

CONCLUSION

By now it should be clear how the analytical reach of the in-between (liminal) concept covers the motifs in Palestinian literary works and films about identity, struggle for change, and liberation: both individual and national. This middle position appears to characterize the many aspects of the works under study: fictional characters, both literary and cinematic, who at times exist on literal or figurative borders; texts of indeterminate genre; and rhetoric of both resistance and reconciliation.

THE BORDER-LINES RHETORIC: TOPIC, CHARACTER, AND TECHNIQUE

The location where real or fictional Palestinian characters are often found evokes instability and transience: borders, airports, tents, moving trucks, as in the case of Kanafani's characters, or ships, as in the case of Jabra's novel *The Ship*—waving as it is far from land with characters on board teetering on the brink of madness and death.¹

Kanafani's characters are met at borders as they attempt to cross to the land beyond. But more often than not they do not succeed in crossing over; they are stuck in an interstitial location, immobilized by forces greater than themselves. Even when they confront their Israeli enemy—as we have seen in the case of Hamid and the nameless Israeli soldier in *All That's Left to You*—their fate is left hanging in the balance without any clear indication of how the scene ends.

The structure of Habibi's novel *Saeed the Pessoptimist* seems to be a reenactment of the tripartite rite of passage: separation, transition/liminality, and reaggregation. As with Kanafani's novelistic characters, it is an aborted rite of passage, since Saeed's story ends with disappearance, not return to the community.

This transitional in-between position of the Palestinians is also reflected in their film. In Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* the

Palestinian couple in the film meets at a border crossing; their rage at the fate imposed on them by the Israeli occupation is camouflaged by exterior calmness. A man waits for the bus that never comes; he knows that it will never come yet he continues to wait. The disjointed structure of the film, whose scenes are rarely connected in any narrative or logical sequence, betrays its indeterminate genre. Is this film realistic, romantic, or phantasmagoric?

Likewise, one can ask the same question about the generic classification of a prose text such as Mahmud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*. What kind of text is it? Is it memoir, journal, fiction, prose poem, or none of these? And Habibi's novel *Saeed the Pessoptomist* also raises the question of literary classification. Is it a tragedy or a comedy? If it is dubbed a tragicomedy, as oftentimes it is, does this not seem to fly in the face of the classical literary theory that sees a dichotomous division between tragedy and comedy?

This indeterminate artistic classification reflects and at the same time is the effect of the betwixt-and-between, contingent political and existential state of the stateless Palestinian. So the Palestinian poses a challenge to his Israeli tormentors and his fellow Arabs as well. As a refugee living on Israel's borders and as a co-claimant to the same land Israel now occupies, he is a constant reminder that a settlement of the conflicting claims has to be reached. As a producer of unclassifiable Arabic texts he taxes the abilities of the critic, Arab and non-Arab alike, who is sometimes at a loss as to where to place these texts in the literary classificatory grid.

THE EXILE'S RETURN IS DISAPPOINTING

In Palestinian literature and film the exile's return, whether real or imagined, is often disappointing. This is the case in Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, Fawaz Turki's *Exile's Return*, and Mahmud Darwish's brief return to Haifa in 1997. One can easily add to this list other works, such as Murid Barghouthi's return in *I Saw Ramallah* and Yahya Yakhlu'f's return, after the 1993 Oslo Accords, to the West Bank, as depicted in his *Nahr Yastahimmu fi Buhayra* (A River Bathing in a Lake).²

In Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* Said S. and his wife Safiyya return finally to their hometown, Haifa, but their return is a distressing disappointment; in fact, it is a reminder and a confirmation of the original tragedy of their exodus. The house they left behind in Haifa is still there, the physical layout, the pieces of furniture, the peacock feathers—they are there. The place has not changed; only its residents

have. Yes, the Palestinian Adam and Eve return to their original paradisiacal haven, but only to find out that it no longer exists for them because it is no longer theirs. Likewise, the child they left behind is no longer theirs. He now belongs to the other side, to the enemy. The paradise lost in this case is the paradise that cannot be regained. And here lies the quintessential tragedy of loss for the Palestinian.

THE POST-OSLO YEARS: 1993 TO THE PRESENT

After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the famous handshake between the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister Itzak Rabin hopes were raised for a period of peace and amity between Palestinians and Israelis, and that in turn may be reflected in literature and art. Some prominent Palestinians returned to the West Bank and Gaza and wrote about their experiences. But their return is no less disappointing. What they discovered was that the Palestine from which they and their families were banished in 1948 is not now what they dreamt about during their decades of exile. It is now a different homeland for a different people. It is unrecognizable and it cannot recognize them, it seems. Asked after his 1997 visit to Haifa about the effect of long exile on his life and work, Mahmud Darwish says, "Even if I return to Haifa and Acre and live there, the exile within me, which can be considered a large human exile, will be my overriding human condition."³

This mood of disillusionment is captured in Yahya Yakhlu'f's 1997 novel, *Nahr Yastahimmu fi Buhayra* (A River Bathing in a Lake). Palestinian exiles return to the West Bank after the Oslo Accords to experience alienation and bitterness, even destructive rage. In one scene in the novel at a checkpoint the Israeli soldier asks a group of Palestinians traveling in a car if they are carrying any weapons. One retorts that he does: a time bomb inside his chest ready to explode at any minute. The crushing effect of exile and the total disillusionment of the return turns the Palestinian into a ticking time bomb, a dehumanized piece of combustible substance ready to explode.

Likewise, several films, fictional as well as documentaries, depict the return of the exile, but none to show a happy reunion with the land or the people. We have seen this in the case of films by Mai Masri, Elia Suleiman, and others.

THE INSIDE-OUTSIDE RHETORIC: ARABS OF THE INTERIOR AND ARABS OF THE EXILE

There are differences between views of the Israeli Jews by Palestinian writers who are citizens of Israel and Palestinian writers who live in exile.

By and large Palestinian citizens of Israel are more circumspect in their portrayals of Israeli Jews than those who live outside Israel's jurisdiction. Take the examples of the fictional work of Israeli Arab citizens such as Atallah Mansur, who also writes in Hebrew, author of *Wa-Baqiyat Samira* (Samira Remained, 1962), in which the Arab, Samira, learns many lessons on personal freedom, respect for work, self-reliance—all sorts of modern values—from Israeli Jewish society. Consider the following scene in the novel, in which Samira and her Jewish friend Sarah talk about Arab and Jewish societies and the cultural differences between the two. Samira is surprised to see Haim and Hadasa, the unmarried Jewish couple, kiss each other in public. Her fellow villagers would judge this public display of intimacy an extremely disgraceful act. Samira asks Sarah about this "immoral act" and Sarah explains it in this way:

"We live like this . . . there are things that are harmful to the individual and his community, things like physical assault, killing, cheating, lying; these are all forbidden. But there are things that are not harmful; everyone is free to do or not to do them. Everyone is answerable to no one but himself . . . and if a man has a female partner then he and his partner are responsible for what they do . . . they both define what will or will not satisfy their consciences . . . every community has its own limits, ours is one way, yours is another. But basically all people are equal. When you open your eyes more you'll understand more."⁴

This kind of acceptance of the values and ways of Jewish society reveals the author's message that "Arabs of the interior" should emulate Jews if ever they—Arabs—desire to enjoy progress and catch up with modern ways and ideas. Compare this with some of the fiction of writers such as al-Nashashibi that read more like war propaganda and one sees the difference. Negative stereotypes about Jews are more often than not found in the works of Arab writers in the diaspora.

"Arabs of the interior" are distinguished from their counterparts in the Occupied Territories or exile by the fact that many if not all of them are proficient in the Hebrew language and culture. Some have also published novels in Hebrew—the most famous example is Anton Shammas's *Arabeskot* (Arabesques, 1986). Other Palestinian writers inside Israel proper who have published fiction, poetry, and articles in Hebrew are Naim Araydi, Emile Habibi, Nazih Kheir, and Attallah Mansur, among others. Filmmakers as diverse as Michel Khleifi, Rashid Masharawi, and Elia Suleiman, who hail from Galilee in northern Israel, have produced some of the most refined and technically superior Palestinian films. It would be beneficial to conduct a detailed study on the regional differences in the artistic production of the different branches of Palestinians.

THE ISRAELI MACHINE IN THE PALESTINIAN GARDEN

Several Palestinian works make the point that Israel is an artificial structure superimposed by force on the natural native landscape of Palestine. This can be seen in Kanafani's "Land of Sad Oranges", Michel Khleifi's films, *Wedding in Galilee* and *Canticle for the Stones*, and Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*, as well as in his poems about "Rita", his Jewish beloved.

As mentioned before in Kanafani's "Land of Sad Oranges" the orange tree would wither away if watered by a foreign (Israeli) rather than a native (Palestinian) hand. This theme is also illustrated in the remarkable scene in *Wedding in Galilee* which shows the Israeli soldiers and the Palestinian headman trying to save the latter's prized horse from being killed in the minefields. In dealing with the animal and the land Israelis use modern ways and technological devices, to no avail, but it is the Palestinian, the native son of the land, who, with his indigenous cunning and intimate cries to the horse, manages to lead the animal to safety. Likewise in *Canticle for the Stones* the impact of Israel and its modern technological apparatus on the spirit of the Palestinians is powerfully illustrated. The returning Palestinian beloved poses this question that sums up this theme: "till when will we let them invade our private garden?" The Palestinian garden being invaded by the Israeli machine is a recurrent image in other scenes, as in the case of a Palestinian house being destroyed by a giant rake-toothed crane, a technological tyrannosaurus.⁵

ARABS AND JEWS: THE INTIMATE FOES

Arabs and Jews are divided by their conflict over the land of Palestine/Israel. But one is struck by the similarities between them. Both had their revival movements in modern times: Arabs had their *nahda* and Jews had their Haskalah. Both *nahda* and *haskalah* were centered on the revival of a classical language: Arabic and Hebrew respectively. In both revival movements there is veneration of the lofty language: the Jewish *m'litza* and the Arab veneration of their classical literary language, the *fusha*. And as we have seen there are common themes in both Arabic and Hebrew poetry.⁶

It would be beneficial to see more studies on the common themes in Arabic and Hebrew fiction. Themes such as exile (*manfa* in Arabic and *galut* in Hebrew) are common in both literary traditions, as are themes like return, homeland, redemption, war, and peace. The fiction

of Aharon Megged, Amos Oz, David Grossman, Sammy Michael, Moshe Shamir, Yonatan Ratosh, Benjamin Tammuz, A.B. Yahoshua, S. Yizhar, and Yosef Haim Brenner can be compared to the fiction of their Palestinian counterparts such as Atallah Mansur, Emile Habibi, Ghassan Kanafani, Hanna Ibrahim, Ishaq Musa al-Husayni, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Liana Badr, and Sahar Khalifeh among others. Novelist Ghassan Kanafani can be compared to A.B. Yehoshua, not only for the common themes their fiction has, but also for the novelistic techniques they both employ. Consider the fact that both the Palestinian and the Israeli novelist appear to have been influenced by William Faulkner; and the episodic structure of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* and Yehoshua's *The Lover* begs for comparison.

Ashis Nandy studies Anglo-Indian relations in a significant book with the telling title *The Intimate Enemy*. One could say that Arabs and Jews are intimate enemies. They appear to have more in common than not. Their enmity emanates from a sense of likeness in their book-centered tradition, sense of peoplehood, the encounter of their age-old religious code with modernity, and the veneration they have for their respective languages, Arabic and Hebrew, as languages of revelations. Their enmity appears to be more conceived than real. It is akin to the perceived bipolarity between man and woman, shown by the literary critic Terry Eagleton to dissolve under scrutiny:

Woman is the opposite of man, the "other" of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle. But equally man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it. And his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence. Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore an essential reminder of what he is. Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity of what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being parasitically dependent upon the woman, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all. Perhaps she stands as a sign of something in man himself which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definitive limits. Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien is also intimate.⁷

Likewise, the bipolarity between the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in the Middle East is more apparent than real. With some modifications

in the quote by Eagleton, in order to apply it to the Israelis and the Palestinians rather than to man and woman, one ends up with this insightful statement about Palestinian-Israeli relations:

The Israeli is the opposite of the Palestinian, the 'other' of the Palestinian: the Israeli is a non-Palestinian, defective Palestinian, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the Palestinian first principle. But equally the Palestinian is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it. And his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence. The Israeli is not just an other in the sense of something beyond the Palestinian's ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore an essential reminder of what he is. The Palestinian therefore needs this other even as he spurns it, is constrained to give a positive identity of what he regards as no-thing. Not only is his own being . . . dependent upon the Israeli, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating the Israeli but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because the Israeli may not be quite so other after all. Perhaps the Israeli stands as a sign of something in the Palestinian himself which he needs to repress, expel beyond his own being, relegate to a securely alien region beyond his own definitive limits. Perhaps what is outside is also somehow inside, what is alien is also intimate.

WOMEN AS RECONCILERS?

Oftentimes it is the women who in scenes of confrontations between Arabs and Jews in literature or film tend to find ways to connect across ethnic, religious, or political lines.

In Hanna Ibrahim's short story "The Infiltrators" it is the Jewish heroine who finds a way not only to relate to the plight of another woman—a Palestinian infiltrator with a child and in search of her captive husband—but also to sympathize and extend her help.

In Ishaq Musa al-Husayni's allegorical novel *The Diary of a Palestinian Hen* it is the wise Palestinian hen, not the rooster, who preaches peace and coexistence with the invaders (i.e., Zionists). The roosters, especially the hot-headed youngsters amongst them, would rather fight to the death.

Likewise, it is the woman Umm Sabir in Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* who has a sympathetic reaction to the pain of an Israeli woman and her daughter. Other Palestinian women writers such as Fadwa Tuqan and Raymonda Tawil transcend the barrier of hatred and find the courage to connect with some Israelis. Fadwa Tuqan, the mother

without a child, tenderly addresses Eytan, the Jewish-Israeli boy in her poem "Eytan," and acts as an intermediary between Arab and Israeli leaders. Raymonda Tawil learned Hebrew and has found a way to reach out to her Israeli enemies. We have also noted the evocative scene in the film *Wedding in Galilee* where a fainting Israeli female soldier is revived by a group of Palestinian women.

Unlike men, it seems, women have a way of connecting across barriers. Can they be the agents for genuine reconciliation between warring communities?

Hanan Ashrawi's poem "Women and Things" inspires hope:

Women can make things cold
sharp and hard
like a legal argument thrust
before the threat of search and detention
Or warm
and gentle like
justice in a poem,
like the suggestion of
the image of freedom
as a warm bath and
a long soak, in an undemolished home
Women make things
And as we, in separate
worlds, braid
our daughters' hair
In the morning, you and
I, each
humming to herself, suddenly
stops
and hears the
tune of the other.⁸

These are remarkable lines by a Palestinian woman who in 1991 held peace negotiations with the Israelis in Madrid. Does life imitate art? "Hearing the tune of the other" is what both Arabs and Jews need at this juncture of their history. For herein lies their joint salvation.

LITERATURE, VIOLENCE, AND RECONCILIATION: A NOVEL APPROACH TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

What is the importance of studying the literature of the Arab-Israeli conflict? While the political history may shed light on the aims and

opinions of the government officials involved, only literature can show us the internal struggles—of conscience, hatred, hope, love—that the everyday individuals of the region experience; from literature we can gain profound insights into the human aspect of the story.

Take the example of Ghassan Kanafani, who besides being one of the most talented Palestinian novelists was also the official spokesman for the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). His organization espouses armed struggle against the Israelis and was responsible for several spectacular hijackings that ended up with planes being blown up. As we have mentioned before, some of these hijackings were graphically described by Kanafani's fellow PFLP member Leila Kahled in her autobiography, *My People Shall Live*. And yet Kanafani is credited with presenting some of the most sympathetic treatment of Jewish characters in Arabic literature. With great sensitivity and empathy, Kanafani depicts the Jewish Israelis Ephrat and Miriam as survivors of the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust. Their suffering and victimhood make them sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. When Miriam sees the Haganah fighters throw down the corpse of an Arab boy as though it were a piece of wood, she is reminded of her brother, who was killed by the Nazis at Auschwitz, and, as Kanafani narrates, she feels like fleeing back to Europe. Through the character of Miriam, Kanafani links the tragic experiences of both the European Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, evoking our sympathy for both communities.⁹

Moreover the conflict between Arabs, and Jews in Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* is depicted as a conflict between two brothers, Dov and Khalid. Dov as we know is in reality Khalidun, the Arab baby left behind by his Arab parents during their chaotic flight from Haifa in the midst of the 1948 war. In his fictional world Kanafani sees the Arab-Israeli conflict as a fraternal conflict, a bloody rivalry between siblings—a theme that has its echoes in the rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael of the biblical story, as well as in some Israeli Hebrew writings such as *My Enemy, Myself* by Yoram Binyur.¹⁰

Throughout this study, what has been most compelling is the manner in which literature and cinema capture the humanistic elements of the conflict. Political pronouncements tend to present issues in a dualistic black-and-white way. Nuance and shades of meaning, allusion and metaphor, blending, and hybrid entities are more likely to be the stuff of literature and art, not the stuff of politics. And herein lies the discrepancy between what Palestinian and Israeli politicians say and what Palestinian and Israeli writers and filmmakers express through their creative works. As long as we keep judging Arabs and Jews of the

Middle East by what their respective politicians pronounce, we will remain unaware of the common resonances of their innermost fears and aspirations, anxieties and hopes, defeats and triumphs that are embedded in their respective literature and art. Studying Arab and Jewish literature and art side by side pierces their respective rhetoric and eloquently illustrates that their affinities are real, their destinies intertwined, and their salvation can be achieved only in recognizing their common humanity.

APPENDIX 1: POETRY

EYTAN IN THE STEEL TRAP

Fadwa Tuqan

[One morning a child from Kibbutz Ma'oz Hayyim asked, "How much longer must we defend the motherland?" It was an awesome question.]

Under the tree, branching out, spreading and growing . . . growing
 In savage rhythms,
 Under the "star", as it builds before his very eyes
 Walls of bloody dreams,
 Forming a trap, held tightly together with the thread of steel,
 Trapping him within, denying him movement
 Eytan, the child, the human being, opens his eyes
 And asks,
 Why the trap and the walls?
 Why the time with amputated legs, clad in khaki and death,
 Enveloped in smoke rising from flames and from sorrows?
 If only the "star" could tell the truth,
 If only it could.
 But alas!
 Alas, the "star"!

Eytan, my child
 You are the victim, drowning in lies,
 And like Eytan, the harbor is sunk in a sea of lies,
 Drowned by the bloated dream
 With the head of a dragon
 And a thousand arms.
 Alas, alas!
 If only you could remain the child, the human being!
 But I shudder, and live in dread
 That you may grow up inside the trap,
 In this time of amputated legs, clad in khaki,
 In cruel death, in smoke and sorrow.