain 139). The individual becomes the collective to oppose the dispossession "that systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice" (Butler xi). For the young boy, the flight is the demarcation line between the child and the adult, home and the different facets of exile. Darwish comments:

> In my situation, there are no essential differences between the story of my childhood and the story of my homeland. The rupture that occurred in my personal life also befell my homeland. Childhood was taken from me at the same time as my home. There is a parallelism and a unity in the tragic aspect of the matter. In 1948, when this great rupture of ours took place, I jumped from the bed of childhood onto the path of exile.
>
> (Yeshurun 48)

Historical accounts confirm that between 1948 and 1949 about 80 percent of Palestinians were expelled at gunpoint, or due to psychological warfare and/

or military pressure (Masalha, *Denial* 29). The memory account of these traumatic events is central to Palestinians at both individual and national levels as it changed their lives radically and irreversibly (Masalha, *Nakba* 12). Darwish argues: "The Israelis want to continue the Nakba. They want it to renew and repeat itself, as if the War of 1948 – and that is what they say – had never ended" (Williams 30).

The horse: the flight to and fro

In "The Eternity of Cactus," the father is seen here protecting the child, while the child is worried about the house. The child enquires of the father:

– Who will live in the house after us,
father?
– It will remain as it is, as it has always been,
my son!

–[ومن يسكُنُ البَيْتَ من بعدنا
يا أبي؟
سيبقى على حاله مثلما كان
يا ولدي!]
(Darwish, *Why?* 28–29)

The son asks about the village home but the father's answer encompasses the homeland. Instinctively the father searches for the key of the house to reassure himself that the home and the homeland are safe: "He felt for his key the way he would feel for/his limbs and was reassured" (*Why?* 28).[31] He then tells his son that they left the horse to protect the home, as without its people a nation dies, the implication being that they will be able to return:

– Why did you leave the horse alone?
– To keep the house company, my son,
Houses die when their inhabitants are gone

-[لماذا تركتَ الحصان وحيداً؟
- لكي يُؤْنسَ البيتَ، يا ولدي،
- فالبيوتُ تموتُ إذ غاب سُكَّانُها...]
(Darwish, *Why?* 30–31)

The father urges the son to look to the future at the end of the poem by reminding him that in Qana, Lord Jesus changed water into wine; in addition, the coming of April will signal a new life:

Here is where

He turned water into wine. He spoke
Much of love. 'My son, remember
Tomorrow. Remember the Crusader's fortresses
That April's grasses have nibbled away after
The troops have gone…

[هنا
مرَّ سيِّدُنا ذاتَ يومٍ. هنا
جَعَلَ الماءَ خمراً. وقال كلاماً
كثيراً عن الحبّ، يا ابني تذكّر
غداً. وتذكّرْ قلاعاً صليبيَّةً
قَضَمَتْها حشائش نيسان بعد
رحيل الجنود …]
(Darwish, *Why?* 24–25)

The poet like the Messiah will be reborn.

The horse in the title and the poem suggests the possibility of a flight and a return. Leaving the animal behind testifies to that which has been lost (Sacks 65). There are around twenty-four references to horse/horses in the collection. The horse symbolizes different meanings, a symbol of energy in both times of war and peace (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 24). The home and the horse are both living presences, each taking care of the other; the presence of the horse keeps the ghost of death at bay (Hamdan). The presence of the horse gestures towards the identity of the land (Obaid). The horse epitomizes resistance while the paternal father embodies failings, as he is associated with the first loss (Rahman, "Literary" 89). The horse is also a symbol of being rooted in the land (Hamdan). Darwish's use of horses is to evoke resistance to the occupation, as he depicts them running towards Jerusalem in their fight against the Crusaders (Ahmed and Hashim 102). In Chapter 5, I discuss the importance of the horse in Tamam al-Akhal's paintings; a copy of her oil painting, *Don't Forsake the Steed*, is the cover of the English translation of this anthology. Tahrir Hamdi sees in the abandoned horse not only a metaphor for the abandoned land "but also for everything that the Palestinian has abandoned, especially the idea, which if allowed to disappear, would mean the end of Palestinian existence" (Hamdi, "Bearing Witness" 36).

There is more than one journey in this collection; it begins with the poet's ghost returning to the homeland, as the narrator who has witnessed the entire history of his homeland, the poetic voice reviewing the journey "including the beginning, to a stage of witnessing, testifying to absence" (Rahman, "Literary" 87). The culture of return is intrinsic to the Palestinian identity, as through its various components one can address the "nemesis of memory, 'forgetfulness'" (al-Hardan 85). The anthology begins at the end, from "the fragments of a precarious present, in a hesitant turning back and looking over, surveying with longing as in a pre-Islamic poetic mode" (Rahman, "Literary" 86). Darwish returns like an ancient pre-Islamic poet, a prophet for his people.

Early Arab poets would arrive on horseback to display their talent of poetry, as they compete with others, and the best poems would be hung on the walls of the Kaaba (Zaqtan 32).

After becoming refugees in Lebanon, Darwish's family returned surreptitiously to Palestine/Israel. Even though they returned to their homeland, they were considered infiltrators, and were labeled present absentees.[32] Darwish describes the night his family stealthily snuck back into Palestine in *In the Presence of Absence*:

> Had rain fallen on us that night, darkness would have dissolved and we would have seen our steps and seen the road. The scent of rain would have led us to the trees that grew in our absence and whose high branches had burst into rooms.
>
> But a salty whisper orders you to lie down on the ground. It is the hyena, they tell you as they point to headlights in the distance. They do not allow you to ask: Does the hyena drive a car? […] I, the narrator, not you, now remind you of the village crier who used to sit on top of a roof and call out: The hyena is coming! Dozens like you ran to the village cave until the soldiers had left after completing their search for those who returned to their country as "infiltrators."
>
> (*In the Presence* 43)[33]

The night of return is also described in detail in a 1969 interview:

> Just over a year of living life as a refugee, they told me one night that we will return to our home tomorrow. I remember very clearly how I could not sleep that night. I did not sleep because I was delighted. Going back home meant to me the end of yellow cheese, end of being abused by Lebanese children who demeaned me by using the word 'refugee'. I departed on the voyage of return. It was completely dark. We were three: my uncle, the guide who knew the unfamiliar paths of the mountains and the valleys and myself. I remember crawling on our abdomens to avoid being seen. After a painstaking journey, I found myself in a village. I was very disappointed when I learnt it was Deir al-Assad, which was not my village. My home was not there and neither were my friends. I enquired when we will return to our village, to our home but received no convincing answers. I did not understand anything. I failed to comprehend the meaning that our village was demolished. I did not understand that my private word has ended without a possibility of return. I did not understand why they chose to destroy my world, and I did not understand who were these people who chose to destroy it.
>
> (al-Naqqash 100–1)[34]

In essence, time has been Hebraized and assigned another memory (al-Sheikh, "al-Qamar" 116). In "How Many Times Will it be Over," the

father tells the son "Get up, my son. We're going back! [قم. سنرجع يا ولدي!]," as he realizes that here and there are not the same, even though he tries to persuade himself that "Everything here/will look like something there/ [يا ولدي! كُل شيء هنا سوف يشبه شيئاً هناك] (*Why?* 34–35). In exile, the *here* becomes suspended in the unattainable *there*. During the return journey, the father hands over the burden to the son, as he asks young Darwish:

– Are you tired of walking
my son
[…]
– yes, father
[…]
so climb up on my shoulders
[…]
This is northern Galilee
Lebanon is behind us

(Darwish, *Why?* 36)

[هل تَعِبْتَ من المشي
يا وَلَدي،
[…]
-نَعَمْ ، يا أَبي
[…]
فاصْعَدْ إلى كتفيَّ ،
[…]
هذا شمالُ الجليلْ
ولبنانُ من خلفنا]

(Darwish, *Why?* 37)

The father is confident they have left exile behind, not realizing that what awaits them is another exile. Darwish "records their expulsion and his grandfather's subsequent longing for his land to convey the enormity of the injustice done to them," in *Memory for Forgetfulness* (Sazzad 123). He writes how his "grandfather died with his gaze fixed on a land imprisoned behind a fence" (Darwish, *Memory* 88).[35] The "grandfather died counting sunsets, seasons, and heartbeats on the fingers of his withered hands. He dropped like a fruit forbidden a branch to lean its age against. They destroyed his heart" (Darwish, *Memory* 88).[36] In this poem, the poet's father wants to see if his son still remembers the way to their home.

Do you know the way, my son?
– Yes, father:
East of the carob tree on the main street there's
a small path crowded by cactus

(Darwish, *Why?* 36)

[نعم ، يا أَبي:
شرقَ خرّوبَةِ الشارع العامّ
دربٌ صغيرٌ يَضِيقُ بِصُبَّارِه]
(Darwish, *Why?* 37)

The son remembers the house in detail, as he tells the father:

I know it like I know the path:
Jasmine winds around an iron gate
[…]
In the yard there's a well and a willow tree and a horse
(Darwish, *Why?* 38)

[-مثلما أَعرف الدرب أَعرفُهُ:
ياسمينٌ يُطوِّقُ بوَّابةً من حديد
[…]
وفي باحة البيت بئرٌ وصفصافةٌ وحصانْ]
(Darwish, *Why?* 39)

However, once they discover al-Birweh under the rubble, the father becomes tired and can no longer carry the burden of the homeland. He asks his son to carry him, along with the longing of the homeland, and the story of their land from its beginning to its end (*Why?* 38). In the "Owl's Night," Darwish returns to the father who can only hand over the burden: "Was that difficult man/my father, who would have me carry the burden of his history?" (*Why?* 24). In the following line, the poet wonders if he should adopt the mother's words and customs, which can perhaps shield him from the burden of history, but the mother/homeland is no longer a choice (*Why?* 24). As the connection between the child and the house is shattered, the child has to inherit the father's burdened belonging to the place (Rahman, "Literary" 90). In this collection, time is circular as the poet incessantly returns to the beginnings of the journey (Rahman, "Literary" 101). The cyclical time not only allows for a return to the homeland, albeit in verse, but also keeps the possibility of a physical return probable. To Darwish, everything will begin again and witness a rebirth, even though he often had personal fears regarding the future (Frangieh 39).

Conclusion: birth of a prophet

Darwish was born on March 13, 1942. The place awaited the birth of the child, and as with Near Eastern myths, March is the month when the prophet is reborn in anticipation of spring. He writes:

The place was ready for his birth. A hill
of his ancestors' basil that looks east and west.
[…]

March is
the pampered child of months.
[…]
March is a land for the swallow's night, and for a woman
preparing for her scream in the wilderness
[…]
A child is born

[كان المكانُ مُعَدّاً لِمَوْلِده: تلّةً
.من رياحين أَجداده تَتَلَفَّتُ شرقاً وغرباً
[…]
آذارُ أَرضٌ لِلَيْلِ السنون ولا مرآةٍ
تَسْتَعِدُّ لصرخَتِها في البراري… وتمتدُّ في
.شَجَرِ السنديانْ
يُولَدُ الآنَ طفلٌ]

(Darwish, *Why?* 10–11)

As with T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," in which "April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land," the birth of a child in March becomes an inauspicious event, prophesying the death of the land, and the possibility of its rebirth (Eliot 61). Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki writes: "April 1948. And so it was the cruelest month of the year; but there were crueler months, then years" (44). The birth of a child could also signify the coming of a Messiah or a prophet.[37] April, the hill, the basil, the olive tree, the almond tree, the mallow, the church, night, wilderness, and the oak trees all signal to a birth of a new Messiah (Hamdan).

In his poetry, Darwish often saw himself a prophet, representing his people, and at times the "Palestinian poet-speaker," who is being crucified (Mattawa 41). As with al-Ali, the theme of crucifixion permeates Darwish's work and "the cross" is often "the site of defiance" (Mattawa 41). The need for a symbolic resurrection by the poet stems from his fear of "what happens *after* the ending, what it is like to live past one's time and place, how survival after the aftermath becomes an esoteric and certainly an exotic situation for the poet and his people" (Said, "Darwish" 115).

The poet wrote "on universal issues such as love, death, exile, and the struggle of humankind, dedicating his poetry to the Palestinian question" (Athamneh 191). The death of Darwish is not merely a loss of a poet but also a closing of an important chapter of Palestinian history (Farsakh 102). His recounting of al-Birweh and his family's forced exodus from it is a journey that evokes a multitude of similar exiles. By writing about the absent homeland, Darwish was often wary of absenting Palestine once again (Nassar and Rahman 3). His work continues to give presence to Palestine with every reading.

Darwish has individually helped create the modern Palestinian identity, and no other writer has managed to shape an identity of a whole nation (Mohammed). In a year before his death, Darwish said in an interview: "I

would not want to appear as a patriot or as a hero or as a symbol. I will appear as a modest poet" (Darwish, "Return"). The poet died on August 9, 2008, and as much as he resisted being a Palestinian symbol, his death conferred upon him this iconic status. The Permanent Committee for Arab Culture, which convened in the Moroccan city of Casablanca, chose Mahmoud Darwish as the symbol of not only Palestinian culture but also of Arab culture for the year 2018 (Safa). His beautiful words, memories of the homeland and loss will continue to survive in the collective and cultural memory of his people and beyond, even though according to him, the most beautiful poem is yet to be written. In a work that was published posthumously, the poet wrote:

أنا من هناك ــ هذا هو تاريخي
أنا من هناك ــ هذه هي لغتي
أنا من هناك ــ هذا هو مصيري
أنا من هناك ــ هذا هو أنا
(Darwish, *Undersigned* 90)

[I am from there – this is my history
I am from there – this is my language
I am from there – this is my destiny
I am from there – this is who I am][38]

Darwish believed that his poetry has made the Palestinian more human (Said and Darwish, *Search*). He wanted the Palestinian to be seen as a human being, and not as a refugee topic. The poet has become his homeland, humanizing his story (Said and Darwish, *Search*). His poetry lives on to tell of his personal exile and that of his people.

Notes

1 Original Arabic script: [أين نمضي ولا أرضٌ هنا ... ولا سماء] (Darwish, *New Works Two* 611).

2 Darwish was born on "March 13, 1941 in the village of al-Birweh, Palestine. In 1948, at the age of six, he and his family were expelled from their village under a shower of bombs. He found himself in refugee camps in southern Lebanon with tens of thousands of Palestinians, after they had been uprooted from the cities and villages of their homeland […] Mahmoud Darwish died in the United States of America on Saturday, August 9, 2008, following an open-heart surgery at the Memorial Hermann Texas Medical Center in Houston, after which he fell into a coma leading to his death" (Foundation). For more details on his life and work please refer to *Mahmoud Darwish Foundation* at www.darwishfoundation.org/index.php. During his lifetime, Darwish received numerous awards: the 1969 Lotus Prize, the 1993 Lenin Peace Prize, the 1997 French Knighthood of Arts and Letters, the 2001 Lannan Foundation Prize for Cultural Freedom, the 2002 al-Owais Award, the 2004 Prince Claus Awards, the 2007 Bosnian stećak, the 2007 International Forum for Arabic Poetry prize, and the 2007 Golden Wreath of Struga Evenings.

3 The translation from Arabic is my own. Most of the translations herewith are my own unless otherwise stated. The interview was first translated into Arabic by Darwish and then later published in *Al-Jadid* newspaper. Here's the Arabic text in full:

أذكر نفسي عندما كان عمري ست سنوات . كنت أقيم في قرية جميلة وهادئة هي قرية البروة الواقعة على هضبة خضراء ، ينبسط أمامها سهل عكا . وكنت أبنا لأسرة متوسطة الحال عاشت من الزراعة. عندما بلغت السابعة ، توقفت ألعاب الطفولة . وإني أذكر كيف حدث ذلك.. أذكر ذلك تماماً : في إحدى ليالي الصيف، التي اعتاد فيها القرويون أن يناموا على سطوح المنازل ، أيقظتني أمي من نومي فجأة ، فوجدت نفسي مع مئات سكان القرية أعدو في الغابة . كان الرصاص تطاير من على رؤوسنا ، ولم أفهم شيئاً مما يجري . بعد ليلة من التشرد والهروب وصلت مع أحد أقاربي الضائعين في كل الجهات ، إلى قرية غريبة ذات أطفال آخرين . تساءلت بسذاجة : أين أنا ؟ وسمعت للمرة الأولى كلمة "لبنان" يخيل لي أن تلك الليلة وضعت حداً لطفولتي بمنتهى العنف. وأحسست فجأة أني أنتمي إلى الكبار . توقفت مطالبي فُرضت عليّ المتاعب . منذ تلك الأيام التي عشت فيها في لبنان لم أنس ، ولن أنسى إلى الأبد ، تعرفي على الجبنة الصفراء.. هذا 'المصطلح' الذي عرفني على كلمة الوطن . فلأول مرة وبدون استعداد سابق كنت أقف في طابور طويل لأحصل على الغذاء الذي توزعه وكالة الغوث. كانت الوجبة الرئيسية هي الجبنة الصفراء. وهنا استمعت ، لأول مرة ، إلى كلمات جديدة : فتحت أمامي نافذة إلى عالم جديد : الوطن، الحرب ، الأخبار، اللاجئون ، الجيش ، الحدود ، وبواسطة هذه الكلمات بدأت أدرس وأفهم وأتعرف على عالم جديد، على وضع جديد.. حرمني طفولتي.

(al-Naqqash 99–100)

4 Susan Slyomovics writes that in *In the Presence of Absence*, "Darwish was writing from his location at the time, ostensibly 'there' in Beirut and far from his native Palestine … Beirut has become another point of origin, momentarily a home for yet a second time. As it happens, Beirut was only another stage, and not even a respite, along his road of permanent exile" (1998, 19).

5 Original Arabic script:

لك ليل على هذا الوادي، فاهبط أسرع من حجل مذعور، الهواء ساكن لا يحّرك ريشة، ولا دليل لرحيلك هذا أوضح من غراب يرافق النازحين الى حدود الليل / لك ليل، ولا اقامة لنا ولك، منذ الآن، تحت أشجار الزيتون، ولا درب خارج ما ينشره الظل الداكن لعربات نسمعها ولا نراها. الليل مكبرات صوت. الليل طبل الصدى. لك ليل صارخ فاهدأ. واسمك الصغير وأسماؤنا كلها تتهيأ للإقلاع إلى مصائرها العشوائية في فوضى التكوين

(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 33)

6 Original Arabic script:

وتسأل: ما معنى كلمة «وطن»؟
سيقولون: هو البيت، وشجرة التوت، وقنّ الدجاج، وقفيرالنحل، ورائحة الخبز، والسماء الأولى

(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 38)

7 Original Arabic script:

هجم الرصاص والرعب على منزلها فتناولت شيئاً حسبته طفلها وقفزت إلى أقرب زورق. في البحر الذاهب
إلى عكا اكتشفت ان الطفل وسادة ومن يومها، أصيبت بالجنون. كم طفلًا تحول إلى وسادة. وكم وسادة تحولت
الى طفل. وما هو الوطن؟ وطن الأم طفلها ووطن الطفل أمه

(Darwish, *Yawmīyyāt* 54)

8 Hamdi suggests: "Memoricide, erasing the memory of Palestine, includes the destruction of books, documents, art, place names, landmarks and any remnant of Palestinian history and culture. The two parallel movements, the geographical erasure of Palestinian land and the dispossession of its people on the one hand and Palestinian memoricide on the other, make the plight of Palestinians unique even in the postcolonial context, especially as the aim of the colonizer/occupier is not simply to rule over a native population for purely economic reasons and influence, but rather totally to dispossess the native Arab inhabitants of their land, an extreme and violent kind of settler colonialism" ("Darwish's Geography" 241).

9 Original Arabic script:

"فلتحفظ ليل الالم هذا عن ظهر قلب "

(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 38)

10 Original Arabic script: "كجارية مدفوعةً الاجر، صعبة وعذبة، وشديدة الممانع" (Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 17).

11 In *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, "Young Darwish recalls the feeling of humiliation at becoming a refugee vividly as he stands in the food line with his father, feeling like beggars" (Nashef, "Challenging the Myth" 339). The poet writes: "The other children put on new clothes and spoke about feasts. And you stood alone with your father in a line of beggars to obtain clothing and a portion of food that came from anonymous sources" (Darwish, *Journal* 11). In a similar account, Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki notes: "I did not (for all men and for all they knew) exist on the face of this globe; that I was robbed of my sense of purpose and sense of worth as a human being […] we existed not in the present tense, the tense of reality, but the future imperfect, when next year, next time, next speech, the wrongs will have been righted, the grievances removed, and our cause justified" (*Disinherited*, 15–16).

12 Original Arabic script: "أبحث عن قلبي الذي وقع في تلك الليلة" (Darwish, *Yawmīyyāt* 29)

13 Original Arabic script:

بساعة نحس واحدة دخل التاريخ كلصّ جَسور من باب، وخرج الحاضر من شباك. وبمذبحة أو اثنين، انتقل اسم البلاد، بلادنا، إلى اسم آخر. وصار الواقع فكرة وانتقل التاريخ الى ذاكرة
(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 47)

14 Original Arabic script:
"لن تجدها على سطح الأرض. فقد نسفناها ومشطنا أرضها من الحجارة ثم حرثناها اخفيناها تحت الأشجار"
(Darwish, *Yawmīyyāt* 37). Hussain Hamzah suggests: "The birthplace and childhood residence of Darwish, the Palestinian village of Al-Birwa was depopulated and destroyed by the Israeli army in 1948. The Galilee village was located 10.5 kilometres east of the historic coastal town of Acre. The Muslim geographer Nasir Khusrwa visited al-Birwa in 1047, while Palestine was under Fatimid rule. Al-Birwa was also known to the Latin Crusaders as Broet. Captured from the Mamluks by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, Al-Birwa grew to be a large village by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1945 Al-Birwa had 1,460 inhabitants, one mosque, one church, an elementary school for boys and a school for girls. The Israeli army captured the village in June 1948 and the inhabitants were subsequently driven out. Most of the inhabitants were relocated to the nearby Arab villages and towns including Tamra and Kabul. Some were driven out to Lebanon, and ended up in the refugee camp of Shatila, near Beirut. Kibbutz Yas'ur and Moshav Ahihud were established on the lands of the village in 1949 and 1950 respectively. Today one school, two shrines for local sages and three houses remained standing" (163).

15 Original Arabic script:

"ان اعلان ميلاد اسرائيل هو في الوقت ذاته انهيار المجتمع الفلسطيني"

(Darwish, *Yawmīyyāt* 62)

16 Original Arabic script:

" فمن يروي قصّتنا نحن السائرين على هذا الليل، مطرودين من المكان ومن الأسطورة التي لم
تجد منّا أحداً
شهد على أن الجريمة لم تقع"
(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 35)

17 According to *Palestine Remix*, the expulsion date was June 11, 1948, and the population at the time was 1,694; the source describes the level of destruction as completely destroyed with only rubble remaining (Al Jazeera Interactive)..

18 Original Arabic script:

> "فلتحفظْ ليل الألم هذا عن ظهر قلب. فقد تكون الراوي والرواية والمرويّ، فلا تنس هذا الطريق الضيّق المتعرج الذي يحملك وتحمله إلى المجهول العربيد الذي سيرميك، وأهلَلك، بالشبهات"
>
> (Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 38)

19 Darwish describes an experience that he had at an early age, in which he was separated from his mother, and was lost as he tried to go to Acre. When the villagers could not find him, they searched for him in the wells. He writes: "My mother was already in the house, but the rest of the family and the neighbors were out searching for me in all the wells of the village. When children got lost, it was assumed they had fallen into wells" (*Journal* 6). The image of the well has accompanied Darwish since *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* (al-Sheikh, "Reading" 27). The moon shone that night and he was found.

20 Stuart Reigeluth notes: "Darwish uses the cliché of 'long caravans' to symbolize both the chain of historical events and unrelenting processions of time. Writing becomes a means of transmitting historical experiences and collective emotions" (301).

21 Original Arabic script:

> لولاه لكنت يتيماً قبل أواني. لم يكن قد سقط في البئر. كان أعلى من جبيني وأقرب من شجرة التوت التي توسطت دار جدي. وكان الكلب ينبح عندما يقترب.وحين دوت أول رصاصة دهشت لحفلة زفاف تحدث في المساء. وحين ساقوني إلى القافلة الطويلة رافقنا القمر إلى طريق عرفت فيما بعد أنها طريق المنفى
> ولولاه – كما قلت لك – لضعت عن والدي
>
> (Darwish, *Yawmīyyāt* 30)

The well also recalls the story of Joseph and his brothers, along with the geography of the place, Egypt, Syria and Babylon (al-Sheikh, "Reading", 27).

22 Ilan Pappé writes: "The operation in and around Nazareth was executed at a fast pace, and large villages not taken in May were now quickly captured [in July]: Amqa, Birwa [al-Birweh] (the village where the famous contemporary Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish was born), Damun, Khirbat Jiddin and Kuwaykat each had more than 1500 inhabitants and yet they were easily forced out" (2007, p. 216). In "the first week of January 1949, Jewish settlers colonised the villages of Kuwaykat, Ras al-Naqura, Birwa, Safsaf, Sa'sa and Lajjun. On the lands of other villages, such as Malul and Jalama in the north, the IDF built military bases" (Pappé 216).

23 For details on the forced deportations, please refer to Nur Masalha's *Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (2003), *Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (2012) and Ilan Pappé's The *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2007).

24 Sleman Jubran sees in this collection a surprising innovation in Darwish's poetry, as it draws on personal memory existentially (85). The anthology also draws heavily on religions and mythology, rendering it a Palestinian epic (94).

25 In this chapter, I will discuss the prologue and the first section, *Icons of the Place's Crystal.* Darwish's mother, Huriyya, immortalized in his poetry, died in 2009, a year after her son's death.

26 My translation.

27 In his epic poem *Mural*, Darwish repossesses his name, choosing to write it horizontally: "And my name mispronounced with its five horizontal letters/my name … is mine" (53).

28 Original Arabic script:

ولكنني أتذكر ساحة الدار التي تتوسطها شجرة التوت التي تشدّ البيوت لتحولها إلى دار جدي. تركنا كل شيء على حاله: الحصان، والخروف، والثور، والابواب المفتوحة، والعشاء الساخن، وآذان العشاء، … وجهاز الراديو الوحيد … هبطنا الوادي الحاد المؤدي الى الجنوب الشرقي المفتوح على بئر

(Darwish and Al-Qasim, *Letters* 45)

29 According to Sleman Jubran, the dialogue between father and son in this collection allows the father to present his side of events; for it is the father who led his family to exile in Lebanon, and it is the father who decides to return (97).

30 Darwish said that the anger towards his father subsided once he understood what they had to go through (Yeshurun 56).

31 Original Arabic script:

"تَحَسَّسَ مفتاحَهُ مثلما يتحسَّسُ / أعضاءه ، واطمأنَّ"

(Darwish, *Why?* 29)

32 Masalha notes: "In 1950 the internally displaced Palestinians in Israel were considered as 'Present Absentees' (nifkadim nokhahin) under the Absentees' Property Law […] Acquiring the paradoxical title of 'present absentees', the internally displaced had their property and homes taken by the state, making them refugees within their own country […] Most of them were forced to leave their villages under military orders during the 1948–9 war, locking their doors, taking their keys and land deeds, and planning to return as soon as the Israeli army allowed" (*Denial* 143).

33 Original Arabic script:

وتقول: لو هطل المطر علينا في هذا الليل لذاب الظلام ورأينا خطانا والطريق، وقادتنا رائحة المطر إلى الشجر الذي شبّ في الغياب ودخلت أغصانه العالية إلى الغرف

لكن همساً مالحاً يأمرك بأن تنبطح على الأرض. هو الضبع– يقولون لك وهم يشيرون إلى ضوء السيارة من بعيد، ولا يأذنون لك بأن تسأل: هل يقود الضبعُ سيارة؟… وأنا الراوي، لا أنت، أذكّرك الآن بمنادي قريةٍ كان يقف على سطح بيت ويصرخ: جاء الضبع. فيهرول من عشرات من أمثالك إلى كهف القرية، إلى أن يعود الجنود من حملة "التفتيش عمن عادوا إلى بلدهم "متسللين

(Darwish, *Fi ħaḍrat al-ghiyāb* 43–44)

34 Original Arabic script:

بعد أكثر من سنة ، عشت خلالها حياة لاجئ ، أبلغوني ذات ليلة أننا سنعود غداً إلى البيت . أذكر جيداً أني لم أنم في تلك الليلة.. لم أنم من شدة الفرح . فالعودة إلى البيت تعني - بالنسبة لي - نهاية الجبنة الصفراء ، نهاية تحرشات الأولاد اللبنانيين الذين كانوا يشتمونني بكلمة "لاجئ" المهينة... وخرجت إلى رحلة العودة كان الظلام مخيماً على كل شيء . وكنا ثلاثة: أنا وعمي والدليل الذي كان يعرف مجاهل الدروب في الجبال وفي الوديان . إني أذكر الزحف على البطون لكي لا يرانا أحد . وبعد رحلة مضنية ، وجدت نفسي في إحدى القرى . ولكن ما أشد خيبة أملي : لقد وصلنا إلى قرية دير الأسد ، وهي ليست قريتي . لا بيتي هناك ولا زقاقي . سألت متى نعود إلى قريتنا.. إلى منزلنا . ولم تكن الأجوبة مقنعة . ولم أفهم شيئاً.. لم أفهم معنى أن تكون القرية مهدمة.. لم أفهم.. معنى أن يكون عالمي الخاص قد انتهى إلى غير رجعة . لم أفهم لماذا هدموا هذا العالم... ولماذا هدموه... ومن هم أولئك الذين هدموه

(al-Naqqash 100–1)

35 Original Arabic script:

مات جدي وهو يحدق
في تراب محبوس خلف سياج
(Darwish, *New Works Three* 95)

36 مات جدي وهو يعد الغياب والمواسم ودقات القلب على أصابع يدين يابستين. سقط كالثمر المحروم من غصن يسند إليه عمره (Darwish, *New Works Three* 95).

37 Near Eastern myth of resurrection is identical to the Babylonian deity's [Tammuz تمّوز] return in the spring from the underworld after nature has died during his disappearance (as-Sawwah 235). Tammuz is both the son and lover of Ishtar [عشتار] (as-Sawwah 175).

38 My translation.

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4 Ghassan Kanafani

The clock, the orange and what remains of the homeland

> I heard you in the other room asking your mother: "Mama, am I Palestinian?" When she answered "Yes", a heavy silence fell on the whole house. It was as if something hanging over our heads had fallen, its noise exploding, then – silence.
>
> (Kilpatrick, "Introduction" 10)

Introduction: denied the 'other room'

The above excerpt is from a letter Ghassan Kanafani wrote to his son describing the sense of bewilderment he faced as a child when they were evicted from their country. In it, the novelist attempts to sum up his experience of loss and his realization that he is a Palestinian; he adds in the letter:

> Afterwards… I heard you crying. I could not move. There was something bigger than my awareness being born in the other room through your bewildered sobbing. It was as if a blessed scalpel was cutting up your chest and putting there the heart that belongs to you […] I was unable to move to see what was happening in the other room. I knew, however, that a distant homeland was being born again; hills, plains, olive groves, dead people, torn banners and folded ones, all cutting their way into a future of flesh and blood and being born in the heart of another child […] Do not believe that man grows. No; he is born suddenly – a word, in a moment, penetrates his heart to a new throb. One scene can hurl him down from the ceiling of childhood on to the ruggedness of the road.
>
> (Kilpatrick, "Introduction" 10)

As with the child's nocturnal journey in Mahmoud Darwish's work, the young Kanafani in the passage above becomes aware of the meaning of the word homeland and his identity at the time of loss. The sense of loss, which is defined by forced exile, denies the boy his childhood and hurls him onto the road to adulthood. The Palestinian author believed that hope for a better

future resides with the children, and this letter is to hand over the burden of the Catastrophe to his son. The action resonates with the father's passing on the burden of the lost homeland to his son in Darwish's poem "To My End and to Its End," when he responds: "–My son, I am tired … Can you carry me?/–Like you used to carry me, father" (*Why?* 38). Equally, in the paintings of Tamam al-Akhal and Ismail Shammout, hope is with the children, a point I will address in Chapter 5. Positive roles are often assigned to the young in Kanafani's stories, and this creates a tension between generations (Bashkin 97). Kanafani also believed that with time literature is able to transform society, albeit through a slow and patchy process (Kilpatrick, "Commitment" 18).[1] In this letter from a father to his son, the year 1948 demarcates the lines between the homeland and the "other room" (Kilpatrick, "Introduction" 10).[2] As with the other Palestinians I discuss in this book [Tamam al-Akhal, Naji al-Ali, Mahmoud Darwish, Ismail Shammout and Elia Suleiman], the Nakba and its effects preoccupy Kanafani's work. His novels, short stories and political essays have played a significant role in shaping how the post-1948 experience of the Palestinian people is understood (Zalman 48). Kanafani's stories have often invoked journeys of exile and departure, and being on the road has the potential of "evoking the 1948 war and the concomitant exodus of Palestinians" (Yaqub 306).

Edward Said notes: "The interesting thing is that there seems to be nothing in the world which sustains the story; unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear" (*Politics of Dispossession* 118). Kanafani's prose continues to tell the story years following his untimely death. In addition, Kanafani's fiction:

> […] often elaborates a rigorous critique, on the basis of class and ethnicity, of Palestinian and Arab contemporary conditions, especially their distorted relationship to power and political struggle. Kanafani was the first to apply the term "resistance" to imbue Palestinian narratives before 1967 with significance as a new approach to Palestinian literature in general […] Kanafani was never an ideologue.
>
> (Saloul 107)

The Nakba haunts Kanafani's work, and many times in his work he has tried to get back to its origin, its "point of killing," but has failed, as the Catastrophe is ongoing (Nashif). Instead, his work dealt with its implication and consequences for his people in exile. Moreover, Kanafani's writing shared the sarcasm prevalent in Suleiman's films, emphasizing a literature under occupation that is neither sad nor defeatist, but is derived from irony and the tragi-comic (Abu-Remaileh 199). Fiction helped him see clearly what he wanted to change in society, and his work is marked by both a sense of urgency and immediacy (Abu-Manneh 73). Kanafani believed that literature should be both artistic and *multazim* (committed), and has a role to play within society; it should try to instigate change. He also believed that through struggle one

could aspire to a better life (Abu-Manneh 78). Additionally, as with al-Ali's cartoons, Kanafani's Palestinian characters are not only marked by their suffering and wretchedness but they also embody conditions "that speak to all human oppression and suffering" (Abu-Manneh 73). For Kanafani, the only form of nationalism that is to be accepted is one that is linked to humanism (Abu-Manneh 77). In addition, justice should be universal, and no "human being should be forcibly evicted from their home, and no human being has a right to force another into a life of exile and want" (Abu-Manneh 89).

Kanafani was born in the city of Acre (ʻAkka), Palestine, in 1936. Like many of his personas, the twelve-year-old child and his family were forced into exile in May 1948.[3] Palestinian-American scholar Rashid Khalidi writes:

> Those Palestinians who lived in urban areas, who amounted to over 400,000 people […] or some 30 percent of the total Arab population of the country, were among the first to be dispossessed. Even before the state of Israel had been proclaimed on 15 May 1948, most of the Arab inhabitants of Jaffa and Haifa had been dispersed, and the bulk of their property had been seized.
>
> (Khalidi 13–14)[4]

Having lost his country, Kanafani has wrestled with the idea of what it means to belong to a nation. His work kept the memory of the pre-1948 Arab cities and towns alive, such as Acre, Haifa and Jaffa. Like many of his fellow compatriots, the sense of *Palestinianess* became more pronounced at the time of loss. His portrayal of generations of Palestinians in his work strengthened the links between those who were born on the land and others who were born in exile. To him, belonging is based on one's consciousness and ability to contribute to a sense of community (Bashkin 97). The collective consciousness of a nation is not premeditated on the reflections of its elite, as in many of his novels it is often the ignorant peasants, uneducated women or children that guide intellectuals (Bashkin 97). In narrating Palestine, peasants were often depicted to highlight the relationship of the Palestinian to the land and create one coherent identity in exile in spite of the variations within the country's social fabric prior to 1948.

With Kanafani, icons or objects that mark the Nakba vary with each story; his protagonists may choose to remember their homeland differently but their identities are founded on the lack and loss of the homeland. They are also founded on the fear that Palestinians may disappear. Commenting on Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, Said notes:

> Let Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* stand for the fear we have that unless we press 'them' they will allow us to disappear, and the equal worry that if we press them they will either decry our hectoring presence, and quash it in their states, or turn us into easy symbols of their nationalism. Three refugees concealed in the belly of a tanker truck are

> being transported illegally across the border into Kuwait. As the driver converses with the guards, the men (Palestinians) die of suffocation – in the sun, forgotten. It is not the driver's forgetfulness that nags at him. It is their silence. 'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?' Our fear to press.
>
> (*After the Last Sky* 32)

Through his prose, Kanafani is able to present a sense of continuity between Palestine, the lost homeland, and Palestine of the diaspora (Bashkin 102). Moreover, in his novels, short stories and political writing, Kanafani has been able to create a national Palestinian discourse.[5] His novels became "sites of vernacular memory, reminding readers of places no longer in existence, and capturing a peculiar space between past, present, and future" (Bashkin 104). His prose work is an "attempt to assemble the fragments of a national life and […] to prove national consciousness" (Brennan 61). Once more, his writing shaped the post-Nakba Palestinian identity. In addition, his novels and short stories show the process of transformation that is needed in order for Palestinians to be able to apprehend their past and understand their present, so they can plan the course of their future (Ouyang 223). In this chapter, I focus on his novella, *All That's Left to You* (1966) [ما تبقى لكم],[6] and his short stories, "Land of Sad Oranges" (1958) [أرض البرتقال الحزين], "A Present for the Holiday" (1968) [هدية العيد], and "The Horizon Beyond the Gate" (1958) [الأفق وراء البوابة], and I discuss how some objects in these works have evolved into emblems that provoke memory of the Nakba, displacement, humiliation and loss. In spite of his short life, Kanafani has risen to become an icon of Palestinian literature.

The clock: marker of defeat and disjointed narratives

At the beginning of *All That's Left to You*, Kanafani explains that "the five characters in this novel Hamid, Maryam, Zakaria, Time and the Desert, do not move along parallel or conflicting lines […] we find instead a series of disconnected lines which occasionally come together" (xxi).[7] In the novella, Kanafani alters the degree of blackness of the letters and the font to indicate the transition of consciousness of the characters. The "[n]arrative causality and development is replaced by the intersectionality and the constellation of unrelated events" happening at the same time (Abu-Manneh 81). The clock plays a pivotal role in the novel, as it chimes to these fragmentary events. It not only marks the current time but is also a continual reminder of previous events that relate to the Nakba, and the lives of Maryam and her brother Hamid before the forced expulsion of 1948. The characters' recollected memories when connected encompass the concept of home and homeland (El-Hussari, "The Symbolic Conflation" 1010). The characters in the novel carry within them the bitter taste of defeat; the pounding of the clock emphatically reminds them of this fact. Defeat may be dangerous but "it

carries within it both the seeds of construction and the seeds of destruction" (Kanafani, Harlow and Yaziji, "Thoughts on Change" 139). The novel, which places the characters physically in Gaza and in the Negev Desert (al-Naqab), and psychologically through an extended time in occupied Palestine, recounts the events of 24 hours.[8] The clock marks both the chronological time and the protracted time of memory. It narrates the story from the beginning. Nonetheless, the logic of a narrative that is usually driven by chronology ceases to operate when confronted with an historical trauma (Zalman 67). Trauma causes time and those under its mercy to become "out-of-joint […] disarticulated, dislocated, undone, beside itself […] disjointed [and] disadjusted" (Derrida 23). The clock bears witness to the trauma and denotes the discontinuous accounts. The latter may initially appear to be disjointed, replicating the discord in the chimes of the clock and the broken narratives, but as with the clock's constant pounding, the broken narratives manage to signify and join this dislocation of time pointing towards a unified story. According to Kanafani, all that is left for Palestinians are "pieces and events, fragments to relate to one another" (Abu-Manneh 81). The author attempts to piece together the disjointed parts. Said suggests:

> Kanafani's very sentences express instability and fluctuation – the present tense is subject to echoes from the past, verbs of sight give way to verbs of sound or smell, and one sense interweaves with another – in an effort to defend against the harsh present and to protect some particularly cherished fragment of the past.
>
> (*After the Last Sky* 38)

The cherished fragments can metaphorically form the absent homeland. Only a few events happen in the narrative time of the novel, but the plot, which brings together the five characters, extends to include those who are no longer there, and a history that precedes them, yet dominates their lives. The characters linger on in the fragments of a past, recalled through the chimes of the clock. The time is cyclical as it incessantly returns to the beginning of the story in 1948. The few events of the novel are connected through a complex structure that relies on flashback and repetition (Zalman 67). The voices of the characters independently weave the narrative, and even though they interrupt one another, each contributes to the wholeness of the story, at times finishing each other's sentence or thoughts (Zalman 68). First and third person voices along with the past and present tenses are used to tell the story (Allen 151). The narrative is:

> […] not a narrative, in which scenes take place *seriatim*, but rather broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, and its limitations.
>
> (Said, *After the Last Sky* 38)

On the surface, the plot is simple: Maryam, Hamid's sister, becomes pregnant by Zakaria, the traitor, who is already married and has five children. Feeling disgraced by her actions and helpless, Hamid decides to leave for Jordan via the desert in search of their mother. They find out about the whereabouts of their mother through a radio program that connects Palestinians inside historical Palestine to those in exile. In the early years post the Nakba, these radio programs were the only method through which families could connect. In the novella, all the characters are anxious, perturbed and restless due to the separation from their mother and uncertainty regarding her fate. The mother or the female figure, as in Darwish and al-Ali in the previous chapters, and Shammout in Chapter 5, symbolizes the homeland. Failure to know the whereabouts of the mother in *All That's Left to You* is indicative of the uncertainty that has also plagued the homeland, which has ceased to exist physically. The novella also "functions as an emblem of the individual's alienation in modern times" (Azouqa 152). Neither brother nor sister feels that they belong in Gaza. Initially from Jaffa, both Hamid and Maryam were separated from their mother in 1948. Maryam recalls the scene:

> Beyond the dark beach Jaffa was burning beneath the blazing tails of meteors that thundered down from the sky. We were floating over dark waves of shrieks and prayers. "Why did you leave our mother on the beach?" "I didn't leave her, it was the boat that filled up with people. She'll come in another boat. The men are looking after her. Our aunt and I had to come with you.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 16–17)

Leaving the mother behind can symbolically be construed as deserting the homeland. Darwish poses this question in *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* The poet has often felt guilty about leaving his mother behind, and returned to her and her teachings many times in his work; Huriyya was both his mother and the lost homeland. Questioning his decision to leave often irked Darwish, who went into forced exile in 1970; first to Moscow then Cairo, he began a life in exile inhabiting many cities, trying to reunite with his mother through his verse.[9] In *All That's Left to You*, part of Hamid's despair stems from attempting to reconnect with his mother and the motherland (Bashkin 99). Hamid is also searching for the beginning to be able to tell and understand the story, and to him the mother may provide this opportunity. She stands for the beginning. He needs to erase the feeling of impotence and begin anew once he is reunited with her. His mother may make possible a "clean start" (Said, *Beginnings* 41). To Hamid, his mother would allow him "to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things" (Said, *Beginnings* 41). Searching for the beginning through his mother allows Hamid to understand the "inconsistency, error, or detail" in their lives (Said, *Beginnings* 39). In the meantime, Maryam anxiously waits in her home in Gaza for news of Hamid, a wait that is punctuated by the

memories, ticking of the clock and the movement of her five-month-old fetus; fertility is "emphatically yoked to both land and the female protagonist" (Zalman 58).

Everything in the novel is deferred: his sister's dowry of ten guineas, the unborn child, Hamid's return, and ultimately the homeland. On a number of occasions, Hamid tells his sister, "if only your mother was here," and only then can time be conquered (Kanafani, *Left* 2). The invoking of the mother is two-fold: the lost mother who has not been there to guide them and the lost homeland that could have spared them the humiliation of being refugees. Hamid reflects:

> My mother had taken that secret with her and left us. It was all that was left to her. All that was left to all of you. All that was left to me. The balance sheet of remnants, the balance sheet of losses, the balance sheet of death.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 39)

Absence of his mother is symbolized as the loss of the homeland and identity. His mother becomes the beginning that needs to be found in order that he may lessen his losses, and acquaint himself with his identity as a Palestinian. For an individual, to be able to "identify a beginning—particularly that of a historical movement … is of course an act of historical understanding" (Said, *Beginnings* 32). In *All That's Left to You*, the mother and the virgin desert can provide beginnings. Hamid's journey into the West Bank, which was then under Jordanian administration, is also a symbolic reuniting of the remnants of Palestine. The mother is also the protector of the land and dignity. Hamid, therefore, also believes that his mother would have prevented Zakaria, who "was slight and ugly as a monkey" from tarnishing his sister in "fifteen minutes of surrender" (Kanafani, *Left* 4). The separation from their mother marks a deferred time. In this suspended time, their lives are peppered with falsehood. Zakaria wants Hamid to congratulate him for having become his brother-in-law, as he is the older of the two, sarcastically drawing on traditional norms as and when it suited him (Kanafani, *Left* 4). Kanafani believed that these hackneyed traditions weigh down and stifle the Palestinian cause; he wanted the young to do away with these binding customs. As with everything else, traditional norms are here adjourned and the clock marks the uneasy passing of time. The wall clock bears witness to this halted life. Maryam recounts the day Hamid brought the clock home:

> He'd bought it one July. He'd carried it back from the market, and when he'd got to the door, he couldn't get the keys out of his pocket. It was heavy in his arms […] He looked at it. "It's a wall clock, but it's like a small bier, isn't it?" […] But it didn't work. As he contemplated the clock face, I said to him, "Perhaps it needs winding." He shook his head in disagreement. "I think because it's not hanging straight […] Wall clocks

> with pendulums go wrong if they're titled." He climbed on the chair and altered its angle […] it began ringing […] its metallic strokes were like the sound made by the tapping of a solitary cane.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 6–7)

The clock as with the lost homeland is not only tilted but also cannot function properly without the aid of its people.

The stolen clock: symbol of death and waiting

The clock is compared to a *Nai'sh*, a small coffin, throughout the novel. With its cold magnetic strikes, it personifies death. The clock, which was not bought but stolen, also signifies the impotent lives of those who are exiled and symbolizes the usurped homeland; the lives of Maryam and Hamid are solitary like the clock's rhythm that marks the loss of the original home, and the disrupted family life. Palestinian-American journalist and academic, Fawaz Turki, describes the solitude that defines the status of an exile. He writes:

> No one knows, save other exiles, the unutterable solitude that is the private fate of those severed from home and homeland, how they are forever haunted by images of themselves as unhoused wanderers, carrying on their backs what little cargo they bring with them from their past: a name, a memory, an inner echo, a kind of dark meaning, and always the weight of a nearness out of reach
>
> (Turki 4)

In Kanafani's stories, Palestinians suffer refugeehood in isolation (Abu-Manneh 80). Normalcy is out of reach for refugees and exiles. According to Said, the word refugee is a political term, while exile carries in its fold solitude and spirituality (*Reflections* 181). The refugee status denies Hamid and Maryam access to the original home, while exile forces them into solitude as they feel that they cannot belong in Gaza, affording them "an anomalous and miserable life" (Said, *Reflections* 181). They fail to belong and feel the effects of "uprootedness" (Said, *Reflections* 183). Maryam conceives in stolen time when she sneaks Zakaria into their home when Hamid is not there. Moreover, the clock's ticking epitomizes waiting but this type of wait is not the solution (Magrath 101). The Arabic word *'ukkaz* that the author uses to describe the pendulum conjures up the image of a solitary cane used by someone old; at the same time, it is associated with Hamid's powerlessness and figurative impotence. Hamid feels he is alone in his fight, and cannot have a life until he reunites his family. He tells his sister: "I'll only marry when I've seen my family brought back together in a proper house—not a hole like this" (Kanafani, *Left* 27). This remark echoes his father's earlier comment in Haifa regarding Maryam, when he tells his wife: "Don't talk about marriage before our national cause has been

decided" (Kanafani, *Left* 19). Kanafani's writing not only exposes the violence of the Nakba but also the brutal abruptness to people's lives and the helplessness felt by the Palestinians (Riley and Harlow 15). It also signifies the unexpected and cruel separation of families. Said sees in exile a "perilous territory of not-belonging" (*Reflections* 177). More acutely, "exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitations" (Said, *Reflections* 177).

Impotence and death are also entwined with the aborted lives of Hamid and Maryam. Their exile in the Gaza Strip, which separates them from home and family, is essentially a discontinuous form of being (Said, *Reflections* 177). Cut off from "their roots, their land, their past," exiles "need to reconstitute their broken lives" (Said, *Reflections* 177). Hamid attempts at reassembling scenes from his earlier life as a child; this he hopes would help him comprehend his present state. Through his memory of the homeland and of his parents, Hamid connects the lovemaking scene between his father and mother to the violent death of his father. He recalls:

> I remember one day rushing into their room, I can't recall why, but as soon as I opened the door and crossed the threshold I saw them together in bed. They must have been naked, but I only saw his bare brown arm circling her white waist. I closed my eyes, and turned on my heels and ran.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 27)

Kanafani has often associated patriarchy as a power that inhibits the emergence of young people (Kanafani, Harlow and Yaziji, "Thoughts on Change" 141). The tension that often exists between generations in Kanafani's prose is often a result of paternal abandonment, disappointment in the parents or their disappearance (Bashkin 97). Kanafani believed that the young have the potential to change the course of events.[10] In this novella, both parents have symbolically abandoned their children, even though they themselves were victims of circumstances and war beyond their control.

A few sentences earlier, Hamid remembers his father's death:

> I saw the blood pouring out of him with my own eyes. They carried him up the stairs bundled in two filthy coats. One bare, yellow arm hung loose between the men, and swung to and fro as though signaling me to join him […] That's how I think of my father, just an arm, once embracing my mother and the other time bloodied in death.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 27)

The association between the two scenes causes Hamid to fuse lovemaking and death into one (Siddiq 26). The dangling yellow hand symbolizes sexual impotence, which is symptomatic of the political situation of the Palestinians (Siddiq 27). The human hand evokes the hand of the clock that is marking the time of waiting and the sterility and futility of such a time.

The watch: breaking away from chronological time

Hamid escapes to and into the desert in his attempt at uniting with his mother. The desert here symbolizes the potential of life rather than death, the pure virginal land that contrasts with the sallied occupied country. It also functions as an actual sentient character, a counterpoint to his life in Gaza (Parmenter 57). An exiled person loses contact with the solidity of the earth, hence homecoming becomes out of the question (Said, *Reflections* 179). Hamid hopes that his association with the desert and its sand can metaphorically lead him to connect with his mother and the homeland. He reflects: "In your mind your mother has always been an absent protectress, ready always to take up arms in your defense and remove obstacles that confronted you" (Kanafani, *Left* 25). As his encounter with the desert is mostly at night, it impels him to remember his hometown Jaffa and his mother. The desert allows Hamid "to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things" (Said, *Beginnings* 41). Remembering his time in Jaffa gives him agency. At the time, the little boy was in Maryam's words, "unbelievably courageous. With his sharp eyes he stood gazing at the men, as an equal, not a child, sticking to me as through he were a protective armor," while Jaffa burned on the night they were separated from their mother (Kanafani, *Left* 16–17). The evoked memory partially restores the self-respect he lost in Gaza (Parmenter 57).

In the desert, Hamid throws away his wristwatch, symbolically severing the ties with the impotent time of Gaza marked by the chimes of the clock. He narrates: "In the infinite expanse of the desert night, my watch appeared to represent a temporal fetter […without] hesitation I unstrapped it from my wrist and threw it away" (Kanafani, *Left* 20). He breaks away from the outside world, surrendering to the cosmic forces (Siddiq 33). He may have broken away from the constraint of temporal time but in this barren place, Hamid realizes that time is the commodity he does not own. The desert explains, "*I've given him everything my untamed nature can afford, and without knowing it, he's gone astray. But there's one thing I can't give him: time. Yet, it wasn't time that he really raced against, but his own loss*" (Kanafani, *Left* 12; emphasis in original). The desert is the pure place, the placelessness that allows him to rethink his life (Parmenter 58–59). Crossing the desert is a journey to a new time (Baydi 165). The use of multiple time frames in this novella emphasizes how the "characters lack a real existence as they move from a state of lack to an even greater lack as they search for a tangible identity" (Magrath). Once liberated from the constraints of time, Hamid can search for his identity that has been rendered void through the loss of his homeland, as "there *is* no identity outside the framework of the relationship to the land" (Khoury, "Remembering" 87). Hence, the center of the exiled being will always be "hollow, unstable, and formless, [as the] Palestinian identity always lurked in [the] subconscious, like an old toy stored in the attic" (Turki 9). The desert allows Hamid the freedom to reflect on his identity.[11]

Even though Maryam and Hamid are now separated by distance, they are united in a common struggle, she facing the enemy within and he the enemy without (El-Hussari, "The Other Version" 150). He emerges from this barren place as a changed person. His journey is from childhood to adulthood, and from despair to alacrity of action (Ouyang 225).[12] In this barren space, he is able to confront the Israeli soldier, initiating a dialogue with him, even though he realizes that the soldier only speaks Hebrew. Once he discovers that the Israeli soldier's identity card has Jaffa written on it, the sense of loss is intensified, as the soldier's presence becomes his negation (*Left* 46). For Hamid, the enemy now has a face and not just some abstract concept. According to Kanafani, Palestinians need to recognize the enemy and assign it a name (Abdel-Malek 43). His ability to face the Israeli soldier diminishes his feeling of humiliation and paralysis. The danger posed by the presence of the Israeli soldier allows for the rebirth of Hamid's senses, as he regains the strength of his body, overcoming his feeling of impotence (Silmi 11). Hamid transfers his own feeling of impotence to the frightened soldier:

> […the soldier] kept his eyes rigidly on the steel blade of the knife that lay between my feet and glittered in the light. I picked it up and once again rubbed the blade against the edge of my shoes, making it emit a warning squeal like a final wail. Only then did he look into my eyes, and once again, I glimpsed on his face that dumb air of impotent terror.
>
> (Kanafani, *Left* 47)

The desert is the place of resistance and rebellion (Baydi 161). In the desert, Hamid realizes what national boundaries mean, and outside of Palestine there is no place for the Palestinian; his identity becomes defined by its space (Khoury, "Commemorating 40 Years" 8). Previously, even though he is bigger in body, he failed to confront the monkey-looking (nītin)[13] Zakaria who always referred to him as the little one. His feeling of paralysis at the beginning of the novella represents that of his people (Azouqa 164). Here, hope emanates from death, "which is in itself a part of life" (Harb 66). As Hamid is reborn in the desert, Maryam and her child will have the potentiality of a life. Zakaria divorces her when she refuses to abort the child. Her act gestures towards Hamid's overpowering the Israeli soldier in the desert. Maryam kills Zakaria in self-defense, while Hamid refuses to kill the Israeli prisoner; killing for Kanafani has to spring from legitimacy (Abu-Manneh 82). Nonetheless, both the internal and external enemy has been eradicated (Allen 151).[14] All the while, the clock's hands continue pounding, "hammering with cruel persistence […] Pounding. Pounding. Pounding" (*Left* 50). The pounding of the clock is indicative of the present time, which signals to a "past of defeat […] the sound of waiting and silence […emitting] terror and anxiety" (Silmi 92). It is also a reminder of the Nakba, lest we forget.

In the novella, we witness the inner development of both brother and sister from passive observers to individuals who are able to lay the foundation for

a better future. They achieve self-knowledge through a restructuring of their priorities (Azouqa 163). The attainment of self-knowledge paves the way for a possible rebirth of their identities as Palestinians. In the desert, Hamid can now answer the question he posed to himself earlier, "But who are you?" (Kanafani, *Left* 25). However, the road ahead will not be easy, as Hamid's actions are a result of both desperation and a lack of alternatives (Coffin 108). Hamid's journey may have been aborted by his inability to reach the West Bank (Abdel-Malek 42), but the novella ends with his facing Gaza. By facing east towards Gaza, he is not shunning his responsibility as a Palestinian. He will return to the little that remains of his homeland.

The shriveled orange: "Land of Sad Oranges"

The "Land of Sad Oranges" is narrated from the perspective of a child who witnesses first hand the expulsion of his family from Palestine.[15] The boy's family, who initially had set out on their annual holiday to Acre, find themselves on the road to exile. The fighting that erupts forces them along with others to seek shelter in Lebanon. The young boy recalls:

> When we set out from Jaffa for Acre, there was nothing tragic about our departure. We were just like anybody who goes to spend the festival season every year in another city. Our time in Acre passed as usual, with nothing untoward. I was young then […] the picture gradually became clearer on the night of the great attack on Acre […] You and I and the others of our age were too young to understand what the story meant from beginning to end, but that night the threads began to grow clearer.
>
> (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 75)

The above scene evokes Darwish's poems, "Innocent Villages" and "Night of the Owl," when families were hurled onto lorries and forced to leave for Ras al Naqoura, the defining border point between Lebanon and Palestine. It also invokes Kanafani's own expulsion from Palestine. As with the child in Darwish, the young boy in this story is confronted with issues such as exile and loss of home from an early age. The Nakba and its consequences form the basis of this story. "Land of Sad Oranges" also illustrates the transformation of a respected middle-class family to spurned refugees (Siddiq 6). In this short story, Kanafani weaves together the forced exile of the Palestinians, the destitute at becoming refugees, and the loss of the children's innocence (Kilpatrick, "Commitment" 16). The country and the experience of loss of Palestine are metamorphosed into a single orange. The expansive orange groves, figuratively bidding them farewell, "followed themselves in succession along the side of the road," as they headed to the Lebanese border, and the homeland became more distant and unattainable (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 76). The orange trees along the way bear witness to the forced exodus of their owners and those who cared for them. Before reaching the Lebanese border,

the "women climbed down [from the truck] over the luggage and made for a peasant sitting cross-legged with a basket of oranges just in front of him. They picked up the oranges and the sound of their weeping reached our ears" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 76). The boy's father stepped out of the lorry and took one of the oranges, and "then burst into tears like a despairing child" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 76). The shedding of the tears at the moment of departure signifies the loss of fertility of the land, and marks the uprooting of the people from the land, and ultimately the loss of the homeland and dignity of the human being (Allaham 56). From that instance, the young boy began to label Palestine the land of oranges.

In 1948, many of the Palestinian peasants believed that not being able to tend to their lands would lead to the destruction of their crops; some tried to stealthily return in order to care for their farms and plantations. Separated from their fields and groves is a slow death for both, because "according to a peasant who used to cultivate [the orange groves] until he left, [the trees] would shrivel up if a change occurred and they were watered by a strange hand" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 80). The young boy not only begins to understand the symbolism attached to the value of the oranges but also the impact brought on by the demise of their earlier life. Loss of childhood and the orange groves is here paralleled with the loss of the homeland (Abdel-Malek 37). The journey to Lebanon is one of a "change of status from land-owners to mere strangers in the land of others" (Allaham 57). It is also the beginning of a long journey of exile and humiliation.

In this short story, Kanafani alternates between both "I" and "you"; his use of pronouns allows the child to be the chronicler of the events that are unfolding and a character in this chapter on the unfolding of history. He is the narrator of their story. In this short trip, not only does the boy grow up but he also realizes the importance of the homeland and how its loss can only lead to humiliation. The young boy even questions the inaction of God, wondering if he has also become a refugee, and in turn is not able to see their plight; he reflects: "I was sure that the God we had known in Palestine had left it too, and was a refugee in some place that I did not know, unable to find a solution to his own problems" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 77). This kind of "impotent exile" does not allow for the presence of a god: "God is absent, and religion is seen as irrelevant" in Kanafani's work (Abu-Manneh 80). Meanwhile, he watches his father surrendering to grief and illness, while his mother cannot hold back the tears. Her tears convey the loss of her country, as she mourns her earlier life. The father, who is unable to cope with exile and his new fate as a refugee, projects his anger onto his family and himself. He tells his wife: "I want to kill them. I want to kill myself. I want to be done … I want…" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 79). The father feels powerless and unable to take care of his family; he forces his children to "[g]o climb the mountain, [telling them not to] come back till midday" because he is unable to provide them with food (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 80). The boy tells us, "As I left the house behind,

I left my childhood behind too. I realized that our life had ceased to be pleasant, and it was no longer easy for us to live in peace" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 80). Instead, the young boy is confronted with his father's face that is continuously "twitching with impotent fury" (Kanafani, *Sad Oranges* 80). A revolver and the orange, now shriveled and dried up, which he carried with him from Palestine, are his only companions. Without land, there is no dignity. The exiled father has become soulless, "torn away from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (Said, *Reflections* 174). The land of oranges has lost its people, and has indeed become sad.

The lentil can: "A Present for the Holiday"

In *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*, Turki describes how his own father was unable to survive the exodus. He writes:

> Exile is a demanding habitat. The spirit bends under its weight, and the mind bruises under the agony of otherness it inflicts. My father (not unlike others of his generation who left the homeland in 1948 and refused to accept life in exile) died mumbling incoherences about the *awda* and curses at the gods for having made such a mess of his life.
>
> (Turki vi)

The humiliation at having lost the homeland is projected inwards, and is amplified by the new status of becoming a refugee. "A Present for the Holiday" is a short story set in a Palestinian refugee camp. The narrator of the story is woken up by a telephone call, in which his friend tells him that he plans to distribute presents to the newly arrived refugee children following the 1967 war; during this war, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank came under Israeli occupation. The short story is narrated in the first person. The story shifts from the present to past tense and vice versa not only to indicate a point of view but also to highlight the continued suffering of the Palestinians (Allaham 67). In addition, the call the narrator receives bridges the gap between the 1948 Nakba and 1967, which came to be known as al-Naksa. The latter completed the occupation of Palestine. The 1967 defeat adds another landmark to Palestinian consciousness and struggle; the understanding that "life in the camps is to continue as a result of this new setback" (Allaham 229). It is also an indication that life without dignity has become the norm. Earlier in a personal entry, Kanafani foretold that the situation could only become worse:

> The only thing that we know is that tomorrow will be no better than today, and that we are waiting on the banks, yearning, for a boat that will not come. We are sentenced to be separated from everything—except from our own destruction.
>
> (Riley, "Biographical Essay" 5)

The narrator in "A Present for the Holiday" repeats the phrase "However, all that is beside the point of what I am going to write about," while his first sentence recounts a story of a Chinese writer who lived long before Christ (Kanafani, "Present" 43). Outside the homeland, all life is deferred; all existence is "beside the point" (Kanafani, "Present" 43). The caller tells him that he wants to collect toys and send them to children in the refugee camps in Jordan. The presents for the refugees are "beside the point," as the friend wants to tackle the symptom rather than the cause of yet another Palestinian displacement. The narrator is forced to remember his own exile in 1948, recalling his own childhood woes as a young refugee; in the camps, he describes "Those stains on the forehead of our weary morning, lacerations brandished like flags of defeat, billowing by chance above the plains of mud and dust and compassion" (Kanafani, "Present" 44). The call itself transported him back to 1949, a year after the Nakba, when he and other refugee children were told that the Red Cross would bring them presents for the holidays. After waiting in line, his turn came to collect his box. He opened the box at home, and the one thing he remembers from it is the lentil can:

> I ran "home" without opening it. Now, nineteen years later, I have completely forgotten what was in that dream box. Except for just one thing: a can of lentil soup.
>
> I clutched the soup can with my two hands red from the cold and pressed it to my chest in front of ten other children […] who looked at it with their twenty wide eyes […] I kept the can of soup for a week, and everyday I gave my mother some of it in a water glass so she could cook it for us.
>
> […]
>
> I remember nothing except the cold, and the ice that manacled my fingers, and the can of soup.
>
> (Kanafani, "Present" 45)

For the narrator, the can of lentils signifies the humiliation and deprivation experienced by the 1948 refugees in the camps. Survival becomes linked to a can of lentils. Moreover, his friend's call along with the lentil can have not only bridged the gap between two Palestinian displacements but were also painful reminders of the Nakba.

The basket: a haunting memory of loss

> And once again, he turned over in his bed perplexed. A faint, sick light wavered in the room and the small basket rested against the wall like a living thing.
>
> (Kanafani, "Horizon" 25)

The small basket in "The Horizon Beyond the Gate" assumes significance as it becomes the object that has to be exchanged between an exiled man and

his mother when they are supposed to meet behind the wired checkpoint at the "Mandelbaum Gate that towers as a stone barrier between the occupied land and the rest of the land" (Kanafani, "Horizon" 23–24).[16] The man has previously shied away from this trip, as he has information that he does not want to divulge to his mother. The basket, which personifies the irremediable loss that his family has encountered during the Nakba, becomes too heavy to carry, forcing the exiled man, Ali, to move "the basket from one hand to the other" (Kanafani, "Horizon" 27). Ali was separated from his mother in 1948, when he journeyed with his ten-year-old sister, Dalal, from Jaffa to Acre to meet his prospective fiancée. The Jewish gangs attacked Acre and Dalal was killed in an explosion. He was unable to go back to Jaffa, and since his sister's death his only method of communication was through the radio: "when he sent a message over the radio saying: 'Dalal and I are doing well, tell us how you're doing'" (Kanafani, "Horizon" 26). Ten years later, he summons up enough courage to face his mother at the gate, planning to inform her of his sister's death, and apologize for his ten-year-old lie. At the checkpoint, he sees his aunt. As he hands over the basket containing the green almonds, she rummages through a bag containing Dalal's green dress. At once, they grasp the lies they have been trading over the airwaves:

> Their eyes met once again. Ali moved the basket from one hand to the other and tried to say something, but his throat was obstructed by a flat lump like a crooked blade. His aunt reached out her hand and placed it on his arm, her voice charged with incredible sorrow.
>
> -Where's Dalal?
> -Dalal?
> Once again he felt a weakness eat away at his legs and get the best of him, feeling like he's going to faint… He raised his hand and extended the basket in his aunt's direction:
> -Take this basket to my mother, there are some green almonds in it…
> He wasn't able to finish and a catastrophic look was streaming out from the old woman's two eyes. Her lip started to quiver. He looked beyond her shoulder and finished spiritlessly:
> - She loved [them]…
>
> (Kanafani, "Horizon" 28)[17]

The memory of her love of almonds survives. Handing over the basket evolves into a symbolic act of handing over the burden while at the same time acknowledging that his mother was killed during the attack on Jaffa. Kanafani chooses almonds and the green dress to symbolize a possibility for a beginning after the characters confronted their past of loss. They have no alternative but to go on. The story alternates between the first and third person personal pronoun to emphasize the internal dialogue resulting from the anticipation and fear of the awaited encounter at the gate. What transpires beyond the horizon is death.

Conclusion: writing is the place to dwell

According to Roger Allen, "No modern Arab novelist has been able to project the tragedy of the Palestinian people in fiction with greater impact than Ghassan Kanafani" (Allen 147). He was able to document the tragedy of the exiles and the refugees in their struggle after the Nakba. Said argues that the fate of undocumented people or refugees not only brings about misery but also denies them a tellable history (Said, *Reflections* 176). Refugees are haunted by their memories and recollections of their lost homes. In the absence of the homeland, certain objects stand as painful reminders of that loss. Exiles belong to nowhere, "always out of place" (Said, *Reflections* 180). In the stories I discussed in this chapter, I tried to show how some objects begin to signify much more than what they are. For the victims of the Nakba, a shriveled orange stands for an appropriated life, a can of lentil soup a reminder of a life of misery in the camps, and a basket carries within it a reluctant recognition of loss. Meanwhile, in *All That's Left to You*, a clock pounds marking the hours and lives lost, emphatically returning to the beginning of the Catastrophe in 1948. The clock, the orange and the can of lentils are reminders that a life that is wrongly based "cannot be lived rightly" or fully (Adorno 39). As with Darwish, the only place that Kanafani can inhabit is in his writing, as "writing becomes the place to live," but in the end due to his short life he was denied that full right, as he was "not even allowed to live in his writing" (Adorno 87). If "Kanafani founded the Palestinian story in language [and] Darwish crystallized it into a lyrical epic," writing is certainly the only place they can dwell" (Khoury, "The Poet is Dead" 101).

Notes

1 Barbara Harlow writes: "Kanafani's argument for the restoration of the 'circulation of blood' in the Arab and Palestinian social and political corpus demands a radical restructuring of the patriarchal and authoritarian ties of genealogical and hereditary filiation into the more collective, 'democratic,' bonds of affiliation" (134). Kanafani believed that through literature this is possible, albeit a slow process.

2 Dina Mattar notes: "The 1948 war unfolded in several stages, beginning, with local skirmishes and ending with the defeat of Arab contingents from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. In the process of establishing a Jewish state in 1948, Israel depopulated and subsequently destroyed 531 villages across Palestine. Between 850,000 and 1 million Palestinians found themselves in exile, outside the boundaries of the new state, and between a fifth and a quarter of the 150,000–160,000 Palestinians left in Israel became 'internally displaced' – prevented from returning to their homes, even with Israeli identity cards. These refugees, referred to as the 'present absentees', felt the full brunt of Israeli policies and remain the most vulnerable of the already marginalized Palestinian community in Israel" (24).

3 Ghassan Kanafani was born in Acre in 1936 to an educated middle-class family. In 1948, he was expelled along with his family to Lebanon and then to Syria. He studied Arabic Literature at Damascus University, and later worked in Kuwait as

a teacher. During that time, he started writing short stories. He also worked as the editor of *al-Rai* newspaper before returning to Beirut, and becoming the editor of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's weekly, *al-Hadaf*. In spite of his short life, Kanafani was a prolific writer; "Ghassan had published eighteen books and written hundreds of articles on culture, politics, and the Palestinian people's struggle" (ghassankanafani.com). In 1972, he and his niece, Lamees, were killed in Beirut by a car bomb planted by the Israeli Mossad. Samar Attar writes: "This terrorist act meant not only to wipe out Ghassan Kanafani as an individual writer and a spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, but also to erase the Palestinian memory and inhibit Palestinians from ever visualizing or documenting the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland or the fall of their cities, such as Haifa, Yafa, Acre and Safad into the hands of terrorist Jewish organizations" (Attar).

4 Ilan Pappé describes how Acre was captured: "The urbicide continued into May with the occupation of Acre on the coast and Baysan in the east on 6 May 1948. In the beginning of May, Acre proved once again that it was not only Napoleon who found it hard to defeat it: despite severe overcrowding due to the huge influx of refugees from the neighbouring city of Haifa, heavy daily shelling by the Jewish forces failed to subdue the Crusader city. However, its exposed water supply ten kilometres to the north, from the Kabri springs, via an almost 200-year old aqueduct, proved its Achilles' heel. During the siege typhoid germs were apparently injected into the water. Local emissaries of the International Red Cross reported this to their headquarters and left very little room for guessing whom they suspected: the Hagana. The Red Cross reports describe a sudden typhoid epidemic and, even with their guarded language, point to outside poisoning as the sole explanation for this outbreak […] With their morale weakened by both the typhoid epidemic and the intensive shelling, residents heeded the call from loudspeakers that shouted at them: 'Surrender or commit suicide. We will destroy you to the last man.' Lieutenant Petite, a French UN observer, reported that after the city fell into Jewish hands, there was widespread and systematic looting by the army, including furniture, clothes, and anything that might be useful to the new Jewish immigrants, and the removal of which might discourage the refugees' return" (100).

5 Ahmad Harb writes: "Although Kanafani was politically committed to the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine, which is known for its hard-line Marxist ideology, he was never an ideologue. His fiction shows that he was a highly conscious writer whose commitment to his politics did not exceed his aesthetic commitment to his art. From a critical point of view, his use of modern experimental techniques and innovations marks 'a distinctive advance in Arabic fiction'" (66).

6 Wen-chin Ouyang argues that the structure of *All That's Left to You* is modeled on the pre-Islamic Arabic poem, al-qasīda (Ouyang 224). The novella contains the three major parts of the pre-Islamic ode: departure, journey and arrival (224).

7 The novella is influenced by the William Faulkner's narrative technique in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). Kanafani's novels and short story, however, remain anchored to realities of life. The use of the "stream-of-consciousness resemble jigsaw puzzles that obscure narrative direction" (Azouqa 155). In *Man Is a Cause*: *Political Consciousness and the Fiction of Ghassan Kanafani*, Muhammad Siddiq quotes the novelist: "Last night I finished writing my new novel, and when I lay the pen down and got up to leave the room, something strange happened. Willy Faulkner was standing there shaking my hand in congratulation" (38).

8 Harb sees a religious parallel between the characters in the novella and the religious trio of father, mother and son. He writes: "The direct reference in the novel is to the Qur'anic Sura of 'Ali-Imran' (The Family of Imran): 'Right graciously/ Did her Lord accept: He made her [Mary] grow/ In purity and beauty: To the care of Zakariya is she assigned.' The priestly Zakariya in the Qur'an, the religious father archetype, who sees the goodly growth of Mary, the mystic mother of Jesus, is diametrically opposed to Zakaria, the protagonist who defiles the purity and the beauty of Maryam (Maryam is the Arabic version of Mary). For Hamid, who stands in this inverted parallel for Jesus (we should notice the interplay in the text of Hamid, Maryam's brother, and Hamid, Maryam's illegitimate unborn child), to accept Maryam as a mother figure" (71).

9 In an interview a year before his death, Darwish seems to have resolved this question: "Sometimes time generates wisdom. History has taught me the meaning of irony. I will always ask the question: Do I regret having left in 1970? I have reached the conclusion that the answer is not important. Maybe the question about why I went down from Mount Carmel is more important" (Darwish).

10 John Collins notes that the Palestinian struggle saw a shift from the older generation comprising notable politicians and peasants to a younger generation that participated in an armed struggle through the 1970s to the children during the Intifada (68).

11 Azouqa argues: "Kanafani animates both the Desert that Hamid attempts to cross and the Clock in Maryam's bedroom […] the Desert undertakes the role of commentator and interpreter of Hamid's thoughts and actions, while the ticking of the Clock pulsates inside Maryam's brain to function as an index to her attainment of self-knowledge. The more Maryam becomes aware of its presence, the nearer she is to self-awareness" (162).

12 El-Hussari writes: "that the journeys taken by Kanafani's fictional characters in almost all his narratives start from Palestine as a place lost, and desire to end in Palestine as an imaginative space with a historical and geographical network of meanings that feeds on memories not dimmed yet by the passage of time or exile, and fuelled by existing anguish and anxiety shaping power struggle and identity politics" (El-Hussari, "The Symbolic Conflation" 1012).

13 The word means rancid in Arabic or a lowly person.

14 Nancy Coffin argues that although Hamid has struck the opening blow of the armed revolution, "his actions are undertaken for all the wrong reasons" (105).

15 Said describes this short story as one of "the saddest of Kanafani's tales, 'The Land of Sad Oranges,' embodies this peregrinations [dislocation and dispossession] of a Jaffa family; its poignancy is almost unmatched in our literature" (Said, *After the Last Sky* 130).

16 The Mandelbaum Gate was a checkpoint that divided the two sectors of Jerusalem, which were under Jordanian and Israeli control.

17 The translation is incorrect; the possessive pronoun is referring to the collective word for almonds and not to "he."

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5 Ismael Shammout and Tamam al-Akhal

The Exodus and The Odyssey

Ismael has become a national icon; the artist is now the painting.
(Darwish, *Eulogy to Ismail Shammout*)

Introduction: pioneers of Palestinian art

In his commemoration speech following the death of Palestinian artist Ismail Shammout, Mahmoud Darwish described his friend as an icon of Palestine who upon his death has become the painting itself.[1] Many consider Shammout and his wife Tamam al-Akhal the pioneers of contemporary Palestinian art.[2] In their first joint exhibition as students in Cairo in 1954, former Arab League Secretary Abdul Khalek Hassouna remarked that the young artists have through their work placed the first corner stone of the Palestinian cause (al-Akhal, *Bayt al-Qaseed*).[3] Shammout was the first Palestinian artist to produce a series of paintings that depicted the expulsion of the Palestinians from their lands following the Nakba in 1948 (Hammami 256).[4] His art, which is typically linked to the Palestinian cause, has striven to document Palestinian life in all of its aspects, pre and post-Nakba days (Mikdadi-Nashashibi).[5]

Although discussions abound in relation to the beginning of the art movement in Palestine, "The Nakba, origin, nationality and art are inextricably fused in the conception of Palestinian art" (Makhoul and Hon 2). Shammout and al-Akhal have for years told the Palestinian story through their paintings, which are considered visual renditions of the trials of their people. On their respective canvases, they have vividly depicted the suffering, struggle and hope of the Palestinians. Their paintings provide a visual interpretation of objects and themes that stem from their own memories and have evolved to become part of the collective cultural memory of Palestinians. As with Naji al-Ali, Mahmoud Darwish and Ghassan Kanafani, symbols of Palestine emerge in their work to tell the story of exile, loss and humiliation of their people. In addition, works by Darwish and Kanafani have "featured prominently in the titles and themes of Palestinian painting and sculpture," a point I will return

to in this chapter (Makhoul and Hon 29). Shammout chronicled the lives of peasants and their relationship to their lands before 1948, but with the onset of the Nakba he began to record the impact the event had on Palestinian life when all was lost. If Darwish recorded the Nakba with his verse, Kanafani with his prose, al-Ali with his caricature, Elia Suleiman with his film trilogy, then Shammout and al-Akhal did the same through pictorial renditions and visual commentaries.

Inspired by Palestinian artist Daoud Zalatimo, Shammout employed allegory "to chronicle the unfolding of the Palestinian saga and rally support for the national struggle" (Boullata, *Palestinian Art* 130). Shammout's much discussed painting *Where to?* was the first visual interpretation of the plight of the peasants who became exiles. Based on his personal recollection, the theme of a number of Shammout's early paintings in 1950s documented the forced deportation from the homeland that turned the Palestinians into destitute refugees, and "presented the first in a long series of artworks that recorded the plight of the Palestinians and provided a source of 'cultural memory'" (Gandolfo 49).[6] In *Where to?* (Figure 5.1), Shammout did not merely "record his individual experience. He transformed a painful – almost unbearable – reality into a potent symbolic icon that became instrumental in the Palestinian nation-building process" (Ankori 48).

Figure 5.1 Where to? 1953
Oil painting, 120 × 95 cm

In the painting, an old man is accompanied by his three young sons on the road to exile. Although the Palestinian man occupies the foreground of the work's canvas, he looks away and his eyes gaze towards the uncertainty that awaits his family. Unable to comprehend the implication of what has befallen him, he searches for justice and his rights as a human being (Gandolfo 49). One of the children gapes at the old man enquiringly. A younger boy walks behind them staring at the ground, while a child has fallen asleep resting against his father's head. Behind them lies a barren landscape, a solitary bare tree foretelling the arid lives that lay in store for them. The withered tree is often a symbol of loss and a rootless existence (Houston 39). The mother is absent, and her obvious absence "evokes the lost homeland" (Ankori 50). The female figure in Shammout's work, as in Darwish's poetry and al-Ali's cartoons, symbolizes the homeland. I return to the metaphor of mother/female/homeland at a later stage in this chapter. In the case of *Where to?*, the homeland is now devastated and the lack of motherly nurture signifies death. We are unable to see the legs of the father or those of the two boys; legs are superfluous as the destiny is unclear. Away from the homeland, their walk is to nowhere. Shammout intentionally left them legless, as the old man does not know where to go (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). The 1953 much celebrated painting "presciently captures the sentiment of dispossession that would continue to blight Palestinian lives into the following century" (Gandolfo 49). The colors in the painting are drab, emphasizing the wilderness and cruelty that surrounds them. By placing the old man in the foreground, the viewers are placed in close proximity to him, and we are forced to partake in his destiny (Ankori 49). In the distant horizon, an Arab town, possibly theirs, lies in ruins but for a minaret that stands tall attesting to its past. This painting, which depicts direct victims of the Nakba, is an attempt at confronting and understanding the implications of the events of 1948 (Nashif, *Nakba and Refugeehood*).

In the first images by Shammout, there were no direct visual representations of the 1948 Catastrophe, and it was only after a decade that the Palestinian artist showed death and a destroyed village rather than refugees who were victims of the events (Nashif, *Nakba and Refugeehood*). The painting documents a rape scene; in it, Israeli soldiers tried to rape the wife of a farmer from al-Lababidi family (al-Akhal, *Amman Meeting*).[7] The farmer tries to protect his wife but both are killed by the Israeli soldiers; meanwhile, their oblivious infant child approaches his dead mother in order to breast-feed (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 158). According to Esmail Nashif, most of the early work on the Nakba failed to show the actual act of killing; instead, the narratives, whether in words or images, concerned themselves with the aftermath of the event; therefore, instead of a narration of the Nakba, we get its results (Nashif, "Postcolony?"). Shammout initially chronicled the effects of the Nakba, drawing on personal experiences; therefore, we saw specific people and events (Nashif, *Nakba and Refugeehood*). In some respect, "the fifties was considered as the lost decade," as it was too soon to address the

Figure 5.2 Al Nakba, 1960
Oil painting, 100 × 200 cm

Catastrophe; moreover, it took the Palestinians ten to fifteen years to apprehend that they have become victims (Nashif, *Nakba and Refugeehood*).[8] In contrast, in the 1960 painting, labeled *Al Nakba* or *Disaster* (Figure 5.2), we see in the foreground a young boy who is trying to wake up his dead parents; the dead father facing the ground is holding on to an axe, and behind the bodies we see a stream of people forced out of their lands on the road to exile, as their village lay in ruins. Shammout's paintings remain not only because of their aesthetic value but also as documents testifying to the Nakba and exile (Hourani 240).

In this chapter, I would like to address the later depiction of the Nakba in both the works of al-Akhal and Shammout, specifically in *Palestine*: *The Exodus and The Odyssey*. These murals are able to recount through this visual medium the Nakba itself and the ramifications that followed, even though Palestinian art has developed "in the context of fragmentation and incessant interruption" (Makhoul and Hon 11). Shammout once divided his work into five distinct periods: the fifties, which dealt with the aftermath of the Nakba; the sixties when the Palestinian human being moved from the desolation stage to insistence on survival; the seventies, in which Shammout returns to melancholic depictions, following the fall of Tel az-Zaatar and Jisr al-Pasha camps, and lastly the eighties, which brought with them a foretelling of the Intifada (Yacoub).[9] Here, I will argue that along with al-Akhal's work, the murals, *Palestine*: *The Exodus and The*

Odyssey, not only encapsulate all the stages of the artists' painting periods but also attempt to tell the history of their homeland as well as their people in the diaspora.

Return to ruin: forty-eight years after the Nakba

Palestine: *The Exodus and The Odyssey* is a collection of murals which narrate the Palestinian saga. Composed of nineteen paintings, they also comprise a number of the previously discussed symbols we saw in al-Ali's caricature, Suleiman's films and the words of Darwish and Kanafani. In this instance, the icons emerge visually from the canvas to help construct both individual recollections and Palestinian collective memory. One of the roles of an icon is "to restore the provocative, dialogic power" of image, and "to breathe new life" into old metaphors (Mitchell 158–59). The olive tree, the white horse, the oranges and other emblems of the homeland are prominent in the murals. The murals are a joint venture, which draws on the respective Palestinian journeys of al-Akhal and Shammout, individually or together, narrating the story of their own exodus and their people's predicament. Shammout presents the history and trepidation of his people in eleven murals, while al-Akhal depicts her hometown of Jaffa in eight murals, showing much artistic dexterity (Joha). The murals tell the history of the homeland against a "long and unsavory history" of silencing and negating the Palestinians (Williams 88). The project was a result of their combined visit to their ancestral country in March 1997, forty-eight years after their expulsion (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 227–8). Ismail Nashif argues:

> The restructuring of the event through the study of its registration and expression techniques might lead to new knowledge, to knowing the event by gazing in a mirror that was built on the shores of its travels via deportation, memory, immigration, and their traces.
>
> (Nashif, "Memory of Immigration" 18)

Al-Akhal recalls the pain incurred in their 1997 visit, as the recollection of the Nakba became more vivid (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). On their return to Amman, Jordan, they decided to draw something special that would distinguish itself from their previous work (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). They drew separately but together, because their personal experiences of 1948 were different (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). Additionally, the geography of the place was different; Shammout's ancestral town, al-Lydd, was known for its cacti, while al-Akhal's Jaffa was known for its oranges (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*).[10] The murals were completed in four years (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 232).

Memories of the land are portrayed vividly in their paintings. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the projection of our memory on a place is what makes it come into being (22). He writes:

> To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 26)

Seeing the place anew allowed al-Akhal and Shammout to project their memories onto it to be able to relive the experience of the forced exodus, as if seeing it anew.[11] The story of the homeland became more defined and urgent; it had to be told. Edward W. Said has often referred to the Palestinians as a displaced and a misplaced people ("Foreword" ix). In addition, Palestinians have struggled to tell their story against the constant negations of their history and denial of their existence (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 55). The Israeli narrative, which "has successfully eradicated Palestinian entity from the land and from history," made it very difficult for the Palestinians to present a counter-narrative (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 55). The Israeli attempt was for the story itself to be effaced along with the destruction of Palestinian villages and towns (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 55). Therefore, it was only after the passage of time that the actual events of the Nakba can be tackled unflinchingly. In contrast, however, Darwish was hesitant about a visit to the ruins of al-Birweh, believing that such a visit would erase his earlier memories of the place; he wanted the original mental and visual images of the place to remain undisturbed. In a 2007 interview, he said:

> I prefer to store the memories that still linger of open spaces, fields and watermelons, olive and almond trees. I remember the horse that was tied to the mulberry tree in the yard and how I climbed onto it and was thrown off and got a beating from my mother […] I remember the butterflies and the clear feeling that everything was open. The village stood on a hill and everything was spread out below.
>
> (Darwish, "Return")

The visit by Shammout and al-Akhal, nonetheless, reignited and sharpened the memories of the Nakba, and reawakened the experience. They write:

> We were able to draw and illustrate this difficult experience, and the very cruel journey, that of our uprooting, Ismail and Tamam, from al-Lydd and from Jaffa. Our individual experiences replicate the journey and experience, in one way or another, of every Palestinian […] In 1997, we visited the whole of Palestine, including our hometowns al-Lydd and Jaffa. The visit had a great impact on both of us; we recalled and relived the events in our memories in all their bitterness, pain and our insistence and determination to live. The visit prompted us to begin working on these 165x200 murals.
>
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 13)[12]

In a twist of irony, al-Akhal discovered that the settler in her family home was Shoshana Finkelstein (1912–2005), an Israeli artist who was an immigrant from Russia (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). Al-Akhal was denied entry into her ancestral home, which has since been turned into a museum by the Israeli government to exhibit Finkelstein's work (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). Al-Akhal believes that art is not only a creative process but it is also imperative for art to have a humanitarian dimension and be honest in its expression (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). Not acknowledging the original owners of the house made al-Akhal question the credibility of the Israeli artist; she felt her a fake (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). In addition, if art's role is to hold a dialogue with the other, Finkelstein closed all the doors (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*).[13]

The murals, which were first exhibited at the Jordan National Gallery in Amman in 2000, capture at once over half a century of an artistic and national journey (Ali 11). The visuals tell the story of a people, loss of life, property and dreams in epic form (Ali 11). Without concrete and viable territory, a virtual space such as a painting becomes valuable as a site of cultural development (Makhoul and Hon 61). The murals are also accounts of forced exile, survival in the diaspora, and the individuals' determination to persist and to hold on to their identity (Ali 11). The 1997 visit was in more than one respect a "return to the ruin" without a mediator (Nashif, "Postcolony?"). It was a reliving of the Nakba. It was also an evoking of an earlier place albeit utopic through memories.

Return to ruin: life is worth living

Al-Akhal and Shammout drew to alleviate the injustice heaved upon the Palestinian individual; they wanted to plant hope and make life beautiful because as Darwish writes: "We have on this earth what makes life worth living" (al-Akhal, *Return*).[14] Similarly, Darwish also thought hope is essential for survival: "Even if there is no hope, we are obliged to invent and create hope. Without hope we are lost. The hope must spring from simple things. From the splendor of nature, from the beauty of life, from their fragility" (Darwish, "Return"). From the beginning,

> […] the overriding theme of [al-Akhal's and Shammout's] work has been Palestine – the people, the land, and the drama. In brush and color, they vividly related and portrayed the story of the Palestinian people; their tragedy; their painful struggle for existence; their dreams and their aspirations.
>
> (Daher 107)

For Survival (Figure 5.3) and *Life Prevails* (Figure 5.4) are examples of paintings by Shammout that address the issue of hope, and insist that in spite of everything life has to go on and dreams have to be sustained (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 41, 47).

Figure 5.3 For Survival, 1999
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

In *For Survival*, the sixth mural in the series, the artist emphasizes that life for Palestinians cannot cease, and Palestinians have managed to affirm their "existence by hard work, study and excellence" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 41).

Shammout often used symbolic references to illustrate the determination of his people to regain the homeland, and his paintings repeatedly sought to capture moments in the unfolding saga of dispossession and struggle for survival (Boullata, *Palestinian Art* 131). Palestine as a nation came into being through their work as "a system of cultural signification" (Bhabha, "Introduction" 1). The symbols have become recurrent themes in Palestinian art, "by turns subtle (such as olives, trees, and soil) or stark (such as guns, graves, and blood)" (Gandolfo 54). The paintings of al-Akhal and Shammout celebrate metaphors and icons that have come to represent Palestine. These have retained their potency, and are used by generations of Palestinians to commemorate the conflict and resistance to occupation that have characterized the Palestinian nation since 1948 (Gandolfo 51). *For Survival* is populated with Palestinians who pursued employment in Arab Gulf countries in all the fields, at once claiming agency and rejecting the victimhood status (Shammout

Figure 5.4 Life Prevails, 1999
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

and Shammout, *Exodus and Odysse*y 41).[15] Amidst this vibrant energy, the Palestinian mother takes center stage, "a symbol of tenacious endurance and patience" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 41). If Darwish "popularized the metaphor of the female body as the ancestral homeland, Shammout gave this metaphor pictorial form" (Boullata, *Palestinian Art* 174). The Palestinian females in their colorfully embroidered *Thobes*,[16] which through their stitches invoke and tell the story of the land, "including cypress trees, grape bunches, apple trees, rainbows, birds and flowers," are drawn proportionally larger than the laborers and workers (Gandolfo 50). In addition, their white veils contrast sharply against the dark blue, orange and brown colors dominating the painting signifying the female's important role in the lives of Palestinians and their struggle for a homeland. In their own right, they acquire the status of the icon, demanding that the viewer look at them. The poised Palestinian female is the symbol of the homeland: "the woman is the land, and the children are the future" (al-Akhal, *Treasure*s). The female is often the mother and the virgin embracing "strength and sustenance for the nation of soldiers and martyrs who would lay down their lives to regain their lost land" (Gandolfo 49). On another note, in Suleiman's film trilogy,

the female is also the one with agency, a symbol of the vocal struggle against occupation.

In *Life Prevails* (Figure 5.4), the Palestinian female once again is presented larger than life, dominating the canvas, and this positioning draws attention to her iconic status and her role as the protector of the homeland. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, an icon's role is to help elevate the souls of the believers (D-Vasilescu 169). With Shammout, the exalting of the soul comes through the Palestinian woman. The three dominant females within the frame are facing different directions, one signaling towards the sea, another to Jerusalem while the one in the middle facing the viewer is holding a bouquet of the red *Shaqa'iq al Nu'man*/*Dahnoun*, which is found in abundance during the spring.[17] In Eastern Christianity, an icon not only communicates spiritual energy but also becomes its center of power, while at the same time its role is to provide grace (D-Vasilescu 170). In addition, the iconic figure is the focal point towards which "the viewer's gaze is supposed to move" (D-Vasilescu 171). In the paintings in Figure 5.3 and 5.4, the female commands this role.

As with *For Survival*, *Life Prevails* stresses the continuation of Palestinian life through the preservation of tradition; the painting also emphasizes that dreams have to be sustained and this is achieved through the steadfastness of the prominent iconic female, such as the one depicted within the frame (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 47). Palestinians from different backgrounds and occupations are presented; they crowd the canvas, and one group is portrayed celebrating a wedding, an insistence that life must go on. Young children are painted in the same yellow hue as the Dome of the Rock in the background to indicate that even though many of these children are born outside the historical homeland, the link to Palestine has to be preserved. Scenes that celebrate Palestinian traditions help in maintaining the threatened identity (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). Al-Akhal says that they were anxious to stress their identity, and this is the main reason why they always signed their names in Arabic (al-Akhal, *Bayt al-Qaseed*). People representing what being Palestinian is have habitually occupied center stage in Shammout's work (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). Similarly, in *The Spring that Was* (Figure 5.5), three Palestinian women are more prominent than the rest. The painting reflects Shammout's memory of Palestine, which "is a glorious spring full of color, abundance, grace and happiness" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 17). This first mural in the series is rich with the bright and vibrant colors of nature and the vivacity of the people. In *The Spring that Was* (Figure 5.5), the Palestinian peasants are portrayed as an intrinsic part of the land; this land is peaceful and not overcrowded as in the earlier murals (Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Light blue, white and green dominate the landscape, and wild flowers, including anemone, cover the earth with a blanket of color (Figure 5.5). The olive tree with its silver-green leaves stands tall behind the peasants in the background.[18] The color is used here to celebrate an earlier time of abundance and richness, a utopic nostalgia of what has been lost (Hourani 239).

Figure 5.5 The Spring that Was, 1997
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

As the occupier has dominated Palestinian time and space, the place is transformed to something that is no longer familiar (Al-Shaikh 777). Recalling the place is one way to reclaim the place itself (Al-Shaikh 777), and this is what al-Akhal and Shammout have done with their work. In addition, showing the Palestinian people on their land runs contrary to a nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse, which was propagated by western travelers to Palestine. The latter were "scarcely able to recognize the presence of a Palestinian population or to grant them decently human status," and this prepared "the ground for Zionism and its range of tactics – discursive/ideological and material/military – for making the Palestinians 'disappear,' and this [was] supported by British colonial attitudes" (Williams 88).

For centuries, Palestine has captured the imagination of pilgrims and writers as well, and "existed for Europe as an idea, at once glorious and obscure, mighty and fallen" (Howe 21). In his introduction to *Palestinian Walks, Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*, Raja Shehadeh argues that even though many travelers and pilgrims have visited Palestine, the literature or visual renditions that have evolved of the country have mostly willfully ignored the presence and the lives of the land's inhabitants (Shehadeh xiv–xv). The geography depicted of

actual Palestine or the area east of the Jordan River, which is now modern-day Jordan, has often assumed mythical and unchallengeable qualities. Palestine as a nation was often ignored. A nation, "like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion," and these are not given any consideration (Renan 19). Simply, the ordinary people of Palestine did not exist. Illustrations of the Holy Land often favored the depiction of shepherds or bedouins, specifically done to emphasize the nomadic nature of their lives. Nomadism implies that the native can be removed easily from the land (Wolfe 396). Thus, the implication was that Palestinians are transients on their land and not its rightful owners. In contrast, the paintings of al-Akhal and Shammout allow the subject to speak from where it has been denied, from "where it is *not*" (Bhabha, *Location* 47; emphasis in original).

Al-Akhal's *Jaffa – Bride of the Sea* (Figure 5.6) similarly illustrates Palestinian life before the Nakba in one of the oldest Mediterranean harbor cities. The Canaanites named their city *Yafi*, which means the beautiful one (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 71). The colors in the mural are vivid, representing the hues that are often associated with this once open and thriving city. Men are preparing the oranges to be shipped through the harbor; the orange trees are glorious with the abundance and color of their

Figure 5.6 Jaffa – Bride of the Sea, 1997
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

fruit against the green richness of the leaves that celebrate and signify life. The orange color is nearly always present in al-Akhal's paintings. She remarks: "The orange and green colour of ripe oranges on the trees filled me with joy, as did the happy rituals associated with picking and shipping the fruit across the blue sea" (Sarhan). In Kanafani's "The Land of Sad Oranges," the Nakba and the experience of losing one's home are morphed into a single orange. The orange, which was a source of joy, is now a reminder of the lost homeland. In Kanafani's short story, the forced deportations towards Lebanon were accompanied by the sprawling orange groves that became more and more distant. Before reaching the Lebanese border, some of the "women climbed down over the luggage and made for a peasant sitting cross-legged with a basket of oranges just in front of him. They picked up the oranges and the sound of their weeping reached our ears" (Kanafani, *Men* 76). The orange that the boy's father acquires accompanies them to their place of exile, and its later shriveled and dried-up state eventually symbolizes their current refugee status in another's land. Like the orange, exiled from the homeland, they will dry up.

In addition to the orange groves, the Mediterranean Sea with its pristine blueness is portrayed as the source of life for the inhabitants of the city in al-Akhal's *Jaffa – Bride of the Sea*; through its shores, produce is exported and the connection through its harbor attests to the once cosmopolitan openness of the city. Typical of a port city, Jaffa was a meeting point for people from around the world: Arab, Italian, Greek and French (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 74). In the foreground of *Jaffa – Bride of the Sea* (Figure 5.6), children are playing on its golden beaches, swimming in its sea; meanwhile, a man in traditional clothes languidly drinks his coffee at one of its cafés.[19] The white horses in proximity to the children project purity, a sense of freedom and vigor. I will return to the metaphor of the horse at the end of the chapter. Al-Akhal believes that art evolves from the environment of the artist and is a reflection of his or her space (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*). Al-Akhal recalls the time she and other children played on the beach, and the family's old traditional house with its arches and domes overlooking the old city, the souks, the harbor and the sea (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 72).[20] In this painting, the sea and the city are in harmony, forming a natural union (Daher 106). *Jaffa – Harbor of Abundance* (Figure 5.7) also celebrates life in Jaffa in mandate Palestine.

Al-Akhal depicts the return of the boats to the harbor at the end of the day; she recounts:

> Our home was in the old City of Jaffa. Its windows framed the clear blue sea […] the masts and sails of the ships in harbor intertwined with the ancient mellowed stone, arches, and domes of the old buildings to form a mosaic of color and beauty. Best of all were the evenings (afternoons), when the fishing boats returned home with their catch and the harbor teemed with life and excitement.
>
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 75)

Figure 5.7 Jaffa – Harbor of Abundance, 1997
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

In *Jaffa – Harbor of Abundance* and *Jaffa – Bride of the Sea*, even though there is much activity portrayed through the daily chores of its inhabitants, there is calmness in both murals. The azure sea waves meander; each action is accomplished through gentle strokes of the brush, barring any sense of urgency, and each scene drifts into the other producing a complete portrait of the old city and its harbor. The city not only provided sustenance (such as fish and oranges) to its people but also a harmonious and tranquil life. Memories of the Palestinian homeland have often evoked the beauty of the land, its fruits and flora rather than the actual people living on these lands (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 62). Homi Bhabha argues:

> The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression.
>
> (*Location* 143)

In the paintings of both artists, which illustrate the pre-Nakba era, the Palestinians are shown as a people etched into the landscape rather than

superfluous individuals alien to it. The relationship between the people and the land provides them with a visibility as we see them engage in their daily activities. The center of activity is communal life, and this takes place in shared spaces in which people practice their traditions. Everything that involves their daily lives and rituals "must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture," by sheer repetition (Bhabha, *Location* 145). The anemone, the cactus, the olive tree and the orange become metaphors of the homeland, in time evolving into cultural icons. K. Luisa Gandolfo notes:

> From 1948 onward the Palestinian art scene exploded in a mélange of symbols that comprised the emotions of a repressed people: the humble peasant (fellah) became an illustrated figure from whose posture, expression, and locale emanated the frustration of displacement; the cactus, soil, and trees morphed into living, breathing beings that represented the parent from whom the Palestinians had been wrenched. That the people of a nation are represented as peasants serves to erase class distinctions, homogenize experiences of the past, articulate the traditions of the nation.
>
> (Gandolfo 49)

Presenting the Palestinians as one community helps in creating the shared consciousness of the homeland.

The pre-Nakba and expulsion murals emphasize the collective experience of the people of Palestine; this helps in forming the misplaced identity in exile. Although the specificity of the Palestinian identity began to form during the British mandate period, it became more pronounced during the Nakba years with the creation of the state of Israel (Gandolfo 48). The pre-given identity needed to be affirmed through a "production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha, *Location* 45). The formation of the identity is essential in keeping alive Palestine and what being Palestinian entails (Gandolfo 50). In her study on Palestinian village memorial books, Rochelle Davis suggests: "A close look at the way places are recalled and described in the memorial books reveals that they are positioned within a national discourse of glorification of the peasant life, of living closely attached to the land" (54). Therefore, in recalling the place, there exists a sense of a geographic nostalgia to that part which has been lost. Celebrating the lives of peasants or fisher folk is essential to show how attached the Palestinians were to their land and sea. Furthermore, emphasizing scenes from this "pre-destruction utopia" eventually helped shape a nationalist discourse (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 61). Memories of these pre-1948 idyllic lives also assist those in exile to hold on to a history that is refusing to die (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 63). Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di argue:

> Memory is one of the few weapons available to those against whom the tide of history has turned. It can slip in to rattle the wall. Palestinian memory is, by dint of its preservation and social production under the

> conditions of its silencing by the thundering story of Zionism, dissident memory, counter-memory. It contributes to a counter history.
>
> (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 6)

Recalling and visually chronicling Palestinian rural and urban lives are essential for the survival of the idea of the homeland. Shammout recalls that even though during the British mandate life in Palestine "was marked by trouble and upheaval […] continuous revolt, and national outcries against the British-Zionist plot to take over the country […] Palestine in my memory is a glorious spring full of color, abundance, grace and happiness" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 17). The artistic process here "crosses the boundaries between representation, invention, and intervention," as the artist becomes the ethnographer (Cesari 84). The cultural production of the homeland helps the lost and would-be country survive through the collective consciousness of its entire people.

Return to ruin: the Nakba

After the Nakba and the dispersal of Palestinians throughout the world, there was a trend in some Arab countries to erase Palestinian identity (Mansur). Therefore, a need to preserve this identity emerged and became central to Palestinian painting; Palestinian artists started to recreate their identity through the use of symbols, village scenes, Dabke dancing as well as colors often associated with the homeland (Mansur). Contemporary Palestinian art had to emerge from a creation of an idea of a country, as the actual state did not exist (Makhoul and Hon xi). Its visual rendition of an imagined country helped create the homeland in the absence of one (Makhoul and Hon xi). Visual culture developed "new forms of nationhood and national identity, [and] Palestine as a nation has been compelled to assert itself without the benefit of a state […] against a systematic programme to erase the very idea of it" (Makhoul and Hon xii). Shammout believed that art was his way of vociferously informing the world of the Catastrophe that has befallen his country and people (Shammout, "Al-Haraka al-Faniya" 159).

Edward W. Said argues that artists are fulfilling an obligation when they embody the historical experience and suffering of their people in aesthetic works that in turn become recognized as masterpieces on their own merit (*Representations* 44). The defining date of the Nakba gave birth to a "heightened sense of national identity and the deliberate construction of a National Art Movement" (Ankori 21). With the destruction of the Palestinian-Arab society in 1948 and the dispersal of Palestinian citizens throughout the world, Palestinian art no longer had a cultural center (Boullata, "Art" 71). In addition, Palestinians suffered from being polarized either as victimized peasants or evil terrorists, and this narrow vision excluded them not only from history but also from the realm of culture (Ankori 15). From the beginning, there was a pressing need to document the aftermath of the Nakba. To al-Akhal

and Shammout, art was not a luxury (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). Mere aesthetics and experimentation with art came second to the documentation of reality (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). Palestinian artist Suleiman Mansur argues:

> All Palestinian art historians, including their doyen, Ismail Shammout, start their documentation of Palestinian art movements after 1948, because the year 1948 has impacted on Palestinian lives on all levels. After 1948, Palestinian painting had for subject, naturally, refugees, the dispossessed living in a tent or in the open air [… and for Shammout, his] work was inspired from his experience
>
> (Mansur)

The same holds true of al-Akhal's work. Shammout writes:

> On the morning of 13 July, 1948, we were forced out of our ancestral homes in Lydda at gunpoint. Zionist gangs rounded us up and herded us into the city's largest squares. Then, surrounded by a tight cordon of heavily armed Zionist gangs, we were driven relentlessly towards the east.
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 23)

Tens of thousands, which also included exiles from Jaffa, were forcibly expelled out of al-Lydd/ar-Ramle on what became known in history as al-Lydd/Lydda Death March. The exodus from these two adjacent towns constituted the largest single expulsion in 1948. The ethnic cleansing of the towns, which occurred during a truce, led to the expulsion of at least 70,000 people (Pappé 156). The United Nations plan failed to protect the people; instead what transpired was intimidation, psychological warfare, executions, heavy shelling of civilian populations, and expulsions (Pappé 156).[21] Snipers were stationed on rooftops to discourage anyone from returning (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 22). *To the Unknown* (Figure 5.8) or *Al-Iqtila'a min al-Lydd wa ar-Ramle* (*The Uprooting from al-Lydd and ar-Ramle*), which is the second mural in the series, illustrates the above.

Armed gangs surround the population; children's mouths are agape, stifling frightened screams. Bewildered expressions on the people's faces expose the moans of the elderly and the sick. The five distinct periods of Shammout's art (described earlier in this chapter) can be found in the paintings depicting the Nakba and its aftermath. The juxtaposition of the different styles adds to the fragmentation representing the individual experience of the event (al-Akhal, *Odyssey of a People*). The immensity of an event such as the Nakba causes the human being to become more attuned with the passive senses, seeing, hearing and smelling, and this in turn helps in registering the event (Nashif, "Memory of Immigration" 23). Even though the expulsion began in the morning, the sky is daubed with blood red. On

Figure 5.8 To the Unknown, 1997
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

the left-hand side of the canvas, a Palestinian family, depicted larger than the rest, stands at the edge; the elderly man averts his gaze while the woman holds on to her infant child; her expression is one of pain; his is of confusion. At the edge stand the cacti, indigenous to al-Lydd, but its fruit now resembles teardrops in the color of blood. In this mural, the brush strokes are harsher, more urgent and the lines are further defined. The armed men depicted in black are mostly faceless, and their guns resemble blades with their sharp edges. Pain and fear dominate, and a sense of disruption is evident. Just as in writing, trauma of loss demands a re-founding of a visual language to address the experience (Fischer 489).

The tragedy recounted in *To the Unknown* (Figure 5.8) carries at once "the moment of its narrativisation and the moment of its visualization" (Nashif, "Memory of Immigration" 16). Al-Akhal's mural 14, *Unholy Alliance* (Figure 5.9), similarly visualizes the Palestinian deportation, this time from Jaffa. She recalls the scene:

> Palestine and the Palestinians are the forgotten victims of the unconscionable (criminal) conspiracy between Zionists and Britain. Jewish

Figure 5.9 Unholy Alliance, 1998
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

> immigrants flooded into Palestine; Palestin[ian] land was seized; Palestinian resistance was brutally suppressed, and a racist Israeli State was established on the ruins and destruction of the Palestinian homeland.
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 79)

This account of the journey brings to mind similar flights by al-Ali, Darwish, and Kanafani, and how the child's memory of such an event forever haunts that of the adult. The colors in this painting are very dark; the previously clear blue of the sea is now dark and foreboding. Al-Akhal remembers the day they were exiled very clearly:

> When they forced us to leave Jaffa, what remained with me is a nagging feeling of injustice, forced deportation and uprooting from my childhood… This cannot be erased… A child can never forget… I was very angry with the sea because it was through it that we became exiles… From the deck of the ship Dolores, I watched Jaffa burn and heard the bombs and I became a different person.
> (al-Akhal, *Special Episode with al-Akhal*)[22]

Al-Akhal's first experiences of the Nakba, which began with an exodus on board the *Dolores*, were translated into two murals, *Unholy Alliance* (Figure 5.9) and *Uprooting* (Figure 5.10). A number of activities and disjointed scenes are taking place within the frame of *Unholy Alliance* (Figure 5.9), emphasizing the fragmentation and the breakup of the country. Frederic Jameson argues that "the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself" (85–6). The individual experience of both artists evolves into that of the whole nation, which in turn is depicted through their artwork. Al-Akhal describes the scene she witnessed:

> At dawn on 28 April, 1948, armed Zionists over-ran Jaffa, and forced the townspeople out of their homes at gunpoint. The terrorized citizens were forced into boats and driven out to sea pursued by a hail of Israeli bombs and bullets.
>
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 83)

Al-Akhal's experience of their eviction is documented in detail; the sea in *Uprooting* has now become the enemy of the citizens of the city. Expressions of fear and confusion emanate from the faces of the people (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 *Uprooting*, 1998
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

Behind them, smoke is rising from Jaffa. The sea has become violent, foreboding and threatening, affording an escape to the unknown. People got on boats or ships without knowing the destination of these vessels (al-Akhal, *Bayt al-Qaseed*). In Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*, Maryam describes a similar scene: "Beyond the dark beach Jaffa was burning beneath the blazing tails of meteors that thundered down from the sky. We were floating over dark waves of shrieks and prayers" (16–17). Al-Akhal recounts that the experience of the forced expulsion will never leave her; instead it will continue to grow within her, and this has urged her to chronicle the pain of her people (al-Akhal, *Special Episode with al-Akhal*). The narrativization of the Nakba became visual. From the start, al-Akhal started documenting in diary form the facts at the time of her family's exile from Palestine, while she was on board the *Dolores*, looking back at her burning city (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*).[23] She later discovered that Shammout began documenting his own experience of the Nakba upon being exiled from al-Lydd by drawing sketches (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). Robert J. C. Young describes the implications of the Catastrophe on the Palestinians:

> Historical conditions of Palestinianess (if you like) appear as a crack in the form of the literature and the art. It is a bit like the literal cracks in the form of the contemporary Palestinian landscape that is symbolic of the historical devastation, loss and lack of place, the shift of internal and external borders, the endlessly redrawn maps evaporating cultural memory of a lost physical landscape, the continued ferocity of military incursions, all these cracks, all these forms of violence appear emerged in their own way in the literally form as well as its content […] [Palestinian texts are] resisting the completion of the narratives.
>
> (Young)

Palestine: *The Exodus and The Odyssey* is an attempt at filling the cracks and keeping the cultural memory alive by visually chronicling the landscape and the experience of being uprooted from the land. In some ways, the murals are chapters archiving and recording the fragmented experience, trying to make the narrative whole.

The Road to Nowhere and *Palestinians … Refugees* recount the experience of Shammout and his people's banishment from al-Lydd (Figures 5.11 and 5.12). *The Road to Nowhere*, which is titled *A'Atash …'ala Tareek al-Taih* (*Thirst … On the Road to Nowhere*) in Arabic, recounts the thirst and hardship the exiled faced after their forced expulsion, as they tried to make their way to Gaza. Shammout recalls:

> Encircled by violent, abusive gangs, [we] were forced to march towards the east through rough, arid, dusty mountain terrain, until we reached Arab controlled territory. The heat and thirst were an agony. Many old people and children died from exhaustion and thirst, and in the

Figure 5.11 The Road to Nowhere, 1998
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

> confusion and panic many children were lost and separated from their families.
>
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 27)

Shammout remembers how the Zionist gangs denied them water, and their armed militias threw away the little that they managed to find (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 28). The July heat made their long journey more arduous, and it is portrayed in the painting by the scorching orange sky. In this mural, the outlines of the bodies are more prominent, while the brush strokes are more forcibly applied; the faces are indistinguishable, as all have succumbed to the same fate, hunger and thirst.[24] Some are looking to the heavens for relief, while a pregnant woman falls to the ground staring at the skies, hoping for mercy. Two little boys in the middle are alone and faceless. The colors of their clothes are subdued. Shammout remembered the water carrier who was begging for water as he screamed, "I quenched your thirst for 40 years, could someone give me a drop?" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 28).

Figure 5.12 Palestinians … Refugees, 1998
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

The fourth mural in the series, *Palestinians … Refugees* (Figure 5.12) illustrates how the once "proud Palestinians" have "learnt to queue to receive hand-outs: meager food ration to ease the hunger pangs" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 31). A whole nation has been humiliated. The experience of feeling disgraced evokes a scene from Darwish's recollection of a similar incident in *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* when he became a refugee along with his family in Lebanon waiting for food rations. Darwish "recalls the feeling of humiliation at becoming a refugee vividly as he stands in the food line with his father, feeling like beggars" (Nashef, "Challenging the Myth" 399). The poet writes, as he addresses the child within him: "And you stood alone with your father in a line of beggars to obtain clothing and a portion of food that came from anonymous sources" (Darwish, *Journal* 11). Shammout describes the road that took them "[o]ut of Lydda to Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron, then to Khan Younis near Gaza and a refugee tent surrounded by barbed wire" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odysse*y 31). A great many tents are shown in the painting, while a long line of faceless refugees await their food rations at the UNRWA office in the background. Amidst the desolate scene, a young female in white looks up to the skies, as

Figure 5.13 The Nightmare and the Dream, 1998
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

she holds a red rose in her hand; she is nursing hope. In a similar portrayal in the fifth mural *The Nightmare and the Dream* (Figure 5.13), Shammout illustrates how the camp has become a nightmare. The only possible escape is by the train, which at the time connected Gaza to Egypt (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 35).

In the painting, hope is depicted through the female in white, occupying the center of the canvas. As she looks to a horizon beyond the camp, her hand rests on a child who is studying. Education is seen as the only salvation for the refugees. In order to save money for his education, Shammout and his younger brother Jamal used to sell cakes at Khan Younis Train Station. The brothers are depicted in the far left-hand corner; once the United Nations established schools in the camp, drawing tools became available and this prompted Shammout to start documenting life at the camp through his drawings (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 39). The dark colors used in *The Nightmare and the Dream* also signal despair, but the young children who are studying offer a glimpse of hope. When armed resistance began in the sixties following the 1967 defeat of the Arabs, Palestinians felt that they had finally taken their destiny in their own hands. This also gave

Figure 5.14 Resistance, 1999
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

them confidence, hope and pride. The eighth mural in the series, *Resistance* (Figure 5.14), demonstrates the hope that prevailed.

The colors are much brighter, and Palestinian females in their bright *Thobes* dominate the painting. The sharp lines of the previous two murals, indicative of anger, have to an extent disappeared; the sun rises behind the resistance groups; an old couple drink their coffee leisurely as their eyes gaze towards a distant horizon, conceivably the homeland and the promise of return. A sense of community, which was missing earlier, prevails in this painting, an indication that people may have salvaged some of their fragmentary lives.

The last two murals by Shammout are the *Intifada* (Figure 5.16) and *The Dream of Tomorrow* (Figure 5.17). In the former, the children who ignited the spark of the Intifada with their stone throwing, as a result of despair, "confronted fearlessly the might and savagery of the Israeli occupation" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 61). The outlines of the children's bodies are drawn clearly, emphasizing the action in the mural. The children occupy most of the frame, and in the left-hand corner, the viewer sees in diminished form the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shaking hands in the presence of the

Figure 5.15 *Homage to the Martyrs*, 1999 [please refer to note 17]
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

Figure 5.16 *Intifada*, 2000
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

Figure 5.17 The Dream of Tomorrow, 2000
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

former US President Bill Clinton. The future of peace lies with the children and not in the "Madrid Conference … the Oslo Conference … Conference after conference…" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 61).

In *The Dream of Tomorrow* (Figure 5.17), the artist returns to hope, stressing that dreams cannot be denied (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 65). The Palestinian female is in her *Thobe*, once again drawn larger than life; she floats over the homeland, which is presented as an "entirety for [its] entire people" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 65). Even though "we dream the impossible," we should not stop nurturing hope for the right of return (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 65).

Al-Akhal's *Steadfast as a Rock*, the sixteenth mural in the series (Figure 5.18), depicts an elderly fisherman from Jaffa, Abu Saber [the name literally means father of patience], who along with his family has ended up a refugee in Gaza. The fisherman refuses to relinquish his profession or his close relationship to the sea. His facial expression is one of perseverance and stubbornness even though the Israelis have forbidden the fishermen to go out to sea in Gaza. He waits in the hope he may resume his livelihood; his bond to

Figure 5.18 Steadfast as a Rock, 1999
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

the sea is a close one. The dominance of blue in the painting signals the role the sea plays in Abu Saber's life, and is a constant reminder of the pre-Nakba Jaffa Sea in al-Akhal's murals, which has been denied him. In the painting, hope is also presented through the galloping white horses on the horizon.

Conclusion: rootedness in the land

Al-Akhal has often said that the Arabian horse is very important to her (al-Akhal, *We Are Still Together*). The animal here symbolizes freedom and purity, "Arab pride and strength," in contrast to the defiant squealing horse that is drawing a carriage to the shore in Jaffa in *Uprooting* (Sarhan). The horse in the later painting, *Don't Forsake the Steed* (Figure 5.19), is calling for help. Al-Akhal demonstrates in this how the Arabs have abandoned their horse. She notes:

> The Arab horse, symbol of Arab pride and strength is hemmed in on all sides. He is bound by restrictions and obstructions, unable to realize his capacity to give and achieve and unable to realize his hopes and dreams.
> (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 95)

Figure 5.19 Don't Forsake the Steed, 2000
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

The stallion is a metaphor for the Palestinian who has been forgotten. In the painting, the horse occupies the middle of a rocky and hilly terrain, standing on the one patch of green. This painting was used on the cover of the bilingual edition of Darwish's poetic anthology, *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* The horse stubbornly guards the homeland, rooted in the land. In addition, the horse is at once a testimony of what has been lost and a reminder of the identity of the land. White horses abound in al-Akhal's paintings; she drew the animal abstractly, almost opaque, only marking its outline. Al-Akhal maintains that outlining the horse without its detail allows the animal to be presented again and again as a recurring tune, even though the color itself may differ (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 218). The horse is hence the notion of strength and pride, and will be completed in detail once the Palestinians are able to return. In spite of everything, al-Akhal asks us to cultivate hope; in *The Rift* (Figure 5.20), a Palestinian bride attempts to cross over a land that has been divided by occupation. On the left-hand side of the painting, Palestinians are being tortured in Israeli prisons, but the bride in her white dress celebrates life (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 91).

In the nineteenth mural in the series, *Challenge* (Figure 5.21), "the fruitful evergreen olive tree" defies the ages as its roots dig deep inside the rocks; it

Figure 5.20 The Rift, 1999
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

"bespeak[s] of our strong attachment to our ancestral country [defying all the] elements and time" (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 99). The olive tree endures, and so does the Palestinian, as they are both survivors (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 99).

In Darwish's poem, "Innocent Villagers [قرويُّون، منْ غَيْر سُوء]," the olive groves, like Kanafani's orange orchids, remained with them on their road to exile:

> For company we had
> The emerald gleam in the night of our olive trees (Darwish, *Why?* 18)
>
> يُسَامِرُنا
> لَمَعانُ الزُمُرُّدِ في لَيْلِ زَيْتُونِنا
> (Darwish, *Why?* 19)

In Palestinian culture, olive trees form an integral part of peasant life:

> The relationship between the olive tree and the Palestinian is very intimate and symbolic. The tree's longevity and healing properties of its

Figure 5.21 Challenge, 2000
Oil painting, 165 × 200 cm

> oil symbolize eternity. Its products provide sustenance. The olive picking season was an activity in which the whole village partook.
>
> (Nashef, "Not to Get Lost" 61)

Palestinians consider the olive tree sacred, and an eternal symbol of their land. Uprooting of the tree has often been compared to the uprooting of a human being from the soil. In addition, it is the soul of the homeland and the people. For centuries, it has epitomized the rootedness of the peasant in the land (Hammer 65). The evergreen tree bears witness to the history of the land, and in *Challenge* (Figure 5.21), it sprouts from the earth, enduring all adversity.

Notes

1 On Ismail Shammout's grave, the words from Mahmoud Darwish's epic poem are inscribed: "You're defeated Death by the arts by each one of them" (Darwish, *Mural* 30).
2 As with the capture of Palestinian lands by Zionist settlers, many Palestinian homes were looted. Ankori notes: "numerous tangible objects of Palestinian culture, such

as carpets, books, paintings, musical instruments, illuminated manuscripts, textiles and icons, were destroyed, looted or sold" (Ankori 28). In a similar vein, Joseph Massad writes: "It is important to stress that Zionist colonization and appropriation of Palestine and the Palestinians were never limited to the land but always extended to culture, art, and even food. The importance of the cactus plant, sabra, in Palestinian culture, for example, was immediately appropriated by the Zionist colonists as the name they accorded their offspring born in colonized Palestine. The theft of Palestinian homes, their contents, including art objects and furniture, coupled with Israel's ongoing archaeological efforts to erase the Palestinian presence on the land and invent a Jewish one have always gone hand in hand with the confiscation of Palestinian land and the physical expulsion of the Palestinians from it" (Massad 126).This meant that what remained had to be saved or in some ways recreated anew. In Suleiman's film, *The Time that Remains*, a scene depicts Israeli soldiers looting the contents of a Palestinian home, after having occupied it. Ismail Shammout is one of the pioneers who were instrumental in resurrecting Palestinian art, and through his work safe-guarding the identity of his people.

3 Ismail Shammout was born in the city of al-Lydd, Palestine, on March 2, 1930 (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 63). His extended family and the rest of the villagers were forced into exile on July 13, 1948, under a barrage of Zionist guns and fire (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 16, 22). Forced to abandon his place of birth, he and his family sought refuge in a refugee camp in Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip (Shammout and Shammout, *Exodus and Odyssey* 30). Eventually, he managed to leave the confines of Gaza refugee life and enroll in the College of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1950. He and Tamam Aref al-Akhal, a fellow Palestinian (later his wife) exhibited their work in the Egyptian capital and the late Egyptian President Jamal Abdul-Nasser inaugurated the exhibition on July 21, 1954. Al-Akhal was born in the coastal Palestinian city of Jaffa in 1935. As with Shammout, she and members of her family were forced by Zionist gangs out of their homes and city in 1948. They escaped on *Dolores*, a Greek ship, which happened to be heading for Beirut in Lebanon to join the exodus of other refugees (al-Akhal, *Special Episode with al-Akhal*). Critics have often described al-Akhal as "The Olive of Palestine," and "The Pine of Palestinian Art" (al-Akhal, *Bayt al-Qaseed*). For a detailed biography of both al-Akhal and Shammout, please refer to *Al-yad tará wal-qalb yarsum: sīrat Tamām al-Ak ḥal wa Ismā'īl Shammūt*.

4 Before 1948, Palestinian artist and educator Daoud Zalatimo (1906–2001) was Shammout's teacher in al-Lydd; his "historical allegories of nascent Arab nationalism were later to inform Isma'il Shammout's (1930–2006) narrative paintings of life in the refugee camps and Arab cultural resistance" (Fischer 484).

5 Shammout and al-Akhal were instrumental in setting up a Palestinian art scene. Joseph Massad notes: "After the founding of the PLO, and its takeover later by the Palestinian resistance movement, Shammout set up and headed a PLO Art Section. Palestinian artists began to congregate around the PLO and hold meetings as early as 1969. Several art exhibitions were held in Jordan, where the PLO was based until 1970. In addition to the PLO's Art Section, an Arts and Heritage Section was established in Lebanon, led by Tamam al-Akhal, Shammout's wife. Shammout was elected the first president of the Union of Palestinian Artists (UPA) and the Union of Arab Artists. The two artists presented exhibitions of Palestinian art in the following years in Beirut, where the PLO was then based, and across the Arab world" (Massad 126). Shammout is also the author of the first book on Palestinian art (Fischer 487).

6 Kamal Boullata writes: "Isma'il Shammout was eighteen when his hometown of Lydda fell to the Jewish forces, who forced the major part of the population out at gunpoint. The long march on foot with family members and neighbours ended in a Gaza refugee camp, where he began life as a street vendor. In his spare time he picked up paint and brush to give body to his personal experience of the Palestinian exodus" (Boullata, *Palestinian Art* 128–29).

7 The Israelis destroyed the painting in 1967 when they invaded Jerusalem; it was hanging in the Arab League Bureau (al-Akhal, *Amman Meeting*).

8 Jean Fischer suggests: "The Nakba was to see not simply the massacre and expulsion of Palestinians from their ancestral homes, but the destruction of Palestinian patrimony through wholesale Jewish looting of Palestinian belongings and artworks whose irretrievability […] doomed a century and a half of Palestinian modernist development to oblivion" (485).

9 During the Lebanese Civil War in 1976, Tel az-Zaatar and Jisr al-Pasha camps were sieged by Lebanese rightwing Christian militias; the refugee camps, which were established after the Palestinian Nakba were administered by UNRWA and housed approximately 50,000 to 60,000 Palestinian and Lebanese refugees. Between 2,000 and 3,000 were killed in the armed siege.

10 Different spellings for al-Lydd exist; in my own writing, I will use al-Lydd, as this is the closest to the Arabic pronunciation of the word.

11 Tamam al-Akhal said in an interview that 80 percent of their work has relied on lived stories (al-Akhal, *Special Episode with al-Akhal*).

12 My translation. All other translations from Arabic are mine unless otherwise stated.

13 Al-Akhal drew the experience; in the painting, the Israeli artist was purple, an indication of her lack of humanity (al-Akhal, *Role of Art*).

14 This line of poetry is from Darwish's English anthology, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise* (6).

15 Kamal Boullata writes: "Shammout's earliest canvases were peopled with destitute figures from the refugee camps determined to regain the lost homeland. His later paintings depicted optimistic images of heroic daughters, dancing women in national dress, and arcadian representations of the liberated homeland. Shammout's visual repertoire often eclectically borrowed from socialist-realist models, which he adorned with familiar peasant clothes and artifacts" (Boullata, "Artists Remember" 27).

16 The Palestinian *Thobe* is a hand-stitched dress nowadays worn mostly by Palestinian peasant women. Each region in Palestine has its own stitch and style, often reflecting elements of nature and myth. The base of the *Thobe* can vary from white, Damascene, to black. The *Thobes* are very rich in color. Canaanites possibly started embroidering their garments as early as 4000 BC. (al-Muzayyin 16). Shelagh Weir notes: "The great variety of women's costumes and their complicated decorative elements constitute a correspondingly complex language about identity and status. Many features, some major, some very small, indicated women's marital and sexual status, displayed the social and economic status of family and village, and announced village or regional origins" (74).

17 The Latin name for the flower is anemone coronaria. The red is often associated with blood and resistance. The *Shaqa'iq al Nu'man* flowers symbolize both death and hope in *Homage to the Martyrs* (Figure 5.15). This mural, which was drawn to mark the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, recalls all the Palestinian massacres.

The color red dominates, and on the side of the frame, Palestinian females hold bouquets of the red anemones to commemorate those who have perished in massacres. As with Hanthala who stood on top of an Israeli missile to hand over a flower to the young girl, these Palestinian females hold on to life through their bouquets.

18 Shammout's father used to be a vegetable seller, and the young child remembers accompanying him to the market where he soaked the richness of the colors of nature (al-Qasem).

19 In his study of café culture in Palestine, Salim Tamari writes that in the mid-nineteenth century cafés evolved in port cities such as Jaffa to serve the sailors, travel agents and custom officers (Tamari 25). One of the places in which cafés proliferated was in al-Manshiyyeh Quarter in Jaffa (Tamari 26). In 1948, al-Manshiyyeh Quarter was attacked and destroyed by the Zionist Irgun Zvai Leumi gang. The area has been turned into a park.

20 Al-Akhal's home was built in 1747 (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 230).

21 Ilan Pappé writes: "Lydd lies fifty metres above sea level on the inner plains of Palestine. In the local popular memory it is engraved as the 'city of the mosques', some of which were famous around the Arab world. For example, the Big Mosque, al-Umari, which still stands today, was built during the time of the Mamluks by Sultan Rukn al-Din Baybars, who took the city from the Crusaders. Another well-known mosque is the Dahamish Mosque, which could host 800 worshippers and had six shops adjacent to it. Today, Lydd is the Jewish development town of Lod – one of the belt towns encircling Tel-Aviv housing the poorest and most underprivileged of the metropolis" (166).

22 Days before their expulsion from Palestine, al-Akhal engraved her name with a nail on a marble pillar in the family's Jaffa house (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 25). During a meeting at her house in Amman on August 9, 2017, she said the Israeli occupants erected a cement block in its place (al-Akhal, *Amman Meeting*).

23 In the chaos and panic, al-Akhal witnessed the death of an infant as he fell from his mother's arms into the water; al-Akhal till this day hears the echo of the woman's scream (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 27).

24 Shammout recalls an Israeli soldier pointing a gun at him because the young boy managed to fill a tin can with water (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 67). After an hour, Shammout managed to fill another tin can with water (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 67). He ran and handed it over to his mother, who after having a sip passed on the tin can to her five-year-old son, but it was too late; the little boy died of thirst (al-Akhal, *Al-yad tará* 67).

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Conclusion

نحن أحياء وباقون ... وللحلم بقية
(Darwish 16)
(We are alive and resolute … and the dream endures)

The above line comes from Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Therein, Now, Here and Now," from his anthology, *I Don't Want for this Poem to End*; this collection was published posthumously in 2009.[1] In spite of the seventy years that have marked the Nakba, Palestinians, whether in historic Palestine or in the diaspora, obstinately hold on to what remains of their country and self. The dream of return and memory of loss endure. In this book, I looked at examples from Palestinian culture and literature that have been instrumental in the formation and perpetuation of the identity of Palestinians, whether living under occupation, marginalized within the state of Israel, in the diaspora or descendants of exiled generations. The symbols discussed here aided in forging the national Palestinian character while keeping alive the dream of return. Moreover, they have also endured as cultural icons that help narrate the story of a displaced and banished people. As the Nakba remains the defining factor in the formation of modern Palestinian identity, its memory and story invariably return to its beginning defined by a point of loss. Through their films, illustrations, paintings and stories, the herein discussed artists and writers evoked the tragedy of their people and homeland by connecting the dots of their ruptured country.

I chose a cartoonist, a film director, a novelist, two painters and a poet whose works are internationally acclaimed and recognized, and who are considered major players in the development of Arabic and Palestinian culture and literature in the twentieth century. My choice is by no means inclusive or exhaustive; there are many others of the same caliber, whose contributions are just as important. Yet, those discussed in this book are generally regarded as cultural pioneers, whose work has influenced generations of Palestinians and Arabs alike. Naji al-Ali, Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, Tamam al-Akhal, Ismail Shammout and Elia Suleiman painstakingly told the story of their silenced people, and recorded the Nakba and its aftermath, be it through their words or visual renditions. Their depiction of the Nakba

stems from both the personal and the collective; four of those discussed in the book were born in mandate Palestine, and witnessed the expulsion first hand. Their individual evictions mirror those of a million other Palestinians whose known livelihoods and existence ceased with the obliteration of their country. Like successive generations of Palestinians, Suleiman, on the other hand, who was born fifty-eight years after the Nakba, experienced the Nakba through the diaries and recollections of his family, and continues to do so through his astute observation of his hometown.[2] During my research, I also became aware that not only was there a commonality in the choice of symbols in the works of al-Ali, al-Akhal, Darwish, Kanafani and Shammout but also these Palestinian pioneers forged friendships among themselves in exile.[3] These authors and artists have become synonymous with the word Palestine, and their works have helped define the meaning and nature of the Palestinian identity.

When a country is erased and more than three-quarters of its nationals are expelled, its culture and language become its first casualties. As people are severed from their roots, their culture and history are interrupted. Previously cherished cultural practices become obsolete and irrelevant, especially in places of exile. Not connected to the physical space, they lose their meanings. Maintaining and creating customs are necessary for the preservation of the link to the ancestral home, and are paramount in protecting that which remains of the original identity. The onus lies with those who are able to sustain the connection with the homeland, even from afar. At times, there is a need for new symbols to be created, ones that could evolve to replace those that have been lost. In diaspora, the search for cultural symbols is crucial, as such symbols give a sense of anchoring in spite of the lost country. For these cultural icons to be sustained, they have to become part of a collective consciousness of the dispersed people. In essence, they have to connect the diasporic people. They also have to keep the memory of the Nakba alive, and to tell and retell the story in the hope that it is not forgotten. The repetitiveness of the narration will perhaps allow the Palestinians to be better heard. During the 1991 Madrid Conference, the Chief Palestinian Negotiator Dr Haydar Abdul-Shafi said at best the Palestinian "narrative was distorted and [their] truth only partially acknowledged" and for a long time the Palestinian "people have gone unheeded, silenced, and denied [their] identity" (133). With the absence of the homeland and denied the right to tell their story, cultural icons and products assume significance beyond their material value and beyond a fixed time. Like Hanthala they will become eternal, resurrected with every new creation that bares a resemblance to the original.

Palestinian Culture and the Nakba: Bearing Witness has looked at the cultural figures, their icons, narratives and visual productions, which have become the essence of Palestinianess. In the absence of the homeland, they have evolved into sites of memory that preserve the lost history and document the events that have shaped and are still shaping Palestinian lives. These "lieux de mémoire" are essential memory triggers lest all is forgotten. They

also provide a window on Palestinian culture and history to the world. By continually invoking the events of 1948, they make known the Catastrophe to the world, which is still as relevant today as it was then.

Edward W. Said has often referred to the position that Palestinians enjoy following the rupture of the country in 1948 as one that is always out of place (3).[4] A sense of belonging to a place will always elude the Palestinians. The same sense of alienation is true for those who were able to remain in historic Palestine and became citizens of the Israeli state; the feeling of being strangers in their own country continues to taint their lives.

The icons and figures have made possible the foundation of a virtual homeland, which has not only provided heritage and culture to this exiled nation but also an understanding of what Palestine was and could be. The continual narrativization of the nation is essential in keeping the memory of the country alive in the imagination of those who have suffered and continue to suffer the devastation of 1948, successive exiles, banishments and wars heaped onto the Palestinians. Abdul al-Shafi said:

> The Palestinian people are one, fused by centuries of history in Palestine, bound together by a collective memory of shared sorrows and joys, and sharing a unity of purpose and vision. Our songs and ballads, full of tales and children's stories, the dialect of our jokes, the image of our poems, that hint of melancholy which colors even our happiest moments.
>
> (134)

In spite of the melancholy they exude, the drawings of al-Ali, the films of Suleiman, the poems of Darwish, the fiction of Kanafani and the paintings of al-Akhal and Shammout will continue to tell a story that needs to be heard. The icons that are created through this narrative will remain as a reminder of what has been lost and what may be possible. Furthermore, their creators have attained the status of icons in their own right.

Notes

1 The anthology was published in 2017 in English; Mohammad Shaheen translated the collection of the poems. According to Interlink Publishing:

> When the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish died in 2008, his friends visited his home and retrieved poems and writings some of which are gathered together in this volume, translated into English for the first time. They include three collections from different phases in Darwish's writing career, as well as reminiscences by friends drawn from the poet's final years, and a moving account of the discovery of the new poems in this collection.
>
> (Interlink)

2 Israel passed a bill on July 19, 2018, that defined the country as the national homeland of the Jews with Hebrew the only official language.

3 In her recently published biography, *Al-yad tará wal-qalb yarsum: sīrat Tamām al-Akḥal wa Ismā'īl* Shammūtal, al-Akhal frequently refers to the friendships that existed between them, al-Ali, Darwish, and Kanafani (217, 177, 180).

4 Please refer to his book, *Out of Place: A Memoir*, which was published in 1999.

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