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Garrett C. Shuffield

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A New Generation "Returns": Fracture, Disorientation, and Tragedy in Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir*

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Karen Grumberg, Supervisor

Jeremi Suri

A New Generation "Returns": Fracture, Disorientation, and Tragedy in Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir*

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Garrett C. Shuffield

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

For Arabic translations to English, unless otherwise noted, I depend on Paul Starkey's 2018 translation of *Masa'ir*, entitled *Fractured Destinies*. All Spanish translations are my own, and I accept full responsibility for any errors or omissions they may contain. In transliterating Arabic words, I attempt to distinguish between sounds that do not exist in the English alphabet through the use of diacritical markings according to the Library of Congress guide to Arabic romanization, with some modifications made for well-known proper names.

Abstract

A New Generation "Returns": Fracture, Disorientation, and Tragedy in Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir*

Garrett C. Shuffield, MA, MGPS
The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

Supervisor: Karen Grumberg

This thesis explores the concept of return to Palestine as presented in two recent novels, Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* (Becoming Palestine) and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir: kūnshirtū al-hūlūkawst wa-l-nakba* (Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba), published in English translation as *Fractured Destinies*. These novels problematize the themes of exile, return, and home as traditionally presented in Palestinian literature. Reading the two novels in conversation, the thesis argues that a new Palestinianness is emerging, built upon shared experiences of suffering but also on the diversity that has emerged among the communities of the Palestinian diaspora and those continuing to live in historical Palestine. In particular, the thesis calls attention to the historical and contemporary experiences of Palestinian diaspora communities in Latin America, members of which are demonstrating an increased level of engagement with historical Palestine. To be Palestinian, the authors argue, cannot only mean to desire to return to Palestine; in fact, *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* question whether any

meaningful return is possible any longer in the context of the political realities on the ground. Palestinianness has thus come to be characterized more by disorientation than by any political principle. The writings of Meruane and Madhoun demonstrate that to be Palestinian at this moment in time is to be disoriented. Yet, *return* continues to hold sway in the minds of Palestinians across the globe, as they grapple with issues of identity, place, politics, and memory. Through close readings and analyses of language, style, and characterization, this thesis explores the ways in which *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* elaborate senses of fracture, disorientation, and tragedy as Meruane and Madhoun describe what it means to be Palestinian today.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction **1**

Chapter 2: Literature Review **6**

Palestinian literature 6

Theories of Diaspora 11

The Palestinian Diaspora 17

Space and Place in Palestinian Literature 21

Return Literature: A Palestinian Genre 25

Chapter 3: Historiography **29**

Chapter 4: Literary Structure **37**

Setting: Episodes and Narration 37

Practical Aesthetics 43

Movement, Transience, and Transition 46

The Airport and the Checkpoint 48

The Built Environment 56

The Metatextual 60

Chapter 5: Characters **64**

Main Characters 64

Insiders 67

Local Informants 69

Half-Rooted Couples 72

Chapter 6: Symbols of Return 76

Houses 76

Memorials 78

Ashes: Symbol of Continuity and Finality 81

Conclusion 85

Bibliography 92

Chapter 1: Introduction

For Palestinians, one of modernity's most famous exilic groups, the theme of return plays a significant role in the production of literary texts. "Return" structures political organization and solidarity, providing a rallying cry for those Palestinian organizations who demand the right to physical return; it serves as a rhetorical device for Palestinian writers who wish to express identity-based senses of exile and loss; it supplies the Palestinian community with a metaphor, a hope, a dream to ground lived experience for those Palestinians who do not live in their pre-1948 homes. The theme of return also carries several related concepts, including those of *home* and *exile*. As a Palestinian national literary canon formed during the second half of the twentieth century, these themes came to be inextricably linked with Palestinian self-expression. Likewise, they were connected to revolutionary politics, with *return* as a central demand for Palestinian armed groups and politicians throughout the second half of the 20th century. The concept has continued to play a significant role to the present day as a political signifier for official Palestinian negotiators and unofficial activists alike.

Seven decades and several generations removed from the *nakba*, or the tragic 1948 removal of Palestinians from their land and homes, Palestinian literature continues to engage with the themes of return, home, and exile. Romantic notions of the land still find their way into novels, an increasing number of which are being published in English and marketed to Anglophone audiences. But what of those Palestinians who have no memory of the land they fled as children, or the land from which their parents or grandparents left?

And what of those Palestinian communities who established an external, diasporic presence in the Western Hemisphere before the *nakba*, whose right to citizenship in a Palestinian state was prematurely cut short by British Mandatory citizenship and migration policies? How does a group that increasingly identifies as a concrete exilic community understand the received notions of *home*, passed down by a century of literary heritage and the hopes of refugees?

This thesis engages with these and related questions as they are explored by two recently-published works of literature. The first, Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* (Becoming Palestine), is a Spanish-language literary memoir written in 2012 by a Chilean-Palestinian author.[1] *Volverse Palestina* recounts the partially fictionalized experiences undergone by Meruane as she contemplates visiting the land of her ancestors, followed by an actual trip to Jaffa, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Beit Jala, the latter being the West Bank village from which her grandfather emigrated. Meruane's novella is significant because it broadens the genre of return literature beyond a simple travelogue, the style in which most Spanish-language material is written concerning the experiences of Arab immigrants to Latin America. Likewise, her experience broadens the definition of a "Palestinian diaspora" to potentially include the pre-*nakba* communities, which live mainly in the Western Hemisphere and which consist not only of groups based in Europe and the United States, but also of those living in the countries of Latin America.

[1] Lina Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, Colección Dislocados (Mexico City: Literal Publishing, 2013).

The second work under consideration is Rabai al-Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir: kūnshirtū al-hūlūkawst wa-l-nakba* (Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba),[2] which was published in Arabic in 2015 and translated to English as *Fractured Destinies: A Novel* by Paul Starkey in 2018 following its reception of the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction, the so-called "Arab Booker Prize," in 2016.[3] An avant-garde novel composed in the style of a musical concerto, *Maṣā'ir* explores the themes of exile and return through four "movements," representing the experiences of characters whose experiences intersect. Blending cinematically styled exposition with perspective shifts and metatextual components, Madhoun's novel also broadens the scope of the Palestinian experience beyond the standard narratives of Palestinians living as refugees in Lebanese camps, as nomads in the Negev, or as a tenuously assimilated group in Amman. The work captures a multiplicity of experiences, from those of Palestinians living in the Gulf, the United Kingdom, or Canada, to those of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, to those of "returnees" without citizenship papers, to those of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

By reading these two novels in conversation with one another and with their particular contexts, I demonstrate how contemporary Palestinian writers are problematizing traditional conceptions of exile, return, and home. This analysis builds on the work of Drew Paul, who has studied Madhoun's previous work and its implications for

[2] Rabai al-Madhoun, *Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba (مصائر: كونشرتو الهولوكوست والنكبة)* (Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-'arabiyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr [Arab Institute for Research and Publishing], 2015).
[3] Rabai al-Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies: A Novel* (London: Hoopoe, 2018).

the meaning of “exile” and “return.” I am especially indebted to his conception of “rupture,” a concept that I apply to both novels to demonstrate the effects of disorientation and fragmentation that they express.[4]

Meruane and Madhoun develop new conceptions of terms like “exile,” “return,” and “home” in three ways: literary-structural elements like setting and metatextuality; jarring characterization; and symbolism that draws upon and subverts the traditional “return narrative.” In the chapters following a literary and historiographical review, I consider the ways in which these elements contribute to senses of disorientation, and the ensuing effect that this disorientation has on a changing Palestinian community both inside and outside the borders of historical Palestine. Chapter 4, “Literary Structure,” considers the formal and aesthetic elements employed by Meruane and Madhoun, and the expressive effects of these artistic choices. Chapter 5, “Characterization,” deals with character tropes and interactions contained within the novels, also demonstrating their relevance to a sense of disorientation, a subversion of classic Palestinian writing styles, and a newly constituted Palestinianness that looks for ways to navigate a likely permanent estrangement from the land of Palestine. Chapter 6, “Symbols,” analyzes several key points of imagery found in *Maṣā’ir* and *Volverse Palestina*, namely ashes, homes, and memorial sites, in order to show the literary innovations that Madhoun and Meruane make in their novels, and how these further add to a more diaspora-centric understanding of Palestinian identity. Each section underscores the authors’ conceptions of the fragility of any depiction of return to Palestine,

[4] This thesis especially draws on the ideas articulated in Paul’s doctoral dissertation. Drew Paul, “Border Fiction: Fracture and Contestation in Post-Oslo Palestinian Culture” (Dissertation: The University of Texas at Austin, 2013);

whether these depictions are literary or biographical. The sections consider whether *return*, for Palestinians, can any longer approach the nearly Platonic political significance that has come to be assigned to it and that has been expressed throughout the corpus of Palestinian literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

PALESTINIAN LITERATURE

A relatively recent national literary form, uniquely Palestinian fiction emerged near the beginning of the twentieth century. Spurred by similar production elsewhere in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Palestinian authors built on more traditional forms of artistic expression, such as poetry and oral storytelling, to create works of fiction that more closely resembled the prose writing of Europe in form. Khalil Baydas is generally credited with writing the first "Palestinian novel" with *al-Warīth*, or *The Heir*, which was published in 1920.[5] Baydas and others had previously translated works of fiction from Russian, English, and French, making novels like those of Tolstoy, Twain, and Hugo accessible to an Arabic-speaking readership.

Fiction did not catch on to a great degree in Palestine before the *nakba* of 1948. This tends to be explained in the literature as the result of the prominence of poetry in Arab culture. Indeed, poetry predominated in Palestine in the early half of the twentieth century.[6] In this respect, Palestine followed a similar trajectory as that of other Arab countries, which were also influenced by the rich tradition of Arabic poetry, including the pre-Islamic, the Qur'anic, and the political, the latter of which emerged in response to incursions by European powers in the Arab world. In Palestine, political poetry gained recognition

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[5] Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992): 13.
[6] Ibid., 7-10.

throughout the twenties and thirties in the face of the British Mandate and increased immigration by European Jews. Following the events of 1948, the political would become an inescapable part of Palestinian literary production, finding expression in the well-known resistance poems and novels of the 1950s and 1960s.

A prominent English-language anthology of Palestinian literature defines the national literature as necessarily political, conditioned by writers' lived experiences as political objects. Jayyusi says that:

> Modern Palestinian experience is harsh, unrelenting, and all-penetrating; no Palestinian is free from its grip and no writer can evade it. It cannot be forgotten and its anguish cannot be transcended. Whether in Israel, or in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or in the diaspora, Palestinians are committed by their very identity to a life determined by events and circumstances arising out of their own rejection of captivity and national loss, as well as by other people's intentions, suspicions, fears, and aggressions. There is no escape. For the writer to contemplate an orientation completely divorced from political life is to belie reality, to deny experience … This means that Palestinian writers have little scope for indulging in escapism; they are compromised by the events of contemporary history even before they are born.[7]

Palestinian writers appear to be constrained by their very identities, frequently producing existential and personally-influenced narratives that engage with political ideas.

This political trend in literature was, of course, not confined to the Palestinian context, and earlier Palestinian writers, particularly those in diaspora, wrote in conversation with prominent artists who believed that literature should serve political ends. This movement, so-called *al-'adab al-multazim*, or "committed literature," grew in influence throughout the 1950s in response to critical texts written by the likes of Sartre, whose

[7] Ibid., 3.

notion of *engagement* was translated by the Egyptian literary doyen Taha Hussein as *al-iltizām*, or "commitment."[8] In a tradition influenced by critics such as Adorno and by the Soviet Union's state-benefiting artistic scene, many Arab writers came to see "art for art's sake" as an impossibility, subsumed beneath the individual's obligation to address social problems as an artist.[9] The concept of commitment had a marked effect on the literature that was produced by Palestinians in the 1960s, and is best represented by the novels of Ghassan Kanafani and the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. Regarding Darwish, who has been called Palestine's national poet, Jayyusi argues that he came to be "trapped in his own kind of commitment: to the cause of his people, and, equally firmly, to the image he holds of himself as their confirmed poet-spokesman, obliged constantly to reiterate their grievances, to the exclusion of almost all other experience."[10]

Doubtless other Palestinian writers felt similar pressures to unfailingly represent the plight of their people to their audiences. Interestingly, it is this commitment that is conspicuously absent in the writing of both Meruane and Madhoun: Meruane cannot confidently speak as a Palestinian, having lived a life in Chile removed from Palestinian culture; Madhoun appears to consciously forego the role of Palestine representative, inserting himself into his novel at will and exiting it as he appears. I will return to this issue in chapter 4 as part of a discussion the novels' structural elements and of the ambivalence Madhoun exhibits toward traditional narratives of exilic return.

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[8] David Dimeo, *Committed to Disillusion: Activist Writers in Egypt in the 1960s-1980s* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2016): 46.
[9] Ibid., 17-18.
[10] Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, 8.

As mentioned above, Palestinian literary production is influenced by the concept of exile, with different literatures emerging depending on location. Jayyusi argues that Palestinian literature before 1967 should be divided into two camps: that of literature composed within the borders of historical Palestine, and that of literature written in exile. Likewise, Ami Elad-Bouskila divides Palestinian literary engagement into one group, which "lived and created with a local perspective from outside Israel," and a second that "lived within the borders of Israel," the latter of which Elad-Bouskila notes did not receive much scholarly or literary attention on the international stage until Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967.[11]

For these scholars, refugees in the exterior represent a special case because they were often the objects of political caprice in their mainly Arab host countries. Their literature tended to differ from that of Palestinians residing in the state of Israel, since "Palestinian authors in the diaspora came into direct contact with the radical literary experiments that have dominated Arabic letters since the fifties";[12] these writers, free from the very real literary isolation imposed by Israeli borders, participated in and contributed to what Jayyusi terms "one of the richest periods of Arab literary history,"[13] when authors such as Naguib Mahfouz brought Arabic literature to the world's attention. By the time of publication of Jayyusi's anthology in 1992, exiled Palestinian poets especially had become "among the foremost avant-garde poets of the Arab world."[14]

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[11] Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1999): 9.
[12] Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, 5.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

Palestinian literature is influenced by much more than the political, however. Geographer Barbara Parmenter has pointed to the role of space and landscape on the literature emerging from various Palestinian contexts, including that of exile. What Parmenter terms the "landscape of exile" has found expression in several motifs, including those of the desert, the city, and the refugee camp.[15] These locations appeared frequently in Palestinian diasporic literature, taking on symbolic significance as places of suffering, self-definition, humiliation, uprootedness, and exteriority. These more classic tropes have little bearing on the narratives present in Meruane's and Madhoun's novels, however. Rather, both Meruane and Madhoun subvert the classic staging options, preferring instead to set their novels in more uncertain places.

In a likely deliberate attempt to differentiate their return narratives from more traditional accounts of the rediscovery of the land of Palestine by a long-suffering exile, Meruane and Madhoun present characters who are bewildered by the built environment they encounter within historical Palestine. This disorientation undergirds the sense of fragmentation and uncertainty that both novels express, demonstrating that, for Meruane and Madhoun, Palestinian identity is even more unsettled today than it has been in the past. Far from the bucolic and agricultural themes that frequently appear in Palestinian literature, the place-based themes of *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* focus on buildings and interactions between protagonists and rooted human characters. I will return to this theme

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[15] Barbara M. Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994): 50.

in chapters 4 and 5 with discussions of the ways in which the two novels' characters react to Palestine's built environment and to the human characters they meet upon arrival there.

THEORIES OF DIASPORA

Meruane and Madhoun write from positions within diaspora communities, so we must consider the ways in which the scholarly literature has defined and approached the term "diaspora." Many scholars base their understandings of diaspora on the "classic diaspora nationalisms": foremost the Jewish diaspora, but also well-known dispersed communities like Greeks and Armenians.[16] However, as Stéphane Dufoix notes, diaspora has become a global term that is increasing in usage.[17] In contemporary discourse, "diaspora" is applied to many dispersed groups, members of which reside outside the borders of a specific pre-defined nation. The term "diaspora" has lost much of its earlier meaning, which evoked a sense of exile and an inability to return. Today, diaspora has come to be applied to groups with a greater level of agency, including powerful communities of Indian and Chinese migrants and their descendants. These groups exert a significant influence on their countries of origin, and they are on average more connected to their homelands than the "classic" diasporas, which tended to be dispersed by force.

At the same time, several scholars warn against the indiscriminate use of the term "diaspora" to refer to Palestinians living in exile. Sari Hanafi argues that Palestinians

[16] See Anthony D. Smith, "Diasporas and Homelands in History: The Case of the Classic Diasporas," in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, Institute of Jewish Studies: Studies in Judaica (Leiden: BRILL, 2010): 8.
[17] Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

residing outside of historical Palestine constitute, at best, a "partially diasporized" group because of the relative weakness of Palestine as a "center of gravity" and the more recent coalescence of a Palestinian identity, which took place in the past century.[18] This is not to mention the more recent development of a Palestinian *national* identity, the current form of which traces back to the 1960s. Likewise, Julie Peteet argues that the political components of Palestinian identity, namely the demand for return, center the experiences and actions of many but not all members of a Palestinian "diaspora"; she points out that the concepts of "exile" and "refugeeness" must be "disaggregated" from that of diaspora in order to truly express the condition of Palestinians residing abroad.[19] Her argument teases out some of the variegated qualities of the experiences of Palestinians, particularly those who have assimilated to host countries. These experiences pertain to the returning characters presented in the novels written by Meruane and Madhoun since these characters have at least partially assimilated into the societies of other countries, namely Chile, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Much of the scholarship on diaspora is indebted to the groundbreaking theory of Stuart Hall, and his insights are useful here as well. Peteet, for one, depends on Hall's 1995 proclamation that diaspora means the "scattering and dispersal of peoples who will *never* literally be able to return to the places from which they came."[20] However, Peteet does not

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[18] Sari Hanafi, "Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationships between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories," *International Social Science Review* 4, no. 1–2 (2003): 179.
[19] Julie Peteet, "Problematizing a Palestinian Diaspora," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 04 (November 2007): 628
[20] Stuart Hall, "New Cultures for Old," in *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ed. D. Massey and P. Jess (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 206.

engage the question of what it means to "literally" return. This distinction is a crucial one for the analysis presented in this thesis; both Meruane and Madhoun, in different ways, assert that while physical return may be possible in small pieces, the current inaccessibility of the land of historical Palestine to many Palestinians in exile means that an actual, meaningful return is presently impossible and impracticable. Even in the context of temporary returns, such as those undertaken by characters in Meruane's and Madhoun's books, Palestine as it is experienced by returnees cannot compare to the images, memories, and nostalgic descriptions held as preconceptions by the returnees. Is a literal return possible? For Madhoun, it is not possible to the degree that it would have been before 1967. For Meruane, the century of separation between her semi-autobiographical protagonist and the protagonist's emigrant great-grandparents means that return is also impracticable.

It is also important to note that "diaspora" need not always be a fixed or cohesive category; it may change over time, at the whims of external observers or by the agency of community members themselves. Hanafi's contention that Palestinians in exile are moving toward a diasporic status is helpful here, as is another of Hall's contentions, that "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[21] Exilic Palestinians are not only in a sense part of a universal Palestinian diaspora (or something approaching a universalizing diaspora), but also bound together by the shared experiences of a different sort of exile and a different sort of identity. As James Clifford notes, "at different times in their history, societies may

[21] Ibid., 225.

wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities-obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections-in their host countries and transnationally."[22] Such shifts were certainly visible in the Palestinian community over time, though accelerations in advocacy on behalf of Palestinian nationalism and in affective identification with Palestinian suffering occurred in the 1980s and again surrounding 2014.

Historically, scholars of diaspora have struggled to place Palestinians into analytical frameworks. Dufoix characterizes Palestinian exile as "multipolar," being connected through politically motivated guerilla organizations and "symbolically gathered" around ambitions for national sovereignty.[23] Presumably the distinction between this "multipolar" category and the one Dufoix assigns to Jews before the advent of Zionism ("atopic") stems from whether the group in question seeks to acquire territory connected to an already-existing state. However, Palestinians might also fall into the category Dufoix establishes as "antagonistic," where an exilic group is opposed to a current regime and competes with it for recognition of legitimacy.[24] The quintessential diaspora community for this category is the case of Iranian-Americans, who advocate politically for antagonistic policy in their host country toward the current regime of their home country. Palestinians do this too, whether they take antagonistic stances toward the state of Israel or toward the post-Oslo Palestinian Authority.

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[22] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1994): 306.
[23] Dufoix, *Diasporas*, 97.
[24] Ibid., 64.

The difficulty of categorizing Palestinians comes back to an inherent problem with the term "diaspora," since it is differently understood yet commonly used. Perhaps the most relevant way to understand the Palestinian diaspora in the context of this thesis is that presented by James Clifford in 1994, in an essay in which he argued that diasporic identity is necessarily contingent and lived within a "fraught coexistence" with other diaspora members and the host country.[25] "Return," as a structuring mechanism, may continue to be significant both politically and socially, but as Clifford says, "decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of original return."[26] Likewise, "[a] shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin."[27] In this definition, the Palestinian diaspora comes to resemble the prototypical diaspora community, that of the Jews following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. With return increasingly impossible, as in the case of the inhabitants of Roman Judea, identity in exile has increasingly come to be represented through remembrances of tragedies, affirmation of culture, or success in business as a form of acculturation.

Along these lines, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin discuss the Jewish diaspora as having developed a Jewish identity that is defined by generational connections rather than geographic or genealogical ones. A communal identity that is based on "memory, history, family, and practice" is to them more significant to determining Jewish identity than are

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[25] Clifford, "Diasporas," 328.
[26] Ibid., 306.
[27] Ibid.

claims to indigeneity or land.[28] These communal identifiers endured through the tragedy of diaspora far more than did an emphasis on geography. In fact, the Boyarins push back against Zionist claims of Jewish autochthony in the mythology of the Jewish people; "the biblical story," they argue, "is not one of autochthony but one of always already coming from somewhere else," in reference to the tales of patriarchs such as Abraham and to the Torah's depictions of exile and exodus.[29] Edward Said echoes the sentiments of these scholars when he writes that "Palestinians feel that they have been turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews. But the Palestinians also know that their own sense of national identity has been nourished in the exile milieu."[30]

The concept of "return" has also been problematized by the work of Avtar Brah. Brah coined the term "homing desire" to describe a diaspora's relationship with its origins, stating that "the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a 'homeland.'"[31] Diaspora for Brah produces "identities that are at once local and global" and that are "networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities."[32] The "homing desire" serves to reinforce the "imagined" nature of a community, and is in

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[28] Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 85
[29] Ibid., 104.
[30] Edward W Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000): 178.
[31] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 180.
[32] Ibid., 196.

turn reinforced by the practice of what Brah terms "difference as identity": identity is identification, performance, and proclamation.[33]

With a lack of scholarly consensus on what diaspora means, let alone how to apply such a definition to the Palestinian community, it can be difficult to write in a stylistically interesting and non-pedantic way about Palestinians residing outside of historical Palestine. For this reason, this thesis tends to use the terms "Palestinian diaspora," "Palestinians in exile," and "exilic Palestinian communities" interchangeably, with an acknowledgement that they are incomplete terms, none of which captures the breadth of the experience of Palestinian dispersal. In addition, when discussing specific Palestinian communities such as that residing within the borders of present-day Chile, I default to the community's terms of self-identification; in this specific case, I use "Palestinian-Chilean," "Chilean-Palestinian," and "Arab-Chilean" interchangeably as well. In doing so I do not intend to minimize the suffering of exilic communities or normalize the experience of diaspora, but rather to emphasize the diversity of diaspora communities, even from one "origin," including the multiplicity of experiences undergone within a single community in diaspora.

THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA

While diaspora and exile afford marginalized groups the ability to construct dynamic place-based consciousnesses, they are nonetheless spaces of tragedy. Tragedy is the thread that runs through the experiences of all peoples forced into exile, and particularly

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[33] Ibid., 124.

of those who cannot feasibly return to their homes or to those of their ancestors. Exile, argues Edward Said, is a space of discontinuity:

> Exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people.[34]

This discontinuity is a facet of the tragedy of exile, one that is repeated again and again in the narratives of return that emerge in Palestinian "return literature" and reinforced by the title and content of Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir* ("Destinies," reflecting the predominance of one destiny and the tragedy of another). This tragedy, for Said, manifests in several ways. First, there is "the sheer fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community."[35] This isolation can result in a sort of fetishization of exile, Said argues, resulting in further isolation and disconnection—the discontinuity of exile. Another facet of exile for Said is "the pressure on the exile to join—parties, national movements, the state," a process by which the exile "is offered a new set of affiliations and develops new loyalties."[36] This new affiliation, however, contributes to the loss of "critical perspective, of intellectual reserve, of moral courage" that might be preserved in a less-connected experience. In these alternative poles of exilic experience, Said gets at the fraught nature of exile: always in-between, never in.

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[34] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 177.
[35] Ibid., 183.
[36] Ibid.

In an attempt to capture the transitory nature of exile, Chantal Bordes-Benayoun describes diaspora culture as a "culture of mobility."[37] For her, diaspora is best defined by concepts like globalism, a borderless world, and the non-national. However, the concept of mobility connotes some degree of agency on the part of the one doing the moving. Therefore, Bordes-Benayoun's is an elite position that has little application for the Palestinian refugee, the lives of many of whom are characterized by a *lack* of mobility. Harassed at airports and border checkpoints, and some without even the passport of a recognized state, many Palestinians would chafe at the definition of their existence as mobile. Said's concept of the exile as non-habitual is more appropriate. For Said, "[e]xile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure. … Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew."[38] It is important to note that Said did have a relatively privileged relationship to mobility, having had the opportunity to move far more freely than many other Palestinians could have. Said, of course, acknowledged this tension, and his struggle with it is a central theme of his memoir, *Out of Place*.[39]

The Palestinian diaspora has also more recently been characterized by Helena Lindholm Schulz as related to the twin experiences of "transnationalism" and "confinement." The Palestinian exile lives and acquires her identity in between the two: "not only when missing home, remembering Palestine or struggling to get there and to

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[37] Chantal Bordes-Benayoun, "Contemporary Diasporas, Nationalism, and Transnationalism Politics," in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, Institute of Jewish Studies: Studies in Judaica (Leiden: BRILL, 2002): 50.
[38] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 186.
[39] Edward Said, *Out of Place* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

reverse the injustice, but also while moving between different destinations and when attempting to live as decent lives as possible elsewhere, Palestinian identity is acquired."[40] This supplements Said's dichotomy of "isolation" and "joining" mentioned above, as additional axes of Palestinian life in exile.

Palestinians are not only shaped by the exilic experience, but they also actively construct the meaning of Palestine. Khachig Tölölyan points to the existence of a "diasporic transnationalism," which takes place along one axis identified by Schulz. For Tölölyan, "the homeland is not home. It is a place to *care* about, but not a place in which and to which one can wholeheartedly *belong*."[41] The alienation experienced by countless narrators in Palestinian stories of return attests to the difficulties in "belonging" to a place from which one has been absent, under duress, for decades. In this view, "homeland" is subjective and contingent, affective and affiliative; it structures being and belonging in exile, but the key features of diaspora mean that it cannot be "home."

The axes identified by Said and Schulz also play a significant role in structuring the narratives of the works of literature considered by this thesis. Narratives of return are inherently about mobility and transnational identity, as characters move from a place of exile to a homeland, however constituted. They are also about confinement and immobility, be it difficulties at airports, the segregated layouts of individual cities, or the circumnavigation of walls and checkpoints. Chapters 4 and 5 will deal with the rupture of

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[40] Helena Lindholm Schulz with Julie Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 169.

[41] Khachig Tölölyan, "Beyond the Homeland: From Exilic Nationalism to Diasporic Transnationalism," in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, Institute of Jewish Studies: Studies in Judaica 9 (Leiden: BRILL, 2002): 39.

identities and the experiences of exilic return that happen between the characters and in the spaces of Meruane's and Madhoun's books, especially as these generate a sense of alienation for the returnee.

Space and Place in Palestinian Literature

In order to analyze works of Palestinian literature, and particularly those that deal with themes like "exile" and "return," one must engage with the concepts of "space" and "place." In an early theoretical work exploring these concepts, Yi-Fu Tuan writes of the two as mutually definitive, each making the other possible:

> In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. "Space" is more abstract than "place." What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of place; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in the movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.[42]

Both "space" and "place" are thus intimately connected with human experience. We define space by charting its borders, and subsequently endow it with meaning as place.

Palestinian literature traditionally tends to be nominally concerned with both of these; the longing for a Palestinian state and the politics necessary to bring it about are essentially spatial, concerned with the political implications of occupation, checkpoints,

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[42] Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977): 6.

settlements, and borders. At the same time, within these spaces are place-based signifiers: the village, the olive tree, the cactus bush, the land-working peasant. So too is exile represented in place and space, as discussed by Parmenter: the city, the desert, and the refugee camp constitute and constrain the identities of Palestinians whose relationship with "Palestinian space" has been severed, resulting in a transitory disaffection, an alienation.[43] For them, Palestinian place has become divorced from Palestinian space, which only exists in a limited sense in pseudo-autonomous areas such as the Palestinian Authority-administered Area A within the West Bank or the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

The concept of the border plays a significant spatial role in Palestinian exilic life and consequently in the community's literature. This is not exclusive to Palestinians in exile, of course; even Palestinian citizens of Israel encounter spatial borders when it comes to travel between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and especially the Gaza Strip. Edward Said comments on the centrality of the border to the exilic experience, both as something that constrains and as something that is straddled and crossed:

> The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.[44]

For the exile, the border is both concrete and abstract, both spatial and placed. For Palestinian exiles, the border is a symbol of the tragedy of expulsion as well as of the

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[43] Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones*, 50.
[44] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 185.

deferred hope of a nation. Thus, space is a significant feature of much of Palestinian literature, and a necessary component of what has been termed the "genre" of return literature.

To Anna Ball, the border is a colonial space, but it must also be read through a post-colonial lens. For her, Palestinians must be understood more broadly than the essentializing tropes of "helpless victims" or "freedom fighters"; they are gendered bodies who interact with borders in ways that inform, subvert, and challenge their self-conceptions and the values placed on and created by the borders.[45] Ball argues that borders are also "gendered," sexual, even "queer" spaces that interact with gendered bodies, both Palestinian and Israeli in the context of borders in Israel and Palestine.[46] She also affirms that borders contribute to the alienation of exiles from the Palestinian homeland in both physical and non-physical senses; the separation engendered by non-physical barriers is also a part of the process of alienation.

In a doctoral dissertation published in 2013, Drew Paul analyzes an earlier novel by Madhoun, *The Lady from Tel Aviv* through the lens of what he identifies as "border fiction." Paul's "border fiction" is characterized by rupture, disjuncture, and disorientation, which all feature prominently in *Maṣā'ir* as well as in *Volverse Palestina*. This designation especially applies to Palestinian literature written after the Oslo Accords of 1993, which ushered in a new era of the relationship between Palestinians, Israeli security forces, and

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[45] Anna Ball, *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 6.
[46] Ibid., 128.

the spatial landscape of Palestine. Following the historical agreement between the Yitzhak Rabin government and PLO negotiators, which culminated in the famous handshake between Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, the landscape of the Palestinian Territories became increasingly more fragmented, with an acceleration in the building of Israeli settlements and the proliferation of Israeli security forces in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip both contributing to the "archipelagization" of Palestinian-administered land.

Paul argues that Madhoun writes in a fashion that subverts common tropes, producing a "parodic narrative of return … in order to engage with and challenge the proliferation and increasing fragmentation of Palestinian physical and cultural space."[47] The border is one main source of this fragmentation: it induces a spatial fragmentation and contributes to a non-physical, symbolic separation as well. For Paul it is a space of "rupture," where "the figure of the exile … collapses within himself."[48] The border's dehumanizing and spatial conditioning effects produce "a form of collective fragmentation – of narratives, of memory, of authors – as people are herded through the turnstiles of the checkpoint and passport control at the non-place of the international airport."[49] Likewise, the act of crossing exilic borders is an act of estrangement, as the exilic identity is unsettled by the experience of a disjointed homeland that differs from the idealized images present in exilic nostalgia or political propaganda.

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[47] Paul, *Border Fiction*, 34.
[48] Ibid., 62.
[49] Ibid.

The very experience of return as expressed in Palestinian literature, Paul argues, is conditioned by "disruptions," "shadows, boundaries, and encounters"; in Madhoun's *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, return is also a "stray narrative," an "out-of-control space."[50] It is this process that I term *disorientation*, a theme that runs throughout the thesis. The spatial distortions and disruptions experienced by the returnee are an essential characteristic of return literature as a genre, but in a post-Oslo Palestine they also bring the experiences of Palestinians in exile into alignment with those of Palestinians living in Israel or in the Palestinian Territories. The work of Madhoun in particular, and especially his all-encompassing *Maṣā'ir*, universalizes the tragedy of the Palestinian experience to include those living in the Western Hemisphere as well as in the occupied territories. He thus participates in the acceleration of what Hanafi calls the "partial diasporization" of Palestinians, bringing many stories into the broad community of Palestinianness in the process. At the same time, he and Meruane contribute to a redefinition of the genre of "return literature" in its uniquely Palestinian manifestation.

RETURN LITERATURE: A PALESTINIAN GENRE

The twin themes of exile and return have been present in Palestinian literature for as long as the national literature has existed, particularly as a result of the development of a literary cadre in diaspora. An early political and committed writer, Ghassan Kanafani, employed the themes in several of his short stories, the best known of which are *'Ā'id 'ilā*

[50] Ibid., 34-35.

Ḥayfā (Returning to Haifa) and *Rijāl fī l-shams* (Men in the Sun). Kanafani personally experienced exile, having been driven from his home as a child during the 1948 *nakba*. A writer of *'adab al-muqawwamah*, or "resistance literature," Kanafani was assassinated in Beirut in 1972 at the age of 36. For Kanafani, who pioneered the narrative of return as a literary tool of resistance, return was political but inherently complex as a human act. Jayyusi notes that for Kanafani, "it is not simplistic nationalism that counts, but lifelong association; [it is] not the ties of blood, but the cultural and human impacts of life" that make the Palestinian experience in exile so alienating and torturous for him.[51]

Ahmad H. Sa'di notes that an early current in post-*nakba* Palestinian literature was the idea of an "imminent and unproblematic" return, with poetry in particular as an expression of defiance to Israeli control over Palestinian lives.[52] This changed in 1967, when the *naksah*, or "setback" of Israel's defeat of the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and its subsequent occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights demonstrated that the return of Palestinian refugees might not be so inevitable.[53] As a result of the *naksah*, "the whole of historical Palestine fell under Israeli occupation and 300,000 new refugees were added to the Palestinian diaspora," thus decreasing even further the likelihood of any prompt return.[54] For Palestinians writing in exile following the *naksah*, "return" became less of a tangible political goal and more of a symbol of dispossession, a tactic of memory that contributes to communal identities.

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[51] Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, 31.
[52] Ahmad H Sa'di, "Representations of Exile and Return in Palestinian Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 46, no. 2–3 (November 6, 2015): 219-222.
[53] Ibid., 233.
[54] Ibid., 234.

In an English account of his 1990 return experience, Fawaz Turki questions the idea of "homeland," arriving to the conclusion that the Palestine he had hoped to find no longer existed:

> I belong to neither world. Now I know it. I am not, or at least no longer am, part of the Palestinian world. Exile and the homeground speak to each other unintelligibly. I am a stranger to those I should know best. Palestinians here are in search of a homeland. I already have one.[55]

Sa'di characterizes Turki as a member of a group of Palestinians who "were exhausted by these feelings [of dislocation and sorrow] and hoped to leave the past behind them, opt out of the journey, and accept a life of being immigrants and eventually citizens of host countries generous enough to grant them citizenship."[56] For Sa'di, this attitude is problematic because it ignores the effect of displacement on the psyche of an entire community; for him, to forget the past is to ignore the marks of one's own identity.

Scholarship on Palestinian return literature has engaged quite thoroughly with emblematic Arabic-language texts such as Kanafani's *'Ā'id 'ilā Ḥayfā* or Mourīd al-Barghoutī's more recent *Ra'aytu Ram 'allah* ("I Saw Ramallah"). Some attention has also been paid to narratives of return written in English, with scholars often analyzing these texts as simple chronicles or travel literature. In fact, the authors of many "return texts" explicitly place their work into this category, though the texts fall on a spectrum from the more factual in tone (Ghada Karmi's *Return: A Palestinian Memoir*) to the more

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[55] Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American* (New York: Free Press, 1994): 102.
[56] Sa'di, "Representations of Exile and Return in Palestinian Literature," 233.

contemplative (Edward Said's *Out of Place*). Based on this scholarly trend, at least one scholar has seen fit to interpret Lina Meruane's *Volverse Palestina* through the same lenses (as factual memoir or travelogue). Since Meruane's novella was only published in 2012 and relatively few scholars who study Arabic literature or Palestinian themes also have Spanish language ability, it is understandable that little has been written about Spanish-language literature written by Arabs.

However, it is a mistake to reduce Meruane's work to simple autobiography. *Volverse Palestina* is a literary memoir, certainly, but its structure and content provide much more than what Tahia Abdel Nasser scholar has termed "an expression of solidarity."[57] While the book explores themes such as identity, memory, and diaspora, its style indicates that it is not only an attempt to document a trip, but also an effort to demonstrate that "return," as a political project, is not as simple as it sounds. For this reason, it should be put into conversation with other texts that problematize return; it is another book in the recent tradition of works that, as Drew Paul writes of *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, declare "the end of the narrative of return as a political project" in their "transformation into a stray, out of control set of narratives."[58] The symbolism of return in Meruane and Madhoun is pyrrhic, evoking an initial sense of triumph that eventually reveals itself to be false. For the two authors, the post-Oslo landscape makes the returnee impotent, helpless to events and power structures beyond her control.

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[57] Tahia Abdel Nasser, "Arab and Latin American Literature: Mourid Barghouti, Najla Said, and Lina Meruane in Palestine," *Commonwealth* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 74

[58] Paul, *Border Fiction*, 64.

Chapter 3: Historiography

Very large Palestinian communities in the Western hemisphere can trace their roots back to ancestors who emigrated from historical Palestine *before* the *nakba*, which created a concrete exilic community and brought the Palestinians to the world's attention. Substantial communities exist in Honduras, El Salvador, the United States, and Great Britain, but no Palestinian community outside the Arab world is larger than that of Chile. Some estimate that upwards of 500,000 people of Palestinian origin currently reside there, while other estimates place the size of the community at over 350,000.[59] This community, along with others like it in Latin America, represents an understudied and different case of Palestinians articulating what it means to be Palestinian in diaspora or exile.

Due to the time of its establishment and the ways in which it promoted communal identity, Chile's Palestinian community maintained a Palestinian nationalist identity that did not appear to the same extent in other diasporic communities, whether Palestinian or Arab. The community traces back to a transitional time in the Ottoman province, in which increases in Jewish immigration coincided with decreases in identification with the Ottoman state.[60] These sentiments, which in Palestine fostered a unique Palestinian

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[59] For the upper estimate, see Cecilia Baeza, Cecilia Baeza, "Palestinians in Latin America: Between Assimilation and Long-Distance Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 59. For the lower estimate, see Nadim Bawalsa, "Palestine West of the Andes: Chile Is Home to the World's Largest Palestinian Diaspora Community. How Did Chile's Arabic Newspapers Contribute to Its Formation?," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 50, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 34.

[60] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 149.

nationalism, were carried across the Atlantic by emigrants who settled in Chile, where they found expression in a close-knit and socially successful community.

Large-scale migration occurred between Ottoman Palestine and Latin America beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century and reaching an apex in the 1900s and 1910s. Some histories ascribe this emigration to Ottoman conscription practices, claiming that Ottoman propensity to conscript Christian subjects to serve as cannon fodder in wars against Christian empires (namely Russia and the Balkan League) led to a mass exodus of adult Christian males from the empire's Palestinian provinces. At the time of writing, this claim was listed on the Wikipedia articles for "Palestinians in Chile," in both Spanish and Arabic, as the primary cause of Palestinian emigration during the days of the Ottoman Empire.[61] Some Chilean historians writing in Spanish also argue that Christian migration to Chile occurred primarily due to Ottoman impressment.[62]

Other Chilean historians point to a general climate of instability in the Ottoman provinces as the main cause of migration. This argument echoes European rhetoric about the Ottoman empire as the "sick man of Europe," made impotent by its Tanzimat reforms that, in the words of one writer, "tried to end the rigid social structure and insert the anachronistic empire into the modern world."[63] And still other historians focus on the pull

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[61] These articles depend on an article in Haaretz, published online in late 2018. Roy Arad, "Meet the Chilestinians, the Largest Palestinian Community Outside the Middle East," (Tel Aviv: Haaretz, 31 Oct. 2018): https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-largest-palestinian-community-outside-the-mideast-thrives-in-chile-1.6613371.

[62] Abdeluahed Akmir, ed., *Los árabes en América Latina: historia de una emigración*, Primera edición en castellano (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España : Biblioteca de la Casa Árabe, 2009); Patricia Arancibia Clavel, Roberto Arancibia Clavel, and Isabel Jara Hinojosa, *Tras La Huella De Los Árabes En Chile: Una Historia De Esfuerzo E Integración*, Primera edición (Santiago: Instituto Democracia y Mercado, 2010).

[63] Lorenzo Agar Corbinos and Antonia Rebolledo, "La Inmigracion Arabe en Chile: Los Caminos de la Integracion," in *El Mundo Árabe y América Latina*, Ediciones UNESCO (Libertarias Prodhufi, 1997), 283.

factors that attracted migration to the Americas, particularly the economic: cheap land, relative freedom, and possibility were the hallmarks of the nascent Latin American states as well as of their American neighbors to the north, enabling Arab migrants to the Americas, mainly young men, to begin as itinerant peddlers and eventually set down roots.[64]

By the arrival of the 1970s and 80s, tumultuous times in both Palestine and Chile, the Palestinian community in Chile continued to echo the nationalist rhetoric of Arab socialist states, expressing support for Arab nationalist leaders and solidarity with a pan-Arab ethos largely ignored by Palestinian communities in Europe or the United States. Interestingly, this rhetoric remained salient in Chile despite the fact that many scholars argue that Pan-Arabism died in 1967 in a crushing defeat by Israel. At the same time, the community's language shifted toward supporting the political aims of the Palestinian Liberation Organization due to the PLO's increased activity in Latin America following the organization's recognition by the United Nations as the representative of the Palestinian people. A marked shift in community rhetoric also occurred after the Sabra and Shatila massacres, which led to a rhetorical acceleration and increased fervor in the community's newspapers.

Agar Corbinos and Rebolledo write, "Las reformas, que trataban de acabar con la rígida estructura social y conseguir la inserción del anacrónico Imperio en el mundo moderno, se prolongaron por decenios.

[64] The phenomenon of migration between the Levant and the Americas is covered in detail in several works. See Nancie L. González, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle: One Hundred Years of Palestinian Migration to Honduras* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992): 93-100. Also see Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris & Co, 1992).

The community's support of and advocacy for Palestinian statehood was therefore influenced by its own origins, by increased political interactions with Palestinian and Arab representatives, and by watershed events in the Arab world—Sabra and Shatila in particular. Each of these factors contributed to the development and maintenance of a unique Palestinian nationalism, which can broaden the scholarly understanding of what Palestinians themselves thought it meant to be Palestinian in the second half of the 20th century. Some scholars have argued that the Palestinian communities in Latin America differ qualitatively from other Palestinian communities because Palestinians in South and Central America are largely Christian, non-refugee populations whose ancestors left Palestine before the British Mandate, let alone before the *nakba*.[65] Most scholarship about Palestinian communities is undertaken with the assumption that the Palestinians in question are refugees, forced from their homes at the creation of the State of Israel or expatriates who were unable to return to their homes following the *nakba*. For this reason, Palestinian communities in Latin America are largely excluded from consideration by scholars of Palestinian diasporic or exilic groups. Interestingly, the Palestinians who left Palestine for Latin America largely did so in the 1910s and 1920s, around the same time that some scholars have identified a new trend in Palestinian self-identification among Arab urban elites in Palestine: the beginning of a uniquely Palestinian identity that did not compete with Arab or Ottoman loyalties.

[65] These include González, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle*, and Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876-1983* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

A significant disjuncture exists in the literature around Palestinian immigrant communities in Latin America regarding the reasons these communities remained in Latin American countries rather than returning to Palestine. Foroohar suggests that communities like that of Honduras simply chose to settle in Latin America because of economic opportunity and the integration of second-generation immigrants into their parents' new societies.[66] In this, he echoes the work of the anthropologist Nancie González, whose studies of Arab communities in Latin America tend to downplay the nationalism of earlier, pre-*nakba* communities, and the conclusions reached by Pamela Ann Smith.[67] However, in an article also published in the *Journal for Palestine Studies*, Bawalsa points to a more structural cause for the solidification of the presence of Palestinian communities in Latin America. He argues that these policies, particular the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order-In-Council, "which provided the legal framework for regulating Palestinian citizenship and nationality during the British Mandate," had the effect of disenfranchising large numbers of Palestinians residing outside of historical Palestine.[68] Though Bawalsa's analysis centers on the Palestinian community in Chile, the communities in both Chile and Honduras mainly originated from the same Christian villages in Palestine, namely Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala. It is clear that, far from being disinterested in Palestinian affairs, the Palestinian communities of Latin America were galvanized and solidified by experiencing their own type of exile 23 years before the establishment of the state of Israel. As Bawalsa

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[66] Manzar Foroohar, "Palestinians in Central America: From Temporary Emigrants to a Permanent Diaspora," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 3 (April 2011): 18.
[67] González, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle*; Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876-1983*.
[68] Nadim Bawalsa, "Legislating Exclusion: Palestinian Migrants and Interwar Citizenship," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 45.

points out, advocacy efforts made by Palestinian communities in Latin America to oppose the Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council had the effect of increasing community identities and solidarity, as well as local identification with emergent Palestinian nationalism. These communities, though they do not always fit the rhetorical definition of Palestinian-ness that has associated being Palestinian with being a stateless refugee, should be considered a part of the global Palestinian community, especially since they are increasing in global notoriety and in their own activist efforts on behalf of a Palestinian state.

Ironically, the same Oslo Accords that have resulted in the increased fragmentation of Palestinian land also opened up new opportunities for some Palestinians to actually "return." Schulz notes that between 1994 and 2000, several categories of people were permitted to repatriate or resettle to the areas now administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA). These included "Palestinians working for the PLO who had come to work for the PA and their families, beneficiaries of family reunification programmes, returnees from Kuwait, many with Jordanian passports, and Palestinians with foreign passports," many of whom were United States citizens; these were not the refugees of 1948, but those displaced in 1967 "or persons who had migrated for other reasons."[69] In the six-year window in which such "return" was possible, various estimates put the number of returnees at between 40,000 to 100,000.[70] The effect of this policy was an influx of capital from the Western Hemisphere and the Gulf countries into the Palestinian Territories, but also a series of

[69] Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora*, 212.
[70] Ibid., 213.

disappointments that were compiled by Schulz in her broad work *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*.

In many cases, Schulz says, returns were celebrated, with returnees being received at the Allenby Bridge, along the border between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, "going 'home' in jubilant caravans."[71] Upon arrival, though, "the actual return was also replete with disappointments and frustrations in realising that the dreamt homeland was not there any more, if it ever had been. 'Real Palestine' was not an easy substitute for 'Dream Palestine'."[72] Predictably, decades of separation and life in another location made the reintegration process difficult for those who attempted to "return" in the limited sense allowed by the joint policy of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. Most Palestinians, according to Schulz, recognized the policy as partial at best; with the exclusion of the refugees of 1948, no actual return could take place.

These experiences undergird the pessimism prevalent in Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir* and the sense of alienation and disjuncture pervading *Maṣā'ir* and *Volverse Palestina*. In the recent shift in "return literature" visible in the writing of these two authors from very different backgrounds, writing in different languages, one comes to see a resurgence of the absurd. Palestine, for Meruane and Madhoun, is a dystopia structured not by fields, villages, or olive trees but by walls, checkpoints, and settlements. Its most salient features are not the resilience of its people (as depicted in previous works) or the simplicity of the *fellāḥīn* (peasants), but rather the fragmentation induced by over two decades of intentional

[71] Ibid., 214.
[72] Ibid.

policies of colonization. *Maṣā'ir* and *Volverse Palestina* are not simple tales of the politics and particularities of the act of return; rather, they present Palestine as a tragedy in which hope is possible, but as impractical as return.

Chapter 4: Literary Structure

The two works under consideration in this thesis share structural strategies for expressing the unattainability of return. In doing so, they subvert traditional modes of telling the story of an exile's return in favor of presenting a return fraught with inconsistencies. Structural elements in *Maṣā'ir* and *Volverse Palestina* lay bare the tragedy of the Palestinian exile. These include the styles, settings, and modalities employed by Meruane and Madhoun. This chapter will demonstrate how these structural elements contribute to an "upside-down" return narrative, in the tradition of the "ruptures" identified by Drew Paul in previous works by Madhoun as well as in other pieces of literature and film.

SETTING: EPISODES AND NARRATION

In an essay about the history of Arabic literature after 1948, Said identifies the language of "contested space" as a phenomenon in Arabic literature generally.[73] This language, he says, "struggles" to assert and maintain "a presence" in the face of the events of the early twentieth century: the compartmentalization of the Arab world into various European spheres of control, and the artificial development of regional and national identities as a result of this occupation and as a means to combat it. This "contested space" leads to "certain aesthetic and technical consequences" in works of Arabic prose: a

[73] Edward W Said, "Arabic Prose and Prose Fiction after 1948," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000): 49.

"tendency … to episodism" and a centrality of narration.[74] Episodism, to Said, creates a pseudo-continuity for the writer, "in which a continuous play of substitutions takes place; entrances and appearances, for instance, play the role of ontological affirmation."[75] Said argues that Arab writers used this sense of continuity to assert the existence and uninterruptedness of cultural life in the Arab world. Episodic scenes thus became "the very problem of Arabic literature and writing after the disaster of 1948"; to Said, "the scene does not merely reflect the crisis … Rather, the scene *is contemporaneity* in its most problematic and rarefied form." The scene stages an event for an audience in order to reassert that event's significance.[76] In fact, the scene is a central organizing theme present in both *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir*, each a collection of Said's "discretely shaped scenes."[77]

Volverse Palestina is composed as a series of 1-to 3-page segments, organized in a loose chronology that allows for flashbacks and the musings of a seemingly autobiographical narrator. In this sense, it resembles a travel journal or a set of field notes in dispatch form. It is also reminiscent of a scrapbook; Meruane's own ruminations on a subject are juxtaposed with actions and memories as well as with the contents of text message conversations. By writing *Volverse Palestina* in such a style, Meruane makes an intentional comparison with travel literature, placing her own work within the genre's

[74] Ibid., 49.
[75] Ibid., 50.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

aesthetic. However, certain clues in the text alert the reader to the fact that *Volverse Palestina* is no mere travel diary.

The first of these clues is Meruane's use of non-textual marks in the work. Specifically, on several pages near the book's center, Meruane recounts an email conversation with a friend, who she names alternately as "Ankar," "the writer-in-Jaffa," and "my friend-the-writer-of-Jewish-descent." In the text of these messages, the two discuss a plan for Meruane to visit Ankar in Jaffa and to use the visit as a way to see the village of her ancestors: Beit Jala. However, in places in which Ankar, himself a recent immigrant to Israel, might employ sensitive language, the language in question is obscured by the mark of what resembles a censor's pen. These marks are rendered as **[REDACTED]** in the following excerpt, which demonstrates the effect of the "censorship" on the readability of the text:

> It hurts me that I have to send this message to you. … In the last few months, two Israeli citizens have been barred from access upon returning from tourist trips (a euphemism to say that they were deported). **[REDACTED]** and the **[REDACTED]**. The charges against the two were "activities against the state," and in the case of one, "treason." The only thing they did was to assist with leftist protests and work with NGOs that help the Palestinian people. I knew one of them. My situation here in Israel is a lot more vulnerable now. I've participated in a lot of protests against the wars of the past few years (I'm in some photos **[REDACTED]** by police cameras), but even more than that, for years I've written **[REDACTED]** of Israeli policy and of Palestinian internal policy. To complete the picture of my vulnerability, I can live here because of my father's Jewish ancestors, who allowed me to get a residency permit, but I actually live here because I'm married to a Muslim Palestinian, which is equivalent to being on the radar of the security agencies.[78]

[78] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 31.

These marks, repeated across several pages, jar the reader into a sense of confusion. Who put them there? Certainly, they were not the result of an Israeli censor, since such a thing does not exist in Israel. Did Meruane place them there to protect the identity of her writer-friend-in-Jaffa? Did Ankar place them there himself, in an attempt to avoid self-implication in case his messages were being monitored? These visual, non-textual elements in Meruane's text leave the reader's questions unanswered and simultaneously introduce an unsettling uneasiness to the proceedings. Return, as Meruane notes by her inclusion of these markings, may not be as simple as she had previously thought when she had earlier made a plan to visit Ankar in Jaffa.

Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir* is structured in an even more unconventional way. From chapter to chapter, the novel switches between narrators, perspectives, and time. The book begins by introducing, in third-person omniscient perspective, a character named Julie Littlehouse, who is beginning her ascent to her mother's childhood home in Acre (a coastal city named Akko in Hebrew and ʻAkka in Arabic, located north of Haifa, with a majority-Palestinian population). The following chapter flashes back to another third-person event that foregrounds Julie's mother Ivana. A few chapters later, the narrative shifts to a first-person account from the perspective of Julie's Palestinian husband Walid, concerning an event that took place before Julie's visit to her mother's home. The novel's constant movement between perspectives and persons prevents the reader from arriving at a fixed understanding of the book's events.

It is this context in which the book's extended title becomes clearer. *Maṣā'ir: kūnshirtū al-hūlūkawst wa-l-nakba* translates to *Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and*

the Nakba. A concerto is a musical composition that usually features one main instrument with accompaniment by an orchestra; different perspectives, time-frames, and settings within the novel serve as the backing ensemble for the main instrument. Madhoun does not clearly delineate which character or perspective serves as the "main instrument" in the symphonic concerto of the tragedies that make up the book's theme; however, the intertwining stories of Julie and Walid give the reader the impression that either's story could serve as the concerto's solo performance.

As we will see in subsequent chapters, the tragedy of the Holocaust has inadvertently contributed to another tragedy, that of the displacement of the Palestinian people. The interconnection of these events is expressed in several scenes in *Maṣā'ir*. These include Walid's visits to Yad Vashem and to the fictional Deir Yassin memorial, as well as Julie's attempt to deposit her mother's ashes in her mother's former Acre home, which was inhabited by Holocaust survivors after Julie's family fled Acre. Regardless of whose perspective represents the "solo," however, the novel is segmented into episodes, flashing back and forth in time and across space and person. These jumps have the effect of unmooring its audience from any one simple interpretation, introducing the uncertainty and "rupture" that both Meruane and Madhoun present as having become the essential characteristic of any contemporary return narrative.

In addition to episodism, Said points out that narration is a significant element in Arabic literature. Indeed, personal narration plays a significant role in the two pieces under consideration in this thesis. It allows for the assertion of authority and experience. "To be

in a scene," writes Said, "is to displace extinction, to substitute life for the void."[79] Jayyusi also mentions the centrality of "personal account literature," in the form of memoirs, diaries, and autobiographies, to Palestinian literary expression; works using this format emphasize "a proclamation of the true state of affairs in many areas of life" as well as "the proclamation of the tragedy" that Palestinians face.[80] Meruane's text certainly has many characteristics of a memoir, and the personal narrative format of Madhoun's novel also draws upon the inherent "authority" offered by traditional personal narratives. As mentioned above, Madhoun also writes from the third person perspective, interweaving perspectives in a way that becomes more complex with each consecutive episode and that underscores Madhoun's emphasis on the disorientation inherent to Palestinian identity.

As narrated and episodic works, *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* draw on the inheritance of Arabic and especially Palestinian fiction. However, both authors play with the concept, employing shifts in time and perspective to subvert the authority-and-continuity-based traditions that precede their own works. These shifts serve to underscore the absence of rootedness for the exile. In Meruane's novel in particular, the vanishing or erasure of the exile's familial roots is a powerful narrative device. Meruane explores her family history but finds few answers; even her encounters with purported distant cousins upon arrival in Beit Jala prove inconclusive and unsatisfying, as I will discuss in chapter 5.

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[79] Said, "Arabic Prose and Prose Fiction after 1948," 50.
[80] Jayyusi, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, 67-68.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS

In addition to their engagement with the stylistic heritage of the literature of Palestinian return narratives, *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* trouble the conventional narrative by their authors' aesthetic decisions. The most obvious of these is the authors' choices of compositional language. *Volverse Palestina* is written in Spanish, with the occasional English phrase appearing untranslated. Since Meruane is fluent in both Spanish and English, she clearly chose intentionally to write in Spanish for a Hispanophone audience that would be familiar with a few English phrases. As *Volverse Palestina* is—to my knowledge—the first major Spanish-language personal account of return to Palestine to be widely distributed outside of the Hispanophone world, its language points to a greater diversity in the experience of the Palestinian diaspora community than many casual observers would initially expect. The book's publication testifies to the existence and significance of the Palestinian communities of the countries of Latin America, and its composition in Spanish underscores these communities' present situation as having fully assimilated into their host countries, yet also continuing to identify as Palestinian. In writing *Volverse Palestina* in Spanish, Meruane has allowed Chile's Palestinian community to be included as a part of a broader Palestinian diaspora.

Language also has an effect on the way Madhoun's *Maṣā'ir* expresses Palestinianness. Madhoun's choice to write the novel in formal Arabic, with significant dialogue in colloquial Palestinian Arabic, places the novel in a literary tradition that traces back to the earliest Arabic novels, and especially those of the famed Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who also interwove colloquial Arabic into his stories. A British citizen,

Madhoun could have chosen to write in English and perhaps to reach a wider literary audience, but his decision to write in Arabic is certainly a political one. How better to express Palestinianness than by writing in Palestine's national language, the primary language of Arab nationalism and the mother tongue of hundreds of thousands of descendants of Palestinian refugees? *Maṣā'ir*'s clear and forceful Arabic deepens the reader's understanding of the tragedy and the urgency of the Palestinian experience, reminding an Arabic-speaking audience of these realities.

Maṣā'ir's effects extend beyond the Arabic-speaking world, of course, thanks to the book's English translation by Paul Starkey. This translation was commissioned as part of the novel's reception of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). The prestigious prize, modeled after the Man Booker prize, receives funding from Abu Dhabi's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and guarantees that translation costs will be met for each year's winning novel.[81] This prize, and Starkey's subsequent translation, reflect the fact that the IPAF's trustees consider *Maṣā'ir* a major work of literature. The prize's trustees are internationally respected experts on literature with experience in writing, editing, journalism, publishing, and policy.[82] Because of the prize, *Maṣā'ir*'s story now reaches a wider distribution, meaning that English-speaking readers can access Madhoun's impressions of Palestinianness, exile, and return.

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[81] International Prize for Arabic Fiction, "About the Prize," https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/about-the-prize.

[82] A list of the prize's current trustees can be found at https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/trustees.

Another important aesthetic component of *Maṣā'ir* is the novel's use of colloquial Palestinian Arabic spellings and vocabulary. The distinctions between formal and colloquial Arabic are far starker in Arabic than they are in English, so it is only in reading *Maṣā'ir* in its original language that the novel's faithfulness to the Palestinian dialect comes across. For example, in speech characters often replace the formal *ṣagheer* (صغير) with the colloquial *izgheer* (ازغير). These differences, impossible to express in equivalent English, create a sense of realism while also paying homage to Palestinian identity. By incorporating Palestinian dialects into *Maṣā'ir*, Madhoun creates a memorial to the Palestinian people and their lived experiences.

Stylistic aesthetic choices also play a role in *Volverse Palestina*, as the novel's relative lack of punctuation markers lends it a conversational, reflective, and nontraditional nuance. I have attempted to render this style in the numerous translations from *Volverse Palestina* in this thesis. In particular, the work's total lack of punctuation makes dialogue a more integral part of the text, underscoring the reader's impression that Meruane is relaying the novel's events from her own memory. This technique places the reader in Meruane's position, allowing the reader a window into Meruane's own disorientation at her memories of Palestine as well as of Chile and New York. The novel's style creates a tone that furthers this experience; sentence fragments, interwoven dialogue, and shifts in time bring the reader into Meruane's mind and dislocate the audience from their own positions. This style contributes to the senses of fragmentation and uncertainty that are crucial elements in the novel's premise. In *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir*, aesthetics

involve the reader in a part of the Palestinian experience, emphasizing the fact that the return narratives of Meruane and Madhoun are unconventional and unsettling.

MOVEMENT, TRANSIENCE, AND TRANSITION

Another structural element that intensifies the disorientation elaborated by *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣāʾir* is the novels' settings. Taking place on several continents and in multiple countries and cities, the novels present characters always in motion. This recalls the remarks of Edward Said, who argued that exiles are people who "cross borders" and "break barriers" in living a life that is not settled.[83] An out-of-place setting for the main characters allows each author to express, in a literary setting, the transient sensation of exile.

The concept of motion comes across first in the very fact that the stories concern a trip. Lina, Julie, and Walid are arriving to a Palestine that they do not know well, and they are coming from elsewhere. *Volverse Palestina* begins with Meruane in Santiago, but then quickly moves to a memory of a trip in which Meruane visited the mountain village to which her grandparents immigrated in the early twentieth century, around 1915. She then traces back through time to follow, in reverse, the journey of her ancestors; from the Chilean Andes to Buenos Aires, from Buenos Aires to Marseille or Genoa, and from the European Mediterranean to Haifa or Beirut. After this thought experiment, though, Meruane finds herself in a New York taxi in the relative present. The movement continues;

[83] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 185.

next, she is making an acquaintance in Madrid; she is arriving in Palestine; she is envisioning her father in Cairo, contemplating the possibility of a return trip of his own that would be preempted by the Six-Day War.

Spanning four continents, *Volverse Palestina* presents Meruane as someone living the life of an exile. Despite her Chilean identity (what Siri Schwabe terms "an inescapable Chileanness"),[84] Meruane still feels the transience of the experience of her grandparents, who were cut off from the land they left first by the British and later by the Israelis. This transience continues throughout her stay in Palestine; she is in constant movement between Yaffa, Jerusalem, Beit Jala, and Hebron, and this motion is underscored by the book's vignette style. No sooner has Meruane described her experiences in one setting than she is in transit to another. One brief episode ends, another begins, and Meruane is in another place.

As for *Maṣā'ir*, one would expect a traditional narrative of return to begin in the exile's country of residence and largely concern events in their home city in Palestine. While Madhoun does devote a significant portion of *Maṣā'ir* to events in Julie's mother's hometown of Acre, the novel's events also span a wide geography. Walid and Julie live in London, but Walid recalls events in Canada as well. The book presents other characters as living in-between: in one poignant exchange between a Palestinian citizen of Israel (Jinin) and her Arab-American husband Basim, Jinin attempts to convince a frustrated Basim of the importance of remaining in Palestine, referencing their experiences outside of the

[84] Siri Schwabe, "Promised Lands: Memory, Politics, and Palestinianness in Santiago de Chile" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation: Stockholm University, 2016): 4.

country as relatively unimportant. Basim says, "Okay, why don't we go back to America? Wouldn't that be easier for us both? America means a nationality and rights that are broader and fuller than anywhere around here." Jinin responds with the following:

> No, Basim, no! Now that our homeland has called us back, and we've returned, why should we go back to America? I needed New York and you needed Washington when we were university students, but now we don't need either of them, my darling. Let's stay in Jaffa. I won't leave Jaffa again, it's where I was born. People dream of returning to Jaffa! Go and read what your friend Khaled Issa wrote on Facebook: the Palestinian who'll turn to stone is the one who has to spend the rest of his life in Sweden. His dream is to sit on the shore in Jaffa and drink a cup of coffee, even just once, slurping it as if he's actually drinking well-being, as he soaks his feet in the sea. We have Jaffa, its Citadel, its shore, its sea, its sky. We kick against the government, and poke our fingers in its eyes. We have a graveyard—when one of us dies, we bury him there. We have the whole country, Basim, and you want us to desert it and go back America? Let's stay here, my darling. Look at the Jews; when one of them dies abroad, they bring his corpse and bury it in a country that he's never even seen. Let's stay here, Basim, it's better for us to live and die in our own country, one we know.[85]

Even Jinin, a citizen in the land in which she was born, has experienced the motion that characterizes the Palestinian life. And Basim, a Bethlehem native and a returnee to the Arab world who lives in Israel by virtue of a residency permit, experiences it even more.

THE AIRPORT AND THE CHECKPOINT

The theme of disorientation also manifests in several scenes set in what Drew Paul refers to as the "non-place of the international airport,"[86] a term borrowed from anthropologist Marc Augé.[87] In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of*

[85] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 79-80.
[86] Paul, *Border Fiction*, 62
[87] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

Supermodernity, Augé includes the airport alongside the highway, satellite broadcasts, and the supermarket as "non-places," manifestations of a historical and social stage he terms "supermodernity."[88] In an age of supermodernity, banal and routinely encountered "non-places" sap the individual of her individuality and sense of place in service of efficiency.[89] For Augé, "the traveller's space" can be considered "the archetype of non-place."[90] In a place of transit, such as the airport, travelers are reduced to the contents of their interactions with the travel process; they become seat numbers, departure times, airline customers as they move from gate to gate and from checkpoint to checkpoint, all of which contributes to a sense of isolation. Human consciousnesses are then subjected to "entirely new experiences and ordeals of solitude, directly linked with the appearance and proliferation of non-places."[91] As a non-place that individualizes experience, the airport provides the characters of *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* with a further sense of disconnection from the experience of undergoing a meaningful return to Palestine because it prevents "return" from having a collective meaning. Lina, Walid, and Julie are reduced to travelers passing through airports administered by the Other, an experience that divests their return experiences of communal meaning.

The airport thus presents both a theoretical and a practical challenge to the exile who hopes to return to Palestine, whether in the literature of return presented by Meruane and Madhoun or in the spatial experiences of many Palestinians. For Palestinian refugees,

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[88] Augé, *Non-Places,* 75-115.
[89] Ibid., 103.
[90] Ibid., 86.
[91] Ibid., 93.

the airport is a hurdle that must be jumped at every instance of international travel, since the politics of passports make Palestinian travel documents at best a curiosity for border guards and at worst an invitation for closer scrutiny and potential refusal. It is significant that the main characters of the two novels arrive to Palestine at Ben Gurion International Airport, and this fact reflects their privilege; Palestinian refugees normally must enter through the Israeli border with Jordan, at what Israelis call the Allenby Bridge. Palestinians refer to this crossing as simply "al-jisr": "the bridge." The airport thus signifies that the returnees in question in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* have special statuses; Western passports (Chilean and British) ease entry for Lina, Julie, and Walid.

However, this privilege does not mean that the airport is without difficulty for the main characters of the novels by Meruane and Madhoun. Upon arrival at the airport in Lydda, Walid and Julie ask that their passports not be stamped. This request results in them being transferred to the "'Restriction of Entry Procedures' room" for further questioning. In the room, a female Internal Security officer continues the questioning:

> "What's the name of your father, and where does he live?
> I told her that he had been a permanent resident in the old Khan Younis graveyard since I was thirteen, leaving her to calculate how many years had passed since his premature death.
> "What's the name of your mother?"
> I gave her her full name, and informed her that she lived in a house in the Khan Younis camp in the Gaza Strip, because I knew she would ask me that next. So as not to give her the chance to put the question that would certainly follow, I quickly added, "But I don't know the location of my mother's house."
> "What's the number of her personal identity card?"
> "I don't know."
> "Your mother's full name again?"
> I repeated the three parts of my mother's name. … She turned the computer screen toward me, and there was my mother, staring out at me, as I surrendered quietly to

> my situation. … I imagined her shouting at the officer, … "What is this lack of shame, what is this meanness? My son's not a foreigner. This is his country, and he's coming back to stay for a few days."[93]

Julie, though she has a Palestinian parent and is married to Walid, is not questioned further. In this instance, the airport is a place of regulation and the projection of state authority; the all-encompassing state security apparatus even has a photo of Walid's mother. Walid's imagination of his mother's protests serves to further underscore the strange case of his "return"; he is coming back to his parents' country, a place from which they have been exiled and confined in the Gaza Strip, but he cannot visit his mother or his father's grave except through the surveillance imagery. The computer image reinforces the mediating effect Israel has had on Walid's life and those of numerous other Palestinians; the state enables a form of return that it finds appropriate but prevents other forms of return that returnees might find more meaningful.

In a slightly different experience from that which occurs to Julie and Walid, Meruane encounters some difficulty before even arriving in Israel. At London Heathrow airport, she undergoes pre-screening checks by Israeli security before boarding her El Al flight to Tel Aviv. She says,

> I finally discover the separate zone that is reserved in each airport of the world for the airline El Al. Right away I notice the Israeli security agents; they're identical to the cops of the Chilean dictatorship. … The questions begin and the truth starts to make the agent shudder. … That's his first shot: why I travel alone. (There's a long answer and another really short one, but I choose in no time and answer with a slight shrug). Why I'm going to Tel Aviv. (Tourism, I say, but that obviously doesn't convince him).[94]

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[93] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 161-62.
[94] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 39-40.

When Meruane mentions that she is staying in “Yafo” (Jaffa) with a writer friend, she is flagged for secondary questioning. She goes to a waiting room, where a different agent gives her another screening:

> The supervisor repeats all the same questions of his subordinate until we get to the topic of my writer-friend-in-Jaffa. Where do we know each other from? … Less bad that my ‘close friend’ (who I’ll call ‘Ankar’) has a Jewish surname. But where does he live—on what street? insists the boss, running his hand across his shaved head. … I give him the address I wrote down on my paper, completely forgetting that next to my friend’s complete name are the names of his wife and children—all undoubtedly Arabs.[95]

The theme of receiving extra attention at security checkpoints arises relatively frequently in the experiences of Arabs who travel by airplane. What is significant about Meruane’s experience, however, is that it confirms to her one element of her identity. She imagines sharing her experiences of interrogation with her friends in Jaffa: “The Muslim-writer-wife of my writer-friend-of-Jewish-descent will be happy to hear me tell the airport incident when I finally get to Jaffa. Great, congratulations, they recognized you; you’re a true Palestinian now.”[96]

A similar questioning experience occurs in the English-language memoir of Ghada Karmi, *Return: A Palestinian Memoir*, published in 2005. Karmi experiences the politics of border control at the land border between Jordan and the Occupied West Bank. She,

[95] Ibid., 41.
[96] Ibid., 43.

however, corrects the border guard who states Karmi was born in Israel, telling her correctly that she was born in 1939 in Palestine:

> 'It says here you were born in Israel.' She was looking at the page where my place of birth was recorded as Jerusalem.
> 'Not Israel,' I corrected, 'Palestine.' As indeed it was before 1948, but a grave error to mention in an interview that had been going well until then. 'OK,' she said, suddenly alert. 'Go there. You have to wait there,' pointing to a bench against the wall.[97]

Following an hour's wait, Karmi is allowed through, and she thinks about the apparatuses of control she has experienced:

> However many times I made the bridge crossing in later years, I never got used to this exercise of Israeli control over what was not Israel's to police at all. … In reality the only power in the vicinity was Israel, and the Israeli blue and white flag fluttering possessively at the Allenby Bridge emphasized the point. … [Whether] it was a Western or Palestinian traveler, the essence of all these measures was the unpredictability of Israeli behaviour. No one could be sure of entering the country, let alone getting anywhere inside it, and planning a journey in advance was something of a futile exercise.[98]

By prefacing her memoir with her experience of Israeli regulation of the land of her parents and family members, Karmi establishes, as does Meruane, a sense of distrust and uncertainty that will permeate her novel. However, Karmi, an older woman and seasoned activist on behalf of Palestine, views Israeli information-gathering differently than does Meruane. For Meruane, paranoia conditions her reactions to her Israeli interviewers, and she assumes they know all about her already. Karmi thinks differently:

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[97] Ghada Karmi, *Return: A Palestinian Memoir*. New York: Verso Books, 2015, 11.
[98] Ibid., 12.

> There was a widespread conviction amongst many Arabs that the Israeli secret services were fiendishly clever. Innocuous incidents involving Israelis became sinister until proved otherwise. But after my experience at the consulate [applying for a visa], I remember wondering if Israelis were such super-efficient, Machiavellian geniuses after all. Perhaps they're just as bumbling and incompetent as we are, I thought.[99]

This picture of Israel as a leaking, bureaucratic entity contrasts sharply with the images of strict control that both authors employ to structure their accounts. In *Return* and *Volverse Palestina*, the Israeli occupation is at once an all-consuming force that destroys and appropriates and a bloated, outdated structure whose mechanisms of control are selectively and capriciously applied. This dissonant image also represents the sense of international activist movements about the nature of the State of Israel's security measures; while the Occupation is rapidly intensifying its capacity for military intervention in Palestinian lives, Palestinians are learning how to exist outside of and within the structures meant to regulate their experiences. Though this image is a somewhat optimistic one, Karmi and Meruane must still contend with the actual control techniques of the Israeli Occupation, promulgated in Palestinian space through systems of displacement and reorganization. The women see the mediated return, described by Madhoun, that is made permissible by the Israeli security forces.

Karen Grumberg has written about these techniques as they apply to the existential difficulties that face both Palestinians under occupation and "the Israeli Palestinian." "The Palestinian," she says, has been made "an identifiable, even an iconic figure" through "the

[99] Ibid., 9.

negation of his basic spatial rights"; the "Israeli Palestinian," meanwhile, "has not been forced to relinquish his spatial rights."[100] Instead, however, he lives within a spatial system that allows for his rights within what has been deemed permissible; Grumberg describes this arrangement as "an intricate and sometimes absurd color-coded system that classifies identification cards, license plates, and maps."[101] Yet this mobility is fleeting. Grumberg notes that, in the novels of Sayed Kashua, three sites—the checkpoint, or *mahsom*, the house, and the village—continue to condition daily life for Israeli Palestinians, essentially functioning to "disrupt and deny the movement that is purportedly the privilege of free citizens."[102] Though the land-based *mahsom* goes relatively unmentioned in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir*, it and other transitional and restrictive spaces undoubtedly have an effect on the characters of the two novels. These spaces delimit and proscribe their movements in the service of the maintenance of a purity narrative that suggests that, in Grumberg's words, "the area beyond the *mahsom* is a purely Jewish-Israeli space that can be corrupted by the presence of the Arabs who wish to go there."[103] The effects of control and surveillance are therefore in full effect at the airport and the checkpoint, demonstrating that the spatial plays a role in the disorientation of everyday Palestinian life. So too, albeit less overtly, do other spatial structures that Madhoun's and Meruane's characters encounter in the built environment of Israel and Palestine.

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[100] Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2011): 125.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 132.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the built elements of airports and checkpoints, which manifest as non-places or liminal spaces in the context of Israel and Palestine, the characters of *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* must deal with a complex urban arrangement that has been made even more convoluted in the past two decades. This arrangement includes streets and walkways as well as buildings and signage. The intricacy of urban space, for instance, has contributed to the maintenance of segregated communities in Meruane's experiences in Yaffa and Hebron. Likewise, the built environment disorients Walid's experience of Acre, causing him to doubt his memories and expectations. For both authors, the physical space of Palestine contributes to the unsettled sense of place experienced by Lina, Walid, and Julie.

In *Volverse Palestina*, Lina Meruane sees this disorientation manifested in the spatial arrangement and cultural displacement of Yaffa, where a Hebrew-speaking taxi driver tells her he is reluctant to drive her into the Arab part of town because the Jews and Arabs do not get along:

> He tells me gloomily that he doesn't like to come to this neighborhood. That no taxis do. We don't like Arabs, he says, and they don't like the Jews. They may not like you, I answer, feeling more bitter for a moment, but even if they don't like you, you haven't left them anything else to live with. Live with, or finish killing each other. The man-in-the-black-kippa stays very quiet.[104]

[104] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 64.

By reinforcing the trope of intransigent struggle that conditions arguments against attempts to end the conflict by claiming that Jews and Muslims have been at war for centuries, the taxi driver too engages in a cultural struggle to displace the Palestinian narrative of constant existence. His silence in the face of Meruane's invocation of the necessity of either peaceful coexistence or violence represents the relative silence of Israeli society when confronted by the historical reality of their state's displacement of Palestinians and the injustice of everyday life for Palestinians living in Occupied Palestine. As Patrick Wolfe notes, quoting Mark LeVine, "through the Zionist modernization of the Arab city of Jaffa was intended to have a certain site specificity, 'in fact Jaffa has had to be emptied of its Arab past and Arab inhabitants in order for architects to be able to re-envision the region as a typical Middle Eastern city.'"[105] That is, Meruane experiences the differentiation that was necessary to construct a distinctly Jewish and Middle Eastern city; Arabs remain to orient the city as a fixed site, but exist on Tel Aviv-Jaffa's margins, unencountered by the city's Jewish population but still anchoring their claims to permanence. The built environment of the city, characterized by specific streets and neighborhoods that the taxi driver has identified as "no-go zones," has contributed to the reinforcement of attitudes that have in turn transformed the Palestinian landscape.

For Madhoun, whose work is more character- and dialogue-driven than contemplative, Palestine's built environment nonetheless also induces a form of

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[105] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 no. 4 (2006): 389, quoting Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine 1880-1949* (Berkeley, CA: California U.P. 2005): 227.

disorientation. As we will see in chapter 6, Julie attempts to return her mother's ashes to her childhood house in Acre, but meets with an unexpected result. The space of the Acre square is familiar to Walid as he waits for Julie to finish her business in her mother's house, but as he walks, he is consistently confused by the signage posted on the buildings of Acre's city center. The signs declare that the residents will never sell their homes, but Walid is aware of many instances of this happening. As he walks, his head is "full of signs challenging other signs, and slogans contradicting each other"—all while

> the houses of Old Acre, and the five and a half thousand residents who still occupied them, waited in a queue of victims of creeping Judaization—like the five buildings in the Maaliq quarter that had been restored for the Ayalim [Association, an Israeli organization that settles students in cooperative housing and villages] and had then been taken over by Orthodox Jewish university students.[106]

The contradictions in Madhoun's head reflect his perspective on the Palestinian residents who remain in Acre, and on the Palestinian citizens of Israel in general—in his view, they are increasingly divided, and their resistance to future settlements is largely symbolic. Walid's perspective on Palestine is thus challenged and redefined during his walk through Acre, as his sense of familiarity with the city's streets contrasts with his own disorientation with the signage, which represents the ways in which the city has changed. The attitudes held by Acres inhabitants have shifted from Walid's own expectation.

In a final instance of the effect of Palestine's dizzyingly confusing built environment, Meruane describes a trip to Hebron to witness the situation in the occupied

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[106] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 30.

city. She is disturbed by the facts her guide mentions about the physical conditions of Hebron:

> That the streets are closed to Palestinians. That to go from one point to another, separated by 500 meters, one would need to traverse 12 kilometers. That the market has been taken by the settlers, and that it's all been walled off to prevent attacks. We leave [the Ibrahimi Mosque] and start up the slope that the Palestinians use. Up, along the slippery gravel and broken stairs, we go. Below, the street is paved and open to settlers. It's along this part of the road that buildings are visible, protected by alarms, cameras, flags, and the army. … This is also the zone where banners are displayed, many in English. … We stop in front of one, and I translate, perplexed, a line written down by Holocaust survivors, or perhaps by their children: "Arabs to the gas chambers," it says.[107]

In this shocking observation, Meruane demonstrates some of the contradictions felt by Palestinians who are considering their prospects of any kind of meaningful return to Palestine. Anyone considering return would have to navigate an immigration system designed to prevent their repatriation. She would have to deal with the physical infrastructure of Israel, which disadvantages Palestinians in the occupied territories to the benefit of settlers in the form of separation walls, private roads, flying checkpoints, and border stations. On an existential level, she would be forced to come to terms with being instantly identified as a malignant Other, as Arabs have been defined in the banner Meruane translates. In all of these obstacles, Palestinians are faced with an antagonistic and restrictive system that allows for their ironic replacement by those who may also have been oppressed in the past. Meruane's depiction of Hebron thus comes to symbolize the whole

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[107] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 63.

of Israel for many Palestinians, for whom return is as complicated as is travel in the city's streets.

THE METATEXTUAL

Perhaps the most unsettling scene in Madhoun's text occurs when the author's metatextual words appear in a scene. While Walid waits for his turn to be questioned at the airport, he picks up a copy of a newspaper that had been left by a man being questioned before him. The newspaper contains an article written by Rabai al-Madhoun, giving Walid "a jolt." "*Oh my God!*" Walid thinks to himself; "The familiar name was sparking various dormant connections in my mind."[108] It is here that the airport is revealed as a place of what Drew Paul refers to as "rupture," in which traditional narratives are upended, a veil is torn, and possible worlds intersect. In first-person perspective, the narrator, Walid, is "astonished" at what he reads; in his impression of Madhoun's article, it is "as if borders were just borders, ports were ports, and airports airports for a Palestinian."[109] The very definition of what it means to be Palestinian comes under scrutiny for Walid in this moment.

The Arabic original of *Maṣā'ir* refers the mysterious man as "the strange, clear man,"[110] an expression that Starkey does not translate. He does render the first interaction between Walid and the man in English, however: "Suddenly, the man straightened up and his back left the wall. He started to read my face with something like recognition. As if he

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[108] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 158.
[109] Ibid., 160.
[110] "الرجل الغريب الواضح", Madhoun, *Tragedies* (Arabic ed.), 170.

knew me. I'd never seen him before, nor had I seen the elegant woman who was accompanying him. But perhaps he did know me."[111] In this scene, the character of Rabai al-Madhoun slips into the character of Walid Dahman, asserting the airport as an unsettling and disorienting place. Walid is suddenly uncertain—of himself, of the identity of the "strange clear man," and of the meaning of Palestinian-ness. It is as if Madhoun has projected his own feelings of uncertainty onto the character of Walid, whom Paul refers to as "semi-autobiographical" in reference to Walid's role in Madhoun's previous novel, *The Lady from Tel Aviv*.[112] The elements of what I call disorientation in *Maṣā'ir* and *Volverse Palestina* continue the trend of what Paul identifies in *The Lady from Tel Aviv*: "These marginal elements, these distractions, the seemingly impossible tangle of narrative strands, *mise en abyme*, metafiction, and blurred boundaries, take center stage and seem to defy any attempts to impose logic and order upon them."[113] The very aesthetics of *Maṣā'ir*, like those of *The Lady from Tel Aviv*, disorient the reader and reinforce her sense of discomfort with the narratives Madhoun has created as well as with what these narratives express about the actual political and social conditions on the ground in Palestine.

Through metatextual elements like the introduction of Madhoun, *Maṣā'ir* becomes imbued with a strong sense of disorientation. Such a sense is also palpable in *Volverse Palestina*, particularly in Meruane's final scene, in which she shares a melancholy drink with Ankar prior to her departure from Palestine. Meruane does not know how to describe

[111] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 155-56.
[112] Paul, *Border Fiction*, 32.
[113] Drew Paul, "One House, Two Shadows: The Rupture of Return in Contemporary Palestinian Literature," *Scritture Migranti*, no. 6 (2012): 128.

her experience in Palestine, and the experience has unsettled her identity as a Palestinian. She describes her final conversation with Ankar thus:

> Ankar, who suffers from insomnia, appears stealthily behind the door and invites me with a gesture to have a drink. To take a farewell tour of the night, to end this journey as it began. In darkness. In the desolate port. Going over all the contradictions. Ankar has decided to stay so that he doesn't lose her, he says, because she could not live anywhere else. We toast, Ankar and I, oppressed by the loneliness of this Sunday bar. I say: I don't know if I've returned. I don't know if I ever could. Ankar raises his glass, looks at me with lulling eyes, and as if humming a verse that was indecipherable yet fitting, says, slowly, don't say that you won't return, Meruane; you will. You'll return soon.[114]

In an interview conducted with the Palestinian Federation of Chile, Meruane says that one aspect of the importance of *Volverse Palestina* lies in attempting to answer the question, "How do we constitute a part of this [contemporary Palestinian] community in a space of exile?"[115] The question of return, as she asks and as Ankar answers, makes up an integral part of the journey of Chile's Palestinian community in reconnecting (or connecting for the first time) with their roots in Palestine. The political urgency of the work is not lost on the Federation; Meruane notes in the group's video the importance of acknowledging and publicizing the situation on the ground in Palestine as one means of maintaining and strengthening identity. In this respect *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* share the same goal; though they shed light on a tragic situation, they also provide a means by which Palestinians, whether in exile, in the occupied territories, or in Israel, can access and participate in a communal identity that differs from that of previous generations. The two

[114] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 67.

[115] "Conoce 'Volverse Palestina' de la autora Lina Meruane!" Federación Palestina de Chile, 12 Aug. 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8v9XJUpH_4.

novels reveal how the meaning of Palestinian-ness has shifted in the light of the post-Oslo fracturing of Palestine. Perhaps the structure of these two novels also illustrates that the process identified by Hanafi as “partial diasporization” is nearer a conclusion than scholars have previously recognized.

Chapter 5: Characters

The qualities of the characters in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* also contribute to the works' sense of confusion, disjunction, and pessimism regarding the possibility of any consequential "return" for the Palestinian in exile. In fact, the two novels share several remarkably similar characters who serve to complicate the main characters' experiences and interpretations of Palestine. At the same time, the interactions by Lina, Julie, and Walid with these characters have a prominent influence on the main characters' senses of self. This chapter will introduce several of the two novels' complementary and unique characters, showing how such characterization also contributes to the authors' portrayals of return as impracticable or ephemeral.

MAIN CHARACTERS

The main character of *Volverse Palestina* is the author, Lina Meruane. Born in 1970 to Palestinian-Chilean parents, she lives and teaches in New York City. Several of her works have taken on personal issues related to identity and the body. The Lina Meruane who appears in *Volverse Palestina* is not a teacher, however, but rather a student. The curiosity she displays in the novel allows her to gather useful information and present it to her Spanish-speaking audience, but it also results in a few awkward encounters in *Volverse Palestina* that betray her distance from Palestine as it exists at the time of her account of her visit. Everything she observes is presented as new information, as if she is discovering her ancestral homeland for the first time. She expresses surprise, for instance, at the sight

of Israeli soldiers riding public buses. The style of *Volverse Palestina* helps her to relay her observations as though they were entries in a journal, though the book's format and Meruane's use of language suggest that her return is unsettling and uncertain.

In *Maṣā'ir*, the main characters are Julie Littlehouse and her husband Walid. Julie is a half-Palestinian, half-English woman whose mother was an Armenian Palestinian named Ivana Arkadian. Raised in Acre during the British Mandatory period, Ivana fell in love with a British soldier, John Littlehouse, and eloped with him to England, where she remained for the rest of her life without returning to Palestine. Julie is their only daughter, and she is interested in exploring Palestine in order to understand her own roots and those of her mother. At one point in the novel, she likes Palestine so much that she says to Walid: "Walid, darling, what do you think about selling our house in London and coming to live in Acre?" She explains her question by saying that "the time had come to go back to her roots," adding that "she would like to add a few new touches to the image she presented to others—the daughter of an Englishman who had been a colonizer in his youth, and of a disgraced Palestinian-Armenian mother, who had fallen in love in a moment of human weakness—that is, to rewrite her past in a way worthy of both of them."[116]

Upon her arrival to Acre, Julie exhibits a zest for life in Palestine, which surprises even her husband. She dances in ecstasy by herself in an Acre mosque, leading Walid to wonder to himself, "Where has she got all this from?"[117] Afterward, her face is "glowing,

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[116] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 37.
[117] Ibid., 31.

like a flower whose petals had been opened by the first rays of the sun,"[118] like a person whose identity is opening up to her homeland. She revels in the experience, enjoying everything from the city walls to the sea to the traditional hummus she eats at the famous Hummus Said.

Julie's husband Walid is a Palestinian citizen of the United Kingdom, whose family is originally from Al-Majdal Asqalan, a Palestinian village that was depopulated in 1948 and is now a part of the present-day city of Ashkelon in Israel. Following the *nakba*, his family members were made refugees and ended up in the Khan Younis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Walid is able to return to Al-Majdal Asqalan in *Maṣā'ir*, and when he does, he attempts to recover his early memories of life in the city: "With tears in my eyes, I searched for my early childhood among the rubble of the city, but didn't find it. I cried for myself and my childhood, and for some time my emotions took over."[119] He receives a phone call from his mother in Gaza, and asks her, "Mother, do you remember where you lived before you emigrated? Do you remember our house?" She gives him directions, but the ground she describes has been "stripped of its features by American Caterpillar trucks"; it is "now just barren land, and it [is] difficult to be sure that houses had ever stood on it."[120] Walid, at least, will not be able to return in the sense that his wife will.

Paul notes that Walid is a semiautobiographical representation of *Maṣā'ir*'s author, Rabai al-Madhoun. Walid, like Madhoun, is "a British-Palestinian journalist and writer

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 43.
[120] Ibid., 44.

who spent his childhood in Gaza."[121] In this sense, he is a vehicle for expressing some of the author's own impressions about the possibility of return, in addition to serving as the place in which Madhoun irrupts into the text, as was discussed in the previous chapter. In *Maṣā'ir*'s metatextuality, Paul's insights regarding *The Lady from Tel Aviv* are also quite appropriate; in both texts, "narrative strands bleed into each other and characters interact on multiple levels with their author-creators,"[122] creating an environment in which the reader is unsure of what is happening in the text.

INSIDERS

One character type that exists in both novels is that of the woman with insider knowledge. For Madhoun, this character is literally nicknamed "Sitt Maarif," which translates to "Lady Information." Sitt Maarif, formally named Fatima al-Nasrawi, is the know-it-all of the Acre neighborhood from which Julie's mother Ivana left in the 1940s. A character in local lore, she is one of the first characters the reader encounters in the book, after only Julie. In her absence, the people of Acre playfully mock her know-it-all persona and describe her as working as a "popular guide."[123] Fatima gives Walid and Julie the back-story on Julie's family history, and on the house of Ivana's parents, Manuel and Alice, which the couple had left two days after the Israeli declaration of independence and two days "before the city had fallen into the hands of Jewish forces."[124]

[121] Paul, "One House, Two Shadows," 108.
[122] Ibid., 109.
[123] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 3.
[124] Ibid., 5.

In addition to information, however, Sitt Maarif also offers a poignant observation about modern Palestine. When Julie laments the fact that her mother was yet "another resident of Acre who died a stranger" outside of the walls of the city, Fatima responds, "What, my dear? Your mother died in London a stranger from Acre? Well, just look at us here, strangers and refugees in our own country. So there's no difference between the dead and the living where we're concerned, praise God and thank Him."[125] The woman with insider knowledge has introduced the book's overarching theme: what good is return from exile when so many Palestinians remain refugees? This question haunts the contemporary depictions of return articulated by both Madhoun and Meruane.

In *Volverse Palestina*, this character is presented in the form of Meruane's aunts, though the insider knowledge possessed by her aunts only serves to deepen Meruane's own sense of alienation. When Meruane asks her father for further information about her heritage, he defers to her aunts: "surely your aunts know," he says in an attempt to avoid his embarrassment at his ignorance of his own history.[126] However, Meruane's aunts do not dispense wisdom, but accusations instead. The character of the woman with knowledge is for Meruane an accuser. Meruane describes her search for information from her aunts in the following way:

> Invariably my oldest aunt defends herself, saying, when I ask her about any detail, "How has your father not told you? … And you don't read *Al-Damir*? continues the same aunt, the most memorable. I have to remind her that I left Chile twelve years ago and I don't have access to this Chilean-Palestinian publication. And why doesn't your father send it to you? … There's an accusation of indifference in the

[125] Ibid., 8.
[126] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 13.

> air. An accusation that falls on me and on my father, although he maintains, like many [Palestinians] of that generation, a bond of solidarity with Beit Jala that he never boasts about. Support that sustains a school called Chile, a plaza named Chile, some children, real Palestinians, if what is Palestinian still exists.[127]

Knowledge, and the lack thereof, combine to create a hostile atmosphere that does not allow questions to be answered. In Meruane's interactions with her family members, we see the underlying trauma caused by exile, and particularly by a forced separation from one's own roots.

LOCAL INFORMANTS

The character of the local informant also appears in both novels, contributing greatly to the alienation felt by the characters who are consider the possibility of return to Palestine. For Meruane, the local informant is her family member whom she meets in Beit Jala. This distant relative, Maryam Abu Awad, insists that Meruane's name cannot actually be Meruane; an integral part of her identity is thus thrown into question.

> I deflect Maryam's questions with another that I've been thinking about for months, the question about our shared last name. I'm intrigued to know if there is any Saharan connection. If there was a translation from Arabic. If Meruane would not be a name like Maruan or Maruani, written down incorrectly in the precarious immigration process of the early 20th century. If my grandfather was also an Abu, son of, some Maruan. But Maryan, who trails a Meruane behind the Abu Awad, interrupts me …: Your family are not Meruanes. … I say: How can it be that we are not Meruanes? No, she says, you are Saba. Sabaj? I ask, almost affirmingly, Sabaj or Sapaj because that part of my family received different names when entering Chile. No, no, she repeats: Saba. The Sabaj are others. … Something is turning in my head. Something is coming down. If I am not Meruane, then this

[127] Ibid.

> woman who claims to be my relative is actually nothing of mine. But there is something even worse: if we aren't Meruanes, then, who am I?[128]

The sudden uncertainty introduced by Maryam's claim expresses the disassociation felt by those who physically return to Palestine. On one hand, the return is a triumphant one; on the other, it further underscores the ever-widening gulf between the returner and her homeland.

In *Masa'ir*, Walid also experiences moments of disorientation, particularly during his visit to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum, and to the nearby destroyed village of Deir Yassin. Taxi drivers dissuade him from investigating when he asks them for directions to the village: "My friend, you can't see anything of it from here. The fact is, there's nothing left of it except for a few stones. … Go past the building. Look to your right, though you won't see anything."[129] He continues along, thinking about Deir Yassin, until he stumbles onto groups of people waiting in lines, in a scene that reveals that his experience is not actually real. He speaks to a woman who is his own "native" informant. This woman, who gives her name as Tala Rabinovitch, tells him that the people waiting in line "want to visit the other museum, on the other side over there," referring to Deir Yassin.[130] She continues with pieces of information that make it clear that Walid is visiting Palestine in a completely different world from our own:

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[128] Ibid., 51-52.
[129] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 229.
[130] Ibid., 232.

> Listen, sir, you're a stranger—in fact, it looks as though you must be a complete stranger! These people are waiting their turn to visit the Zikhron ha-Filistinim[131] museum, it's a museum of Palestinian memories. It was built recently following the historic peace agreement that was signed just two years ago between the two peoples of the country, and which ended the bloody struggle that had lasted more than a hundred years.[132]

Upon reading these lines, the reader necessarily feels her own sense of disorientation. Is there really a museum at Deir Yassin? What peace agreement is Tala Rabinovitch referring to? The answer to these questions, of course, is that Walid's literary world is different from that of the reader. This sense of lurking disorientation, as well as the invocation of the possibility of peace, reinforce the tragedy of Palestine as it is today. At the same time, the fact that the interaction occurs at a memorial to one horrific modern massacre and the site of another allows Madhoun to draw a parallel between the two. The irony is stark: not three kilometers from the site of a well-documented massacre, which is currently, as the taxi drivers say, a pile of stones, stands a site that preserves the legacy of the victims of the Holocaust.

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[131] This phrase in English transliteration introduces an ambiguity that is also present, albeit in a different form, in the original Arabic transliteration of the Hebrew phrase. In the Arabic text from which I worked, the museum's name is Zikhrot ha-Filistinim (زخروت هفلسطينيم), a transliteration of an ungrammatical Hebrew expression that would read זכרות הפלסטינים. The original rendering is likely a simple typographical error with the Arabic *taa'* substituted for *nun*, since in Hebrew either Zikhron (memory) or Zikhronot (memories) would make more contextual sense. Zikhron ha-Filistinim, what the expression has become in English transliteration, refers to either "the memory of the Palestinians" (i.e. of a people group that no longer exists) or "Palestinians' memory" (i.e. the memories that belong to the Palestinians). The original Arabic text also conveys the expression's ambiguity; Tala Rabinovitch's proclamation that "it's a museum of Palestinian memories" translates the Arabic expression (إنّه متحف ذاكرة الفلسطينيين), literally "it is a museum of the memory [singular] of the Palestinians" or "it is a museum of the Palestinians' memory." In this respect, Starkey's use of the transliteration "Zikhron" more accurately captures the Arabic context and the dual meanings of the phrase "the memory of the Palestinians." This ambiguity captures the disorienting nature of the Deir Yassin memorial; it is at once a testament to the steadfastness of the Palestinians and an epitaph mourning their passing.

[132] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 232-33.

Walid continues his tour of the Deir Yassin memorial site, the mere mention of which evokes the hope of a near-future coexistence. This hopefulness arises when Walid considers the situation of the Palestine/Israel in which he finds himself, and discusses this with Tala Rabinovitch:

> I felt the value of my visit to Yad Vashem. The visitors to the Palestinian museum that we were heading for would doubtless also feel at peace after their visit to Yad Vashem—a peace that would prepare them for their visit to the other museum opposite. Truly the rights of the dead become equal when the rights of the living are equal, I thought.
> Then I turned to Tala and said, "At last this has become a homeland for everyone, hasn't it?"[133]

The very mention of the possibility of coexistence makes Walid feel content. But Madhoun's point is that, though this alternate future is possible, it is untenable under the current conditions of Palestine. The possibility of a better future tantalizes the reader in the book's final chapters, but an event featuring Julie and her entrance into her mother's house shows the devastating truth of Palestine's present. This event will be discussed in chapter 6.

HALF-ROOTED COUPLES

Another representative pair of characters whose presence supports the political arguments being made by Meruane and Madhoun, that Palestinian existence in Israel is tenuous at best and under grave threat of eradication at worst, is that of what I call the half-rooted couple. In *Volverse Palestina*, this couple is Ankar and Zima. Ankar is Meruane's

[133] Ibid., 234.

"writer-friend-of-Jewish-descent"; "Ankar" is a pseudonym that Meruane uses to conceal her friend's true identity. Ankar is a prominent Spanish-language writer and journalist, a Colombian national married to a Palestinian woman with Israeli citizenship (a "'48 Palestinian"), and Meruane's acquaintance. As mentioned above, his status in Israel is uncertain, and he fears retribution by Israeli security forces for his political affiliations. He lives in Israel on a residency permit, though he has Jewish grandparents whose relatives perished in the Holocaust. Zima, as Meruane refers to Ankar's wife, is a native of Jaffa, and a Muslim. Zima is rooted in Jaffa, and as Ankar notes, she "could not live anywhere else."[134]

Like *Volverse Palestina*'s Zima and Ankar, *Maṣā'ir*'s Jinin and Basim are a half-rooted couple. Jinin is Walid's cousin, a Dahman and a writer, who lives in Jaffa and is married to a Palestinian man she met in college in the United States. Basim is from Bethlehem, and the separation between the Palestinians in the West Bank and '48 Palestinians like Jinin comes across clearly in their relationship. Because of their marriage, Basim is temporarily able to live in Jaffa with Jinin, but he longs to return to Bethlehem, and his work permit eventually expires, forcing him to return to Bethlehem. Their relationship represents the dilemma of many '48 Palestinians: part of Israeli society on one hand, yet somehow strangers as well. When Jinin thinks in despair about their predicament, she realizes that the impulse to "return" to Palestine may not be as strong for Basim, who can return to the land his family owns in the West Bank. The narrator remarks that "Basim

[134] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 67.

wasn't a refugee, and Jinin hadn't reckoned on his returning [to Bethlehem]. She didn't understand things the same way that he did. She didn't feel as he did—returning to the country that seven million Palestinians dreamed of going back to didn't concern him as it concerned others."[135]

As Jinin considers the possibility of her separation from Basim, she cries:

> "for him and for herself. For their love, which had opened a path to return to the homeland, only to separate them when they'd arrived. *My God, it's ridiculous that exile should bring us together and the homeland should drive us apart!* …
> Now she screamed to herself, *My God, how cruel Jaffa has become to us! Can't it stand two Palestinians born in different places living together here?*
> She cried to and for herself.
> She cried so much that her tears raised the overall level of sadness in the country.[136]

The separation, caused in part by the events of 1967 and in part by the Oslo Accords, of Palestinians into two groups ('48 Palestinians and those living in the West Bank or Gaza Strip), affects Jinin and Basim as it affects the entire Palestinian population. Their alienation from the one they love resembles the alienation felt by those who are attempting to return, as we have seen in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir*.

As couples, Ankar, Zima, Jinin, and Basim illustrate that the possibility of love and continued existence persists in Palestine, but their relationship also demonstrates the tenuousness of life in Palestine. Ankar believes he could be deported on a whim and taken from his wife and children. In this sense, he and Zima are vulnerable to the Israeli security apparatus, a familiar status for many Palestinians currently living in Israel and the

[135] Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 103.
[136] Ibid., 103-105.

Palestinian Territories as well as for Palestinians attempting to return and international activists on behalf of Palestinian causes. Their very existence in Israel points to the precarity many Palestinians face, and these characters therefore serve as examples of yet another facet of Palestinian life.

Several types of characters shared between *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* aid in reading the novels in conversation with each other as well as in supporting the authors' arguments about the impracticability of return. The main characters (Lina, Walid, and Julie) experience senses of disorientation, which express the idea that Palestinian identity today is even more unsettled than it has been in the past. Insider characters reinforce this sense of alienation, revealing the main characters as outsiders. Local informants play a similar role, reinforcing the main characters' separation from their ancestral cities and lands and demonstrating that Lina, Walid, and Julie are not in fact natives in Palestine. Finally, half-rooted couples illustrate the impermanence and instability that can characterize the lives of Palestinians who have attempted some form of return or who are living as tenuously assimilated citizens in Israel. The character types of *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* offer a deeper, more well-rounded sense of fracture; secondary characters bring to light the alienation experienced by the main characters and exemplify the tragedies inherent to modern Palestinian life.

Chapter 6: Symbols of Return

The final way in which Meruane and Madhoun complicate the traditional narrative of return is obvious yet powerful: the use of symbolism. Several symbols in the novels lend themselves to interpretation as expressions of the disorientation inherent in any attempt to return to Palestine, whether physically, temporarily, or even intellectually, in the context of the situation on the ground today. These symbols include houses, memorial sites, and ashes.

HOUSES

In a scene in *Volverse Palestina* that takes place before Meruane's trip to Palestine, Meruane and her father and brothers take a trip to the Chilean Andes to visit the village to which her grandfather immigrated. Once there, they find the house in which their grandfather, her father's father, lived, and they attempt to enter. However, entrance is impossible. Meruane says,

> The door is locked with a key that no longer belongs to us. My younger brother Peers through the hole in the door and can't make anything out. It's dark…, he says; … [sic] like a tomb, I finish, thinking about my grandfather in his. …
> I don't see anything, insists the voice of my younger brother through the peephole. And maybe there isn't anything to see, because after an earthquake and later a fire, the house was declared uninhabitable. I told you there was no point in going back, my father murmurs.[139]

[139] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 22-23.

The house has been devastated by natural disasters, but it is also inaccessible because the Meruanes do not have its key. The key is a classic symbol of Palestinian refugees; many of those who were removed from or left their homes in 1948 kept the keys to their homes with the intention of returning soon; when it became clear that imminent return was becoming less likely, the key became an enduring symbol, adorning mantles and hanging from necklaces.[140] Palestinian refugee camps, regardless of country, usually have large keys prominently displayed at their entrances, claiming the right to return to the property from which they, or their parents or grandparents, have been alienated.[141] However, what use is a key when the locks have been changed? In practice, one's house is no longer one's house at that point, however strong the principle of ownership or one's claim to the right to enter. The home that Meruane visits in the Andes symbolizes her own disconnection from her family history, but it also symbolizes Palestine: inaccessible for so many because of events beyond their control, locked up with a key that they do not possess, and changed beyond recognition.

Likewise, in *Maṣā'ir*, Ivana's childhood home also symbolizes loss and inaccessibility. As we will see, Julie's attempts to enter it and fulfill Ivana's wishes result in a reinforcement of the practical impossibility of returning to the homeland that was lost or left. Near the novel's beginning, Julie tells Walid a false story, making up the details about her experience in Ivana's home. She tries to rein in her emotions while relaying the

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[140] Avraham Sela and Alon Kadish, "Israeli and Palestinian Memories and Historical Narratives of the 1948 War—An Overview," *Israel Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 12-14; Laleh Khalili, "Grass-Roots Commemorations: Remembering the Land in the Camps of Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 13-14.
[141] Sela and Kadish, "Israeli and Palestinian Memories," 13.

fabrication to him: "She gathered together inside herself the various emotions that her visit to her grandfather's house had left behind—all of which she was hiding from Walid behind this story that she had invented and was trying to believe in, so as not to shock her husband or collapse in front of him when she related it."[142] The story she tells is a wishful one; her mother's house is inhabited by a woman who appreciates the home's history and who is planning to turn it into a hotel that will be named after Ivana. However, this story is not true, and represents yet another alternative reality. Perhaps, Julie is saying, a future exists in which people attempt to respect the previous inhabitants of the homes they occupy, though this is not actually the case for Ivana's house. While Julie ascribes an Orientalist motivation to the house's new resident (the house will "retain its Oriental flavor"[144] as a hotel), perhaps this Orientalism, for Julie, is preferable to the current reality, in which all features of the house's past have been erased. The home's presentation as an Oriental palimpsest is thus the lesser of two evils. In Julie's fantasy, even an Orientalized preservation is better than total erasure.

MEMORIALS

Individual homes serve as a form of memorial to the dispossession of some Palestinians, but in the Israeli context, memory is a politically charged and deeply personal and existential issue. In *Maṣā'ir*, Madhoun engages with issues of memory and memorialization by juxtaposing a visit by Walid to two parallel locations. One location is

142 Madhoun, *Fractured Destinies*, 35.
144 Ibid., 34.

real, however, while the other is not. In Walid's visit to the Holocaust History Museum, he contemplates the surroundings in the context of the ways in which the Holocaust has affected him and the Palestinian people:

> The Hall of Names made me pause and captured my feelings. I studied the names, and examined the features of the victims—who continued to scrutinize me as I looked at their faces—and tried to gauge their feelings at the moment the pictures had been taken. Moments that would no longer be there for people who had been reduced to skeletons or whose corpses had disappeared entirely. I lifted my head to follow the names upward until my gaze reached the hall's circular extremity, open to the sky. At that moment, I felt like the faces of thousands of Palestinians—some of whom I knew, but most of whom I did not—gazed down on me. They were pushing and shoving, as if they wanted to come down into the halls of the museum, spread through them, and take their places as victims. I felt sorrow for those from both groups, and I cried for those who were crowded together in the sky, looking for a place to assemble their names.[145]

In his recognition of the tragedies that were imposed upon the Jewish people as well as on the Palestinians, Walid's thought process recalls an earlier scene, in which he is in Al-Majdal Asqalan, visiting a house that he believes may have once belonged to his family, or that is similar to their house. The house is now occupied by a family of Yemeni Jews, and Walid is welcomed in by a woman, "Roma," who speaks "in Arabic with a slight accent."[146] She kindly shows the house to Walid and his companions, but a sense of uneasiness undergirds her actions, as though she is aware that she, in her flight from Yemen as a child, may have participated in the displacement of others. As Walid and his friends leave the house, Walid says that

[145] Ibid., 230-31.
[146] Ibid., 48.

> I was conscious of Roma saying something far behind me. I turned back, and saw her waving her short arm in the air. I stopped for a few seconds, and watched her as she turned away under my watchful eyes. I don't know whether tears were actually falling from her eyes as she moved away, or whether I imagined it. But I wondered whether Roma was looking for her Yemeni childhood in us.[147]

Here Madhoun underscores the fact that no one community may lay claim to suffering; Palestinians have certainly suffered, but so have communities like the Jews of Yemen, not to mention the Jewish communities of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This simultaneous suffering that undergirds the role of the memorial as symbol. The Holocaust History Museum is one symbol that exists and endures. Nearly next door to the museum, however, is another site that has ceased to exist except in memory. There, Madhoun imagines what the site's own memorial might symbolize.

The massacre of Deir Yassin is represented in *Maṣā'ir* as having been memorialized in a post-one-state solution future, as discussed in chapter 5**.** The symbolism of this destroyed village stands parallel to the poignant symbolism of the Holocaust memoir. The hypothetical museum also has its own version of a Hall of Names:

> I [Walid] lifted my head, to be met with a sign that linked earth and sky as this world is linked to the next. I found myself facing a large memorial, whose base covered almost sixteen square meters, and which was about a meter and a half high. It had been designed in the shape of a four-sided rocket, which grew narrower the higher it went, until it turned into a thin line that disappeared into the sky. Starting from the body of the rocket, a moving beam of light rose up, showing, inside a rectangle of light, the name of a Palestinian martyr, which shone for a few seconds, then moved up, for its place to be taken by another name. And underneath each name appeared the date of birth and date of martyrdom.
>
> I continued to follow the names as they shone and rose upward. They had been arranged at random, reflecting the wish of the designers that everyone should be

[147] Ibid., 51.

> equal, with no distinction between those who had been martyred sixty years ago and those who had fallen victim to the latest Israeli raids on Gaza.[148]

After seeing the museum, Walid says that he "woke," but gives no other indication as to whether he had dreamed the memorial at Deir Yassin or whether the novel had jumped in time to an alternate future. Madhoun leaves this question unanswered, as it to suggest to the reader what might be possible alongside what currently is.

ASHES: SYMBOL OF CONTINUITY AND FINALITY

In the beginning section of *Maṣā'ir*, Julie and Walid gather at the London home of Julie's mother Ivana in order to hear an announcement. It turns out that Ivana is delivering her will to her closest family and friends, which becomes a far more significant event once Ivana dies one week afterwards. When Ivana discusses her wishes for what is to be done with her ashes, she requests that handful of ashes be tossed into the Thames, "which will carry them throughout the waters of the ocean."[149] The spreading of the ashes throughout the world in this case represents the maintenance of diaspora identity, in which Ivana and other Palestinians are scattered. However, Ivana also requests that her ashes be left in a specific place:

> Ivana continued speaking, giving instructions that another handful of her body's ashes should be placed in a glass jar thirty centimeters high, the color of the sea in summer, and the shape of her own body in every season: a neck of haughtiness (she raised her head); a chest of pride (she pulled herself upright in her chair, revealing the elegance her prominent aristocratic nose); a waist encircled by a lover's hands (she put her two thumbs and her two forefingers together so that they formed a

[148] Ibid., 236.
[149] Ibid., 21.

> small circle); the belly of a virgin; and a Bedouin behind. She asked for the container to be taken to her parents' house in Abbud Square in Old Acre. "Take part of me and all of my spirit to Acre, so that they may apologize to it quarter by quarter. Take my remains and carry them in procession where I was born, just as London will carry me in procession where I die. My friends and loved ones, one day soon I shall die. I want to be buried here and to be buried there."[150]

Ivana's request represents a desire to be present in the land that she feels guilty for leaving as a young woman, to make amends for her absence. She wants her remains to simply be. Julie and Walid agree, not expecting that Ivana will die, but when she does, it gives them the opportunity to visit Palestine to try to carry out Ivana's wishes. The vase is made, Ivana's ashes are placed in it, and Julie and Walid make their way to Acre. There, Ivana's ashes will serve as a symbol of both impermanence and continuity, a reminder of death and an example of perseverance.

However, the cautious optimism expressed in the possibility of permanently placing Ivana's ashes in her childhood house is ultimately revealed as fleeting in *Maṣā'ir*'s final scene. In the book's closing pages, Julie considers telling Walid the truth about what happened when she attempted to follow her mother's dying wishes and place the statue containing her ashes in her childhood home in Acre. Here Madhoun presents a literary argument that, though suffering has occurred to both Jews and Palestinians, this does not excuse the transposition of the experiences of the former on the latter. This is the story that Julie thinks about telling Walid, but decides against:

> I turned around and banged on the door with my fist.
> After a few seconds, the old two-paneled door opened, and I found myself

[150] Ibid., 21-22.

> confronted by a woman, apparently in her fifties, blocking it with her arms. I explained to her briefly, in English, the purpose of my visit. She said something that I didn't understand in reply, though I could feel the impact of her sharp tone. Then a man appeared behind her, at least ten years older than her, wearing thick glasses. He said something to her that sounded like a question. I looked from one to the other, imploring either of them to let me understand something of what they were saying, but without success. For a few moments, I was overcome by embarrassment, fear, and tension. The woman let her arms fall from the two edges of the door and stepped back a little. The man moved forward. He took her place and asked me in broken English what I wanted. I explained to him the purpose of my visit. When he understood, he jerked back and said first in Hebrew, "Lo, lo, lo, lo!" then in English, "No, no, no, no!" as he refused my request.
>
> "Please, sir, the soul of my mother will never disturb you," I begged him. "Listen to me. She is listening to us now."
>
> "Lo, lo, lo, lo!"
>
> The man looked at the glass container like someone looking at an evil spirit that's emerged from the darkness, wanting to drive it away. "We do not accept strangers in our house," he shouted. "Go on, go on, go away!"
>
> I didn't go away. My feet were nailed to the threshold of the door, almost against my will. The man rushed toward me, threw himself on me, and snatched the statue from my hands. He hurled it over my head and slammed the door hard in my face. The statue flew several meters up in the air, then fell. I heard the sound of it smashing on the staircase. I covered my mouth with my hands to stifle a scream from inside me as my body shook. The church bells started to sound again. I watched the ashes of my mother rise into space in small, scattered clouds, which disappeared in the city sky.[151]

In the end, Ivana's ashes are not allowed to fulfill her benign request. They instead ultimately come to symbolize tragedy. The symbolic weight of their tragedy exceeds that of any other symbolic meaning of ashes, be it an attachment to the land, an acknowledgement of impermanence, or the maintenance of memory and family. All of these things are destroyed, smashed along with the statue on the stairs of the home that Ivana left more than six decades before the events of *Maṣā'ir*. In deciding to keep this story

[151] Ibid., 255-56.

from Walid, Julie avoids making him upset and keeps alive her suggestion of the possibility of the pair moving to Acre. As the two prepare to board their plane back to London, Walid mentions once more Julie's proposal, and says he thinks that it is a good idea. "Return" is a good idea, Madhoun is saying. But it must be contemplated by those with the luxury to do so. Indeed, the novel ends with Walid telling Julie, "We'll talk about it when we get home," as they pass through the boarding gate. For him, home is London, and Palestine is a good idea, but has lost its homelike characteristics.

In the destruction of the container with Ivana's ashes, Ivana is refused entry in her final chance to return to Palestine. So too is her beauty smashed, just as the beauty of Palestine has been destroyed by settlers, depopulation, and forced exile. Even the ashes do not remain in any meaningful sense; they are scattered to the winds, losing any sense of physical or semiotic cohesion. In this way, they resemble the scattering of the Palestinian people. Palestinians have been scattered into diaspora, as is well known, and Madhoun makes the point that it is difficult for these refugees and exiles to return to Palestine. But even more than this, the Palestinian people have been divided even within the territory of historical Palestine. It is this fracturing, Madhoun points out, that conditions and will continue to influence the process of being and becoming Palestinian for many years to come.

Conclusion

A new Palestinianness is emerging in literature and in practice, and it is represented in the works of Rabai al-Madhoun and Lina Meruane, among many others. Distinguished from the militancy of past writers but maintaining and constructing an expressive Palestinian identity, these novelists are demonstrating the changes that have occurred in Palestine in the past three decades. Their works express the disorientation and fragmentation that have come to condition everyday life for Palestinians, regardless of place. However, they also indicate that this disjunctive experience is contributing to a new diasporic identity, one that does not prioritize "return" over all other concerns but that acknowledges the political reality of Palestine and emphasizes the need for Palestinians to endure. In this new diaspora, Palestinian identity becomes less about an increasingly pyrrhic return and more about the preservation of a community. In this regard, the diaspora has much to learn from the example of the earliest Palestinian exiles: early migrants to Latin America and their descendants.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated the ways in which Meruane and Madhoun advance a nuanced and unconventional perspective on the present and future of Palestinianness. In style, characterization, and symbology, *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* build upon a robust literary heritage concerning the experiences of Palestinians attempting to return to Palestine. Beyond this, though, the novels invert and improvise on these themes in order to show how such a return can no longer resemble the vaunted return narratives of the past, which placed militant emphasis on the political symbolism of return as part of a

connection to a literary aesthetic of commitment. In presenting unsettled, fractured, and rupturing return experiences for characters like Lina, Julie, and Walid, Meruane and Madhoun create a literary environment of uncertainty and disorientation that captures a new perspective on daily life for all Palestinians. By expanding the definition of "Palestinian" beyond that of the common images of refugees or freedom fighters and instead depicting a quotidian existence that has internalized the trauma of separation from Palestine, the authors illustrate that today's Palestinianness differs qualitatively from that of previous generations, even from that of the generation of the peace process. Palestinians, the novels argue, are unified by their diversity as well as their tragedy, by disorientation as well as a longing for "home."

The structures of *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* contribute to this argument by grounding the novels in a literary tradition, which allows for the authors to subvert that same tradition. Aesthetic factors, such as language of composition, punctuation, and perspective, combine to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, bringing the reader in on the questions and anxieties that Lina, Julie, and Walid ask and feel. Depictions of movement, both spatial and temporal, combine with experiences in non-places to deepen this sense of un-rootedness, giving the impression that any meaningful return is no longer practicable. This conclusion is reinforced as the characters encounter a hostile built environment and political structures that are designed to limit their freedoms and dissuade their return. Beneath all these facets, particularly in *Maṣā'ir*, lurks the metatextual; Madhoun's self-insertion in the text personalizes his novel, making a self-conscious claim about the unlikelihood of return for even the author.

Structural elements in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* allow the authors to create characters who mimic and invert traditional archetypes in Palestinian literature. Local informants and half-rooted couples expand the novels' depictions of what it means to be Palestinian, demonstrating that Palestinianness is disorienting not only for those living in diaspora but also for those residing in historical Palestine. These characters both welcome the novels' main characters to their ancestral homeland and exemplify just how difficult return will be for Lina, Julie, and Walid. Their lived mixture of optimism and despair, pain and joy, drive home the nuance of the fraught and shifting nature of Palestinianness.

The novels' symbols also contribute to the idea that Palestinians live in increasingly uncertain and disorienting conditions. Houses take on a somber nature, no longer representing homes, but rather vestiges of a lost past, reminders of just how far Julie and Walid are from their memories of Palestine. A vision of a museum of tolerance and coexistence built upon the ruins of a massacred village, adjacent to a memorial commemorating the senseless deaths of European Jews in the Holocaust, proves to be ephemeral, further deepening the pain Walid feels at the injustice of the *nakba*. The simple act of attempting to place an urn of ashes becomes a harsh symbol of the displacement of the Palestinian people. In each of the symbolized stories mentioned in this thesis, the characters imagine hopeful possibilities even while experiencing grim truths that obviate any grounds for optimism. In the areas of structure, characterization, and symbology, *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir* depict Palestinianness as disorientation, a fractured existence characterized by rupture and impossibility. For the novelists, though,

Palestinianness is also a dignity that lives on in exile as well as in presence in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

This thesis has sought to describe the experiences of dislocation and dignity through the lenses of two contemporary novels. Future research surrounding the Palestinian experience and the ways in which Palestinians engage with the themes of exile, return, and home might expand the purview of this thesis to include novels and memoirs written in English. A thorough survey of Palestinian return narratives is also in order; this currently exists with respect to literature published in Arabic and more well-known books written in English, but much more literature has been published on this topic. There may also be literature in other languages, such as French, German, or Hebrew, which are presently beyond my linguistic scope. Taking these narratives into account would extend the arguments begun in *Volverse Palestina* and *Maṣā'ir*, bringing in even more facets of the Palestinian experience. Researchers could also consider narratives of return expressed through various other media, including blog posts, twitter threads, film, music, photography, and poetry, both written and oral. Novels, however, givs us a unique perspective on the ideas that Meruane and Madhoun express, especially since they allow the audience to tangibly interact with the material, creating a connection that differs from that of other media; multidisciplinary research should continue to take novels and memoirs into account when studying self-identification and community identity among Palestinians.

In addition to literary research, further historical work is needed regarding Palestinian identity in Latin America. This historical research can support future analyses of the literature that is sure to continue to emerge from Palestinians in Chile and other Latin

American countries with significant Palestinian populations. Of particular importance is the place of the Palestinian community in Chile during the decolonization events of the Third World. Community newspapers from this period indicate that Palestinians in Chile exhibited concern for these events, particularly those that occurred in the Arab world, such as the Suez Crisis or the Algerian revolution. As displaced members of two separate third-world communities, Chilean Palestinians would likely have held interesting opinions concerning their communities' participation in such events. In fact, perhaps the most well-known memoir written by an Arab migrant to Chile was published during this period, Benedicto Chuaqui's *Memorias de un Emigrante*, indicating that there is fertile ground for more interdisciplinary research that weds literary and historical analysis of the pre-Pinochet period in Chilean history. This research would build upon the already-extant wealth of research published in Spanish on this topic. Likewise, the word-of-mouth accounts I have heard concerning increasing numbers of Chilean-Palestinians making the trip to Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Bethlehem can only signal an increased awareness on the part of the community for post-Oslo Palestine, demonstrating that more recent historical and literary research efforts would prove fruitful.

Palestine has changed as a result of the Oslo Accords and the administrative and military effects that have affected the lives of millions in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel. In the process, Palestinian identity is changing as well. Meruane and Madhoun present novels that differ from previous, politically committed novels that rage against Israeli injustices. Their novels are instead meditations on impracticability and the tragedy that ensues in the lives of Palestinians. But the novels are not entirely without hope; a

reconstituted Palestinian identity means a fresher start, a new perspective. They do not relinquish the claim Palestinians have to the land, but they also approach the Palestinian life and identity with a pessimistic pragmatism. Their characters can hope, as does Walid when he imagines an alternate future with a Deir Yassin memorial, but in the end, their hope is relatively impotent in Palestine. Elsewhere, though, hope is strong; in the lives of Palestinians who are putting down roots in new countries, a new Palestinianness is being forged, one that reflects a more complete diasporization *à la* the classic diasporas.

Madhoun and Meruane write precarious novels that teeter between dichotomies—possession and loss, possibility and impossibility, family and individuality. In *Volverse Palestina*, Meruane makes the decision to return to Palestine in part because of her conversation with a taxi driver in New York, Jaser. He is Palestinian, from a town near Jerusalem, and he encourages her to go to Palestine, but he does not come up again in the course of the novel. In a postlude, however, Meruane says the following:

> While I was finishing this book, I called Jaser. In the past few months, I had called his phone a few times to ask him to take me to the airport and to deal with Palestinian questions. But a voice answered that wasn't his. It said, that voice, that the number didn't belong to any Jaser. I remembered the mandate that the taxi driver had uttered. I wondered if he had decided to return.[152]

What Meruane wonders is quite unlikely. Jaser's return to Palestine would require him to overcome significant, likely impassable obstacles. Perhaps Meruane's musing is wishful thinking; however, the imaginary continues to be important in structuring the Palestinian narrative. Pessimism and cynicism certainly have their places in Palestinian life, but though

[152] Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*, 69.

hope may be presently restricted to those with the luxury to sustain it, it still inevitably makes its way into Palestinian literature. In the same way, Madhoun's novel articulates the end of "return" as a politically significant or salient project, but at the same time presents a snapshot of the Palestinian experience writ large, in all its breadth and diversity.

Perhaps one day, Meruane and Madhoun would say, a form of return might be possible. But the most important—and achievable—thing today is the preservation and continuation of a community united by suffering and exile. Madhoun and Meruane make clear that a growing global awareness of the multiplicity of Palestinian experience will also play a role in uniting the community. A new Palestinianness is emerging, rooted in struggle but also in diversity, solidarity, and mutual support and recognition. The literary work done by Madhoun and Meruane serves to bring this trend into closer focus. will certainly appear in increasing force in Palestinian cultural expression for years to come.

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