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Paradise Lost, and Lost Again: Limitations and Realities of Palestinian Identity in Exile,
Occupied Palestine and Israel.
(Under the Direction of Dr. Jon Thompson)

Abstract

The focus of this research is to examine the literature of Palestinian authors for insight into the meaning of Palestinian national identity. The literature of Ghassan Kanafani, Liyana Badr, Sahar Khalifeh and Emile Habiby represents a wide range of themes that mirror the real-life struggles of many Palestinians. Throughout the novels I examined in this study, modes of Palestinian identity, whether in exile, in occupied Palestine, or in Israel, present different life possibilities and realities, which are limited by location, political situations and social elements. This thesis is an attempt to illuminate the difficulties and challenges that Palestinians have had to face as a result of over 50 years of Israeli occupation, and the resilient and innovative ways in which they have dealt with their reality.

**PARADISE LOST, AND LOST AGAIN: LIMITATIONS AND REALITIES OF
PALESTINIAN IDENTITY IN EXILE, OCCUPIED PALESTINE AND ISRAEL**

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Palestinian people, whose struggle for peace and justice continues, and to Raed Samamra, for opening my eyes to a new world of understanding.

Biography

I am a native of the small, but delightful city of Hickory, North Carolina. After completing my undergraduate degree in Journalism with concentrations in news writing and advertising from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I decided to enroll in the English Master of Arts program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

At N.C. State, I took a class with Dr. Larysa Mykyta titled “Islam in the Middle East and South Asia in Women’s Writing,” which sparked my interest in the literature of the Middle East. Because of Dr. Mykyta’s class, I realized that there is a wide world of literature available from the Middle East region to which I had previously not been exposed. Further, Raed Samamra, a native of Palestine, is responsible for my interest in Palestinian literature specifically as a result of learning about his culture and his country’s troubled and contested history.

It is my sincere hope that this thesis can help encourage understanding of the Palestinian struggle throughout history, and that through such awareness, we will move one step further toward peace.

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Introduction

In no other realm can the pain and struggles of the Palestinian people be more vividly portrayed than in its literature. In the novels examined in this study, modes of Palestinian identity, whether in exile, in occupied Palestine, or in Israel, present different life possibilities and realities, which are limited by location, political situations and social elements. Despite differences in background or location, the characters face the consequences of possessing a Palestinian identity, which means coping with the oppression of Israeli occupation and the loss of their homeland. The characters choose to cope with oppression in various ways, some of which include joining the Israeli work force, fleeing Palestine or other Arab countries, or taking up arms against Israel and other Arab nations.

In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said presents the problems that have arisen from the Israeli occupation of Palestine and addresses both the future of Palestine and the issue of Palestinian identity: “Each Palestinian community must struggle to maintain its identity on at least two levels: first, as Palestinian with regard to the historical encounter with Zionism and the precipitous loss of a homeland; second, as Palestinian in the existential setting of day-to-day life, responding to the pressure in the state of residence” (121). In essence, a person may be Palestinian, but Palestine no longer exists as a nation, so the only true homeland possible for the Palestinian is one constructed in the mind. This lost homeland, and the necessity to construct a kind of makeshift homeland in the mind has led to feelings of permanent displacement and hostilities, according to Said:

The pattern begins in Palestine with some real but partly mythologized spot of land, a house, a region, a village, perhaps only an employer, then it moves out to take in the disappearance of a collective national identity (even while remaining inside the old

Palestine), the birth of concrete exile, always, always a head-on...collision with laws designed specifically for the Palestinian, finally some recent sense of revived hope, pride in Palestinian achievements. And there is hostility everywhere. (121)

Similarly, Barbara Parmenter describes how Palestinian writers portray the actual land of Palestine in her book, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature*. In her analysis, she examines various Palestinian authors in terms of their representations of home and exile: “Whereas the Israelis establish their place by transforming nature – draining swamps, irrigating arid lands, and building cities, Palestinian writers cling to the indigenous landscape and its relict features for inspiration and support” (79). Throughout the novels examined in this study, characters make repeated references to their lost homeland and idealize the actual land. These references reveal the characters’ need to preserve their connection to their lost homeland in order to maintain a larger collective national identity as Palestinian. Salma Khadra Jayyusi provides a broad overview of the role of identity throughout the entirety of Palestinian literature in her essay, “Palestinian Identity in Literature”: “Palestinian identity is well-preserved in its pride and convictions, its aspiration to heroism, its resilience, and its rejection of counterviolence, its assumed self-righteousness, even sometimes in its arrogant defiance” (172). Though Jayyusi’s statement provides an accurate generalization of Palestinian identity in literature, her statement is idealized. Not all of the characters in the novels aspire to be heroes, not all reject counterviolence, and not all of them even defy Israeli occupation. These exceptions reveal Palestinian identity to be a more complex issue than the critical generalizations suggest. The novels illustrate that differences in location, political involvement, and social situation shape the characters’ lives and reactions to oppression.

However, to understand the identities portrayed in Palestinian literature and the oppression that the characters withstand is nearly impossible without examining the complex and disputed history of Palestine itself. By examining Palestinian history, the reader can better understand the roots behind a character's struggle in exile, in occupied Palestine, or in Israel, and can therefore gain insight into the character's actions and reactions. Also, knowledge of historical context will provide the reader with an understanding of the characters' deeply ingrained longing for a Palestinian homeland and the sacrifices that some of the Palestinian characters make to attempt to secure such a place for themselves and their families.

Throughout history, the land that gave birth to three major peace-oriented religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, has been the source of more conflict, bloodshed and loss than nearly anywhere else in the world. To call the place Palestine, and not Israel or Zion, is an act of political will in itself, as Said notes in *The Question of Palestine*, since any name for the country represents a particular political doctrine and the land has been altered and contested for centuries (10)¹. From the Jewish perspective, the establishment of Israel is justified as a homeland to escape the centuries of persecution the Jewish people have endured in many countries around the world. The Jews wanted to create a national homeland in Palestine, which according to their beliefs was their place of origin, where they could create a uniquely Jewish identity. Despite these intentions, many Palestinians feel that Israel was, in fact, created at the expense of the Palestinian people, who already inhabited the land that the Jews claimed as their own. Ironically, the persecution that the Jews were escaping in other

¹ Conflicts over Palestine can be traced back at least to Biblical times since Christians, Jews and Muslims all trace their origins to Palestine. As a result, conflicts have flared throughout history, from the Hellenistic period, through the Roman Empire, the Crusades, various wars during the Ottoman Empire, violence that occurred during the British Occupation and the continued violence that accompanied the establishment of Israel in 1948.

parts of the world found new victims in the people of Palestine. Palestinians refer to the establishment of Israel as the *Nakba*, or the “Disaster,” and since then, the lives of many Palestinians and Jews alike have been filled with devastation and tragic loss. During the founding of Israel (1947-1949), approximately 1 million Palestinians were exiled from their homes, never to return, and were forced to relocate in surrounding Arab countries, where they faced continued discrimination, distrust, and brutality. Cheryl Rubenberg addresses the issue of Palestinian nationality by summarizing the history of the Palestinian problem as a result of Israeli occupation: “Not only have Palestinians been denied a normal national existence in the country where they and their ancestors lived for countless generations, but they have also been denied an identity and have been subjected to systematic dehumanization” (5). This devastating struggle for a national identity and a future free of discrimination, hate, and fear by both the Jews and the Arabs can be fully recognized only by examining the modern era of the age-old conflict.

The history of Palestine is as diverse and contested as the land itself. In 1908, during the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was part of Greater Syria and had been under the rule of the Ottomans for nearly 400 years.² The Ottomans governed Syria and Palestine as administrative territories in which they used mainly local residents to run the bureaucracy, and did not seek to colonize or settle the land. Under Ottoman rule, Palestinian territory was divided into two main areas: the *Vilayet*, or province, and the *Sanjak*, or district. In 1888, the Ottomans divided Palestine into three main districts: Jerusalem, Nablus, and Akka. The Ottoman government was based on Islamic law, or Shari’a, within which non-Muslim

² Historical information came from the following sources: *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict*, by Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Dawoud El-Alami, *The Question of Palestine*, by Edward Said and the introductory timeline of Salma Jayyusi’s *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*.

peoples were governed by their own religious law and were fully recognized. This acceptance fostered mainly peaceful co-existence among Arab Muslims, Christians and small Jewish communities that were already established. Small-scale Jewish immigration was tolerated, and even encouraged to boost the economy, and the first Zionist colony was founded near what is known today as Jaffa, Israel, in 1878. Jewish inhabitants constituted approximately 10 percent of the population, and actually bought two-thirds of the land that they settled on from Arabs who lived outside of Palestine, particularly in Beirut.

Theodore Hertzl, one of the main proponents of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was responsible for the first instance of contention over the land in 1896. Hertzl offered the Ottoman Sultan 20 million lire for Palestine, but the Sultan adamantly rejected this offer. However, the Ottoman Empire had begun its decline as a result of economic problems and corruption, and maintaining control in the Middle East became a concern for Britain during World War I. Britain wanted to ensure that the trade routes to its colonies in India would remain secure and open, and therefore began to focus much attention on colonizing the region. In 1908, an opposition group rose up against the Ottoman Empire known as the Young Turks. The Young Turks subsequently deposed the Sultan, took control of Palestine and allied with Germany against Britain and France in World War I. Arab forces joined with Britain to fight against Turkish oppression, and finally drove the Turks out of Palestine, after which British troops led by General Allenby occupied all of Palestine in 1918.

All the while, however, the British had been involved in negotiations with the Zionists, and had committed themselves to help establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This commitment was embodied in the Balfour Declaration, the result of an offer by Arthur James Balfour, British Secretary of State to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild, a British

Zionist seeking national support for the war from British Jews in World War I. The Declaration promised a national home for the Jews in Palestine and, most important, protection of the religious rights of the native “non-Jewish” population. According to Edward Said, the impact of this policy “radically altered the course of history, if not for the whole world, then certainly for the 700,000 Arabs and their descendants whose land was being pronounced upon” (17). From the Palestinian perspective, Dawoud El-Alami, in *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict*, a book that presents two separate historical accounts of Palestine/Israel from both Palestinian and Jewish viewpoints, contends that the injustice of the Declaration stems from a simple question: “On what basis did the British believe that they were entitled to promise to the Zionists a land that belonged to others?” (104). The injustice was all the more blatant since it came at a time when the native population of many colonized nations began the struggle to regain their land. While nationalist movements were being born in many countries, “the most calculated scheme for the artificial settlement of an incoming population was being hatched” (El-Alami 104).

The Balfour Declaration was subsequently adopted as part of the British Mandate in Palestine, and as a result, from 1918 until 1948, the British facilitated widespread Jewish immigration and the establishment of numerous Zionist colonies. These years were filled with uprisings and riots by the Palestinian people, which peaked in 1936 during the three-year Great Rebellion sparked by widespread unemployment and poverty. The British Royal Peel Commission reacted by proposing partition of Palestine into three states: Arab, Jewish, and British-controlled Jerusalem. The majority of Zionists accepted this plan while the Palestinian leaders rejected it and renewed the rebellion. Finally, in 1939 the British defeated

the Arab rebellion. Nearly 1,000 Palestinians were killed and their leaders exiled (El-Alami 122).

In a final effort to reunite the Arabs and Jews, the British government published a plan known as the White Paper in 1922, which proposed unification of Palestinians and Jews in a single state and would have restricted Jewish immigration. Both the Zionists and the Palestinians rejected the plan, but the initiative to restrict immigration sparked deep Zionist resentment toward the British. This resentment culminated in the two most notorious incidents of Jewish terrorism against the British. During the years 1944-1947 Zionist forces began guerilla warfare against the British army, and in 1946 the militant Zionist group Irgun, headed by Menachem Begin, bombed the British headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and hanged two British officers. As a result, in 1947, the British formally announced their plan to withdraw their forces in May 1948 and ceded the land to the United Nations. The UN then voted to partition the land in November of 1947, giving the Zionists 55 percent of the total land area. This plan led to widespread fighting between the Palestinians and the Zionists with 1,974 killed on both sides by January 1948. The Irgun group's terror was not limited to the British, however, and in an unprecedented act of terror against the Palestinians, Begin and his troops carried out a massacre of 254 people in the Palestinian village of Dair Yassin on April 9, 1948 (El-Alami 133-4). Dan Cohn-Sherbok, who writes about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the Jewish perspective in *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict*, presents the massacre as a response to Arab attacks on the Jewish population in Israel near the end of the British Mandate in November 1948 (46).

The fighting continued after the massacre, and on May 14, 1948, the British High Commissioner officially left Palestine. Immediately after the British withdrawal, David Ben-

Gurion proclaimed the independent Jewish state of Israel in Tel Aviv on May 14, and on May 15, United States President Harry Truman was the first world leader to recognize the state of Israel. By the time of the official establishment of Israel, approximately 200 Palestinian villages had been attacked and over 200,000 Palestinians had fled from their homes. An Israeli military force some 97,800 men strong, had razed many villages and replaced them with Jewish settlements. The Israelis justified their attacks because of Palestinian and Arab resistance after their declaration of statehood. By December, there were nearly 1 million Palestinian refugees who fled mostly to surrounding Arab countries such as Jordan and Lebanon (El-Alami 134-35).

With such vast numbers of displaced Palestinians, Israelis had to justify Israel's establishment in order to explain why settlements were built on land where people were already living. Recognizing the injustice, Israeli Professor Israel Shahak stated that nearly 400 Palestinian villages were "destroyed *completely*, with their houses, garden-walls, and even cemeteries and tombstones, so that literally a stone does not remain standing, and visitors are passing and being told that 'it was all desert'" (Said 14). According to Said, whose argument represents the Palestinian viewpoint, the idea that Palestine was unpopulated before the establishment of Israel is a popular myth turned into a Zionist slogan. This myth was promoted primarily by Israel Zangwill, a Zionist supporter of Jewish Nationalism in the late 1800s. Zangwill promoted the motto that Palestine was "a land without people, for a people without land" (Said 9). This Zionist myth has been a justification of Israeli occupation both before and since 1948.

With the vast number of Palestinian refugees, the question arose of exactly where they were to relocate. By December of 1949, some 430,000 Palestinians were living in Red

Cross and United Nations refugee camps in surrounding Arab nations and within Palestine and an additional 250,000 were receiving free food rations. In a relief effort, Jordan officially annexed central Palestine, which later became known as the West Bank and absorbed approximately 600,000 refugees. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was also established to aid such refugees. While refugees were struggling in camps to maintain a meager existence, the seeds of organization and action were brewing. After the Suez War³ of 1956, and a subsequent massacre of 51 Palestinian villagers working in the fields of Kufr Qasim⁴, Yassir Arafat and others were prompted to establish the Palestine Liberation Movement, Fatah, in 1958. Fatah and similar resistance movements gained support from various countries and organizations such as the Arab League.⁵ In 1964, the Arab League established the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to be a representative organization for the Palestinian people.

The next significant event in Palestinian history came in 1967 as a result of the June, or Six-Day, War. Egypt's President Nasser decided to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, which sparked a war between Israel and the Arab nations. The war resulted in Israel's defeat of the Arab forces and its ensuing occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights and the entire West Bank of Palestine, including Jerusalem. On June 19, 1967, Israel agreed to withdraw its forces from part of the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights in exchange for a peace treaty. However, Egyptian forces continued attacks on Israel in order

³ The Suez War occurred when Israel, Britain and France attacked Egypt's Sinai Peninsula after President Jamal Abd al-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal.

⁴ Kufr Qasim is a Northern Palestinian village near the Lebanese border.

⁵ The Arab League was established in 1945 by independent Arab states to strengthen the relations between Arab nations and protect the sovereignty of the countries involved.

to regain full control of the Sinai Peninsula. More than 350,000 refugees fled from the West Bank and Golan Heights at this time.

After Arafat was elected as chair of the PLO in 1969, several years of intense violence followed in both Jordan and Lebanon because of the Palestinian refugees who had fled to these countries after the Six-Day War. In Jordan, King Hussein struggled to maintain control over the Palestinian refugees, whose camps came to resemble a state of their own. As a result, fighting broke out between the Jordanian army and Palestinian commandos, an event known as the Black September civil war. The Jordanians were victorious and expelled the Palestinians in 1971 (El-Alami 150-51).

As a result, the PLO, which was then headquartered in Jordan, was forced to move to Lebanon. Many Palestinian civilians had also relocated to Lebanon and lived there in refugee camps but were not welcomed by the Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia. In August 1976, the Phalangists attacked and massacred the inhabitants of the Tel al-Zaatar and Karantina Palestinian refugee camps. Israel saw this conflict as an opportunity to justify an invasion to crush the PLO headquarters in Beirut and to expel the Palestinians from South Lebanon, many of whom were responsible for the shelling of Israeli settlements. When Ariel Sharon became Israeli defense minister in 1981, he supplied the Phalangists with arms and decided to aid in attacks on Palestinian refugees, some of whom were supported and armed by the PLO. Consequently, Sharon and his forces invaded West Beirut and laid siege to the city for two months. The Palestinian refugees, who had fled from Palestine to Jordan, then from Jordan to Lebanon, faced a third devastating exile. In total, over 300,000 were left homeless, and more than 1,500 Palestinians were killed or wounded. In September 1982, within a 48-hour time span, Phalangists committed another brutal massacre of nearly 2,000

Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila while Israeli troops looked on. The majority of people in the camps were old men, women, and children, and there were no armed Palestinians. The massacre prompted unprecedented international outcry, and in 1983, Sharon was forced out of office. Six months later, Prime Minister Begin resigned from office (El-Alami 157-60).

Even after such devastating losses, Palestinians failed to gain support from the surrounding Arab nations since the latter viewed Palestinian problems as a burden to add to their own hardships and labeled them as troublemakers. The Palestinian situation had reached an all-time low, and most exiled Palestinians were experiencing deep misery in refugee camps. The camps were supposed to be only temporary residences, and the Arab governments of the countries in which the camps were located, such as Lebanon and Jordan, placed restrictions on them to ensure that the Palestinians would live there only briefly. As a result, the governments did not allow camp occupants to work to earn a living, no building materials were allowed into the camps, there was no freedom of travel and any violation of order resulted in quick arrest. Despite such squalid conditions, refugee camps did become a permanent residence for many Palestinians in exile simply because they had nowhere else to go. In addition, in Palestine, which at this time was almost entirely occupied by Israel, an entire generation had been brought up under the occupation and was witness to and the victim of military orders, home demolitions, imprisonment, torture and deportation. Further, new Jewish settlements were being built and new immigrants were pouring into Israel from around the world (El-Alami 161). All the while, Palestinians were experiencing daily violations of human rights that were largely ignored by the world. If leaders or any supporters of the Palestinian resistance spoke out against Israeli occupation, Israel's

supporters often silenced them with accusations of anti-Semitism. Since most Palestinians and their supporters do not want to be identified with anti-Semitism, even today many people are reluctant to speak out against Israeli occupation. As Said argues, "...all liberals and even most 'radicals' have been unable to overcome the Zionist habit of equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism" (59). This low-point of the Palestinian existence is responsible for sparking the most comprehensive Palestinian revolt since 1936, the Intifada.

According to El-Alami, the Intifada of 1987 was a result of "a community materially and morally subjugated," that "realized it had nothing left to lose" (161). The Palestinian people armed themselves with stones and petrol bombs against one of the best resourced armies in the world. El Alami states, "Young boys with stones confronted Israeli soldiers with automatic weapons, like David standing in the face of Goliath" (162). Such images were broadcast worldwide, and raised awareness and questions about the legality of Israeli occupation. In the first three years of the Intifada, the Israeli army killed about 700 Palestinians, and approximately 200-300 Palestinians were accused of collaboration with the Israelis and killed by their fellow Palestinians. By the end of the Intifada, a total of 12,000 Palestinians were wounded and 10,000 Palestinians were imprisoned. In stark contrast, by July 1990, 18 Israelis had been killed and 3,300 wounded. An important political development occurred during the Intifada when Arafat proclaimed the creation of the State of Palestine at the 1988 meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Algeria. At the same time, he acknowledged the right of Israel to exist by accepting United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 (El-Alami 162-63).⁶

⁶ UN Resolution 242 (1967) acknowledges Israel's right to exist, but calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from land occupied in the 1967 conflict, and Resolution 338 (1973) called for a re-instatement of Resolution 242.

Just as things were looking hopeful for peace, the Gulf War erupted, and Arafat made the grave mistake of supporting Saddam Hussein. This position isolated the Palestinians from the rest of the Arab world, whose support they desperately needed. At the same time, however, the Arab masses concluded that the U.S. was exercising double standards: Iraq's violations of UN resolutions were punished by force, while Israel's were ignored. Israel had been violating UN resolutions 237, 242 and 252⁷ by illegally occupying Palestinian territory and annexing lands, but no punitive sanctions or violent actions were imposed upon them (El-Alami 165). This recognition of double standards and subsequent disdain for the U.S. and the Western world continues in the Arab world even today.

The early to mid 1990's brought a period of relative peace and negotiation between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Madrid Conference marked the beginning of this period in 1991, when Palestinian and Israeli leaders met to negotiate their differences. The Palestinian/Israeli problem was discussed by the Palestinian delegation, President Bush and the Israeli Prime Minister Shamir, in addition to broader issues of the entire Middle East region such as water shortages, the environment, arms control and refugees. No side made major gains at the Madrid Conference, other than simply bringing together the leaders from Israel and Palestine, which was an accomplishment in itself (El-Alami 167-68).

The next step toward peace was the meeting in Oslo between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin. A groundbreaking event occurred when on September 9, 1993, Arafat confirmed that the PLO recognized the State of Israel and said that he and his organization were committed to the peace process and renounced terrorist acts. In turn, Rabin responded

⁷ UN Resolution 237 (1967) calls for Israel to allow and facilitate the return of Palestinian refugees who fled their homes during the entirety of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Resolution 252 (1968) states that Israel cannot take control of Jerusalem.

by stating that Israel officially recognized the PLO and that it would continue negotiations with the organization. As a result of the talks, Arafat and Rabin signed the Declaration of Principles and shared a famous handshake on the lawn of the White House. The Declaration gave Palestine limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and control of health, internal security, education, the postal service and tourism. Israel, however, retained control of the land, water, overall security and foreign affairs. In September 1995, Rabin signed the Oslo II agreement, which stated that Israeli forces would begin a withdrawal process from six major West Bank cities. With this step toward peace, an Israeli extremist determined that Rabin had gone too far, and shot and killed him a few months later at a peace rally in Tel Aviv.

After Rabin's assassination, relations between the two sides deteriorated with the election of the right-wing Likud party hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu. Upon his election, Israel rejected Rabin's efforts toward peace, and Palestinian hopes of an independent state were destroyed. Netanyahu allowed the building of new settlements and refused to comply with the Oslo agreements. This stalemate in the peace process lasted until the election of Ehud Barak, a member of the Labor Party, in 1999. In the same year, Egypt hosted negotiations between Arafat and the Prime Minister, and the two parties agreed on the Sharm al-Shaykh agreement that called for staged Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian areas, the release of some Palestinian prisoners, the opening of roads, construction of the Port of Gaza and efforts to boost the economy.

Unfortunately, peace did not last. Despite negotiations between Arafat and Barak, in 2000, the two parties could not come to an agreement over East Jerusalem, which Arafat insisted needed to be the capital of the future Palestinian state. In September, the worst violence in years broke out. When Likud party hardliner Ariel Sharon, who had been

responsible for the massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in the early 1980's, visited the Temple Mount, he sparked a new uprising called the Al Aksa Intifada. The area known as the Temple Mount by the Jews and as Haram al Sharif by Muslims is a holy site for both religions, and Palestinians viewed Sharon's visit with outrage. In his *Washington Post* article, "How It Came to This: A Palestinian's View," Muhanned Tull describes the Palestinian reaction to Sharon's visit: "It was a humiliating show of force and disrespect to our national and religious aspirations, because we consider Sharon to be a war criminal responsible for killing hundreds of innocent Palestinians...." (*Washington Post* Online). Furthermore, Tull states that Palestinians saw the visit as a political message from the Israelis: "Do not dream about Jerusalem," and many Palestinians lost hope that they would someday have an independent state with partial control of Jerusalem.

Since Sharon's visit, violence has continued to escalate, and Sharon was elected Prime Minister in 2001, an event that further incited conflict. In March 2002, Israeli troops invaded Palestinian territories in the West Bank in response to Palestinian suicide bombings, targeting Israeli civilians and soldiers alike. Troops subsequently razed several Palestinian cities and refugee camps in an attempt to destroy the "terrorist infrastructure." Tensions continued to escalate when in early 2002 Arafat was surrounded in Palestinian Authority headquarters in Ramallah for five months while Sharon called for his expulsion from Palestine. Sharon accused Arafat of not doing enough to stop terrorist activity, while Arafat responded that he had no power to prevent such measures, especially while trapped in his headquarters. Israelis have imposed various 24-hour curfews on West Bank cities, allowing residents only brief periods in which to buy food and seek medical help if needed. Since the recent Intifada, violence has continued between the two sides. Violence from the Palestinian

side incites Israeli retaliation, which in turn promotes more Palestinian attacks and vice versa. By September 2002, on the second anniversary of the Intifada, more than 1,500 Palestinians and 550 Israelis had been killed. Violence continues, with more casualties occurring.

Such a grim state of affairs raises questions about whether peace will ever be achieved, and if so, how? These are questions that Said addresses in *The Question of Palestine*. Said indicates that realistically, both Palestinians and Israelis must admit that their lives and destinies are inextricably intertwined, and that such interdependence must be recognized for peace to evolve (49). Also, Said insists that each group is acting out of passionate conviction for its unique cause, but that most of the Western world is more aware of Zionist motives. He believes that “most Americans seem unaware that the Palestinians actually lived in Palestine before Israel came into existence,” and that they therefore do not understand the Palestinian struggle. Said states that “only if...values and history are taken account of, can we begin to see the bases for compromise, settlement, and finally, peace” (118). He further discusses two conditions that would help peace to prevail. First, the Israelis and the world must acknowledge the Palestinians as a people. Prime Minister Begin referred to the Palestinians as the “Arabs of Eretz Israel” and Israel’s “own” blacks (138). Rabin, in turn, referred to them as the “so-called” Palestinians. Said states that “To deny the existence of the Palestinians makes sense epistemologically if one believes that Palestine is still an empty desert waiting to be cured of its neglect” (139). Therefore, until the Palestinians are recognized as a people, the world will remain unaware of the complex nature of their grievances. Secondly, Said notes that many Palestinians feel that a Palestinian state is necessary to “rectify, defend against, and embody the memory of a past history of

suffering, that has seemed to Palestinians to account for Israeli theorizing and for Zionist practice in creating a state apart for the Jews” (175). If a separate state can be established, Said believes that this step would be the most important in working toward peace between the Arabs and Jews. As he indicates, “For peace between neighbor states will mean common borders, regular exchange, mutual understanding,” and in time, the human contact between the two peoples will replace concern over the borders themselves (176). In essence, Said suggests that only two things about the conflict are certain: “The Jews of Israel will remain; the Palestinians will also remain” (235). In light of this reality, Said indicates that the question of Palestine will continue renewing itself until a reckoning occurs between the two sides, and that when the reckoning occurs, it will be to the mutual benefit of both parties (238). By exploring the complexities and violence of Palestinian history, the reader can better understand problems of oppression, identity and displacement as they come to life and are embodied by the characters in Palestinian literature.

To understand the portrayal of Palestinian problems and issues, one must also be aware of the conditions under which Palestinian authors write, whether in occupied Palestine, Israel or in exile. The writing that war-torn Palestine has produced often reflects the writers’ experience and typically reveals how the national struggle has affected the lives of Palestinians. In the introduction to her *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, Salma Jayyusi gives an overview of Palestinian literature and explains the impact of the political situation of Palestine on its writers. While political struggles affect most of the Arab writers throughout the Middle East, politics impose even greater hardships on Palestinian writers than their Arab counterparts. Jayyusi states that, “Palestinian writers have to spend their lives either as exiles in other people’s countries, or, if they have in fact remained in their own

ancestral homeland, either as second-class citizens in Israel proper or lacking any citizenship at all under Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza” (2). Even during times of peace, the realities of Palestinian history haunt the writing of its authors: “Modern Palestinian experience is harsh, unrelenting, and all-penetrating; no Palestinian is free from its grip and no writer can evade it” (3). If Palestinian authors attempt to divorce themselves from politics and history, Jayyusi suggests that they feel a sense of betrayal. For this reason, Palestinian literature leaves little room for escapism, and the luxury of choosing to remember a past free of occupation or memories of a life untainted by oppression is not possible (Jayyusi 3). Despite such challenges, Jayyusi indicates that Palestinian writers have refused to become victims, and “exhibit a resilience that transcends tragedy and overcomes necessity” (3). Even though much of Palestinian literature ends in despair and tragedy, a great deal of it also displays visions of hope, resistance and faith in the triumph of justice. Many themes center on the premature death of heroes, the death of innocent victims, foiled plans of resistance, constant uprooting, injustices and issues of identity (Jayyusi 4).

In addition, Palestinian writers in Israel must face unique difficulties in their profession since Israel imposes political restrictions on them. Some writers have been imprisoned or confined to house arrest, while the work of others is suppressed. Between Arab and Jewish authors, however, literary interaction has not ceased. Arab Palestinian writing is typically rooted in language and time as a result of their long history of inhabiting the land, while much Jewish writing is struggling to cope with the establishment of a new existence, and attempts to rationalize their presence in Israel (Jayyusi 5). Palestinian literature differs greatly depending on whether the authors are still living in occupied Palestine or are in exile. The literature written inside Israel and occupied Palestine is “robust

and clearly innovative,” according to Jayyusi, but the balance of recognition by critics still leans toward the literature written in exile (7). In general, since the Israeli occupation in 1948, Palestinian literature has signified a “...turning point for modern Arabic literature *on a pan-Arab scale*. It represents a fundamental division between a time of relative calm and false confidence and hope, and a time of brutal self-realization [of their present condition], despair, deep loss of faith, anxiety, and general restlessness” (Jayyusi 16).

Among Palestinian writers, women played a minimal role in the publication of literature throughout most of Palestinian history. Though a handful of Palestinian women wrote before the occupation, the resistance to Israeli occupation, and particularly the Intifada in the late 1980’s gave women an unprecedented voice in the realm of public and political affairs. During the first Intifada, women were the first to take to the streets, and throughout the West Bank they carried out loud but non-violent demonstrations for an end to occupation. As a result, women began to write about and record their experiences as never before. Though the differences in the literature written by men and women are not the focus of my research, I found that in the novels I analyzed, the female author Liyana Badr was the only author to make women the main characters in her novel.

Whether male or female, the characters in Palestinian literature bring the ramifications of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict to life. In the literature, the characters’ lives are limited by location, political situations and social elements, whether they are in exile, occupied Palestine or Israel. The novels that portray these complex restrictions are *Men in the Sun*, by Ghassan Kanafani, *A Balcony over the Fakihani* by Liyana Badr, *Wild Thorns* by Sahar Khalifeh and *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist*, by Emile Habiby. The availability of Palestinian authors translated into English is somewhat limited because only

the most prominent authors are usually translated, which include the writers I examined. I chose the four novels based on their settings and consequently the modes of identity that they portray. I felt that by choosing two novels set in exile, *Men in the Sun* and *A Balcony over the Fakihani*, one in occupied Palestine, *Wild Thorns*, and one in Israel, *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist*, I could present a broader and more representative sampling of Palestinian existence and identity. As a result, I chose to organize this thesis according to location. Through their individual portrayals of a unique form of Palestinian existence, or mode of identity, each novel brings to light the constraints of the characters' life resulting from their reality. Chapter One, "Palestinian life in Exile: *Men in the Sun* and *A Balcony over the Fakihani*," is an exploration of the shared plight and individual hardships of Palestinian refugees in exile and the consequences and actions that result from those hardships, both internally and externally. In Chapter Two, "Life in Occupied Palestine: *Wild Thorns*," I examine the conflict that Palestinians in occupied territories face in choosing whether to take action against oppression or to peacefully co-exist, and the multi-dimensional aspects of oppression and shared humanity. Finally, in Chapter Three, "Palestinians Living in Israel: *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist*," I probe the complexities and difficult life dilemmas Palestinians in Israel face and Habiby's presentation of such existence in an ironic, non-realistic style.

Men in the Sun, by Ghassan Kanafani, depicts the mode of Palestinian existence in exile, where refugees lack citizenship of any country and must deal with their rootless reality as a stranger living on another country's land. The novel exposes the common internal and external hardships of permanent exile both through its psychological effects and through the physical actions that result from such constraints. Kanafani refrains from giving detail about

how the characters became refugees or their current way of life in exile in order to expose larger common issues with which most refugees must contend such as legal restrictions, economic frustrations, familial pressures, consequences of political involvement and lack of support from other Arabs. The three main characters the author introduces each represent the hardships of exile at different stages of a male refugee's life – a man nearing the end of life, a young man in the prime of his life and a teenager just beginning. Abu Qais, the first main character, represents the pressures that refugees confront from themselves and from their families resulting from economic frustrations and emotional conflict about their exilic status. Assad, the second character reveals the problem of lack of protection under the laws of the country in which one is exiled, and the life potential that can be undercut by political involvement and tradition. Marwan, the third and youngest character portrays the loss of life possibilities by financial lack and abandonment of familial responsibility in exile. The author makes a general statement about the shared fate of exiles when he brings together the lives of these three characters as they journey to Kuwait for work. He shows that despite individual hardships, refugees face the common lack of alternative, and are therefore forced to make similar decisions, which link their fate. The men all face the same tragic end – dying from overheating in the back of the truck in which they were being illegally smuggled to Kuwait. Kanafani shows the repercussions on Palestinians of the lack of support from other Arabs since the Arab border guards are indirectly responsible for the men's death. The novel indicates that to solve the larger collective problem of exile, other Arab nations must unite with Palestinians to help resist their oppression. *Men in the Sun* also explores the meaning of landscape and its symbolic representation, which helps portray the plight of the Palestinian characters in exile.

Ghassan Kanafani is one of the most widely translated Palestinian authors, and his life proved to be as complex and tragic as much of his writing. He was politically involved as the spokesperson for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the editor of its publication, *Al-Hadaf*. Born in Acre, Palestine, in 1936, he and his family were forced to flee Palestine for Damascus upon the establishment of Israel in 1948, and later lived in exile in Beirut. Kanafani believed that the Palestinian problem would not be solved without the support of other Arab countries. He portrays this belief in *Men in the Sun* by emphasizing the need for Palestinians to speak out to other Arabs for help to fight their oppression. His most poignant literary achievement is believed by critics to be his depiction of the brutal lives of Palestinians in exile, as portrayed in *Men in the Sun*, which he published in 1963. His life came to a tragic end when he was killed by a car bomb in 1972 along with a niece who was with him at the time (Parmenter 54).

Though the characters in Liyana Badr's *A Balcony over the Fakihani* share the same state of exilic existence as those in *Men in the Sun*, this novel illuminates the psychological effects of repeated exile and the uniquely Palestinian predicament of exilic experience repeating over and over again so that there is little hope for taking root. Because of their nearly nomadic existence, the characters experience internal repercussions of the external suffering in exile. Rather than exploring action taken to transcend exilic reality as seen in *Men in the Sun*, Badr exposes how refugees deal with exile mentally, and the psychological repercussions it imposes. Badr also presents life in exile from a feminist perspective by making two of her main characters women, which is a departure from Kanafani's portrayal of only male refugee experiences. In the novel, Badr presents three separate sections in which she tells the stories of two women and one man, throughout their uprooting from Palestine,

Jordan and Beirut. In the first section of the novel, “A Land of Rock and Thyme,” Badr illustrates a refugee’s hardened reaction to death and the struggle with the responsibility of remembering the past in order to effect change in the future. In the second section, “A Balcony over the Fakihani,” we see that life in exile does not allow refugees to separate beauty from tragedy, and the insecurity of exilic life. In the final section, “The Canary and the Sea,” the author demonstrates that discrimination and oppression can lead to involvement in the resistance movement and how the consequences of such involvement make the land of Palestine even more inaccessible. Like Kanafani, Badr calls on other Arab nations to help solve the Palestinian struggle through unification, and not by the discrimination and oppression that she reveals.

Like the characters in her novel, Badr lived an unstable life of exile. Though she was born in Jerusalem in 1950 and raised in Jericho, she moved with her family to Lebanon, Damascus, Tunis, Amman and finally returned to Palestine in 1994. In addition to her work as an author, Badr runs the Cinema department at the Palestinian ministry of culture in Ramallah and for a time, she edited the ministry’s periodical, *Dafater Thaqafiyya* (Arabworldbooks.com).

In contrast to the two previously examined novels, Sahar Khalifeh’s *Wild Thorns* portrays a different mode of Palestinian identity in Israeli occupied territory, and demonstrates how this difference in civil status creates unique financial and social burdens that lead to the dilemma of whether to resist occupation or to co-exist peacefully. As Palestinians living in occupied territory, the characters in *Wild Thorns* are not concerned with taking action to survive exile as in *Men in the Sun* or dealing with tragedy internally as in *A Balcony over the Fakihani*. Instead, because they still live in former Palestine, they see the

effects of occupation first-hand, and struggle with the decision to actually take action against the Israeli occupiers or to accept their dependence on the Israeli economy. Unlike the other two novels, Khalifeh addresses the issue of oppression not only from outside forces, but also from within the Palestinian family. Like Badr, Khalifeh includes feminist elements in her novel. She presents Palestinian women as being doubly oppressed by both the occupation and from the men in their own families. Also, she proposes a possibility of peace through the realization of shared humanity in the interaction of a Palestinian woman with a Jewish woman. Accordingly, Khalifeh deals with the Palestinians and Israelis as individual human beings who are equally affected by the tragedy the conflict creates. The novel also explores the issue of betrayal and the need to justify action, which the characters face both in their decision to work in Israel and in taking action against their oppressors by killing their own people. Khalifeh proposes that in order to end oppression, Palestinians, whether they agree to take jobs in Israel or not, must unite in resistance even through non-violent means in order to transcend their dependence on Israel.

Khalifeh was born in Nablus, Palestine, in 1941, and began writing shortly after the 1967 Israeli invasion of Gaza. She is considered to be the leading Palestinian novelist, and critics of Palestinian literature praise her style as “sensitive, economical and lucid.” She is the most widely translated Palestinian author after Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Salma Jayyusi, in the introduction to her *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* praises Khalifeh’s ability to realistically portray Palestinian life: “No other Palestinian writer of fiction has equaled her capacity to reproduce the rhythms, intonations, vocabulary, and cast of mind of the Palestinian urban classes – menial workers and intellectuals alike...” (42). Khalifeh completed her Masters degree in English literature at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill after divorcing her husband of thirteen years and starting a new phase of her life. Since then, she has taught at the University of Iowa and Bir Zeit University in the West Bank. Khalifeh has had her share of hardships in her writing career, since Israeli authorities confiscated the only copy of her first novel. She published her third novel, *Wild Thorns*, in 1976, which she credits for her fame as a writer and which gave her international literary recognition (Sakakini Cultural Centre).

The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist, by Emile Habiby, differs completely from the three previously discussed novels in that all of the events of the novel do not occur in a realistic sense, and Habiby focuses on the transformation of a man's life within Israel from an ironic and comic standpoint. He allows his character to employ elements of the supernatural to solve his problems. Therefore, instead of portraying the result of the actions that characters take as in *Wild Thorns*, Habiby demonstrates the unsolvable nature of the dilemma that his character faces. He presents and parodies the discrimination and injustice that Palestinians left in Israel after its establishment in 1948 have had to face and the lack of choices that they have had in withstanding their oppression. Because Palestinians in Israel see the actual defeat of their people every day because of the flourishing of Israel, Habiby exposes the fact that many face an unsolvable dilemma of not accepting Israeli oppression, yet not fighting to resist it either. The main character, Saeed, is first introduced as an Israeli informant, but undergoes a transformation which makes him sympathetic to the resistance movement, but he lacks the ability to take action against the oppression he witnesses. Habiby seems to suggest that Palestinians living in Israel must find the strength to take action against their oppressors, or else they will be forever suspended like Saeed in a state of dilemma. *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist* won Habiby his greatest literary acclaim

because, as Salma Jayyusi indicates in the book's introduction, "...on an artistic level, it was highly original, fresh, and, being cast in the straight ironic mode of comic fiction, it was a challenge to the existing modes of fiction in the Arab world" (xii-xiii). The novel is a departure from previously written Palestinian literature in its ironic portrayal of life in Israel. As Edward Said notes about Habiby's work, "[His] novel is unique in Arab literature in that it is consistently ironic, exploiting a marvelously controlled energetic style to depict the peculiarly 'outstanding' and 'invisible' condition of Palestinians inside Israel" (153).

In presenting Palestinian life in Israel, Habiby was able to draw upon events that he experienced first-hand since he actually lived and worked within Israel. Habiby was born in 1919, and died in 1998 at his home in Nazareth. He was a founding member of the Israeli Communist Party and a leading Arab journalist, and he was elected three times to the Israeli Knesset, or Parliament. He also served as editor-in-chief of Israel's *Al-Ittihad* periodical.

The novels I have chosen to examine each make a unique contribution to the understanding of Palestinian realities because of the varied themes and locations they present. Whether struggling to survive in exile, contending with hardships in refugee camps, contemplating taking action against oppression or spying for the enemy, the characters in these novels illuminate the many hardships and difficult decisions that Palestinians have had to face in their everyday lives and throughout history.

Chapter One

Palestinian life in Exile: *Men in the Sun* and *A Balcony over the Fakhani*

In Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* and Liyana Badr's *A Balcony over the Fakhani*, characters must contend with Palestinian life in exile. While *Men in the Sun* presents the desperate actions that result from an unstable exilic life, Badr's novel exposes the psychological consequences of repeated exile, and the effect that a rootless existence has on the minds and lives of refugees.

Specifically, *Men in the Sun* exposes the various common hardships of Palestinian male refugees at different life stages that result from internal turmoil and physical deprivation in exile. Through his three main characters Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan, Kanafani explores issues that construct an exilic existence such as stress on one's self and familial pressures, economic and emotional frustration, legal restrictions and escape from responsibility. The exilic self in Kanafani's novel is represented by a constant lack, which one must constantly struggle to overcome without traditional sources of support from family or other Arabs. This exilic selfhood results from the physical state of dispossession and leads to economic hardship since exilic status prevents working to earn a living. Because of financial privation, a man in exile is unable to fulfill his traditional role of breadwinner for his family, and familial tensions arise as they blame and resent him for their deprivation. Ironically, the family no longer serves as a source of solace for the exilic self, but rather as another hardship that one must struggle to overcome. Instead of helping to ease the feelings of oppression and helplessness, the family in *Men in the Sun* works against the male head of the family by encouraging him to take desperate measures to overcome his lack. To cope

with these repercussions of exile, the characters in *Men in the Sun* attempt to justify the loss of their homeland while facing the emotional turmoil of realizing the legal restrictions that enforce the permanence of exile. The characters in Kanafani's novel illustrate the physical hardships of a single exile and its permanence, as opposed to Badr, who reveals the mental consequences of repeated exile or Khalifeh who explores the different choices that oppression presents. Kanafani's novel is unique in the sense that it exposes a universal absence of choice that men in exile face, and the desperate measures that the men take as a result.

The novel features three main male characters who present individual hardships of exile that link their fate because they lack alternatives to their suffering, and must all take the same action in an attempt to transcend it. Kanafani does not divulge the reasons each man is in exile or details about the men's lives in their exilic state, a silence which one can interpret as an attempt to show the similar tribulations and destiny of all refugees. He joins the individual stories of the three character's lives and reveals the lack of choices that refugees face through the men's decision to take a desperate and dangerous illegal journey to Kuwait to find work. Abu Qais is an older man nearing the end of his life who lives in a refugee camp with his family. He portrays the internal consequences of exile through pressures from himself and his family because of his lack of financial means. He also presents the exilic self struggle with emotional suffering because of his realization of the permanence of exile that will never allow him to return to his homeland. Assad is a young, unmarried man who wants to get a start in life, but instead reveals the consequence of political involvement in exile, which limits his life possibilities by making him a slave to tradition. Finally, Marwan is a teenager who has to support his family because his father abandons them, exposing the

ramification of financial lack that leads refugees to desert their responsibilities for personal gain.

Kanafani first introduces Abu Qais as he is lying prostrate on the ground trying to convince himself that he is back in his home of Palestine, when in reality, he has been in exile for years. He embodies Kanafani's exilic self because his principal emotional struggle stems from the fact legally, his state of exile will not allow his return to Palestine, but he nevertheless longs to be back in his homeland, even though this return is not possible. In essence, Abu Qais' struggle stems from his lack in exile, both mentally and physically. Further, Abu Qais condemns himself for not having accomplished enough to justify his long exile and indicates it has caused him far more loss than gain. He blames himself for his lack of accomplishment while wasting time trying to cope with the reality of his loss: "You have needed ten big hungry years to be convinced that you have lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your whole village. People have been making their own way during these long years, while you have been squatting like an old dog in a miserable hut" (13). By undertaking the journey, Abu Qais will be able to prove to himself and his family that his years spent in exile have yielded the fruitful result of his being able to work in Kuwait, and were worth all of his longing for his homeland.

Even though Abu Qais realizes he must undertake the journey to assuage his emotional turmoil and guilt by proving himself, he also represents the humiliation and indignity that being in exile imposes since, at his age, he must go to such great lengths for probably little reward. Abu Qais remembers one of his childhood teachers from Palestine and states that the latter was fortunate to have died before the Jews took over his village so that he would not have to live in exile. He reveals his reservations about his decision to go to

Kuwait by wondering if his teacher would have been willing to make the same sacrifice, perhaps only to “find a crust of bread” (11). Abu Qais also reveals the two-fold problem of not having accomplished enough personally, but also not being able to support his family who depends on him, which undercuts his dignity as a man. Abu Qais faces familial pressures, as they demand that he undertake the journey for possible financial gain. His family tells him that he is a disgrace because he lives like a beggar even after being in exile ten years. As a result of pressures from himself and from his family and lack of an alternative, he is forced to accept the risks of trying to go to Kuwait.

Abu Qais hopes that by finding work in Kuwait, he can provide a better future for his son, build a small house and buy olive shoots. Kanafani’s decision to use olive shoots as targets of Abu Qais’ aspirations is particularly significant since olive trees, as Barbara Parmenter explains, are symbolically representative: “The villager viewed its [the olive tree’s] fertility as a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. Although peasants did not own the land they tilled, they did own their individual olive trees.... Today the olive tree is a potent symbol of Palestinian nationalism and resistance [in literature]” (23). Thus, Abu Qais reveals the need to compensate for the loss of his homeland and feelings of inadequacy by establishing a possession of his own in a land that he does not possess.

Because of his emotional struggle with the permanence of exile, Abu Qais attempts to escape his reality and compensate for his exilic lack through brief instances of memory and denial. He imagines momentarily that the earth is damp from the rain the day before, but he quickly reminds himself of his reality by telling himself, “No. Yesterday it had not rained. The sky now could rain nothing but heat and dust. Have you forgotten where you are? Have you forgotten?” (9). Abu Qais’ internal dialogue alludes to fragments of his past in Palestine,

and shows the reader his predicament of being trapped in exile while desperately longing for home. Said explains his dilemma: “Abu Qais’ own present, therefore, is an amalgam of disjointed memory with the gathering force of his difficult situation now; he is a refugee with a family, forced to seek employment in a country whose blinding sun signifies the universal indifference to his fate” (151). Even though Abu Qais’ true identity is that of a Palestinian in exile, in his brief moments of denial, he constructs an imaginary identity of being a Palestinian living in his homeland. But because Abu Qais can return home only in his mind, he cannot maintain this desired identity. He is forced to live in the exiled state of existence that he despises, because he has a family to support and his own feelings of inadequacy to answer to in reality, and thus he cannot afford to stay lost in his dreams of his home.

The second main character in the novel is Assad, a young Palestinian who depicts the exilic self through facing the consequences of political involvement. Since he has no protection under the laws of the country in which he is exiled, he must flee to Kuwait to escape charges. Because of this necessity to escape, Assad is denied the chance to start life out on his own, since he has to depend on his future father-in-law to finance his trip. By allowing his future father-in-law to pay, he is committing himself to a traditional arranged marriage, which was agreed upon when his father recited the Fatiha, or “marriage agreement,” when he and his cousin Nada were born on the same day. In return for the payment, his future father-in-law expects him to make a better life for himself by escaping political charges so that he will be suitable to marry his daughter, Nada. Essentially, Assad has no choice, since he will be imprisoned either by authorities for his political involvement or by tradition, and he is left only with the option to undertake the difficult journey.

The third main character undertaking the journey is also the youngest, Marwan. He portrays the exilic self through coping with restrictions that are imposed when refugees abandon responsibility for personal gain because of financial lack in exile. Marwan's brother used to send money from Kuwait to help support the family, but stopped sending it when he got married. As a result, Marwan's father could no longer support the family, and left his wife and their four children for a new wife, Shafiqah. Shafiqah had only one leg, so she had difficulty finding a husband, and as a result, her father offered money and a "concrete roof" home to whoever would marry her. Marwan remembers what his father told him before he left: "...a man wants to be able to settle down in his old age and not find himself obliged to feed half a dozen open mouths" (26). Because of the financial burdens imposed by exile that prevent refugees from even having a decent home or providing for their families, Marwan's father chooses to abandon their family for his own personal gain, disregarding his responsibility as a father and husband.

Because of this abandonment, Marwan has had to give up his lifetime dream of becoming a doctor, and has to go to Kuwait to find easy work to support his family. Living in exile has deprived Marwan not only of making his own choices, but also his youthful innocence, since he has become disillusioned by his father's actions. When Marwan meets the smuggler, Abul Khaizuran, he discusses why he has to take the journey, and asks, "But...why do they do that? Why do they deny...?" (28). He naively cannot understand the actions of men like his father who deny their families a chance of relative happiness and financial security in exchange for their own personal gain. Marwan's naïve questions are quickly answered as he learns on his journey that money comes before family and responsibility. As Abul Khaizuran tells Marwan, exile imposes universal limitations on the

lives of refugees, which some face by choosing personal gain over responsibility: “The first thing you will learn is: money comes first, and then morals” (28).

Marwan further reveals the consequences of abandonment through his father’s attempts at justifying and compensating for his action. When he visits his father and Shafiq in their “concrete-roofed home” before embarking on his journey, Marwan’s father tries to erase the culpability of his actions. He tells his son that he had no choice in the matter, and that he even asked Marwan’s mother to come live with him and Shafiq. After his pathetic attempt to justify his actions, the father tries to compensate for the lack of choice he has left Marwan by giving him money. One can interpret the figure of the father as representative of Palestinians who are hurting themselves. By abandoning their responsibilities, Palestinians in exile are creating more hardships for their families and denying their sons, in this case, a chance to escape from life in a refugee camp. Marwan could have fulfilled his dream of becoming a doctor and might have been able to help his family once he got established. Instead, his destiny has been changed, since he must journey to Kuwait for a job to maintain some sort of meager existence for his family in the camp.

Before the journey to Kuwait commences, Kanafani includes Assad’s troubles in journeying from Jordan to Iraq, where he is supposed to meet the smuggler. Assad encounters rats in the only hotel he can afford, that are “large enough to eat him,” according to the hotel owner. The inclusion of rats indicates the Palestinian view of cities of exile, Parmenter suggests: “The city of exile in Palestinian literature is unrelenting in its ugliness. It is associated with crowds, strangers, vermin, corrupt bureaucrats, and hucksters” (60). Rats are also referred to at another point in Assad’s journey to meet the smuggler when he catches a ride from Western tourists and they joke about the rats in the desert. The tourist’s

comment is a foreboding hint about the outcome of the journey to Kuwait: “This desert is full of rats. What on earth do they eat?” one tourist asks. In reply, the other tourist answers “Rats smaller than them” (21). In a sense, the rats symbolize the Arabs who patrol the desert borders and cause the death of the three smuggled men, or “smaller rats.”

The three men’s lives come together in the second half of the story when they all reach Iraq, meet the same smuggler, Abul Khaizuran and negotiate the financial terms of the journey. Kanafani symbolically comments on the tremendous dependence of Palestinian refugees on other Arabs, and the fact that other Arabs can determine the refugee’s fate through a Quranic reference. When the journey commences, Abul Khaizuran makes a foreshadowing reference to its tragic end by comparing it to the 150-kilometer path that, according to the Quran, Muslims must cross in order to reach heaven. If anyone falls from the path, he goes directly to hell, but if he passes safely paradise awaits (Surah 1)⁸. The only difference, Abul Khaizuran jokes, is that “here the angels are the frontier guards.” In their journey the men must depend on the Arab frontier guards to determine their fate, just as those in heaven depend on angels to help them complete their journey to the afterlife. Ironically, the men’s journey, like the journey of those in heaven, also leads them to the afterlife.

Abul Khaizuran’s character is worth examining, since his name literally means “father of the bamboo stick,” an obvious phallic reference, yet he was hit in the crotch and became impotent while battling the Zionists. Exile has taken both Abul Khaizuran’s home and his manhood, and has reduced him to an overly greedy man trying to compensate for his losses. In his essay, “Living on Borderlines: War and Exile in Selected Works by Ghassan

⁸ Surah 1 of the Quran states, “Show us the straight way. The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who did not go astray.

Kanafani, Fawaz Turki, and Mahmoud Darwish,” Kamal Abdel-Malek explains that Abul Khaizuran “is destined to live with the physical scars of the war in whose aftermath he lost both home and manhood” (181). He also suggests that Kanafani is hinting at the fact that “much like Abul Khaizuran, Arab or Palestinian leadership became impotent in 1948 and after, and yet kept pretending to be aroused by the desire to do battle with Israel” (181). Abul Khaizuran is now impotent not just in a physical sense, but also mentally, because of his inability to deal with his present plight. Like Abu Qais, Abul Khaizuran cannot accept the tragedy that exile has brought to his life, and attempts to escape, not through memory, but through acquiring wealth. Abul Khaizuran sees smuggling the three men to Kuwait as an easy way to continue his compensation, and takes all that the desperate men possess, including their lives.

As the journey commences, the men undergo the torture of riding in the baking lorry through the first border stop, and each man spends time in reflection trying to justify the suffering of the long trip. They each repress the thoughts of what they have given up by having to live in exile and the suffering they are experiencing by taking the journey and focus instead on what they will gain from the trip. In essence, the men are now contemplating their exilic selves by reflecting on how they have dealt with the limited choices that exile has afforded them. Abu Qais reminds himself that with the money he will earn in Kuwait, he will be able to send his son to school and buy olive shoots and a new home, thus transcending his feelings of inadequacy and familial pressures. He asks his fellow exiles “Will you spend the whole of your life eating the flour ration for one kilo of which you sacrifice all your honour at the doors of officials?” (47). Assad remembers his encounter with and subsequent escape from police officials. He is able to accept his imprisonment to

tradition and the consequences of his political involvement by telling himself that his uncle has good intentions for him, since, “Otherwise he would never have collected fifty dinars in the whole of his life” (47). Marwan tells himself, “Shafiqā is an innocent woman.” He deals with his inability to receive an academic education and become a doctor by reassuring himself that he will receive an education in the ways of the world by going to Kuwait: “School teaches nothing. It only teaches laziness. So leave it and plunge into the frying-pan with the rest of humanity” (47).

As the men try to justify their choices by focusing on the future, they are riding through a desolate desert of blazing sun and suffocating heat. Parmenter sees the symbolic function of the desert in the novel as a type of “anti-place” that is the void of the homeland that the men leave behind. She explains that, “The burning desert in *Men in the Sun* is not simply the setting for the story nor a symbolic challenge, but a counterpoint to the land in which the characters once lived and a denial of their very existence” (55). The desert can also be taken to represent the empty void that each man must fill in order to compensate for what they lack because of their exilic state. Despite their efforts to justify the trip and maintain hope, the desert heat, combined with the border guards, proves to be fatal.

As the men climb back into the steaming lorry for their final border crossing, they realize that they can only bear the intense heat for a few short minutes. When Abul Khaizuran goes to give the guards his papers, they begin teasing him about alleged escapades with women in Basra and exhaust the small and precious window of time in which the men in the lorry can survive. When Abul Khaizuran finally gets away and opens the lorry, he discovers the heart-rending sight of the corpses of the men who have all died from the heat. Despite their attempts to evade their life limitations, the men meet the same tragic end, which

inexorably links them as victims of their own exilic destinies and reveals the shared fate of all refugees because of their lack of choices.

The border guards, who are indirectly responsible for the men's death and prevent them from improving their situation in Kuwait, can be seen as symbolically representing the role of the Arab people and nations in the problem of Palestine. Instead of realizing what Abul Khaizuran was doing and trying to help with the plight of refugees, they joked around, and as a result of their non-action, the Palestinians suffered a horrific death. Salma Jayyusi concurs with this interpretation in the introduction to her *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*:

The story ironically emphasizes the miserable experience of Palestinians immediately after 1948: the desperate quest for survival, the unified tragedy of men from all walks of life, and, above all, the stifled spirit of Palestinians who have already experienced such devastating rejection and such exacting conditions within the wider Arab world that, numbed by fear and desperately eager to fulfill their dream in Kuwait, they let precious time slip through their hands. (29)

After finding the corpses, Abul Khaizuran cannot understand why the men did not scream for help, and he asks them, "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?" (56). He receives no reply, except the empty echo from the desert back to him. Kamal Abdel-Malek, in his essay, "Living on Borderlines: War and Exile in Selected Works by Ghassan Kanafani, Fawaz Turki, and Mahmoud Darwish," proposes that this question is a call to the rest of the Palestinians to speak up to the Arab world: "Here Kanafani seems to suggest that Palestinians be called upon to embark on their national struggle in word (shouting) and in deed (knocking).... Otherwise, they are destined to be both physically and

existentially banished outside the borders of their homeland and world attention” (183). One can also suggest that Kanafani is making this claim throughout the entire novel with his repeated depiction of Arabs, and even Palestinians like Abul Khaizuran, who are either unwilling to help the Palestinian exiles or who may help, but take advantage of them in the process. The story serves as a harsh but realistic glimpse of the lack of support the Palestinians encounter in the Arab world, and as a warning that it is the Palestinians’ responsibility to make other Arabs aware of their oppression so that Arabs will unite with them in resistance. Edward Said expresses the same viewpoint in a more general context: “For the Palestinian, the other Arabs are fraternal on one level, and on another they are separated from the Palestinian by an unbridgeable gap” (150). In the novel, this gap cost the men traveling to Kuwait their lives, and the story suggests that only by closing that gap through unifying against oppression will political change and advancement come to the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world. Kanafani seems to suggest that his portrayal of the exilic self, represented by lack of financial and emotional support, will continue to exist without unification from the Arab world.

Like *Men in the Sun*, Liyana Badr’s *A Balcony over the Fakhani* portrays Palestinian life in exile, but this novel also uniquely exposes internal psychological consequences of repeated exile. Such repercussions include desensitization to death and tragedy, difficulty of assuming the burden of remembrance, emotional and spiritual consequences brought about by loss of a homeland and alienation from the actual land of Palestine. The repeated exile in her novel is indicative of the specifically Palestinian experience with exile, since Palestinians have been repeatedly shuffled from one country to another with no actual home in which to return. *A Balcony over the Fakhani* illustrates the internal consequences of exile listed

above shared by Palestinian, and perhaps all refugees. The refugees in this novel have no choice in trying to transcend their realities such as in *Men in the Sun*, when the characters undertake their perilous journey to try to better their life situation. Instead, Badr's refugees must flee to save their lives after brutal camp massacres and bombing attacks. As a result, Badr does not focus on the characters' attempts to transcend their realities through active choice, but rather the way they deal with their existence internally. Badr also portrays exile from a feminine perspective. Since two of the central characters, Yusra and Su'ad, are female, one sees the effects and repercussion of exile through the eyes of a female, rather than male, as Kanafani revealed. Women in Badr's novel experience more psychological consequences of exile, since they are not directly involved in resistance, but instead observe as the men around them are physically wounded or killed. Unlike the men in *Men in the Sun*, the women do not take physical action to change their exilic lives; rather they deal with the effects of oppression emotionally and mentally. Some of the ways in which women in the novel deal with the tragedy they witness include distancing themselves from horrifying scenes of death around them by not becoming fully involved emotionally and choosing to deal with their difficult past through remembering and acknowledging it.

The first section, "A Land of Rock and Thyme," is the story of a young girl, Yusra, who has fled from one refugee camp to another and therefore has witnessed horrifying massacres and death to the point that she becomes hardened to tragedy and death. As a result of her rootless existence, Yusra learns to deal with her tragic life by acknowledging her responsibility to remember her past, which preserves the history of Palestinian suffering. The story opens with Yusra, pregnant with her late husband's child, visiting his grave in the Martyr's cemetery. She begins by telling the story of her childhood in Tel al-Zaatar, a

Christian Phalangist-besieged Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. In exile, the need for basic necessities is so dire that Yusra remembers having to wait for days at a time to get water from the one well in the camp until the soldiers would open fire and scatter everyone. A defining moment in her life occurs when she is trying to get water for the family while her father has been shot and lies dying at their home. Her mother, however, refuses to send for her because she would have had to abandon her place in the water line. As shown above, basic necessities and the need for survival have replaced all other considerations. Death becomes an integral part of life for the camp residents. For example, Yusra remembers seeing a boy standing in a doorway who is anticipating his own death, “When I die, put me in this coffin,” he says, since the camp residents make coffins from cupboard doors. In the next instant, as the young man is measuring himself against the door, he is hit in the back by a piece of shrapnel that kills him on the spot. Yusra comments, “It was like a dream. You’d talk to someone and an hour or two later you’d hear they were dead” (11). Marilyn Raschka remarks on this commonality of death in her article, “A Balcony over the Fakihani”: “Death follows life and life follows death in these stories. Young brides become widows. Wives become widowed mothers. Sons are made martyrs in an afternoon” (72).

Death is specifically and brutally linked to national identity. When Yusra and her family flee the camp after the Phalangist raid, they walk along a highway lined with Phalangist soldiers on either side. Yusra recalls walking beside a young man who the soldiers grab by the shoulder. The man remarked “For God’s sake,” and the soldiers replied, “Which God?” and shot him instantly, while the other refugees had to keep walking past stoically. Yusra also tells the story of her brother, Jamal, who is excited to leave the camp because they are headed toward the sea, which he loves. The other refugees warn him before

he leaves to state that his nationality is Lebanese, if asked. His pride, however, keeps him from replying with anything but that he is Palestinian. The result: “A bullet to the head, just like that,” Yusra casually remarks (14). Such remarks reveal both the desperation to maintain a Palestinian identity and the psychological effect that witnessing such events has had on Yusra through her matter-of-fact statement.

The story becomes more tragic as Yusra continues to describe witnessing countless Palestinian refugee deaths as part of her daily existence. A particularly disturbing scene occurs when she arrives at a museum that the refugees have turned into a makeshift gathering place to find one another after being separated in the flight. Yusra describes a slaughter in a room of the museum packed with young Palestinians inside. She says she sees a Phalangist “woman dressed in deepest black, more than forty years old” who is hitting a Palestinian man over the head with a piece of wood with a nail on the end of it. Another Phalangist woman beside her says, “I want to pick out the handsomest young men and kill them.” Such gruesome scenes of murder give the reader a sense of the horrifying events that refugees like Yusra have to witness because of their state of exile.

As a result of the above-described torments they experience in exile, all of the refugees in the novel are tragically desensitized to horrific events, which Badr portrays through her off-hand and understated style. Marilyn Raschka comments on Badr’s style in her review of the novel in the *Washington Report On Middle East Affairs*, “The violence of everyday life fills page after page. She presents the brutality of those times in short single-paragraph episodes devoid of blame or accusation. Her main characters are young and have lived with violence all their lives. There is no surprise or fanfare” (71). Yusra must accept

death as an integral part of her daily life, and must preserve her sanity by not investing emotionally with each brutal instance of death she witnesses.

After portraying such horrible scenes of death and murder, the author raises the issue of dealing with such oppression through remembering and memory, and lack thereof. Even though Yusra appears to somewhat casually accept the widespread death that she witnesses, she hints that she only represses her shock and mourning when she recalls her father and his death. She begins to let herself painfully remember her mother's accounts of her father's last moments alive while she had to wait for the family's water at the pump, but then stops herself by saying, "I remember...No" (19). She refuses to let herself evoke the painful memory of his death, and the fact that her family's miserable state in exile kept her from saying goodbye to him. The issue of remembering surfaces again when Yusra describes her first meeting with her husband, Ahmed. He had just returned from studying in India, and he had drawn a miniature map of Palestine on his diary and wrote "Remember. This must be turned into a reality" (21). Remembering, or choosing not to remember creates a form of dealing with the past and acknowledging reality for the characters. While Yusra chooses not to remember, perhaps for her own sanity, Ahmed warns that if Palestinians do not remember, their dreams of a homeland will never become a reality. In this sense, remembering becomes a responsibility that the Palestinians must uphold to be able to accept the tragedy of their past and keep alive the dreams of a future homeland. Ahmed illustrates this linkage between remembering and a hope for return when he keeps the memory of his home alive by describing it to Yusra: "'We want to build one or two more rooms,' he said. 'For the two of us.' 'There's an orchard here.' He'd draw a plan of his town as he spoke, sketching it out on paper or dust or sand. He hoped to go back; and kept on telling me the 1980s would see us

return” (22). Though Yusra has not succumbed to grief and mourning with the other deaths she has witnessed, Ahmed’s death forces her to accept the responsibility of remembering as grief finally overpowers her. She remembers the exact moment he was killed as “This happened during the day on Thursday, January 29, 1981. In the first month of the year. At two o’clock in the afternoon” (24). Unlike the other incidents of death for which Yusra does not give particular times and specific dates, the death of Ahmed profoundly brands itself into her consciousness at the very moment she learns of it, and from then on, she takes on Ahmed’s responsibility of remembering. As she lay in bed mourning, Yusra exclaims, “Don’t talk to me about forgetting!” and repeats the phrase over again as she gazes at Ahmed’s photo (26). A national pride and sense of serenity emerges next as she remembers the child she is carrying. Even though the child would not be born in Palestine, Yusra proclaims, “It would be Palestinian, from its first moment in the world,” and the struggle would continue into a new generation (25). Through bringing a new Palestinian life into the world, Yusra is finding a way to circumvent the lack of choice that exile has afforded her. By passing their hopes and memories on to a new generation, she is helping to turn Ahmed’s drawing of a Palestinian homeland into a reality. At the end of this section of the novel, Yusra remembers Ahmed’s explanation for his taking of pictures: “I’ve taken them to embody phases of life: phases of darkness, and phases of light. There are times of bitterness and there will be times of beauty and tenderness and light. Those times will come” (29). This explanation exhibits a certain amount of hope for a better future. Through taking on Ahmed’s strong belief in the power of remembering, Yusra has faced her past and reality, made peace with his death and expressed hope for better times to come.

In the second section of the novel, “A Balcony over the Fakihani,” Badr reveals the mental repercussions of exile on women through Su’ad, an exiled Palestinian woman who demonstrates the inability to separate beauty from tragedy and the insecurity of exilic life. Su’ad has been shuffled from place to place. First, she leaves her home in Amman for Beirut to marry Umar, a member of the Palestinian resistance movement. With him she has to move to Damascus and finally ends up back in Beirut on their “Balcony over the Fakihani” at the end of the story. The story begins with Su’ad talking about a carpet plant growing on her balcony, which one can interpret as symbolic of the Palestinian people in exile because of her reaction to its growth and its color: “Why did my heart become troubled when the carpet plant grew so big?” as if to indicate that the growing number of Palestinian exiles in other countries is troubling to her. She describes the plant as having a “green surface,” with “red spots the color of blood,” which she relates to “the memory of the nightmare I had: white dust and smoke, and, stretched out on the ground, a dead man I didn’t know, his body gashed and spattered with blood” (34). Through her description we see the mental effects of a life of exile that distort normal interpretations of beauty to the point that a seemingly innocent observation of a flourishing carpet plant into a gruesome dream of death.

Like Yusra in “A Land of Rock and Thyme,” Su’ad illustrates the need for Palestinians to preserve their history and identity through memory. Su’ad, unlike Yusra has no reservation about remembering her lost home. Instead of remembering her original lost homeland of Palestine, however, she fondly reminisces about her home in Amman that she fled after Black September. She therefore establishes a true identity of exile, since she has been exiled from Palestine so long that she dreams of returning to Amman instead, which seems to be what she defines as home. Su’ad describes how she and a friend whom she

knew from Jordan would reminisce: “We’d remember Amman, losing ourselves in our recollections; we hadn’t been back there for many years, since Black September” (34). In this way, Palestinian national identity is in danger of being lost. Su’ad has lived as a refugee for so long that she preserves her life in Amman through her memory rather than her actual homeland, Palestine.

Through Su’ad’s description of her life in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, Badr demonstrates refugees’ attempts mentally cope with exile by denying the reality of its permanence. Su’ad tells of the refusal of the Palestinians who had lived there for some time to accept their exile: “People would greet one another in the morning and evening and would talk without any kind of ceremony or introduction, in a Palestinian accent as authentic as if they’d arrived in Beirut just the day before; and their homes were fitted out in a makeshift way, as if they were going to set off again the next morning” (44). As with real-life Palestinians in refugee camps, the camps were, in fact, designed only to be a temporary existence, even if that did not turn out to be the case in reality. Parmenter discusses the significance of the Palestinian refugee camp and further explains the refugees’ feelings toward the camp: “Despite its impermanence, poor housing, and unsanitary conditions, the refugee camp has become a living symbol of struggle.... The Palestinians who live in the camps have shaped them into their own place.... Re-creating certain aspects of home imbues the camp with form and meaning otherwise absent in exile” (66). Even with their denial and attempts to create a stable life in exile, the refugees are reminded of their rootless existence as Su’ad proceeds to tell of the attack and massacre of Shatila camp and her flight from it. The most poignant moment in the aftermath of the attack occurs when Su’ad notices a white hair on her baby’s head: “I couldn’t believe a baby’s hair could turn white,” she said (46).

The fact that even the baby's hair turned white reveals the extent of the tragedy, and proves that even the smallest of refugees cannot escape suffering and shock.

After the attack, Su'ad and Umar move to Damascus, where she is living when she again reminisces about her life in Amman, and shows a common link between exiles. She describes her taxi being searched at a border, and how a man sharing the cab asks Su'ad to conceal his gun so he can avoid being arrested. She tells of the gratitude the man displayed: "I remember with total clarity his entreating gaze and the flash of gratitude that appeared in his black eyes" (47). Su'ad demonstrates that she remembers the unspoken common bond of Palestinian refugees, and the formation of a collective national identity. This collective identity is strengthened through helping one another cope with exile's constraints, or in this case, concealing evidence of involvement in the resistance movement.

When Umar, Su'ad's husband has to go to an unnamed, but seemingly European, country for treatment of an unknown illness, he mirrors the attempt of the refugees in the Shatila camp to deny their reality by creating a temporary alternate existence. After running numerous tests on Umar, the doctor indicates that she can find nothing wrong with him that she can identify, only an unknown infection that the Europeans do not have in their country. Umar describes how he told the doctor: "I was from the Middle East, I told her jokingly, and that explained everything" (56). One can interpret Umar's disease as representing the "disease" of Palestinian oppression in exile that he is trying to fight. The fact that the doctor does not recognize the disease illustrates the ignorance and unwillingness of other nations to participate in the Palestinian struggle.

During his stay at the hospital, Umar deals with his exile through mentally erasing his former life. He creates a kind of new existence for himself by falling in love with his doctor,

Louisa. Umar describes his relationship with Louisa and the time he spent with her as blissfully happy. He essentially creates a temporary utopian escape from the troubles that await him back home by completely disregarding the fact that he has a wife and family. Upon his eventual return, however, he is jolted back into reality as he describes his flight into Beirut: "I looked at the old, drab buildings as if seeing them for the first time. I don't know why people, when they're abroad, think Beirut's the most beautiful place in the world; it's not like that at all" (61). He also describes the destruction that surrounds him as opposed to the beautiful life that he left behind with Louisa: "The disfigurements on its face had increased: from the bombing of buildings, from the garbage piled up by the sides of the streets, and from the claustrophobic press of people and vehicles" (61). As with the negative, dirty description of the Arab city in *Men in the Sun*, this description corresponds with Parmenter's theory that cities of exile are often described as filthy places because they represent exile itself.

Umar's return brings about an internal struggle over whether to take action against the oppressing forces or not, even though he never acts upon it. When Umar discovers that his friend, Jamal, was killed while he was away for treatment, he becomes upset and exclaims, "What have we really gained when we give up the struggle and bow our heads?" (62). Proving his commitment to his family and fellow Palestinians, Umar leaves his idealized life with Louisa to fight against oppression by the Lebanese and the Israelis in Beirut. A neighbor of Su'ad and Umar, Salwa, expresses her disdain for Palestinians who abandon their struggle and forget their past. Salwa tells Su'ad and Umar about a recent trip to the Gulf where she met Palestinians and other Arabs living there whose only concern was their annual pay raise and vacation. She also encountered Palestinians who opposed the

resistance movement and “complain[ed] about the decision to mobilize” (66-67). This problem of non-action by other Arab nations and Palestinians living in those nations mirrors the lack of support that was also seen in *Men in the Sun*. As Salwa indicates, instead of looking at the larger source of their oppression and exile, many Arabs, and even Palestinians in exile, are concerned only with their own day-to-day lives and do not want to take the risk of involvement. Su’ad reacts to this position by stating that, ironically, the Palestinians who complain about the resistance movement will be the first ones to “skip back to Palestine when it’s liberated” (67).

In addition to making women main characters in her novel, Badr presents them as having an active role in the resistance movement. Encouraging Su’ad’s commitment, Umar insists that even women have a responsibility to fight for resistance by training for mobilization. In a sense, the struggles of exile liberate women by giving them an opportunity to transcend their traditional roles. Women were able to step significantly outside the typical roles of Arab women inside the home, and were also able to interact with men, which is another break from tradition. Umar describes their involvement: “They used to come back from their training sessions covered with dirt and sand – we couldn’t believe our eyes. And then they’d take off their uniforms and their boots, and try to show us they knew more about military things than we did” (70). As a result, women turned what would have been the victimization of exile into an opportunity to escape tradition, another form of oppression in their lives. Though women in exile may long to return to their homeland geographically, one positive aspect of exile is that it helps women escape the constraints of their traditional roles back home. Such talk of action and involvement raises Umar’s spirits as he exclaims, “We’re here, we’re still here! The world hasn’t come to an end yet!” (70). Their

conversation is then suddenly interrupted by loud bombing, and sadly, the world for Umar does end as he is killed by bombs dropped by the Israeli air force as they attack Beirut.

In her description of the bombing Badr brilliantly demonstrates the insecurity that exiles contend with since their everyday lives are constantly at risk of being interrupted by such gruesome surprises. In the middle of Su'ad, Salwa and Umar's seemingly ordinary conversation, Badr suddenly interrupts the narrative with short, abrupt one-line phrases:

“The noise! Something extraordinary.

Suddenly,

It shrieks into the sky, whizzes around us.

Salwa comes running. Her face is pale.

I calm her. The sound barrier broken perhaps,

It's happened before.

Then,

Boom!.... (71)

This choppy narrative illustrates Su'ad's thought pattern at the very moment that she is facing the reality of the attack, and gives the reader a better understanding of the insecurity of exiles that sudden events can forever alter their lives. Salwa is the one who first discovers that Umar has been killed in the attack, and that their building has been destroyed. Since his enemy kills him, Umar is immortalized as a martyr, and therefore his identity changes from a Palestinian in exile to a Palestinian who can return to his homeland. Salwa describes this phenomenon of immortalization: “Umar the Martyr.... The martyr is dead, long live the martyr, this was no mere death, martyrs never die” (76). Umar returns to his homeland in a coffin draped in a Palestinian flag, the final symbol of his identity as a Palestinian martyr.

After Umar's death, Su'ad becomes aware that the looming presence of death has so drastically affected her life that it spoils even normally beautiful surroundings. Su'ad cannot accept beauty without it reminding her of her tragic exilic life, just as in the beginning of her narrative when she associates the carpet plant on her balcony with a bloodied green field. She is unable to escape being constantly reminded of death as she describes walking by the sea, and the images that the smell of the sea evokes. She characterizes the sea as having "a smell that was like the man you love: beads of sweat and lemon flowers and the onset of a rosy twilight" (85). But at the same time, she indicates that she can experience the sea only as having the "smell of human bodies." For her, "The sea began to take on the smell of a speeding ambulance with its wailing siren and its red lights flashing on and off" (85). This juxtaposition of beauty and tragedy again reflects the events that construct the reality of the exiled characters. Though the exiled characters attempt to create a new life for themselves that is filled with brief moments of beauty and normalcy, the threat of tragedy is always present and can interrupt their lives at any moment, as seen with the surprise bombing attack. Finally, however, Su'ad expresses her acceptance of her fate, "I breathed it in [the smell of the sea], and I wasn't afraid" (85). In her life of exile Su'ad has experienced times of beauty and times of tragedy, and she accepts both as realities and is not afraid to experience those moments again in the future.

In the final section of the book, "The Canary and the Sea," Abu Husain al-Shuwaiki, a Palestinian soldier in exile, illustrates the psychological effect of discrimination and oppression by political restrictions and other Arabs while in exile. The injustice that Abu Husain experiences leads him to become a resistance fighter. This involvement brings internal and external repercussions to Abu Husain through severe physical injury and mental

anguish as he exposes the inaccessibility that refugees feel toward the land of Palestine. He begins his narrative by describing his lost birthplace, Shuwaika, Palestine, and indicating that even though he recognizes that he is “from” Shuwaika, he has been there only twice in his life. This moment exemplifies what Edward Said defined as the formation of a Palestinian identity in exile through “some real but partly mythologized” memory of a lost homeland. This mythical element is clearly evident in Abu Husain’s description of Shuwaika:

“Shuwaika, my home village, is an expanse of green at the end of a mountain range, with lemon and orange groves and silver sunbeams on the olive leaves, and if you stand on the roof of our house you can see the sea and the Natanya district – alas for Natanya, which I can no longer visit” (90). Abu Husain’s idealized images of his lost “lemon and orange groves” and “silver sunbeams” on his olive trees are suddenly interrupted by the thought of Natanya, which he is forbidden to visit because of Israeli-established lines of division.

Such divisions would destructively separate families, keeping them just miles apart for years. Many families, like Abu Husain’s, were kept apart by borders for so long that they sometimes failed to recognize one another. Abu Husain tells how his uncle became separated for eleven years from his mother, and his mother failed to recognize him when she finally saw him from the other side of the separation gate. His grandmother also experienced similar tragedy since she died as a refugee and had gotten to see her son only one time after being exiled. Being plagued by such bitter memories of his family’s needless separation and his lost homeland is partly what prompts Abu Husain’s decision to be a resistance fighter.

Abu Husain’s exile also exposes the discrimination that many Palestinian refugees suffer in their country of exile. Abu Husain moves to Lebanon as a boy with his family during the 1948 exodus and faces oppression from both the Lebanese people and Lebanese

authorities throughout his life. First, he tells of his marriage proposal to a Lebanese girl whose family initially turns him down because he is Palestinian, but ends up accepting after they discover a distant relationship with his family. He then explains some of the prejudices behind the family's refusal as he comments on the larger significance of what being Palestinian in Lebanon meant: "I soon came to feel that the word Palestinian had a different meaning in Lebanon, conjuring up, immediately, the army, the authority and the secret police" (95). For example, if a Palestinian woman spilled water outside her tent in a refugee camp, she would be fined 25 Lebanese pounds, because "how could a woman, any woman, be permitted to soil the fair, verdant face of Lebanon by spilling filthy washing water on it?" (96). He also faces harassment and unequal treatment while working in an East Beirut factory. He remembers his boss saying, "You're refugees, and yet you try and tell us how to do things. This is our country. You shouldn't be here at all." His boss also used to call the Palestinian workers "the Palestinians," with a "special ring" which upset Abu Husain (96). Abu Husain's boss seems to resent the Palestinians in a similar way, but on a much smaller scale, similar to the way in which the Palestinians resent the Israeli settlers and refugees who come to Israel. His statement claiming that Lebanon is his country and that the Palestinians should not be there "at all" reveals the fact that he sees the Palestinians as a nuisance that infringes on his rights as a Lebanese citizen. What he fails to realize, however, is that Abu Husain is dealing with the circumstances of his exile in the only way he knows how, by starting a new life in another country, and if he had the choice he would return to his own country.

Because of this discrimination and injustice, Abu Husain feels compelled to fight to defend the existence of the Palestinian people: "For them the clashes sprang from a desire to

dominate, for us it spelt defense of our very existence” (97). While fighting the Lebanese Phalangists and the Israelis in Lebanon, he gets shot once in the head and twice in the hand. Even while receiving treatment for his injuries, he must contend with brutality as a result of his identity as an exiled Palestinian. He asks a soldier to put a blanket around his head to stop the bleeding, but the soldier instead steps on his head with his boot, insults his sister and calls him a pimp. Abu Husain, even nearly fatally injured, still defiantly responds on behalf of his people by saying, “Our heads weren’t meant to be trampled on” (117). He retains his commitment to fight for Palestinian survival, which reveals his determination to resist his oppressors at all costs. The encounter with the Israeli soldiers at the hospital portrays them as brutal and heartless since they prey on a wounded and nearly dying man. While in the hospital, the doctors gather around him and ask, “Do you like the Jews?” and he responds by explaining that he does not hate the Jews simply because they are Jewish, but instead he hates the fact that they are occupying his country and have taken the land that is rightfully his. In response to his last statement, one of the doctors jumps up and punches him. One can interpret this absurd action as indicative of the relentless attempts of the Israelis to continue to show their dominance over the Palestinians, even after they have already caused unbearable suffering.

After being released from the hospital, Abu Husain suffers the most difficult mental repercussion of his involvement because he experiences the inaccessibility of the land of Palestine. He is delighted to be taken to Israel for interrogation about his involvement in the resistance movement yet he knows he will be forced to leave again. Ironically, the only time he is able to return to his homeland is to divulge information that can result only in his continued exile with even less of a chance of ever returning to Palestine. The very fact that

Abu Husain is allowed back into his homeland, but then must leave again is seemingly crueller than never allowing him to return at all. After the brutal interrogation, he gazes out of the bus window taking him back into exile and tries to savor every last glimpse of his homeland before leaving again. He describes seeing the “abandoned Arab houses with the names of their owners still on the doors,” and weeps along with all the other prisoners on the bus as they see remnants of their people’s former existence. He laments the inaccessibility of the land, which is so close, yet still so far from his possession. This inaccessibility extends to his life of exile in Lebanon, which is geographically so close to his former home, yet a world away because of exile.

Throughout the novel, each character presents unique repercussions of exile, which are mostly internal, but stem from external suffering and witnessing of tragedy. Badr seems to propose, especially in the final section, that this suffering could be relieved with the help of the Arab nations in which the Palestinians are exiled. Instead of discriminating and making life harder for the Palestinian exiles in their country, the Arab nations could be unifying with the Palestinians to help solve a two-fold problem: the problem of exiles in the Arab countries and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

Chapter Two

Life in Occupied Palestine: *Wild Thorns*

Differing from the previous two novels, *Wild Thorns*, by Sahar Khalifeh, presents Palestinian life within Palestinian territory occupied by Israel. Because of their unique civil status, Palestinians in occupied territory are forced to depend on the Israeli economy for financial survival since Israeli jobs are significantly better paying and Israeli goods are much cheaper than Arab ones. This dependence often fosters feelings of betrayal in Palestinians because by allowing themselves to depend on the Israeli economy, they are in effect accepting occupation and turning their backs on the resistance movement for individual survival. The only alternative is to take action and fight oppression, which also raises the issue of betrayal, since to take action, in this novel at least, means killing fellow Palestinians. Khalifeh skillfully exhibits this problem through the tension that arises between a Palestinian who has been out of the country and resents the dependence on the Israeli economy and his cousin who has lived in the occupied territory and realizes the lack of a viable alternative.

Khalifeh uniquely presents the conflict as multi-dimensional in that she exposes oppression not just by the Israelis, but also from within the patriarchal structure of Palestinian families. The patriarchal structure of the Palestinian family is unique since men are denied the opportunity in many instances to prove themselves outside the home through traditional means such as accomplishment in education or the acquisition of wealth. Because they cannot fulfill their conventional male role by sufficiently supporting their families, men in some cases must compensate by restricting the choices of women, whom they are able to control. In *Wild Thorns*, Khalifeh illustrates this need to prove dominance through the family

patriarch's attempt to force his daughter, Nuwar, to marry a man whom he chooses, and her inability to voice her opposition to his choice. Like Badr, Khalifeh includes feminist elements in her writing, such as the double oppression of women, and she reveals that women can transcend such oppression through unification with other women. Khalifeh seems to suggest that the seeds of peace lie in understanding of shared humanity, which she illustrates in the interaction between a Jewish woman and a Palestinian woman. Because women from each side of the conflict share the realization of their common plight, one can propose that this bond between women will be the means in which they can overcome both political and patriarchal oppression. If women can bring about peace, they can restore an outlet in which men can fulfill their need to maintain dignity by supporting their families, thereby eliminating the need to prove dominance over women in the home.

The main character of *Wild Thorns* is Usama, a young Palestinian man who returns to Palestine after working in the Gulf as a translator. Usama is representative of Palestinians who are committed to violent action because, as Khalifeh indicates, they do not understand the need to depend on Israeli economy. He is a supporter of the Palestinian resistance movement against the Israelis and returns to Palestine with plans to take action against Israeli oppression. Upon his return, Usama encounters Israeli oppression at a checkpoint on the Israeli border – the first time he had experienced the effects of occupation since he left Palestine years ago. The narrative records the somewhat humorous and ridiculous conversation between the border guard and Usama as the guard repeatedly asks him the same questions, just phrased in different ways. While Usama defiantly uses the Arab names of Palestinian towns, the guard counters him by emphasizing the Israeli re-naming of the towns. Usama describes the town where his mother moved, Nablus, and the guard keeps replying

using the Hebrew word that the Israelis used to rename it, Shekem, as Usama repeats the original Arab name. “My mother moved to Nablus,” Usama states. “Why did your mother move to Shekem?” the guard replies. “She likes Nablus,” Usama retorts. “Why does she like Shekem?” the guard answers (13). Such conversation reveals both the absurdity of the stubbornness that continues to fuel the conflict, and the tragic loss of Palestinian history through Israeli attempts to rename and erase the past.

As Usama travels into Palestine, he remembers his idealized picture of his home while living in the Gulf much in the same way that Abu Husain remembers his homeland in *A Balcony over the Fakihani*. Usama recalls, “...those idyllic green meadows, the clear waterfall, beneath the towering walnut trees,” but then indicates that his vision had reduced the West Bank into the size of a “genie’s magic bottle,” and that he is now a prisoner in that bottle (19). Essentially, Usama has vowed action against the Israelis, and is a prisoner to that commitment, which ultimately shapes his destiny. He is forced by his own will to carry out his mission, even at the expense of his own life and the lives of his family and friends, who may be injured or killed in the attack.

When Usama reaches his home, he is immediately bombarded with appalling instances of his people’s corruption by Israel, as he sees it, which fuels his desire to take action. He notices that the taxi driver smokes Israeli cigarettes, and the driver tells him that he also eats Israeli rice, tahina and sugar because they are cheaper. Because he has been away, Usama does not understand the change in his people and wonders what happened to their will to resist. He cannot believe that his own people, whom he has glorified as willing to resist occupation at any cost, have, in his eyes, given up and accepted the occupation. The driver re-enforces Usama’s disappointment as he reveals his view that resistance is futile and

can yield no improvement in their situation. The driver tells a joke about a kid standing on a crate shouting in vain against the oppression that mirrors this feeling about the futility of resistance: “I resist, I stand firm, on my crate of lemons!” (21). The driver has lived with occupation, and sees resistance as making no more change than the boy standing and shouting on a box of fruit. Usama returned to Palestine with a vision of a unified people who were angry and would jump at the chance to take action against the Israelis. His vision of a Palestinian uprising is shattered in the face of the hopelessness, submission and indifference that he sees in the people upon his return.

Usama then meets his cousin, Adil, who represents the other side of the dilemma Palestinians in occupied territory must face. Adil has seen how Palestinians struggled in the first days of occupation, and the lack of alternative in taking Israeli jobs and using Israeli goods. When Usama meets him in the street, he asks Adil what has happened to the Palestinians, who, when he left for the Gulf were fighting for their rights against the Israelis. He tells Adil of his shock at seeing what he interprets as the corruption of Western culture and greed that has overtaken the Palestinians: “They’ve stuffed you full and made you greedy. They’ve absorbed you. And I see no sign of shame in your eyes” (27). Usama is so upset at the changed lives of the Palestinians in the town that he disassociates himself from them, which will later allow him to justify taking action against the Israelis, even if he kills his own people in the process. He sees those who depend on cheaper Israeli goods and take higher-paying Israeli jobs as hopeless and as traitors to the Palestinian cause, and thus, in his eyes, their lives become more expendable. He further questions Adil, “Is this an occupation or disintegration?” which reveals Usama’s view that to take action is to benefit the collective whole (28). If action is not taken, the alternative only benefits the individual, and not the

community, which will disintegrate without resistance. Usama blames Adil and other Palestinians who have taken jobs in Israel for the plight of the Palestinians since they have not taken action. Since Adil understands the need to depend on the Israeli economy, he states, “There is more than one dimension to the picture,” indicating that he realizes that to take action invites consequences such as lost lives, poverty and retaliation from the Israelis. Usama does not understand the ramifications of action since he has not seen its consequences first-hand, and thus can see only the necessity of action.

After his initial shock at seeing the change in his people, Usama becomes even more incensed when he visits his old home, which is a large “old-style mansion.” One can view the mansion as representative of the Palestinian people’s fate, which has disintegrated from the inside. Usama observes, “...there was a sense that time had sapped the strength of everything in the house, including the kidneys of the head of the family” (33). The servants of the house had caused the dilapidation of the house by taking higher-paying jobs in Israel, just as Israeli jobs have caused the ruin of Palestine in Usama’s eyes. Both the house and the head of the family, who is slowly dying from kidney failure, represent the failings of the former Palestinian way of life before occupation. Usama equates his Uncle’s blood, which is poisoning him as it mixes with his urine because of his kidney failure, to the “waste” of Israeli culture mixing with the blood of Palestinians that is just as destructive in his mind. The patriarch also frequently meets with foreign journalists and talks about the Palestinian problem in order to maintain his own power over his outdated way of life.

Joseph Zeidan comments on the aging patriarchal structure of Usama’s family: “The head of the family is an old sick notable who represents oppressive patriarchal authority. Lacking any real national feelings, he is ready to acquiesce to the foreign occupation to

maintain his social and economic prestige” (179). This willingness to accept occupation only adds fuel to Usama’s rage, and he is further dismayed when he goes to visit the family land, which has also been abandoned for higher paying, easier jobs in Israel. The sole remaining guard on the land does not even recognize Usama, and defends the decision to work in Israel: “I don’t own anything. The land isn’t mine or Shahada’s [his son’s], so why should we care about it? Why should we die for it?” (42). Because such characters see the land as no longer belonging to them and their people, but to foreign oppressors, they see no need to defend it and risk their lives for the benefit of the Israelis. Like the cab driver that Usama encounters when he first returns to Palestine, the guard and his son have given up any hope of reclaiming the land, and have chosen to benefit themselves, even by taking Israeli jobs.

Just as Usama thinks the situation is hopeless, he meets his young cousin, Basil, who is representative of the younger generation of Palestinians who have seen the dependence on Israeli jobs, but also see past the immediate benefit of survival and recognize the dangerous repercussions of losing any hope for future independence. For Usama, Basil embodies hope for the future of the resistance movement. Unlike the older generation that has acquiesced to their oppression, Basil mirrors Usama’s disdain for dependence on Israeli jobs and goods.

Basil comments on the current problems of Palestinians:

Our parents don’t work their fingers to the bone paying for our education so that we’ll return and work for peanuts at home. So the only solution is emigration, which means working in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and the Gulf.... Educated people leave the country, and only workers and peasants remain. And that’s exactly what Israel wants to happen. We’re humble in spirit, feeble-hearted. Men who work like machines, too scared to say ‘no’ to anything. (59-60)

Usama views Basil as a potential future ally in fighting for the Palestinian cause, and his words spark hope for the future in Usama and reassure him that resistance is the right way to respond to occupation: “It would be among these young people that the spark would be ignited...All’s well with the world, after all!” (60).

In contrast to Usama’s renewed conviction, his cousin Adil sees more clearly what occupation has done to his people while Usama was away. Adil’s response to his reality is shaped through his ties to his father, the family patriarch, who has submitted to the occupation, and through his own feelings of frustration as he sees the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of Israelis. He does not wish to take action, however, because he realizes the “two dimensions” of the resistance movement. He knows the repercussions of resistance, and though he is deeply troubled by occupation, he represents the generation in-between the older generation of submissiveness and the younger generation of violent action (Zeidan 179). He observes the suffering around him, but is not sure that armed resistance is the answer to fighting the occupation. In several instances, Adil repeats the phrase, “Sink into the mud, oh Palestine of mine, and suffer, my people, the bitterness of recognizing reality and being helpless before it” (61). Like Usama and Basil, Adil also recognizes the injustice of their reality. He is different from Usama, however, because he has accepted their tragic fate and has no hope of helping the Palestinian people fight occupation. He notes, “The great house is covered in dust. The family glories fade, and the big lie’s exposed.” (61). Adil realistically accepts oppression and occupation, and refutes the “big lie” of Palestinian hope and resistance that Usama promotes.

An ensuing dialogue between Usama and Adil while Adil has become inebriated in a bar reveals in more detail the difference between the two men’s viewpoints about how to

respond to the Palestinian reality. When Usama meets Adil in the bar, he accuses him of drinking to escape their problems, and ignoring the wrongs experienced by Palestinians. Adil counters Usama's accusations by asserting that he must face oppression every day first-hand and justifies his drinking as a way to escape. He refers to a co-worker, Abu Samir, whose right hand was severed while working with Adil in an Israeli factory, and the Israeli plant owners refused to transport him to the hospital in the company ambulance that was on site because he did not possess a work permit. Adil recalls Abu Samir's worries that since his injury would cause him to be out of work, his wife might have to beg for food as she did before he took the job in Israel. Like Adil, Abu Samir is keenly aware of the injustice that the Palestinian workers face in Israel. Abu Samir describes the unfair treatment of the Palestinian workers: "Here there's a big difference between Muhammad and Cohen: Muhammad gets the heavy work, Cohen the light. The Jewish workers have cafeterias with tables and chairs, but we sit on the ground to eat, in the sun or in the garage with the scrap metal and the oil and grease" (76). Despite the knowledge of such injustices in Israeli jobs, Adil and Abu Samir realize they must accept such discrimination because they understand the consequences of not working in Israel. Without their Israeli jobs, the men will not be able to support their families, and will face fears as Abu Samir does that his wife will have to beg for food.

After their heated conversation at the bar, Usama mentions his plan of action, which is to blow up the buses of Palestinian workers going to Israel for work. He warns Adil to be careful since he rides those buses. Adil is disgusted at Usama's idea: "What about those who will get killed or injured? Abu Sabir, for example. Who'll feed their children and clothe their wives? And when the women are widowed, who'll marry them?" (64). Again, Adil

draws upon the reality of what he has seen to justify his objection to armed resistance. Adil becomes even more hopeless as he thinks about the predicament of the Palestinians: to take action and leave widows and fatherless children or to take jobs in Israel and experience humiliation and injustice at work. As a result, he laments his hopeless reality: “Sink into the mud, oh Palestine of mine, and let the seaweed cover you! Let’s say goodbye homeland and finish with it!” (66).

Another of Adil’s co-workers, Zuhdi shares his dismay at Usama’s violent plan. Like Adil, Zuhdi sees Usama as naïve and believes that he does not understand the reality of what he and Adil must face: “Tell him [Usama] how Israel’s blown up twenty thousand homes and four whole villages. Tell him how the detention camps are as full of young men as a cheap public bath’s full of cockroaches.... But the worst thing is that all of us, every last one of us, are forced to work in their brothels just in order to live!” (84). Zuhdi also realizes the grim reality of the conditions they have been forced to live in, but also has no will or hope to fight for change. He resents Usama’s plans because he feels that Usama is imposing his violent reaction to oppression on him. Adil and Zuhdi both represent the Palestinian who has had to make sacrifices and adjustments in order to survive under Israeli occupation, and therefore they resent Usama, who leaves Palestine and comes back with wild ideas of destroying their very means of survival.

The next day, Usama witnesses the social repercussions of the dependence on Israeli jobs in a street conflict over a man selling Israeli-made bread. The young man who tries to buy the bread calls the seller “disgraceful,” and in reply, the seller responds by describing his lack of choice in the matter. He explains that when he took an Israeli job, fellow Palestinians chastised him for giving into occupation, but when he quit his job in Israel and could find no

other work they called him disgraceful for staying home like a woman. For the Palestinian in occupied territory, unless he succumbs to Israeli culture and industry, as the bread seller indicates, he cannot be pleased with his reality. He has to work to maintain dignity, and is forced to take an Israeli job, or else stay home with the women. This predicament leaves the Palestinians like Adil, Zuhdi and Abu Samir no choice but to take jobs in Israel unless they choose to take up arms against their oppressor and accept the consequences, like Usama. This scene momentarily shakes Usama's conviction to take action as he sees the lack of choice confronting Palestinians who did not leave the country as he did. For an instant, he considers Adil's claim that the resistance has two dimensions, one of taking action against occupation, but also one of repercussion, but quickly reassures himself that, "There's only one dimension, one reality, that of defeat and occupation" (69). While Usama still sees occupation as one-sided, and refuses to accept the possibility of losing lives and financial stability as a deterrent, he feels he is outnumbered and defeated by Palestinians who agree with Adil and are willing to accept the "disintegration" of Palestinian existence. In this brief moment of doubt, Usama begins to reiterate Adil's hopeless phrase, by starting to say, "Sink, Palestine...." He stops himself, however, before finishing the phrase, and recommits himself to action: "But no, the country won't sink! There'll still be people who believe in the impossible.... Palestine's in the heart, in the pupil of an eye, in the very essence of life. And these people, in all their ignorance and sorrow, with their bread stamped in Hebrew, they're still my people.... Long live my people" (69-70). Though Usama feels that his people have given in to occupation, he has changed from when he first arrived in Palestine and disassociated himself from those who depend on Israeli goods and jobs. Usama now claims

that they are still his people, and perhaps through his dealings with them, he better understands why they have had to resort to taking Israeli jobs and eating Israeli bread.

Even though he is still committed to action, as a result of this increased understanding of the Palestinians' dependence on Israel, Usama has reservations about killing his own people, even if he sees them as traitors. He brings to life the issue of betraying his own people if he attacks them, but also betraying himself and his commitment if he does not take action, and he is therefore conflicted. Usama remembers his past, and tries to understand how he has changed so much. He remembers his dismay at seeing a lamb slaughtered on a feast day during a Muslim holiday. He had taken the lamb as a sort of pet when his family sacrificed it for the feast. He remembers crying and refusing to eat the lamb because he was so upset that his family killed it. He also recalls that Adil was equally upset at the lamb's slaughter and understood Usama's reaction. Through remembering this moment of compassion toward another living being, Usama questions how he could have gone from feeling such compassion to wanting to fight oppression, even by killing his own people. One can understand the lamb to represent the Palestinians whom Usama thinks he must sacrifice for the greater cause of resistance. Usama's life has been transformed by his anger at the occupation as he has gone from compassion to commitment at all costs. He counters his feelings of betraying his people by choosing to see Palestinians who work in Israel as traitors. At this point, one must note that Usama's definition of a traitor differs from the normal definition. Usama does not see the men's lives as innocent, and therefore can justify his killing of what the reader understands to be innocent people. This transformation of Usama also serves as a comment on the effect of occupation's oppression on Palestinians. All Palestinians are affected by the occupation, but each chooses to respond in a different way,

whether to take action for the collective good or to take jobs in Israel for the good of the individual family. Since Adil and Usama both mourned for the slaughtered lamb, they shared a sense of compassion, yet the occupation has hardened them both. However, Adil and Usama have chosen to respond differently to the occupation, which has led them in two separate directions.

In sharp contrast to Usama's mercy toward the lamb as a child, the change in him that occupation has produced is revealed when he demonstrates the cold detachment that one must possess to take action against one's own people. He commits himself even to the point of erasing all feelings of human compassion: "So what if Adil died? Or ten like him? The individual was of no importance when the fate of the community was at stake" (86). Usama has convinced himself that violent action is the only solution, even at the expense of his own family's lives. He continues coldly to justify Adil's death and to suppress any guilty feelings of betrayal by viewing him as a traitor: "Adil, he told himself, was totally deluded, his shameful position couldn't be justified on any grounds. Nine mouths to feed? People weren't going to die of starvation. The kidney machine? To hell with it! It was better for a sick person to die than to go on living" (87). Through such detached statements, Usama reaffirms his decision to respond to his reality by resisting it, and such thoughts help him to suppress memories of the compassionate boy he once was. By conveying Usama's chilling thoughts about the ease with which he is willing to sacrifice innocent lives, Khalifeh seems to be allowing the reader to pass judgment on Usama as a cold-blooded person who will go to any lengths to achieve his mission of violence. Usama's troubling commitment raises the issue that perhaps his violence is not the only way or right way to resist Israeli occupation, and leaves the reader searching for alternatives to more needless loss of life.

Usama's conviction that violence is the only way, however, is strengthened when he meets Shahada, who represents a completely corrupted and tainted Palestinian in Usama's eyes. Shahada is a Palestinian who has found success in Israel and flaunts his acquired wealth in the face of Palestinians who are struggling to survive. He relishes his newfound wealth, and displays his money for anyone who will notice. Usama meets Shahada in a café, and is shocked and disgusted by Shahada's appearance: "Shahada wore a leather jacket with a fur collar. His curly hair stood out around his head like a giant halo in an Afro at least four inches high.... In his hand, adorned with an expensive gold ring, he held a pipe, and he spoke out of the corner of his mouth, like some big foreign film star" (90-91). He sees Shahada as betraying the Palestinian cause, not just because he has taken a job in Israel, but also because he is so proud and flaunts the wealth that taking the job has afforded him. Joseph Zeidan proposes that Shahada has abandoned his responsibility to the national cause: "Greed is not only the domain of the business owners: for some workers, too, the desire to move up in class rank overshadows feelings of national solidarity" (181). Seeing Shahada dripping in Israeli wealth disgusts Usama and, to him, justifies his decision that killing Shahada, and others like him, should not be troubling: "By Jesus, killing you would be no crime..." (91).

When Usama confronts Adil about his disgust with Shahada, Adil defends the latter, and tells Usama that he identifies himself with Shahada, making the best of their difficult circumstances. He now actually feels betrayed by Adil, who has admitted that he has given in to oppression. Since Usama feels betrayed, he can accept the possibility that he may kill Adil in his attack on the buses headed to Israel. Adil, however, defends his own choice by telling Usama that the proof that he has not forgotten his country is that he did not leave it, and has had to survive in the only way possible.

As a result of leaving Palestine, Usama views Adil's lack of action from an outsider's perspective because he has not had to face the problems that Adil has had to negotiate by staying. He tells Adil that he should be ashamed that Arabs and Palestinians in other countries are complaining about their lack of action. Just as in *Men in the Sun* and *A Balcony over the Fakhani*, Adil comments on the lack of support from other Arabs and expatriate Palestinians, and provides an alternative to Usama's plan of violence. He suggests that if Palestinians would start businesses in the West Bank instead of leaving for other countries that Palestinians could stop working in Israeli jobs. However, he indicates that Palestinians are not willing to make the necessary sacrifices – risking loss of their money, for example – to establish themselves in Palestine. As a result, Adil resorts to alcohol to forget his frustration over the hopelessness of the situation and the lack of support from other Arabs. This resentment also surfaced with Palestinians in exile in the previous two novels as they commented on the Arabs who lived in the countries with them and saw the poor conditions of the refugee camps, yet refused to help remedy the problem.

Usama's hopes for Palestinian resistance are again revived when Israeli tanks roll into their neighborhood to destroy a particular house, and the neighborhood rallies in the streets in defiance. The old man whose house is just destroyed shouts, voice breaking, "*Allahu Akbar!* God is most great!" and the neighbors join the chant, which evolves into "Palestine! Palestine!" (105). The unification of the Palestinian residents against the Israeli tanks brings tears to Usama's eyes and finally provokes him actually to carry out violent action.

However, the way in which the novel presents Usama's action raises perplexing issues. The scene portrays a Palestinian woman shopping in the local market and noticing a decorated Israeli soldier buying fruit with his wife and young daughter. Suddenly, a masked

attacker (who turns out to be Usama) emerges and stabs the soldier in the back of the neck, and quickly disappears. The Palestinian woman is left stunned, and her first reaction is to yell to the attacker, “You’re a hero, you’ve done well!” (158). However, as she meets the gaze of the Israeli soldier’s wife and sees his daughter on the ground, who has fainted from shock, the reality of the murder hits the Palestinian woman, and she shows an atypical sympathy for the enemy. Perhaps from her own suffering, she understands the suffering of the woman and her daughter, and the universal pain of death, which prompts her to tell the woman, “God have mercy on you! God help you, sister” (159). She then covers the girls’ exposed legs as she lies where she had fainted, since, “...the sight of the little girl, lying there on the pavement with her legs exposed up to the crotch, made [her] think of her own girls, of all little girls.” She tells the girl, “I’m so sorry for you, my daughter” (159). The juxtaposition of Usama’s violent murder of the Israeli officer in front of his family with the Palestinian woman’s empathy for the Israeli woman and girl can be interpreted as a negative judgment on Usama’s disturbing action. The humanity of the enemy is evident through the shared suffering of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israelis and of the Israelis at the hands of the Palestinians. Zeidan comments on this empathy: “Khalifeh captures many complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli occupation here: just as the Israelis are not dehumanized in the novel, neither are the Palestinian characters portrayed as blind to the humanity of the ‘enemy’” (180).

The fact that Khalifeh uses two women to illustrate this shared humanity is significant in itself and can be seen as a feminist stance that perhaps women hold the key to peace. Through understanding their shared subjugation, both in the conflict and within patriarchal society, women from both sides can unify to attempt to end both forms of oppression.

Women have an added incentive to end the conflict, since peace would also end some of the patriarchal oppression that many women withstand by giving men an opportunity to fulfill their traditional roles outside the home.

In sharp contrast to the Palestinian woman's empathy toward the Israeli woman and girl, Khalifeh ends the section with Usama coolly escaping and reassuring himself that he is justified in his attack, as he walks away, "whistling cheerfully" (163). Neither side benefits as a result of the violence, since the Palestinians will suffer Adil's description of the "second dimension" to the picture, or repercussions of Israeli response to the violence, and the Israelis suffer loss and increased anger and distrust toward the Palestinians.

Another instance in which Khalifeh portrays the humanity of the "enemy" is in a scene involving Zuhdi, Adil's co-worker, who is in prison. The wife and little boy of one of the prisoners come to visit, and the child runs to his father shouting "Daddy! Daddy!" (148). The sadness of the moment moves not only the other prisoners, but also the guards, who begin to weep as well. Zuhdi resents the guards' shared emotion because of their cruel treatment of the prisoners, provoking him to cry out: "So you shed tears, then? The barbarity and torture you witness in the prison walls doesn't make you cry, but a boy no more than five does?" (148). Palestinians and Israelis are linked together by common emotion, at least for an instant. The brief moment of common humanity is shattered, however, and identities are divided again with Zuhdi's statement of resentment and by the prisoners as they begin to chant, "Long live Palestine, Arab and free!," and the soldiers quickly wipe away their tears (148).

Usama's devotion to his plan for action culminates in his attack on a bus of Palestinian workers headed into Israel. He must complete the mission that he returned to

Palestine to carry out in order to keep his commitment to being a resistance fighter. Usama blows up the bus, although he realizes that Zuhdi is on it. As shrapnel hits Zuhdi, he quickly realizes that Usama is behind the attack. “Usama, you bastard!” Zuhdi exclaims. Zuhdi then remembers a Jewish man, Shlomo, whom he attacked in a fight at his factory. Since he is now himself injured, he regrets having injured the Jewish man. Again the tragic plight of both the Israelis and Palestinians is evident as Zuhdi realizes the humanity of his oppressor because of their shared pain. As the Israelis advance and fire on Usama, he is fatally wounded, and Zuhdi, despite his realization of the Jewish man’s common suffering, goes to Usama to fight alongside him. In the end, Zuhdi’s identity of belonging to the collective Palestinian struggle emerges, and he chooses to benefit the collective cause by fighting the Israelis with Usama.

In the last few moments of his life, Usama speaks to himself in the third person, and proves that he realizes that his action has forever separated him from participating in the future of his people. He tells himself: “You’re bleeding, Usama. You’re dying. Down there in the town square people are eating *kinafa* and smiling. Their ears are stopped up; they’re made of dough or clay” (185). Usama loses his conviction that his action was worth all the sacrifice it necessitated, since he understands that Palestinians are still going on with their everyday lives and do not hear his cry for action. As he has done throughout the novel, he manages to create a final justification for his actions, which killed innocent Palestinians, by proclaiming himself a martyr. Usama’s identity changes from resistance fighter to self-proclaimed martyr in his last words, “...tell everyone I died a martyr, a martyr to the cause. A martyr to the land” (185). Only through his death is Usama able to free himself from his imprisonment to action, since he has now proven his commitment by completing his mission.

Usama has symbolically become the sacrificial lamb, but instead of lamenting his own death as he did with the lamb, he proves that the occupation has hardened him by glorifying his own death and calling himself a martyr. In the end, Usama is thinking only of himself, and how he has fulfilled his mission, not about the fact that he has killed innocent Palestinians, such as Zuhdi.

Life for Adil and the rest of the family continues, however, and a hope for the future, even in the darkest of times, emerges. Adil retains his commitment to respond to oppression through non-violence, although this time in different circumstances. In taking another feminist stance, Khalifeh presents oppression not just from the Israelis, but also from inside the Palestinian family. Nuwar, Adil's sister is supposed to marry a man that her father chooses for her, although she is in love with another man. She is afraid to tell her father the truth because she fears his reaction. Even though he is disturbed by Nuwar's lack of courage to stand up to her father, Adil retains his silent acceptance of oppression by refusing to speak on her behalf and condemns her for her silence. Adil displays a double standard by defending himself and the other workers in Israel who do not "defend" their dignity, but condemning Nuwar for her lack of courage. Adil fails to recognize that both he and Nuwar are oppressed, just by different oppressors. Basil, her other brother, who inspired hope in Usama for the younger generation, has the courage to speak to his father for her. Joseph Zeidan comments on the significance of Basil's outburst: "Basil's actions support the notion that men must participate in the break with oppressive traditions, because they are in power where these issues are concerned and it's men's reactions to such a challenge, that understandably, many women fear" (182). Basil finally speaks the truth, and continues to reveal his anger at his situation as he observes his family:

I hate my father because he personifies sickness. I hate my mother because she's the personification of submissiveness. I hate my old grandmother: she represents man's collapse in the face of time. And Nuwar's hateful because she's spineless.... As for Adil, I scorn Adil because he's not like Salih or Usama. (199)

Through this painfully truthful exposure, Basil shows his family for who they really are, and provides hope that other young Palestinians in his generation will also see the truth and the mistakes of older generations. In essence, Basil's response to oppression is shaped through his disdain for his family's weakness. By taking action for Nuwar, he has begun to speak out against oppression, and shows awareness that oppression does not reside only on the side of the Israelis. Basil has taken over Usama's commitment to action in the younger generation, but one hopes, through less violent means.

The family, with all its faults, now faces retaliation for Usama's actions, and experiences first-hand the second dimension to the resistance that Adil had described earlier to Usama, when Israeli officials come to destroy their home. The crumbling, dirty old mansion finally falls, and Adil recognizes his own inner struggle as anger rages through him while he watches his childhood home explode: "A thirst for revenge, for rebellion stirred deep within him. I'm not cruel, but I'm filled with rage and bitterness, filled up to here" (206). The rage that transformed Usama from a boy crying over a slaughtered lamb into a violent resistance fighter seems for a moment to be transferring itself to Adil, only Adil does not know how to handle the rage. He realizes that even though he feels enraged by his oppressor, he does not possess the internal strength to rise up against the Israelis, or at the very least does not know how: "If only you knew how to begin! If only you were more cruel, or harder of heart, you'd blow up everything you could lay hands on, from the Atlantic to the

Gulf and on to the world's furthest reaches" (206). Despite the loss of Adil's family home, the novel ends with a hope that life goes on, despite death, loss and mourning. As Adil and his family stand looking at the rubble that was their ancestral home only a moment earlier, he decides to walk toward the town square. In the square, he sees the persistence of life moving on, with or without him.

In essence, the novel makes a complete circle. The novel ends in the same way as it began, with people going about their daily lives in the town, buying Israeli bread and stuffing themselves with sweets, seemingly oblivious to oppression. Khalifeh seems to be indicating that unless Palestinians as a whole disrupt their daily lives and make sacrifices to resist oppression, even through non-violent means, change will not occur, and Palestinians will continue to depend on the Israeli economy. Through this dependence, Palestinians move further away from creating a state of their own and a means to support themselves through Palestinian enterprise. Therefore, if individuals such as Usama act alone in resisting, their efforts and the consequences of their actions are pointless since nothing will change as a result. The cycle will only continue as others like Adil, who experience great loss from actions like Usama's, walk to town and see life going on with Palestinians continuing to accept occupation. Khalifeh also introduces non-violent alternatives to the conflict, and a hope for peace through women as she presents the shared humanity of the two sides through the marketplace stabbing of the Israeli soldier. Also, Khalifeh reveals that Palestinian oppression comes not only from the Israelis, but is also inflicted internally through familial and gender relations, as illustrated through Nuwar's inability to challenge her father's decision. By solving internal oppression, Palestinians can more effectively unify to fight the external oppression from the Israelis. Khalifeh presents the conflict and its effects on the

Palestinians and the Israelis in an uncompromisingly realistic light and reveals that there truly is “more than one dimension to the picture.”

Chapter Three

Palestinians Living in Israel: *The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist*

The Secret Life of Saeed The Pessoptimist, by Emile Habiby, is a departure from the previously examined novels in its ironic portrayal of life in Israel. The novel does not employ realism; rather Habiby uses comedy and irony to relieve the reader from becoming enveloped in depictions of the serious suffering of Palestinians in Israel. The novel suggests that Palestinians living in Israel face unique and difficult dilemmas in wanting to resist oppression, but in sometimes lacking the strength to fight back because of the defeat and loss of their homeland that they must see every day. Habiby employs a supernatural element, using aliens in the main character's dreams to illustrate the extreme lack of a solution to this dilemma. Habiby portrays the situation as so intractable because Palestinians in Israel must face the unique difficulty of living on land that was formerly part of their own country, but that has now been occupied and completely replaced by the establishment of a new nation. Because Palestinians must contend with this actual erasure of their former homeland, many face difficulties in finding the will to resist since they are fighting for a country that no longer exists for them. The difficulty in facing this problematic existence is embodied in the Palestinian character, Saeed, who starts out as an informant for Israel, but then decides to change his life by becoming a resistance sympathizer, even though he cannot bring himself to take action.

Though the type of informant character that Saeed represents appears frequently in Arabic literature, according to Salma Jayyusi, Saeed breaks the mold. Jayyusi explains that the typical image of the traitor or informer character is of a "...vicious, cleverly self-seeking,

and generally loathsome kind of anti-hero” (xvii). Habiby breaks this convention by making Saeed a sympathetic, comic and foolish informant, who is simply not strong enough individually to stand up to the State. Through portraying Saeed as a Palestinian unwilling to stand up to Israeli power, Habiby suggests that Israeli attempts at erasing Palestine as a country have been so successful that they have removed the ability in many Palestinians to resist. Israeli power is so encompassing that even though Saeed feels the sentiment of resistance, he still is constant witness to the successes of Israel, and cannot take action against the State. Through this portrayal, Habiby more effectively achieves his goal of representing the reality of an Arab living inside Israel. Palestinians in Israeli are not, in reality, all heroic resistance fighters, and many people, like Saeed, resort to betraying their own people to gain favor from the Israelis. Habiby does not excuse Israeli State from blame as he reveals its complicity in betraying the Palestinian people. By giving Palestinians special treatment who inform, they encourage Palestinians to betray their own people. Accordingly, Saeed knows that his life will be easier if he works as an Israeli informant because he will receive special treatment from the Israelis, such as financial reward that most ordinary Palestinians cannot fathom.

In her essay about the novel, “A Simpleton Exposes Complex Cruelty,” M.L. Rania explains Habiby’s portrayal of Saeed: “As a comic butt of everybody’s taunt, he [Saeed] is a better vehicle of Habiby’s views on Israeli occupation than a really heroic character could be. Staying within the comic-absurdist limit, he helps to expose the tragedy of his people under the sadistic ferocity of the occupation regime” (*The Tribune India Online*). As Rania suggests, Habiby turns the oppressive realities of Palestinians in Israel into a sort of farce, which reveals the tragic absurdity of Palestinians having to live in a homeland that has been

stolen from them. Habiby not only blames Palestinians like Saeed for this problem, but also indicts the Israeli State that encourages Saeed's informing, thereby helping to create this tragic farce. Habiby's ability to portray tragedy in a comic light makes it easier for the reader to accept. The reader is able to laugh at the absurd aspects of what Habiby describes, while still understanding the seriousness of the oppression in question.

Saeed is a man who "cannot win," despite his attempts to transcend the problems that Palestinians face living in Israel. He is essentially faced with a dilemma that has no satisfactory solution, since he is presented as having only two choices: to help the Israelis or to be a resistance sympathizer. He does not succeed in either choice, since he initially tries to transcend his oppression by spying for the Israelis, yet nothing he does satisfies "the big man," as he refers to his cruel Jewish boss. Saeed tries to compensate for the fact that he is not seen as an equal by the Israelis by spying for the Israeli government, which limits his life choices. Because of his spying, he is a "wise fool," since he realizes to make his life easier he must help the Israelis, yet he fails to see that his efforts are wasted on the Israelis whom he will never please. Jayyusi explains this predicament in the novel's introduction:

"Saeed...being a wise Fool, saves his life by succumbing to the side that has the power, becoming an informer in the service of the State, which is the service of the enemy" (xvii).

In his essay, "The Advances and Limits of the Israelization of Israel's Palestinian Citizens," Sammy Smooaha helps explain why Saeed will never be treated as an equal by Israeli authorities, since in Israel, the Arabs are "...excluded from the elites and other higher rungs of society. They are discriminated against in appointments and budgets. The prevailing Jewish norms and practices in Israel make it difficult for an Arab to compete on equal footing with a Jew" (10).

His frustration at not being able to please the Israelis and his meeting a dedicated resistance fighter while in prison leads Saeed to understand Palestinian motives for resistance for the first time. He transforms his life as he decides to become a Palestinian resistance sympathizer, but he cannot find the inner strength to actually take action. As Jayyusi explains in her essay, "Palestinian Identity in Literature," Saeed's life undergoes a drastic change from Israeli informer to Palestinian resistance sympathizer: "...the protagonist undergoes two experiences: [despite his spying,] he does not escape Israeli suspicion and is therefore imprisoned and tortured, and he meets in prison a real Palestinian hero under whose influence he experiences a reversal and rebels against both himself and his Israeli masters" (174). Because he has exhausted all of his choices and cannot find a way to cope with his reality as a Palestinian living in Israel, either by informing or by taking action, he resorts to dreaming of a way out. Saeed dreams he is rescued from his dilemma by supernatural elements at the end of the novel.

As a character, Saeed is quite different from those previously discussed. Unlike the characters in both *Men in the Sun* and *A Balcony over the Fakhani*, Habiby's character does not need to idealize the land in a nostalgic memory, but instead faces the oppression of occupation every day when he steps outside. Thus, Saeed's reality is primarily constructed, not by his link to the land as with the characters in the other novels, since his land is "officially" gone. His identity is defined by his choice to accept and aid the Israelis, versus resisting the oppression as he decides is right in the latter part of the novel. Barbara Parmenter comments on the reasons why Palestinians who remained in Israel could no longer see such nostalgic visions of their homeland:

The Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948, or who came under Israeli occupation in 1967, found themselves a minority among strangers who were rapidly reshaping the landscape. Nostalgic visions of the past were no longer tenable under such circumstances.... To the younger generation of Palestinians growing up in Israel, nostalgic images were an impediment to creating and maintaining a sense of enduring identity. (70-71)

The characters in the other novels who live in exile or in occupied Palestine are able to dream about their lost land because they either re-create an idealized homeland in their mind, or they are still hopeful that Palestinians may regain control of the land. Saeed is, as Parmenter suggests, among strangers who have established a state and have transformed his homeland completely, and therefore must face that reality and do what is necessary to live among them, rather than dreaming of what is lost. Instead of dreaming of a lost homeland, Saeed can dream only of a way of escaping the dilemma he faces in reality. In the novel, a young Palestinian girl questions the verity of the dreams of an old man she is talking with in order to illustrate the pointlessness of nostalgia: “Do you really know how the beginning was, uncle? The beginning was not merely sweet memories of pines over Mount Carmel, or orange groves, or the songs of Jaffa’s sailors. And did they really sing anyway?” (154). Thus, many Palestinians in Israel refuse to dream of their lost land, and even doubt the validity of the dreams of those who do.

Palestinians in Israel have had to create ways to live amongst their Israeli occupiers, and Saeed’s family, being no exception, copes with oppression by creating a philosophy embodied in their name, “Pessoptimist.” This combination of “optimism,” and “pessimism,” is explained by Saeed to mean that if something bad happens, one should be thankful that it

happened in that way, and not in some other way that could have been even worse. In this way, optimism, or being thankful that the bad event was not worse, is juxtaposed with pessimism, or accepting the fact that the bad thing happened the way it did. Saeed remembers that, when his brother was killed in an accident at his job, though his mother was devastated, she insisted that his death was better than him living with the possibility that something worse could happen. Saeed's mother said that had he lived, his brother's young wife would have probably run off with another man, which she actually did two years after his death, proving his mother was possibly correct in her "pessoptimism." Saeed's life is also complex and contradictory like the view of "pessoptimism." On one hand, Saeed is an informant for the Israeli government, but on the other, he is a silent observer of the injustices that his people face at the hands of the Israelis, and he is ultimately drawn to resist oppression. Saeed's identity is problematic because he witnesses the oppression of Palestinians in Israel, but in the first part of the novel he is not personally affected by oppression because of his spying for Israel. Jayyusi comments in her introduction to the novel that Habiby uses Saeed's pessoptimist philosophy to play upon the contradictions in Saeed's reality: "The paradoxical view of the dynamics of the situation explains the meaning of the word 'pessoptimist.' Habiby aims to mix the comic with the tragic and heroic on one hand, and, on the other, to uncover the various contradictions that crowd the distance between the extreme poles of Zionist colonialism and Palestinian resistance" (xiii). The idea of pessoptimism could also be taken as representative of Palestinian life in Israel. Even though their situation is bad, many Arabs, such as Saeed, are coping with the oppression in the best way they can, whether through extreme measures such as informing, or through less serious forms of betrayal, and they may be thankful that, horrible as it is, the occupation is

not any worse. Saeed reveals one such less serious way of coping with the difficulty of living in Israel by describing how some Arabs in Israel change their names to Jewish ones in order to gain business: "...don't forget Shlomo in one of Tel Aviv's very best hotels. Isn't he really Sulaiman, son of Munirah, from our own quarter? And 'Dudi,' isn't he really Mahmud? 'Moshe,' too; isn't his proper name Musa, son of Abdel Massih?" (101).

Though Saeed chooses to withstand the oppression through informing, he does not at first realize that he is betraying and hurting his own people. He later realizes that the Israelis have erased the entire history of his own people, and he has aided them in their efforts. Saeed, even though he is an informer, does not act as a villainous character, but rather as someone who deserves the reader's sympathy. Saeed evokes sympathy because his unrelenting and self-deprecating efforts at spying are never satisfactory to the Israelis, and therefore his betrayal of his own people is for naught.

On one occasion, Saeed makes a tremendous mistake by flying a white flag over his home that signifies he does not recognize the town as part of Israel, but he does not realize that this action is an insult to his boss. He simply flies the flag so as to not be suspected by his fellow Palestinian neighbors. As a result, Saeed is arrested and sent to jail, an event that changes his entire life. On the way to jail, Saeed has a conversation with the prison van driver similar to the one Usama had with the border guard in *Wild Thorns*. Saeed innocently observes, "Oh, I see we're in the plain of Ibn Amir." The Jewish driver, enraged, corrects him by emphasizing the Israelis' erasure of Palestinian history: "No, it's the Yizrael plain!" he remarks (123-24). In the ensuing dialogue, Habiby provides a brilliant satire of Israeli attempts to justify occupation and oppression. The driver states, "...take for example our policy of punishing people with exile. This we award them without their going to jail." The

satire stems from the fact that most Palestinians would consider exile a life tragedy, not an “award,” and would much prefer to serve time in jail. The van driver continues his outrageous justifications: “And we demolish their homes when they’re outside, but when they’re inside prison we let them occupy themselves building.” The irony here is evident when Saeed asks what the prisoners’ build, and the driver replies, “New prisons and new cells” (124). One can interpret the new cells that the prisoners build as symbolic of the larger prison of occupation that the Palestinians continue to strengthen by working in Israel and helping the Israeli government through informing like Saeed. Finally, Saeed asks why the government destroys the prisoners’ homes while they are in jail, and the driver ridiculously replies, “To exterminate the rats that build their nests in them. This way we save them from the plague” (125). Just when the driver’s comments seem that they cannot get any more preposterous, he goes on to explain pompously how Israel “civilized” the Palestinian land by planting trees where there were only stones, since the land called out to them, “Come ye hither, tractors of civilization.” Habiby mocks the Zionist contention that the Jews did not destroy what was already in Palestine before they arrived by suggesting that they preserved only what would benefit them: “But we gave the monastery to the monks, for a tourist attraction. And we left the graveyards to those buried there, out of our faith in God” (126). Such comments seem to parody Edward Said’s explanation of Zionist justification of development by claiming that they “civilized” and “cultivated” a barren land, when, in reality there were Arab villages and farmers all over the land. The driver makes a final comment to prove his dominance over Saeed and Israel’s over Palestine. He tells Saeed that the Palestinians will not defeat the Israelis as they had defeated other invaders in the past: “You defeated the Mongols in the battle of Ain Jalut because they had come only to loot and leave;

but we loot and stay, and it is you who will go. Don't bother yourself with all those whisperings about history" (126-27). Saeed must remain silent in order to maintain his own survival, although the comments greatly upset him and plant the seeds of the transformation that he undergoes in prison.

In jail, though he is supposed to receive "special treatment" because of his status as an informer, Saeed is badly beaten by the guards, and is put in a cell with a young man also named Saeed, who is principally responsible for bringing about the former's identity transformation. The boy is a resistance fighter and refugee, and ironically, immediately bestows the title of "brother" upon Saeed. "Had we met outside, would he have called me brother?," Saeed asks himself (132). The undeserved recognition makes Saeed cry, and his tears transform him into a resistance sympathizer: "I did not stop crying, but now it was from pride and gratitude; my tears were those of a soldier whose leader is awarding him a medal for courage" (132). For the first time, he feels a pride in his nationality through his bond with the younger Saeed. "I have become his brother! I have become his father!" (133). Saeed has now found a place among his own people, and feels that for the first time, he can identify himself as one of them and share in their struggle against oppression.

As a result of his transformation, once out of prison Saeed sees for the first time the true oppression his people endure. By talking with a Palestinian man, Saeed learns that the man's family planted and tended their fields before the Israelis confiscated them. This conversation triggers a memory of the van driver telling him that Israel had planted and made green the "barren fields" of Palestine. He bursts out in revelation, "Then all this greenery is the fruit of *your* labor, not as the big man claimed" (143).

In spite of Saeed's transformation, in the end he cannot seem to find a way to face his newfound truth, and represents the lack of choice that Palestinians have in Israel. He therefore escapes into a dream world where he can be rescued by supernatural beings. In his dream, Saeed is sitting upon a stake suspended in the air as he looks below and sees the various people who have influenced his decision to be an informant and then his decision to be a resistance sympathizer. Though Saeed, like Adil in *Wild Thorns*, has learned the truth about his people's suffering and history, he is not strong enough to change it, so he is therefore stuck in a suspended state of being. In his dream he is rescued from his perch on the stake by an alien, who tells him, "When you can bear the misery of your reality no longer but will not pay the price [of action] necessary to change it, only then you come to me" (159). Depending on dreams and supernatural elements for escape is a last resort for Saeed, who, since he lives in Israel, must accept that the Israelis have won the conflict, at least in Israel proper. Unlike the characters in the other novels who may have some hope left for reclaiming their land since they either live in territory that is still Palestinian but occupied by the Israelis, or in refugee communities with strong resistance sentiments, Saeed sees the actual possession of his homeland in the established state of Israel. He also witnesses the erasure of his history, as illustrated by his conversation with the prison van driver. Habiby seems to suggest that unless Palestinians find the inner strength to solve their dilemma by "getting off the stake," and taking action, they will continue to witness the erasure of their history and will be able to only dream of being rescued from Israeli oppression.

In the novel's introduction, Jayyusi explains that Saeed, like most characters in Palestinian fiction, come to realize the universal oppression that they face as Palestinians: "Recent literary works revolving around the Palestinian experience usually end on a note of

affirmation, but they can hardly escape a tragic realization of universal injustice. Habiby is no exception. His Saeed is a comic figure touched by tragedy” (xix). Even though his portrayal differs greatly stylistically from the characters in the other novels, Saeed comes to realize that he is part of a collective national identity that is touched by the “universal injustice” of the Israeli occupation, whether in exile, in occupied Palestine or in the State of Israel.

Conclusion

In each of the novels I treated, the characters are linked by a common plight that stems from Israeli oppression. Though the novels present unique forms of Palestinian existence and the characters experience political, social and economic hardships according to their individual reality, they all share a common bond of being Palestinian, a people without a homeland. In the introduction to *Men in the Sun*, Kanafani explains the significance of being Palestinian in a letter he wrote to his son. He remembers his son asking his mother if he was a Palestinian. When his mother 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" (2). The sad reality of this situation is that the "burden" of the Palestinian plight had been passed down to another generation to carry. Kanafani explains this transference, in 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 again in the heart of another child" (2). Essentially, Palestinian children are destined to carry the weight of their unjust history, despite what they may become in life.

Similarly, throughout the Palestinian novels that I analyzed, though the characters may be in completely different parts of the Arab world and in completely different circumstances, they all, in the end, fight for their collective national identity as Palestinians whether through taking action, or just in thought and recognition. Maintaining a Palestinian identity, even if one is in exile, or has chosen to make a life somewhere else, is a struggle to preserve a lost homeland, and a lost way of life. As Edward Said comments, "Palestinian children today are born in such places as New York or Amman; they still identify themselves as being 'from' Shafa'Amr or Jerusalem or Tiberias" (121). By preserving this heritage,

Palestinians retain their claim to their history and their people's former existence, so that they can pass the knowledge of their lost heritage down to future generations. Without retaining ties to their lost country, Palestinians could possibly be integrated into other cultures and nationalities so completely that their historical ties to the land would be erased.

Through the poignant tragedy and resilience of Palestinian life as portrayed in these four novels, the truth about Palestinian existence is made available not only to Palestinians, but also to people otherwise unaware of their plight. With today's increased communication and intermixing of cultures through globalization, such authors are translated and read in other countries, thus opening a new window of opportunity for peace and understanding through knowledge of the past. In her introduction to Habiby's novel, Jayyusi explains her views on the purpose of Palestinian literature and its effect on the reader:

Good contemporary Palestinian literature is disturbing. It raises questions that shake us because they do not simply relate to the moment and a particular historical 'event,' but transcend them to probe into problems of injustice, aggression, and coercion as they are imposed on a contemporary human consciousness that is fully aware of their implications. (xxii)

Through literature, the memories and nostalgic reveries of a lost homeland become realities in the minds of its readers, creating a hope for a peaceful co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. In order for the conflict to end, hope for peace is a permanent necessity, despite recent violence during the new Intifada. If Palestinians are able to maintain a hope for peace in the present time and not resign it to a particular historical moment, then peace is possible. Throughout Palestinian history, there have been strides toward resolution by maintaining this hope for peace, but strides forward were negated by even larger regressive strides as people

from either side of the conflict gave up and resigned the hope for peace to a particular historical moment. Badr, in *A Balcony over the Fakihani*, specifically indicates that peace needs to be a permanent necessity in her portrayal of Ahmed, who stresses the need to maintain hope for the “times of beauty and tenderness and light” that he is certain will come in the future.

As Edward Said indicates in *The Question of Palestine*, “If we think of Palestine as having the function of both a place to be *returned to* and of an *entirely new* place, a vision partially of a restored past and of a novel future, perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hope for a different future, we will understand the word’s meaning better” (125). Through the combination of remembering mistakes of the past, and facing the actualities of the present, some of which can be changed, and some of which cannot, a building of a shared future for Palestinians and Israelis can occur in a more peaceful future. In the end, unjust occupation does not benefit either side, since both Israelis and Palestinians have suffered from the conflict, and both sides have shared in loss, tragedy and needless death. If, as portrayed in some of the novels, Israelis and Palestinians can realize the shared humanity and fate of both their peoples, peace would follow, and allow them to live without fear and injustice. One can only hope that in the future, Palestinians and Israelis will be able to live in peace, for the benefit of both peoples, for future generations and for the entire world.

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