

**Within the Green Line¹: Paradoxes of the Lives of Palestinians
within the State of Israel as represented in Ibtetam Azim's
The Book of Disappearance and Rabai Al-Madhoun's
*Fractured Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba***

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“Let it be known about me that I have experienced the most extraordinary event to befall a human being since the staff of Moses, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the election of the husband of Lady Bird to the presidency of United States of America!

I have disappeared. But I am not dead. I was not killed at the borders as some of you believed. I did not join the *fidaeyeen* resistance militias, as those who know me better feared. Nor am I rotting in a prison cell as your friends claim.”

Emile Habibi, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessimist*²

Since the 1948 Nakba Palestinians have crossed borders again and again, literally and metaphorically. Their displacement has taken them to different countries and regions. In each place in which the Palestinians landed, they had different experiences: The Palestinians who landed in Kuwait had a different experience from those who landed in Lebanon; those in Jordan had a different experience than those in Egypt, and so forth. In all of these places, including refugee camps within Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians struggled with two possibilities: returning to their Palestinian hometowns and villages, or settling somewhere else, particularly as it became increasingly clear that the prospect of “returning” was not as eminent as they had thought it to be. Those who stayed struggled through difficult times as they rapidly became a minority surrounded by strangers who were building a new society on what used to be their cities and villages. Their suffering was often overshadowed by the experiences of those who left. And even though those who remained were eventually granted citizenship in the new State of Israel, their identity was

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sometimes ignored by the Jews, other Palestinians, and other Arab nationals. The situation of those left behind was both ironic and paradoxical. This paper traces these paradoxes as represented in two contemporary novels: Ibtisam Azim's *The Book of Disappearance* (2014) and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Fractured Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba* (2015).

The first paradox took place when questions about the current attitudes and future identity of those who stayed began to emerge. Should they apologize for being Arabs, or should they be proud for having held fast to their land? Should they demand the same civil rights as the Jewish members of society, or should they attempt to construct their own closed societies within the State of Israel? Should they guard and reproduce their inherited identity, or should they take part in the political life and activities. Should they become members of the Knesset? When they first attempted to articulate these questions, both individually and collectively, they could not communicate among themselves or with those in power. During the past two decades, however, voices from within the “green line” have started to be heard. Filmmakers, musicians, and dancers who carry the Israeli nationality but identify themselves as Palestinians have found their way to the outside world and in some cases to international awards.

The identity issues were accompanied by trauma issues. Trauma, as defined by Cathy Caruth in her now classical study *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* is a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world [...] [that] [...] [if] experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known and therefore not available to consciousness [...] imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 1996, 4). The Palestinians found themselves within the span of months deprived not only of their homeland as they knew it but also of the world as they knew it. This is how Ahmad Sa’di and Leila Abou Loghd describe the experience of the Nakba:

The Nakba meant the destruction in a single blow of all the worlds in which Palestinians had lived [...] The Nakba marked a new era dominated by estrangement, and often poverty. Nothing in their history or that of neighboring countries had prepared Palestinians to imagine such a catastrophe. The fact that the Nakba took place within a short period—a matter of months—made it hard to comprehend; there was little time to reflect. (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007, 9)

It took decades for the Palestinians to understand the extent and scope of what occurred. As they put together their individual stories of displacement, forced eviction, and massacres, they concluded that what took place was, as historian Ilan Pappé termed “a full-scale international crime of ethnic cleansing” (2006). When the painful work of collecting individual Palestinian memories and formulating a collective cultural memory of the Nakba was finally unveiled, their meanings still had to be explored and investigated. During this process the conditions of the Palestinians living within the boundaries of Israel was special: they had to reconstruct their story against the ever-changing reality that they witnessed daily on the ground, erasing all trace of their existence in their home cities, towns, and villages. This was a distinctly different experience from those who had to remember what happened to them in places where they now live. It is true though that all Palestinians shared the experience of reliving the trauma of the Nakba in one way or another, and for some, their predicament is not over yet. Unlike other selected traumas in history the Nakba does not reside in the past but is still lived in present.

Finally, another issue experienced differently between Palestinians in Israel and displaced Palestinians is their relationship with the other. The former experienced first-hand the Israeli presence as a settler-colonizer while being told that the Zionist project was a logical solution to the problem of a victimized “people without land” who fled to “a land without people”, and now must defend themselves against aggressive neighbors. The analogy to the term settler-colonizer, is inescapable. When one follows the history of the minority who owned a small amount of the land but were granted through the support of superpowers and its own highly militarized constitution dominion over more land at the expense of its legal owners and present inhabitants, it is clear that the intent of narrative is not as innocent as it appears. Just prior to the war in 1948, the indigenous Palestinians made up the two-third majority, down from ninety per cent at the start of the Mandate. One third were Jewish newcomers, i.e., Zionist settlers and refugees from war torn Europe” (Pappé 2006, 29). The exact numbers are given by Walid al Khalidi: “Overall, Jewish land ownership in the whole of Mandatory Palestine in 1948 totalled 1.7 million dunams (1 dunam = 1,000 square meters). The area designated for the Jewish state was 15 million dunams.” As for the population of the nine designated districts by the UN plan “Only one of the nine had a Jewish majority, while the Jewish population percentage in the other eight ranged from 47 percent to 1 percent” (Khalidi 2009, 26). Khalidi points out the clear parallels with “early English settles in North America, Australia, and New Zealand,” in “the mechanics of dispossession and

colonization.” All strategies and policies of a colonizing power were adopted to ensure the control of a minority of the majority of the population who owned and inhabited the place.

Fictional Expressions of the Arab Palestinians in Israel

The first expression in fiction of the plight and paradoxes of Palestinians in Israel came 25 years after the Nakba in Emile Habibi's novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessimist* (1974). As the title implies, the work presented a satiric view of Palestinian life that no doubt continues to loom in the background in later writings that tackle more current themes of memory and identity as well as presenting a sophisticated aesthetic experience. The plots of both Ibtistam Azim's *The Book of Disappearance* (2014) and Rabai al-Madhoun's *Destinies: Concerto of the Holocaust and the Nakba* (2015) take place in cities with mixed Arab and Jewish populations in which Arab populations account for 10% of the inhabitants. The rest of the one and half million Arab Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship live in ghetto-like villages and towns populated solely by Arabs (The Galilean Society: 5th Socioeconomic Survey 2017). The paradoxes of the lives of this population, however, are more evident in the mixed cities. *The Book of Disappearance* takes place in Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Haifa; *Destinies* takes place in Acre, Jaffa, Haifa, Lod, al Majdal Asklan and Ramla.

The Book of Disappearance begins with the disappearance of all Arab Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied territories, including those who were imprisoned. The work is narrated from the point of view of an Israeli Jew named Ariel, whose actions and thoughts are alternated with chapters from the diary of a Palestinian neighbour named Alaa. Alaa's diary details his bitter feelings about his neighbours and presents a depressing view of the life of the Arab Palestinians in Israel. *Destines*, on the other hand, presents an account of a ten-day visit by a British couple of Palestinian origin to the small town of Acre to attend the burial ceremony of the wife's mother, an elderly native of the town. Their journey takes them through the lives of relatives who stayed behind as well as through a fictional account written by Janine, Dahman's niece. The novel imitates the structure of a symphony with four movements, each having a main character and place. Jinin Dahman is the character living in Jaffa: Walid Dahman is traveling to small towns while reading a novel Janine wrote about her own and her father's life. In the following I will examine three main themes that appear in both Azim's and al-Madhoun's works: identity, memory, and relationship to the other. I will discuss how and why they are categorically different from the themes present in the works that feature displaced Palestinians and conclude with remarks on how

both novels share constant reference and intertextuality with Emile Habibi's *The Pessoptimist*.

The Invisibility of Arab Palestinians in Israel

In its conclusions, The Galilean Society's *5th Socioeconomic Survey on Palestinians in Israel 2017* states that Arab Palestinians in Israel do not identify themselves similarly and cannot be grouped collectively under one identity. According to the researchers:

76.1% of the Palestinians in Israel belonging to the age group 15 years and above identify themselves as Arabs, considering this as their primary identity, whereas 17% consider their religious identity as their main identity. 4.1% identify themselves as Palestinians whereas 2.1% consider themselves Israelis. 37.3% consider their religion as their secondary identity whereas 28.8% consider being Palestinian as a secondary identity; 21.5% consider being Israeli as a secondary identity, and 12.3% consider being an Arab as a secondary identity. (Khatib, Marjeh and Muhammed 2018, 42)

Such nonconformity on how to identify themselves and whether their primary identity should be their religious or pan nationalist affiliation rather than their national identity is the special plight of Arab Palestinians in Israel. There is no doubt that all displaced Palestinians, especially second and third generations, suffer a conflict between asserting their Palestinian identity and attempting to fit in and belong to their new adopted society, but the predicament of the Arab Palestinians in Israel is that they must identify themselves vis a vis the enemy. They have been displaced paradoxically into their own changed, reshaped and renamed cities and villages that have been populated with strangers. In identifying themselves vis a vis the Israeli, they are faced with perplexing choice. Are they to be distinguished by their being Muslims, Christians or Druz rather than Jews? Are they to be distinguished by their being Arabs rather than Hebrews? Are they to retain their identity as Palestinians even though the vast majority are neither refugeeed nor under military occupation but are, moreover, Israeli nationals?

When faced with the dilemma of an inability to identify themselves, Palestinians in Israel withdraw into an invisible existence that quickly becomes their identity, their daily reality, their destiny. Palestinians in Israel have been put into a difficult situation. Their very existence denies the Israeli grand

narrative of “a land without people”; the memory they keep of their shared historical homeland threatens to expose the demolished towns and villages buried under the parks of European imported trees. Their story is the cause of great inconsistencies in the Israeli grand narrative. Their very existence makes their enemies uncomfortable. Israel has decided that all Palestinians have left voluntarily and considered them “absentees” in order to have the right to confiscate their properties and lands. Faced by the minority who are present, the Israeli law coined the strangest of terms, “present” absentees, in order to carry on its confiscation of their properties. “The “present absentees concept,” explains Nur Masalha, “is a legal one coined with Kafkaesque irony by Israel’s legal bureaucracy in its 1950 Absentee’s Property Law to describe those Palestinians who had been displaced from their homes and villages in 1948-49 and become ‘internal refugees’ within their own country (Masalha 2012, 231-2).

Accordingly, the predominance of the metaphor of disappearance in both novels is one way of expressing the predicament of Palestinians in Israel. Rather than stress their controversial identity, they disappear! It is worth noting that whereas metaphors of silence and breaking silence are the dominant metaphors in the mainstream Palestinian novels, the metaphor of invisibility is also occasionally pushed to the foreground. Their disappearance is partly a desire on their part not to present their controversial identity and partly a refusal to be seen by the new state in which they are an unwelcome reality. In *The Book of Disappearance*, even before the fantastic event of the disappearance of all Palestinians, and with the opening of the novel, Alaa, the protagonist experiences the presence of other Palestinians, those who used to be there up to “that year”, as the frightening presence of “shadows”:

When I used to pass through old streets as a child, I would see my shadow walking next to other shadows. Sometimes it would leave me, as if it had become someone else’s shadow. I thought I was crazy and kept this a secret for years. Once I was with Tata and I asked her to take another route that doesn’t go through the old city. She laughed, kissed my head, and held my hand. “Don’t

عندما كنت أمر بالشوارع القديمة في صغري كنت أرى ظلي يمشي بجانب ظلال أخرى. كان يتركني أحيانا. يخرج عن طوعي كأنه ظل شخص آخر. كنت أظنني مجنونا. وبقيت لسنوات أحفظ هذا السر في قلبي. ضات مرة كنت تاتا ورجوتها أن تأخذ طريقا آخر غير أزقة البلدة القديمة. فضحكت وقبّلت رأسي وأمسكت بجي وقالت بحنان "ما تخاف حبيبي. كل أهل يافي إلي ضلو فيها بشوفو دايم خيال بيمشي بجانب خيالهم لما بمر من البلد القديمة حتى اليهود بقولو إنهم بسمعو

be scared, *habibi*. All the Jaffans who stayed here see a shadow walking next to them when they walk through the old city. Even the Jews say they hear voices at night, but when they go out to see who it is, they don't find anyone. (4, translation mine)

صوت بالليل.. ولما يطلعوا يشوفو مين، ما
بلاقو حدا. (10)

Though frightening, those shadows are other fellow Palestinians with whom Alaa is supposed to identify. The grandmother gladly does so, but Alaa was “overwhelmed [...] even as I got older” (4). The grandmother had to live with those who were not there, those who were either massacred or fled away. She had come to terms with this feeling since the time she herself had to deal with her father's trauma. In his last days the father was in total denial that his people were driven away. Tata had to walk the streets with him pretending to greet people who were not there. Alaa, the grandson, on the other hand, only knew the city in its transformed state, but having “inherited” his grandmother's memory, he saw the other city all the time: He saw the invisible and identified with them.

In *Fractured Destinies*, the metaphor of invisibility is equally apparent in the incorporated novel written by Jinin, the main character's niece living in Jaffa. The novel opens with the visit to Palestinian cities in Israel by the British couple of Palestinian origins. Walid Dahman was displaced with his family in 1948 into Gaza and eventually moved to England, whereas his wife Julie was the daughter of a Palestinian Armenian mother who fell in love with a British officer, married him, fled her family's hometown, and eventually county. As visitors, first in Acre then Lod, they meet a number of Palestinians who stayed and continued living in Israel. The apparent aspect in these characters portrayed in the opening chapters is their steadfastness and persistent fight against plans of driving them away. The owner of the hotel where they stayed relates to Walid how French Jews keep offering great amounts of money to buy Palestinians' houses but the latter refuse and put signs on their houses “we don't have homes for sale.” The person who helps them locate Julie's grandfather house is Fatima al-Nasrawi, “a popular guide guarding facts from forgery” (15).³ She knows the history of every stone in Acre and makes it her job to resist the lies of Israel: “We give them accurate information free of charge, it's better than them buying lies from the Jews for a price!” (4) she says when describing her work as a “popular guide.”

Those two examples seem to be living a life of resistance and succeeding in performing their roles of resisting the increasing attempts of Israel to annihilate all memory and trace of a past Palestinian life.

Once one goes into the incorporated novel by the niece, however, one is removed from the visitor's point of view into a view from the inside. It is there that the characters reveal their controversial existence and identity conflict. The incorporated novel relates the story of two young Palestinians who meet in the United States and fall in love. One of them, Basim, is a displaced Palestinian from Ramallah, the other, a young woman who is the daughter of a man who refused to leave his hometown in 1948 and carries Israeli citizenship. The young couple get married and return to the Palestinian city in Israel, i.e., Jaffa:

When they'd returned from the US, she'd been certain that Basim really wanted to come back home [...] She'd been ready to support him, to dig together with their nails to bring Palestine out to the surface of their lives. They would seek shade in the shadow of a Palestinian city. They would give it an injection of new life so that it wouldn't be infected by the Jewish immigrants, old and new, who were changing its appearance before their eyes. (102)

حين عادا من الولايات المتحدة، كانت متيقنة من أن باسم راغب في العودة إلى البلاد فعلا [...] كانت مستعدة لأن تسانده، ويحفران بأظافرهما معا لإخراج فلسطين إلى سطح حياتهما. يتقيان في ظل مدينة فلسطينية. يتأملان ظلالهما تحت شمسها. يسقيانها جرعة حياة إضافية كي لا تخنقها حياة المهاجرين اليهود القدامى والجدد، الذي يغيرون ملامحها على مرأي من ملامحها. (110-111)

Being a Palestinian in Israel is a buried identity that one needs to "dig up," and yet the best that they can do is to live in "the shadow of a Palestinian city" side by side with the immigrants who changed its face. The prospect fails gloriously, as far as Basim is concerned, for he finds it impossible to endure the kind of paradoxes Jinin and her father had endured within Israel.

Basim reveals his frustration at the refusal of Israeli authorities to acknowledge his existence and allow him residence and a work permit in Jaffa, the birthplace and lifelong residence of his wife Jinin. His situation is even more of a burlesque than the situation of the "present absentees":

Even you Jinin, are present though absent, like every Palestinian in the country, but I'm an absent absentee, my darling. I'm an invitation to punish the self. A bad advert for them to distribute free to every Palestinian who's thinking of returning home as I did. I am like a website that can be wiped from the face of the earth with the jab of a single finger. (91)

حتى أنت يا جنين، حاضرة غائبة، زي كل الفلسطينيين في هالبلاد، بس أنا يا حبيبتي غايب غايب. أنا دعوة لتعذيب الذات. إعلان سبى بيوزعوه من غير مصاري ع كل فلسطيني بيفكر يرجع للبلاد بطريقتي. أنا موقع زي المواقع الإلكترونية اللي بتصممها، عمو كلمته السرية على كل أجهزة المدونة اللي بتقدر تلغيني من الفضاء الإلكتروني وتمسحني من على وجه الأرض في لمح البصر. (101)

Carving a Place on the Margins of Society

Like many Palestinians in Israel, Alaa in *The Book of Disappearance*, and Jinin, and Basim in *Destinies* try to carve a space within Israeli society in which they can be seen and admitted. This place is usually the margins of society where intellectuals, rights groups, and peace groups are keen on distancing themselves from the bigotry and racist nature of Israeli society. But their experiences with these Israelis turn out to be just an experience with a more subtle sophisticated version of racism. Alaa, for example, expresses extreme self-consciousness in the fact that intellectuals befriend some Arabs to state a point about themselves and put forward a liberal image. He introduces himself at a party thus: "Shalom Ariel. I am the token Arab of the party you all need so you can say you have an Arab friend" (25). Yet Ariel, the friend and neighbour, is not, after all, a lot different from mainstream of Israeli Jews in his attitude towards the Arabs. Alaa felt scorned and hated throughout his childhood by other Jews:

The Jaffa I grew up in was full of fear, poverty, ignorance, and racism. Full of those who look like us, walk on two feet, but, for a reason I didn't understand at the time, scorn us. That's what it seemed like to me at the time. No, it didn't "seem." I heard it with my own ears. I

يافا التي كبرت فيها أنا كانت مليئة بالخوف والفقير والحجل والعنصرية، ومليئة بهؤلاء الذين يشبهوننا ويمشون على رجلين مثلنا ولكنهم، لسبب لم أفهمه في حينه، كانوا يزدروننا، أو هكذا بدا لي. لا لم يبد لي بل سمعت ذلك بأذني. سمعتهم يشتموني فشتمتهم. كنت أخاف منهم عندما كنت طفلاً. اليوم تعلمت ألا أراهم وحدهم في الصورة. أراهم وأرى ظلي كلما أراهم. (130-129)

heard them cursing me, so I cursed them back. I used to be afraid of them when I was a child. Now I've learned not to see only them. I see them and see my own shadow whenever I see them. (123)

With Ariel, however, there is a dialogue, a friendship, and shared professional and social interests, and yet Alaa does not feel himself when he is conversing with Ariel. It is a different identity that he is not comfortable with:

When I heard myself speaking Hebrew to Ariel, I felt the voice coming out of my vocal cords was not mine. It just comes out, and speaks Hebrew on my behalf, while I am there inside myself looking and not knowing what I was doing to it, and to myself. I cannot stand this voice any longer. I felt estranged from myself. (89-90)

لا أدري لماذا وجدتني أستمع إلى نفسي وأنا أتحدث العبرية وكان الصوت الذي يخرج من حنجرتي ليس لي. لكنه يخرج ويتحدث العبرية نيابة عني وأنا هناك في داخلي أنظر إليه لا أدري ماذا أفعل به وماذا أفعل بي. لم أعد أطيق هذا الصوت. شعرتني غريباً عن نفسي. (97)

This is probably because in a most subtle way, Ariel does not accept the reality of Alaa as a Palestinian who has a right in this place, and against whom the Israeli state has committed endless crimes. Ariel who befriends Alaa and is prepared to listen to his stories is quite clear when it comes to his allegiance to the Israeli army unconditionally. In discussing with himself the possible responsibility of the Israeli army for the disappearance of all Arab Palestinians, Ariel thinks: "Our army can never do such a thing. Have they made mistakes? Yes, but at the end of the day they follow laws and adhere to humanist values" (127). Ariel further believes that for Alaa and any Palestinian to be living in Israel is a better fate than to be living in any other Arab county:

He remembered how Alaa erupted in anger when he heard him say that. Ariel told him he understood

تذكر كيف اشتاط علاء غضباً، عندما قال له ذلك مرة. قال له إنه يفهم أن أخطاء قد ارتكبت وأن الفلسطينيين

that mistakes were made, and that Palestinians needed more rights, but he had to acknowledge that this state gave him so much. His situation is much better than the refugees in Lebanon, for example, or Arab countries. (174)

بحاجة إلى مزيد من الحقوق. لكن عليه أن يعترف بأن هذه الدولة تعطيه الكثير وأن وضعه أحسن من وضع اللاجئين في لبنان مثلا أو في الدول العربية. (178-179)

Alaa's anger is understandable because this false logic denies the fact that Israel is responsible for the fate of displaced Palestinians in refugee camps, and that its "democracy" was only possible after excluding three quarters of the inhabitants of the place at the time the state was established in 1948. Ariel is finally the one who occupies Alaa's flat in a symbolic act making him an extension and true representative of the settler colonizer state. This act is most expressive of his deep feelings towards his Arab 'friend.'

Jinin in *Fractured Destinies*, like Alaa, tries to build a dialogue and relationship with Israeli Jews who are willing to consider a peaceful and just solution for both peoples. She works at the "Harmony Cooperative" an institute:

that worked to encourage a common citizenship between the residents of the country, guaranteeing a psychological balance in confronting the current discrimination against the Arabs. The job helped her with a large dose of imagination, to confront the complexities of life in the country. (89)

المعهد الذي يعمل على تشجيع المواطنة المشتركة بين سكان البلاد، ويؤمن لها توازنا نفسيا في مواجهة التمييز السائد ضد العرب. يساعدها، ولو بكثير من الوهم، على مواجهة تعقيدات العيش في البلاد. (99)

However, the complexities of life in the country were beyond confronting. She would pretend that she is a citizen who has rights, tries to negotiate with the representative of the interior ministry regarding her husband's right to get residence and a work permit, but she is eventually tired of having to confront discrimination. For a very short time the 'dose of imagination' makes Jinin think herself and the Jewish employee of the minister of interior responsible for providing permit of work and residence to Basim "like good, rational fellow citizens in a rational state that didn't discriminate between its citizens" (86). She

is quickly disillusioned by the shouts of Ayalla in her face telling her vindictively that her request cannot be granted.

The involvement of Arab Palestinians in Israel with Jewish liberals, peace supporters and communists is humorously commented on through the story of Jamil and Ludmila. Jamil, a member of the Israeli Communist Party, meets a fellow communist during his study in the Soviet Union at the school for Communist Party Cadre. Jamil eventually marries Ludmila, who happens to be a Jew, and brings her back to Haifa, deserving the humorous censure of his grandfather: “Look here, you should be ashamed of yourself. Does the country need Russians so much that you have to go and bring back a Russian girl, and a Jewish one at that” (178).

Palestinians in Israel in the Eyes of Other Palestinians

The identity of Arab Palestinians in Israel is further complicated because of the way they are seen by other Palestinians and Arab nationals. If this group’s existence upsets glaringly the Israeli grand narrative, they are equally outside the long silenced, now emerging, Palestinian narrative of the Nakba. They are the survivors of the trauma of displacement not its victims. The decision to stay is differently interpreted and valorized by Palestinians who were driven out of their towns and villages and those who did not, or those who returned after a short while “illegally.” Those who stayed were viewed by other Palestinians as crazy, stubborn and even traitors. In both novels, *Tata* and “The Remainder”, as Jinin’s father was called by his relatives, and in spite of the fact that “the Remainder” is a more politicized character than *Tata*, describe the decision not to leave in very similar terms: they just decided not to be driven away, not to risk going to nowhere when they have their own place, not to let go for no logical reason except not letting go. It is only with the passage of time that that this view starts changing and they are seen as living evidence of the Palestinian narrative.

In *The Book of Disappearance* Alaa feels that his mother never forgave her own mother, *Tata*, for separating with her husband who fled to Beirut in 1948. *Tata* was pregnant with Alaa’s mother then and refused to leave. Her own father, Alaa’s great grandfather, decided not to leave her alone and stayed behind as well. Everybody else left. The husband waited for ten years asking his wife to join him in Lebanon, but she would not. “She inherited stubbornness from her father. My grandfather waited ten years for her, but she never joined him. She would always say, ‘I never left. He’s the one who left. I stayed in my home’” (12). She has built her refusal earlier upon no particular logic. “He told me that we must leave. I’ve arranged everything and we must go to Beirut before they

kill us all. We'll come back when things calm down. I told him that am not leaving. I'm six months pregnant. What would we do if something happened on the way there?" (10). Mahmoud Dahman, in *Destinies*, was more logical in his refusal to leave: "Anyone who leaves, my friends, will not come back" (115). Yet he himself left forced by others and then changed his mind and decided to smuggle himself back and stay there.

"Mad, she's mad," says the daughter about her mother. In analyzing how his mother viewed his grandmother, Alaa considers that the former never forgave her mother "because she lived like an orphan, even though her father was alive," as a result of the grandmother's decision to stay. Alaa thinks that the grandmother cannot possibly be blamed. Her decision cannot be labelled madness or stubbornness. "Tata is the one who should be angry with *sidu*. How could anyone leave his wife and go to Beirut" (22). But the grandmother does not regard her staying in any heroic light. She believes that both those who left and those who stayed were acting under the intolerable pressure of horrific and brutal attack. "Who said I was not afraid," (11) she tells Alaa when he asks her how she could stay in spite of the imminent dangers at every step. He later reconstructs for himself all she told him about that moment:

I used to ask you often why your relatives left, but you stayed? You'd remain silent for a couple of minutes and then say, "There is no answer, dear. It was a coincidence that we stayed. They left because they had to leave. Do you know what kind of bombing we endured? There were explosions every day. [...] They killed people and threw them on the street. [...] Do you know how many buildings collapsed on our head? No one leaves their country just like that. Leaving was like suicide, and staying was suicide too/" (122-3)

كنت أسألك كثيرا لماذا تركوا أقاربكم؟
لماذا تركوا هم وبقيتم أنتم؟ كنت تصمتين
لنصف دقيقة ثم تقولين "ما في جواب يا
عيني، بالصدفة إحنا ضلينا وهمي طلعو
هيك لأنه كان لازم يطلعو. إنت عارف
شو الضرب إلي كان علنا؟ إنت عارف
التفجيرات إلى تققع كل يوم والثاني؟ [...]
كانوا يقتلو الناس ويرموهم بالشوارع
[...] أنت عارف كم بناية تهدمت على
روسنا؟ ما حدا بترك بلده هيك. إلي طلع
زي إلي انتحر والي ضل برضو كأنه
انتحر. (131)

Although she stayed, she very much understands what the others did. There is no explanation for what she did: she considers it just another terrified reaction as that of her family members who escaped.

In *Fractured Destinies* Walid Dahman, triggered by reading his niece's novel, starts recalling his own childhood with his displaced family. He recalls particularly the attitude of his family members to Jinin's father, upon whose history she probably based her character. The Remainer, Jinin's father, Walid remembers, decided to smuggle himself back to his city rather than live in a refugee camp. When he is eventually given the Israeli citizenship his family members are horrified and start speaking of him as a traitor. But family members are not of one view on the subject.

Finally, my mother said to my aunt: "There isn't a Palestinian in the world who'd accept becoming an Israeli, cousin, and if he did, it wouldn't be through his own actions, desire, or inclinations. Mahmoud became an Israeli despite himself, hajja, he became one despite himself. I'll say to you quite frankly, in full view of witnesses, it's a good thing that Mahmoud stayed there. It's a good thing he didn't emigrate like us, to be treated with contempt. Being treated with contempt back home, hajja, even with the Jews, is a hundred times more noble than being treated with contempt and abused here in the camps." (111)

في نهاية كلامها، قالت أمي لعمتي: "فش فلسطيني في الدنيا يقبل ع حاله يصير إسرائيلي يا بنت عم، ون صار، ما بيكون بإيده ولا بكيفه ولا بخاطره. محمود صار إسرائيلي عصبين عنه يا حاجة. عصبين عنه حارز وابصراحة بقول لك اياها ع روس الاشهاد: منيح اللي محمود بقي هناك. امنيح اللي ما هاجر زينا واتهدل. البهدلة في لبلاد يا حاجة، حتى مع اليهود، أشرف وأرحم ميت مرة من البهدلة والشرشحة في المخيمات." (117)

This later view, however, is only expressed by one character. In the two novels, those who stayed are at best stubborn and mad, and at worst traitors.

Internal Conflicts of 'Those Who Stayed'

Becoming "an Israeli" despite oneself is indeed another predicament different from the view of other fellow Palestinians. "There isn't a Palestinian in the world

who'd accept becoming an Israeli," says Walid's mother. It is a situation that makes Alaa reluctant to have children: "Why would I bring other Palestinians to the world? Aren't there enough wretched Palestinians already?" (179). In *Fractured Destinies* Basim tells Jinin that if they stay in Jaffa their children will not be really Palestinians and implores her to go to the Palestinian occupied city of Bethlehem: "Soon we'll have a state, we'll have children there, and bring them up as proper Palestinians, not half and half" (101).

This double identity of the "half and half" is exhausting to Alaa. In *The Book of Disappearance*, his consciousness is divided between the identity he presents to the officials and the one in his own heart and mind: He is officially an Israeli, but aware of the hatred of those who consider themselves "real" Israelis, the Jewish majority claiming their right and priority in the place. This double identity was a lifelong suffering for him as he describes in his diaries addressed to his deceased grandmother:

Cities are stories and I only remember what I myself lived, or fragments from your stories and what you lived, but they are truncated. I remember *their* stories very well. The ones I learned in school, heard on TV, and read and wrote in order to pass exams.⁴ I had to tell their stories to pass in school and college. That's why I remember them like I remember my ID number. I know it by heart and can recite it any minute. I memorized their stories and their white dreams about this place so as to pass exams. But I carved my stories, yours, and those of others who are like us, inside me. (88)

المدن قصص وأنا لا أذكر من القصص، إلا الذي عشته أو فتاتا من قصصك وما عشته أنت ولكنه مبتور. وأذكر جيدا قصصهم التي تعلمتها بالمدرسة وسمعتها بالتلفزيون وقرأتها وكتبتها في الامتحانات، لكي أنجح فيها. كان عملي أن أروي قصصهم، كي أنجح في الجامعات والمدارس. لذلك أذكرها كما أذكر رقم هويتي. أحفظه عن ظهر قلب، وفي كل لحظة يمكن أن أردده. حفظت قصصهم، أحلامهم البيضاء عن المكان كي أنجح في الامتحانات! لكنني حفرت في داخلي قصصي، وقصصك وقصص الآخرين الذين يشبهوننا. (95)

The irony in the situation of the Palestinian with Israeli nationality is most evident in the way "The Remainder," in *Fractured Destinies* expresses his "pride" that Emile Habibi won the highest Israeli prize in literature.⁵

The Remainer liked Emile Habibi a lot. When Emile won the Israeli State Prize for Literature in 1992, and accepted it from the Prime Minister of the time, Yitzhak Shamir, at a glittering official ceremony, The Remainer was happy and said, “Comrade Abu Salam has surpassed their writers and raised the status of Arabic literature, sitting over their heads with his legs dangling, as if he was sitting on a rock with his legs hanging over the sea. And now, of course, he’ll have some influence after catching the biggest fish in the land, the Literature and Culture Fish. I swear by Almighty God he was always swearing by Almighty God that this man has raised our heads up high, higher than anything except the Israeli flag flying over all our heads.” (137)

وأحب باقي هناك أميل حبيبي كثيرا. وعندما نال أميل جائزة الدولة الإسرائيلية للأدب عام 1992، وتسلمها من رئيس الحكومة آنذاك، إسحق شامير، في احتفال رسمي بهي، فرح باقي هناك، وقال: "الرفيق أبو سلام اتفوق على أدبائهم، ورفع من شأن الدب العربي، وقعد فوق روسهم كلهم وندندل رجليه، كأنه قاعد ع صخره وامتد رجليه في مية البحر. طبيعا بيطلع له يحط اصبعه في زورهم كلهم، بعد ما صاد السمكة لكبيرة في البلاد، سمكة الأدب والثقافة. أشهد بالله العظيم (وكثيرا ما كان يشهد بالله العظيم) إنه هالزلمة رفع رأسنا لفوق فوق، بس أوطى من العلم الإسرائيلي اللي مشي تحته وخلاه أعلى من راسه ومن روسنا كلنا." (143)

The scene is described in an ironic tone reminiscent of Habibi’s own writing. Pride and defeat are the mixed components of this double identity. There is the pride in the ability to make the invisible not only seen but recognized and acknowledged for their contribution. In a way this is what Alaa dreamed of when he expressed his desire to be visible and heard by the majority of this society that ignores him and other Arab Palestinians: “I imagine them being genuinely interested and asking what never crosses their mind [...] How do *we* feel? How do *we* live? [...] What if we were to scream into their ears? Would they hear us? We could pull their ears and scream. Would they hear us?” (116-7). Paradoxically, however, this recognition according to the ironic representation of the situation by “The Remainer” and Rabai al-Madhoun only consolidates the power of the state of Israel with its apartheid system rather than creating a space where both Arab Palestinians and Jews are equal.

Perhaps, both novels seem to be saying in different ways this is an irresolvable conflict and an impossible dual identity. In *The Book of Disappearance*, Ariel complains that to recognize the full rights of the Palestinians is to end the State of Israel. “What did Alaa want? Were we to recognize what Alaa sees, it would only mean one thing: that we pack up and leave this land. Could it mean anything else? Why didn’t Alaa answer this point honestly? Lately he used to say that this is not his problem, but rather the white man’s problem. He kept calling us white!” (130).

Arab Palestinians in Israel as the Target of Violence of Both Sides

Arab Palestinians do not live this conflict between their different identities on the level of consciousness only, but this identity as an Arab Palestinian and an Israeli citizen at the same time means that their physical existence is threatened by both conflicting parties in all acts of war and violence. They are caught in the line of fire of both sides. In *The Book of Disappearance* Alaa just missed being in a bus blown out by a Palestinian suicide bomber in Tel Aviv: “I would know that I had escaped death when the landline kept ringing in the early morning. I would hear my mother’s terrified voice when I picked up. She used to call to make sure I was still asleep. I always missed the early morning bus and death would miss me. I hated working as a cameraman those days. Having to hear the chants of “*Mawat La Aravin!*” (Death to Arabs)” (100). Amidst the violence Palestinians in Israel are the enemies of everybody: they could easily be the target of suicide bombs against Israel, and they are targeted by the Jews’ who shout, “Death to Arabs.” This physical war over their bodies is to be added to their own divided hearts and sympathies.

The situation for Alaa is the same when witnessing Israel, whose nationality he carries, wage criminal wars against civilians in other parts of Palestine. Alaa relates the bombardment of Gaza along the tragic suicide of his father as if his feelings of the tragic loss of his father are part of the daily loss of life and present and future loss of other Palestinians:

Yesterday marked twenty days since they bombed Gaza. That’s what I initially wanted to say but didn’t want to start with. They were pulling corpses out of the rubble as if they were dolls. They pull, but the corpses refuse to come

بالأمس سجلنا مرور عشرين يوماً على ضرب غزة. هذا ما أردت أن أقوله لك ولكن لم أرغب أن أقوله من البداية. كانوا ينتشلون الجثث التي بدت كأنها دمي. هكذا يسحبونها من بين الحطام. يشدونها وهي ترفض الخروج من بين الأنقاض. كانت مغطاة بالغبار والدم. كانت تتنابني غبة قوية لأن

out of the debris. They were covered with dust and blood. I had a strong urge to go and wipe the dust off myself. Maybe because I wanted to see the faces clearly. I say ‘bombed Gaza’ and not ‘declared war on it,’ because ‘war’ sounds lighter. ‘War’ was a big word when I was young. But I grew bigger, and it grew smaller. There are so many wars around us we’ve gotten used to them.

[...]

Baba’s suicide was trivial after all these days of them bombing Gaza. (111-3)

أذهب وأمسح عنها الغبار. ربما لأنني أردت أن أرى الووه بوضوح. أقول ضربوا غزة وليس أعلنوا الحرب عليها، لأن وقع كلمة حرب يبدو خفيفا على أذني. حرب، كانت كلمة كبيرة عندما كنت صغيرا ولكن سرعان ما كبرت وصغرت هي. كثرت الحروب من حولنا وتعودنا عليها. [...]
وكان انتحار أبي تافها بعد كل هذه الأيام من ضرب غزة. (120-118)

The identity of the city of Jaffa and Tel Aviv which was built on part of Jaffa and its destroyed surrounding villages is another site of the conflicting identity of Alaa. He chooses to live in Tel Aviv “because,” as Ariel recalls that Alaa told him once, “this is *my* Palestine, and I want to live wherever I please, even streets that whip me. I don’t want to stay in our ghettos because I am not a stranger here” (130). However, to experience the place as Palestine, Alaa must reconstruct it every day. He must remember the fragments he inherited from his grandmother’s memory and bring those images, places, people to life as he walks through the streets of the city. He must denounce the “white city” that claims to have been created from scratch. “Tel Aviv’s houses have been washed up in the city’s whiteness, or vice versa. There are things that are born all at once. A building is memory. Cities and places without old buildings have no memory” (114).

Using the paradoxical image of painting the city in black to bring it to life, the novel expresses the paradoxical situation of those who stayed. They cannot just live-in ghetto-like cities deserted by most of its inhabitants, nor can they live in the white cities claiming to be built from scratch as if the place never had history, life and people who populated it before. Palestinians in Israel try to continue a life that was ruptured by a strong State which has now given them citizenship. The attempt to continue the lives, dreams, traditions, lifestyle that was supposed to continue had the state of Israel not been built is the impossible

mission of the Palestinians who stayed. They want to recreate a past so that it reflects a continuation of past, present, and future; a continuation that does not silence their memory, does not deny their existence, and acknowledges their rights in the place.

The Contradiction Between Jewish and Arab Societies

Moving between surviving Palestinian society with its traditions and customs intact and the modernized democratized welfare society of Israel is another contradiction with which Arab Palestinians have to grapple. From the beginning the immigrant Jews who founded Israel “had an inherent qualitative superiority over the indigenous Palestinian population. They were a Western, industrialized, socialistic, centrally controlled, highly mobilized urban community led by an efficient, dedicated managerial elite” (Khalidi 1991, 8). This is reflected in the contrast between the Jewish quarters and the remaining Arab towns and villages with their reality of poverty, unemployment, crime and drugs, and the oppressive traditional society. While seeing the advantages of the democratic society of the Israeli Jews and wishing to be part of it, it was the Arab Palestinian Israelis who had to deconstruct that kind of democracy as a democracy based on the exclusion of the majority of the native inhabitants of the country at the time of its establishment. For “the country that is tirelessly hailed in Western capitals today as the ‘sole democracy in the Middle East’ came into existence in Palestine only through the burial of democracy and the building up of an artificial imported majority through mass Jewish immigration from overseas forcibly imposed by the colonial power” (Khalidi 2009, 32). It took a great deal of courage on part of Arab Palestinians in Israel to criticize the oppressive and reactionary elements of their own society without undermining the right of that society and its members vis a vis Israeli authority.

In *The Book of Disappearance*, Nadine, Alaa’s friend, tells him of how frustrated she is in working as a teacher in an Arab school in the mixed city of Lod. She abhors the reality of Palestinian parts of the mixed cities and all Arab cities that lack enough funding for social services: education, health care and other services. She sees these cities as poor places where unemployment surges and drugs are widespread:

Things are so tough here in Jaffa, I never thought there could be worse. But it’s much worse over there. I just can’t go on. Students boast that their fathers are drug

قديش الوضع هنا بيافا صعب بس
هدول في مدينة اللد وضعهم
أصعب! أنا بصراحة ما فكرت إنه
ممکن يكون في وضع أصعب بس ما

dealers. One of them even brought a gun to school and the principal didn't do anything. Can you believe that? They are drowning in drugs and a form of tribalism that has nothing to do with old Bedouin values or their city life. It's a hodgepodge and the state leaves it as is so that they keep wallowing in drugs, crime, and hopelessness. They don't need to do anything or bother with these youth because they're already lost. [...] It's hopeless. (98)

عاد ممكن أكمل. تعبت ما عاد في. تصور إنهواحد فيهم جاب على المدرسة سلاح والمدير ما بعمل شي. وعاشين في عالم من المخدرات والعشائرية ما إلها علاقة لا بعادات البدو القديمة ولا بحياتهم بالمدينة. خليط تاركته الدولة عشان يغرف بالمخدرات والجريمة والضياح. وهيك ما في حاجة يعملو شي ولا يتعبو حالهن مع هل شباب لأنهم أصلا ضايعين [...] ما بحس إنه في أمل. (105)

What Nadine terms “tribalism,” is also apparent in the dominance of the violence against women as represented in a sociological research conducted by Basim in the incorporated novel of Jinin in *Fractured Destinies*. The many cases that Basim documents in his research testify to how Palestinian women are doomed when it comes to their rights as women in Israel: neither the traditional make up of their society supports their rights nor the apartheid state in which they are third rate citizens:

Jinin pitied the simplicity of Alaa, a girl from Haifa. The poor girl had believed that she was a first-class citizen in Israel. She was sure that the police would guarantee her protection from the threats of her parents, and cousins, and all her other relatives who had been entrusted with preserving her honor. Alaa had made an official complaint, which she had left on the desk of Officer Avigdor – ‘Fatty,’ as they called him in the Haifa police station. ‘Fatty’ Avigdor had left Alaa to the family honor laundry, which had cleaned her stain away soon after. (72)

أسفت جنين لسذاجة آلاء الحيفاوية. صدقت المسكينة أنها مواطنة من الدرجة الأولى في إسرائيل. اقتتعت بأن الشرطة ستؤمن حمايتها من تهديدات والديها وأبناء عمومتها، وكل من أوكل من أقاربها، صيانة شرفها. تقدمت آلاء بشكوى رسمية تركتها على مكتب الضابط ابيغدور السمين، كما ينادونه في مركز شرطة حيفا، ونامت على عماها. ابيغدور السمين ترك آلاء لغسالة شرف العائلة، تشطف ساحتها منها قبل أن تشطف ساحات المدينة. (84)

Basim's stories contained many other young girls and women killed at the hands of their family members simply because they wanted to live independently, or fell in love, or wanted to work.

Conclusion: The Lives of Arab Palestinians in Israel Between Fact and Fiction

Creating a fictional story about Palestine is indeed a challenge. It is done amidst an ongoing project to rewrite history, to expose denied atrocities and to break the silence and the stereotyping of Palestinians as mindless remorseless terrorists. Within such a project fiction is a challenge, for, it is documents, history and social science that are called upon to support such a project. This is why this paper focuses on the specificity of the fictional discourse and applauds its value.

In *The Book of Disappearance*, the use of the fantastic event of the disappearance of all Palestinian Arab population creates a hypothetical situation only possible within fictional discourse. This hypothetical situation, however, gives a chance to highlight the racist structure of the Israeli society in a way no realistic or documentary narrative can do. The imagined disappearance gives a chance for the writer to imagine the hate, bigotry, and guilt lurking under the role of the victim upon which the state of Israel thrives. It further imagines how this racist society will reproduce itself in the absence of Palestinians by discriminating against eastern Jews, black Jews, and women. The novel also highlights the fear produced by the crimes perpetuated by Israelis against Palestinians, crimes that even if the Palestinians were to disappear would live within the hearts of the Israelis creating a perpetual fear of retaliation.

In *Fractured Destinies* the novel within novel creates a metafictional discourse revealing the relation between fictional writing and "real life," in this case the main narrative in the novel, thus showing in microcosm the relationship between the novel and outside reality. As for the hero, the Remainer, his status is questionable. Was the Remainer in Jinin's novel actually her father, Mahmoud Ibrahim Dahman? Did Jinin derive the character from him or import his biography into her novel? Such questions can be asked and similarly answered in trying to relate the novel of Rabai al-Madhoun to the reality of the Palestinians. As we follow these questions, their answers validate the value of fictional discourse. In the face of constant deletion of history, these novels stubbornly refer to other Palestinian books. The intertextuality with Emile Habibi's novel *The Pessimist* and *Destinies* is more than a literary technique. The title and plot of *Disappearance* is a clear intertextual reference to Habibi's

classical novel. Whereas in *Fractured Destinies* Emile Habibi figures, as shown above, as a historical character in the novel within novel, the name of the fictional protagonist “The Remainder” is coined after the epitaph Emile Habibi chose to have written on his grave “Emile Habibi who remained in Haifa.” It is an affirmation of the history, the past that was negated, and the tradition within which these writers write. It is an act of resistance against deletion.

Endnotes

¹ The green line is the term used to refer to the borders of Israel at the end of 1948 war.

² My translation, emphasis added.

³ My translation from the Arabic original, as this phrase is dropped out of the English transition.

⁴ The Israeli authorities adopt a most discriminatory policy regarding education of Arab Palestinian citizens. They have to attend segregated schools specially for Arab Palestinians, which is very lowly funded, but at the same time they have to follow the curriculum of Israel; moreover, their teachers are scrutinized by the military intelligence.

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⁵ In 1992 Emile Habibi caused a great controversy among Palestinians and pro Palestine Arabs when he accepted the Israel Prize for Arabic Literature.

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