Suited Tours of Urban Palestine: Literary Countermapping in

Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* and Suad Amiry's *Mother of Strangers*

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'[A] city is always a realization of the stories that it tells about itself.'[1]

This article explores how and why two contemporary Anglophone Palestinian novelists – Isabella Hammad, in *The Parisian, or Al-Barisi* (2019) and Suad Amiry, in *Mother of Strangers* (2022) – imaginatively return to Palestinian cities in the first half of the twentieth century. Their debut novels span from the late 1910s, through the 1936–39 Revolt (*The Parisian*), to the cusp and aftermath of the Palestinian catastrophe (*an-nakbeh*) of 1948 (*Mother of Strangers*). Read consecutively, these novels trace a shocking arc from modernization, against the backdrop of networked relations with Ottoman and European imperialism, to the shattering of Palestinian society under Zionist settler colonialism.

My primary objective is to show how creative literature retrospectively textures cities as a counterpoint to urbicide, defined by Nur Abujidi in the Palestinian context as a 'colonial space engineering practice for oppression via surveillance, control and destruction strategies'.[2] *The Parisian* and *Mother of Strangers* exemplify how literary narratives

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[1] Sharon Rotbard, *Black City, White City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa* (London: Pluto, 2015), 3.

[2] Nur Abujidi, *Urbicide in Palestine: Spaces of Oppression and Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3. With obvious resonances for the cataclysmic assault on Gaza that began

contribute to a wider counter-colonial archiving project in the Palestinian context. As I demonstrate, literary writing can 'crystalliz[e] social relations' and give emotional and affective depth to a 'locus of memories.'[3] It is, moreover, attuned to the intrinsically narrative qualities of space. While narrative fiction cannot produce exact replicas of historical settings, Hammad and Amiry purposefully reimagine a fragmented and interrupted archive of Palestinian urban belonging.

Secondarily, my reading demonstrates that cities are dynamic, diverse sites of self-fashioning in which modernity is co-produced by actors differentially imbricated in a capitalist and colonial world system. Hammad and Amiry instantiate a cartography of modern urban Palestine made visible through the heuristic of the Palestinian *flâneur*. Their novels, which reimagine early and mid-twentieth-century Palestine for global anglophone audiences, each centre a male protagonist who walks through the inland city of Nablus (*The Parisian*) and the coastal city of Yafa/Jaffa (*Mother of Strangers*) in a European suit. [4] This enables thick descriptions of settings in which some upwardly mobile Palestinian men defined and oriented themselves in the first half of the twentieth century.

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on 8 October 2023, Abujidi notes that urbicide is approachable under paradigms of warchitecture, cultural cleansing, cultural genocide, and identicide (5).

[3] Robert Tally Jr., *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination* (Indiana UP, 2019), 2, 18, 20; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990 [1974]), 93.

[4] Palestinian Yafa became part of what is now Tel Aviv-Yafo. Because Amiry uses the English spelling Jaffa throughout her novel, I will subsequently do the same.

Countermapping Palestine

The Parisian and *Mother of Strangers* are legible as biographically inflected historical fictions. As postfatory Acknowledgments (in both cases) and an Epilogue (in *Mother of Strangers*) indicate, Hammad and Amiry draw on the scholarly archives, memoirs and letters, architectural and historical consultations, and oral topomnemonics (place-memories) gleaned through extended family interviews in imaginative attempts to counter what historian Nur Masalha calls Palestinian toponymicide (place-erasure).[5] The fictional quality of their writing is evident in the way both authors combine generic conventions drawn from Bildungsroman (the novel of formation), romance, social comedy, and tragedy. Both novels were written in English but feature some Palestinian Arabic dialogue; in *The Parisian*, to a strikingly unglossed extent. While Hammad was born and has lived most of her life in the United Kingdom, Amiry grew up in Jordan, was educated in Lebanon, the United States and the United Kingdom, and moved to Ramallah in the early 1980s. As Maurice Ebileeni persuasively demonstrates, only 'a polylingual category of Palestinian literature' can account for 'the ongoing cultural and literary implications of displacement in the various contexts "inside" and the variety of locations "outside" Israel-Palestine.'[6] It is increasingly evident

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[5] Nur Masalha, 'Settler-Colonialism, Memoricide and Indigenous Toponymic Memory: The Appropriation of Palestinian Place Names by the Israeli State', *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 14: 1 (2015): 3–57.

[6] Maurice Ebileeni, *Being There, Being Here: Palestinian Writings in the World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2022), 6.

that English is also a Palestinian language and not only because Palestinian writers continue to appeal for international acknowledgement through 'rhetorics of belonging.'[7]

In addressing global anglophone audiences, *The Parisian* and *Mother of Strangers* invite a literary cartographic reading that illuminates the relationship between 'spaces and places visible within the confines of the text,' on the one hand, and 'relations between the text and the referential spaces of the outside world,' on the other hand.[8] Lieven Ameel dismisses a 'mechanical examination of a literary city's relationship with its possible "actual factual" counterpoint' as 'one of the least interesting questions of literary urban studies.'[9] I refute this point in a context where Palestinians are existentially impelled to reconnect with spaces occupied, enclosed, impoverished, and 'occluded' since 1948.[10] In related fashion, we need to unsettle complacent literary criticism that privileges representations of a city as 'a presence and not *merely* a setting' (my emphasis)[11] in a context where whole cities have been

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[7] Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[8] Robert T. Tally Jr., 'Introduction: The reassertion of space in literary studies', in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017): 1-6 (3, 4).

[9] Lieven Ameel, 'The City Novel: Measuring referential, spatial, linguistic, and temporal distances,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Routledge, 2017): 233–241 (234).

[10] Saree Makdisi, *Tolerance is a Wasteland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022).

[11] Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 8.

appropriated and others routinely subjected to military incursion, encirclement, de-development and – as we continue to observe – wilful destruction. As *Mother of Strangers* allegorizes through the 'remnants of [an] English suit' that remain after the collective catastrophe of 1948,[12] Palestine cities cannot be taken for granted as a stable setting.

I am guided by Robert T. Tally Jr's suggestion that literary narratives and cartography both:

> [O]rganise and coordinate the various data of experience and abstract projections or structures in such a way as to constitute a meaningful ensemble, a self-contained whole, if only provisionally and temporarily, which can then be used to make sense of, or give form to, the world as we can then know it.[13]

Tally Jr. challenges a contrast between sequential, multi-perspectival narratives, on the one hand, and synoptic, synchronic, and totalizing maps, on the other. He argues that:

> [I]n reality both [static and dynamic] features are present in any given narrative scenario. The subject's movement through space and among places and his or her perceptions of them presupposes, and is informed by, a more abstract or theoretical vision of a nonsubjective or suprasubjective image: a bird's-eye view that brings order and a sense of objectivity to the limited view of the itinerant subject.[14]

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[12] Suad Amiry, *Mother of Strangers: A Novel* (New York: Vintage, 2022), 4.

[13] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 2.

[14] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 4–5, 4. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider Samira Aghacy's argument that poetry 'tends to provide a synchronic view of the city (or an

Conversely, maps are fundamentally narrative in how they identify, establish relations between, and assign relative significance to places and spaces.[15]

Historical fiction does not only reimagine Palestinians in their historic homeland as a way of grounding and sustaining individual and collective identity; it shows how place and space are articulated (in both senses) in relation to power-knowledge formations. Gary Fields traces how '[f]rom 1914 onwards, Zionist historians, geographers, linguists, and archaeologists transcribe[d] notions about Jewish rights to Palestinian land into a cartographic idiom. Their goal was a Hebrew map of Palestine.'[16] The production of Israeli territory has been reinforced legally as well as by demolition, appropriation, and occlusion through more insidious (such as greenscaping and gentrifying) processes. Edward Said claimed 'permission to narrate' the Palestinian story to counter this constructed reality because:

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idealized view in an anthem-like manner),' whereas 'the novel mirrors the daily mundane life of the city' (*Writing Beirut: Mappings of the City in the Modern Arabic Novel* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press], 2–3).

[15] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 5; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Blackwell, 1991), 51–52.

[16] Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in an Historical Mirror* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 213.

Facts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them. Such a narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, a homeland for the resolution of its exile since 1948.[17]

Said recalls:

[D]uring the [June–August 1982] siege of Beirut obsessively telling friends and family there, over the phone, that they ought to record, write down their experiences; it seemed crucial as a starting-point to furnish the world some narrative evidence, over and above atomised and reified TV clips, of what it was like to be at the receiving end of Israeli 'anti-terrorism.'[18]

At this stage, '[t]he archive [spoke] of the depressed condition of the Palestinian narrative.'[19] Said's article was understood as an invitation to narrate as a national imperative.

One result is an outpouring of Palestinian memoirs, oral narratives, and documentary films which share a counter-historiographical thrust and an alternative cartographic idiom in elaborating Palestinian life-worlds before and after 1948. Cartographers have also (re)produced maps of the region for a future return, as exemplified by Salman Abu Sitta's life

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[17] Edward Said, 'Permission to Narrate: Edward Said Writes about the Story of the Palestinians,' *London Review of Books* 6, no. 3 (1984): n. pag.

[18] Said, 'Permission to Narrate', n. pag.

[19] Said, 'Permission to Narrate', n. pag.

work.[20] Maps are 'social and material *practices*' that 'constitute reality in relation to one another across space, time, and forms of social difference.'[21] The State of Israel used maps produced by the British Palestinian Exploration Fund and Mandatory Survey of Palestine. Alternative maps have subsequently been produced by the Palestinian Authority and NGOs such as Zochrot. Palestinians both within and outside historic Palestine countermap space in quotidian and consciously creative ways. As Ted Swedenburg says:

> Despite the constraints imposed by a colonizing movement that has expelled their compatriots, drastically limited their access to land, and severely constrained their efforts to build national institutions, Palestinians living under Israeli rule assert their own history and presence in the land of Palestine: against Zionist mapping, a shadow cartography.[22]

Focusing on twenty-first-century creative literature, Ned Curthoys and Isabelle Hesse suggest that it produces 'new, descriptively thicker, and cognitively disruptive imaginative

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[20] See also Palestine Open Maps (https://palopenmaps.org/en).

[21] Jess Bier, *Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine: How Occupied Landscapes Shape Scientific Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017), 9, original emphasis.

[22] Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 71.

cartographies.'[23] While they emphasize an increasingly concrete 'architecture of enmity,'[24] we can retrospectively examine how, as Jess Bier argues, 'geographic categories like "city" or "nation" are produced in discourse and practice.' Landscape itself is a 'relational and performative concept'[25] that fiction is adept at capturing.

Hammad and Amiry contribute to growing interest in pre-1948 urban Palestine, in a corrective to an emphasis on Palestinian *fellahin* and depopulated villages.[26] Manar Hasan suggests that, for Zionists, '[t]o acknowledge the existence of an urban Palestine was to admit that the land, far from being "without a people", was home to another emerging nation.'[27] For Palestinians, the shattering effects of territorial dispossession have encouraged restorative nostalgia.[28] The loss of urban centres as former sites of national narrative production also

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[23] Ned Curthoys and Isabelle Hesse, 'Introduction', *Literary Representations of the Palestine/Israel Conflict After the Second Intifada* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024), 2.

[24] Curthoys and Hesse, 'Introduction', 2; Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 28.

[25] Bier, *Mapping*, 9.

[26] *Inter alia*, Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed, 1979); Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

[27] Manar Hasan, 'Palestine's Absent Cities: Gender, Memoricide and the Silencing of Urban Palestinian Memory,' *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (2019): 3, 6.

[28] Hasan, 'Palestine's Absent Cities,' 7; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

contributed to hyper-localised memory-making.[29] On the eve of Partition, almost 40% of Palestinian Arabs lived in cities and their society was undergoing 'an urbanisation process with momentous spatial-geographical, demographic, technological, social, and cultural implications, including significant changes in class structure and gender relations.' Growth was particularly marked on the coast: in Jaffa, between the 1920s and mid-1940s, Muslim and Christian Palestinian populations grew by 113% and 147% respectively. Then abruptly, Palestinian cities became sites of political erasure.[30] Manal Massalha flags:

> [T]he vanishing of the Palestinian city [in 1948] as a social, political, economic and cultural site, the amputation of Palestinian urbanisation, the exile of most of the urban Palestinian population, and the forcible conversion of major Palestinian urban centres into cities which became either predominately or entirely Jewish.[31]

While some of the 'outer shell' of formerly Palestinian cities remains, the recuperation of their (historic) 'living essence' requires 'return[ing] the urban repressed' to memory.[32]

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[29] Hasan, 'Palestine's Absent Cities,' 10.

[30] Hasan, 'Palestine's Absent Cities,' 2, 3.

[31] Manal Massalha, *In Suspension: the denial of the right to the city for Palestinians in Israel and its effects on their socio-economic, cultural and political formation – the case of Umm al-Fahem*. Unpublished doctoral thesis (Goldsmiths, University of London, 2014), 39.

[32] Hasan, 'Palestine's Absent Cities,' 4. While historians often cite (auto)biographical writing, seminal city fictions include Ghassan Kanafani, 'Returning to Haifa', trans. Karen E. Riley, in *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, ed. Barbara Harlow and Karen

This century, pre-1948 Palestine is being systematically reimagined. Creative narration does more than give subjective texture to geography; it reflexively contributes to palimpsestic space. Sharon Rotbard, whose influential study of Tel Aviv and Jaffa gives this article its epigraph, explains how a city's history is always the outcome of a power struggle:

> Those who have the power to shape the physical space to suit their needs can easily shape it to suit their values and narrative – not only to obtain for their values and narratives a hegemonic stature, but also in accordance with them, to reshape the city. We may formulate this simple state of things in the following paradoxical rule: a city is always a realization of the stories that it tells about itself.
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> One of the most common means of realizing the stories a tells about itself is through conservation, and in its reverse, through demolition.[33]

Cities typically feature an unstable demography, spatial density, and a surface area susceptible to horizontal and vertical expansion, infilling, demolition, and rebuilding.[34] The resulting cartographic challenges are radically heightened in the Palestine/Israel context defined since (at least) 1948 by appropriation, renaming, enclosure, and destruction.

E. Riley (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000); and Sahar Khalifeh, *Passage to the Plaza*, trans. Sawad Hussain (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2020).

[33] Rotbard, *Black City*, 3.

[34] John Wyatt, *The Use of Imaginary, Historical, and Actual Maps in Literature: How British and Irish Authors Created Imaginary Worlds to Tell Their Stories* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), 283–86.

However, Hammad and Amiry demonstrate fiction's ability symbolically to conserve and simultaneously to register the violent foreclosure of Palestine's modern urban history.

'Map[ping] the social fabric of Nablus' in *The Parisian*

In *The Parisian, or Al-Barisi*, we meet the eponymous Midhat Kamal – based on Hammad's great-grandfather, pictured in *Recognizing the Stranger*[35] – on a ship to Europe. Born into a prosperous Nabulsi family in the last years of the Ottoman empire, Midhat's trajectory leads from a *lycée* in Constantinople to medical training in Montpellier during the Great War. His enchantment with France wanes as he realises its civilization has only the 'appearance of rightness.'[36] His host Dr Molineu is writing an anthropological text on (European) language learning in which Midhat is a 'primitive' case study.[37] Upon discovering this and fleeing to Paris, Midhat is drawn into the orbit of Greater Syrian expatriates debating their region's future. He cultivates a dandy persona and exploits his sexual freedom, losing his virginity in a Rue Ménilmontant bombsite and reflecting that '[i]t was easy to rewrite [one's] story in a city of strangers.'[38] In Paris, Midhat embodies two archetypes of a modernity normatively ascribed to European subjects: the 'spirit of dandyism' in rebellion against 'the patriarchal centre' of his father's world, and 'the perfect *flanêur*' who 'set[s] up house in the heart of the

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[35] Isabella Hammad, *Recognizing the Stranger: On Palestine and Narrative* (London: Fern Press, 2024), 39.

[36] Isabella Hammad, *The Parisian, or Al-Barisi* (London: Vintage, 2019), 108.

[37] Hammad, *Parisian*, 128.

[38] Hammad, *Parisian*, 155.

multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement [...] to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.'[39]

In 1919, however, Midhat is recalled to the inland Palestinian city of Nablus. His father, having intercepted a letter from Midhat's former lover, Jeanette Molineu, plans to entangle his son in provincial urban life. In Cairo, Midhat recalls:

> [H]is fearful self on the outbound trip, nineteen years old, with a shaky grasp of European manners, and sore with isolation. From his new vantage of self-possession and social grace, he could look back at that young man and laugh. But the pleasure of these thoughts was only a brief respite from the real anxiety of returning to Palestine.

The omniscient narrator reveals that Midhat 'still clung to a particular idea of cosmopolitan life' and sees Cairo as an intermediary stage between Paris and Nabulsi 'boredom,' '[g]ossip,' 'deference,' and 'duty.'[40] Before he arrives 'home' – framed topophrenically as the matrix of 'a constant and uneasy "place-mindedness"'[41] – Midhat is cognitively mapping ways out again, strategizing without discrimination along spiritual and economic lines:

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[39] Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function, & Style* (London: Reaktion, 2016), 116; Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1995), 9.

[40] Hammad, *Parisian*, 187, 188.

[41] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 1.

> [P]erhaps he might negotiate with his father over his future and go to Jerusalem, or to one of those port towns already loosened by pilgrim routes, perhaps, indeed, to Cairo; or perhaps they could even work out a way of him to return to France. He might expand [his father's textile] business in a westerly direction, and travel there for French fabrics.[42]

While the port of Jaffa was flourishing as a hub for pilgrims to Jerusalem as well as the mass export of oranges to Europe (as we see in *Mother of Strangers*),[43] the interior city of Nablus was pivoting less decisively from a hub 'in the heart of Ottoman Palestine' to a 'westerly' trade orientation.[44] Hammad's travelling subject projects a dynamic constellation of Palestinian cities, Greater Syria, the wider Ottoman world, and Europe even as he reductively associates modernity with the West.[45]

Midhat's expansive dreams are not to be realized. Instead, he is installed as manager of his father's textile store in Khan al-Tujjar, the merchant's market, which gives Hammad a

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[42] Hammad, *Parisian*, 188.

[43] Mahmoud Yazbak, 'Jaffa before the Nabka: Palestine's Thriving City, 1799–1948,' in *The Social and Cultural History of Palestine: Essays in Honour of Salim Tamari*, ed. Sarah Irving (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 16.

[44] Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 59; Hammad, *Parisian*, 188.

[45] Doumani observes that economic modernization processes had shaped Jabal Nablus since the early nineteenth century. *Rediscovering*, 8.

vantage point from which 'to map the social fabric of Nablus,' as her narrator puts it.[46] The novel toggles between a birds'-eye and street-level view of the city to produce a perceptual 'ensemble' of objective/synoptic as well as subjective/selective perspectives.[47] When Midhat 'step[s] over the threshold' of the store on 'the edge of the square by al-Manara clock tower,'[48] he observes a scene of colonial mimicry in which a vegetable vendor plays un-modern to frustrate the British authorities and amuse a spectating crowd. The passage is rich in topographical references, some named and others implying insider knowledge ('the khan,' 'the square'), a descriptive oscillation underlining Midhat's Europe-returned, intermedial positioning.[49] The same chapter (Part II, Chapter 4) uses an aerial perspective to geo-locate Nablus: its nominative references include Yishuv (early Jewish) settlements, Paris, Istanbul, Beirut, Damascus, Egypt, Syria, and England.

Hammad populates her novel with characters, some of them adapted historical personages, who variously reveal limits and alternatives to European perceptual frameworks. The visiting Père Antoine is modelled on Père Antonin Jaussen, a 'Dominican priest, ethnographer, and sometime spy' who studied mental illness in a 'folk' framework.[50] This perspective is

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[46] Hammad, *Parisian*, 198.

[47] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 4–5.

[48] Hammad, *Parisian*, 198: one of seven clocks built in Greater Syria to commemorate Sultan Ahmed Hamid II's reign. See also notes 86 and 87.

[49] Hammad, *Parisian*, 195.

[50] Chris Sandal-Wilson, 'Ethnographies of Madness: Père Antonin Jaussen, Shaykh Sa'ad al-Din and the Management of Mental Illness in Mandate-era Nablus,' in *Social and Cultural History*, ed. Irving, 142.

exposed as a mode of epistemological capture, aligned with Dr Molineu's ethnography, that contributes to Midhat's eventual breakdown, but that *The Parisian* retrospectively resists. We are told that Père Antoine studies Nablus because 'here was a place seemingly cut off from the modern world.'[51] The novel emphasizes, however, a 'transnational forging of multiple modernities' in the context of Ottoman and European imperialisms and, particularly from the mid-1930s, decolonizing nationalism.[52]

Following the scene above, Midhat walks, with his cousin Jamil, to Sheikh Qassem coffee house, where they encounter aristocratic landowners, scholars, and 'newly rich mercantile' men; Midhat steps 'over [another] threshold' to become enmeshed in Nablus's '[homo]social fabric.'[53] A newspaper article is read aloud, likely from *Filastin*, about demonstrations in Damascus against a deal between France and King Faisal.[54] As in Paris, Midhat acts as an auditory vector for 'changing geographical imaginaries' in the context of a modernity

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[51] Hammad, *Parisian*, 144. Jaussen's book is listed in *The Parisian*'s Acknowledgements.

[52] Reina Lewis and Yasmine Nachabe Taan, 'Mapping Modern Bodies in the Middle East: Introduction,' in *Fashioning the Modern Middle East: Gender, Body, and Nation*, ed. Reina Lewis and Yasmine Nachabe Taan (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 14, 1.

[53] Hammad, *Parisian*, 199, 198. Women gather in *hammams* and, if their class permits, elite salons.

[54] *Filastin* was founded in 1911. Faisal was installed in Syria in March 1920, then Iraq in 1921.

accelerated by the Great War and replete with threats and opportunities.[55] Hammad also transmits the local effects of geopolitical change. The reader of the article, Haj Abdallah Atwan, is a 'notable' and soap factory owner[56] and Midhat is two social 'tier[s] below' him, but the 'new [merchant] set, the Kamal family among them, [...] were in the ascendant, attending the same parties, participating in the same conferences, and marrying their women.'[57] As a *nouveau riche* who will marry up into the scholarly Hammad family, Midhat's ambivalent class affiliation facilitates a wide social perspective.

The ambulatory, ocular, and auditory access to urban space provided by Hammad's cast of characters amplifies maps of Old Nablus, a compact, dense, inward-facing environment with limited street names. In a single chapter, we start with Midhat 'peer[ing]' at downtown Nablus from 'between the hanging bolts of fabric' in his father's store, then zoom out to a schematic perspective complemented by *longue durée* socio-economic analysis. The narrator tells us that Nablus is divided geographically between 'East and West,' a division rooted in clan filiations quasi-mythically 'dating from the early Islamic settlement of the land of Can'aan' that maps on to family rivalries to dominate trade routes to Egypt, Syria, and

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[55] Nadi Abusaada, '"The Reconstruction of Palestine": Geographical Imaginaries after World War I,' in *Social and Cultural History*, ed. Irving, 102; Salim Tamari, *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

[56] Merchants consolidated land and soap factory ownership and carved the Jabal Nablus region into spheres of influence, 'impart[ing] to Nablus its unique character as a conservative interior trade and manufacturing town'. Doumani, *Rediscovering*, 53, 56.

[57] Hammad, *Parisian*, 199.

Lebanon.[58] As Fadwa Kamal Abdel Rahman argues, shifting perspectives transmit 'both the subjective experiential sense of place and the objective analytical and ideological sense of how place materializes the fabric of immanent relations of power.'[59]

Hammad uses material fabric to track the city's changing fortunes through time. Beshara Doumani details the 'incremental incorporation of Palestine [...] into the European economic orbit,' resulting eventually in Nablus's decline in status from 'Palestine's principal trade and manufacturing center.'[60] Hammad reproduces a letter cited by Doumani, in which a wealthy peasant orders wedding cloth from a Nabulsi merchant.[61] In the novel, it is written in 1919, at least two decades after its historical inscription 'around the end of the nineteenth century.'[62] Midhat's father receives it with the letter from Jeanette. The anachronism oddly reinforces a contrast between Nabulsi provincialism and European modernity that *The Parisian* otherwise destabilizes through its bifocal, travelling, dandy protagonist. The Kemal store caters for 'clients in the hinterlands' as opposed to Samaritan tailors who sell 'European-style' garments

[58] Hammad, *Parisian*, 195, 198.

[59] Fadwa Kamal Abdel Rahman, 'Mapping Spaces, Identities, and Ideologies in *The Parisian* (2019),' *IAFOR Journal of Literature and Librarianship* 10, no. 1 (2019): 105.

[60] Doumani, *Rediscovering*, 20, 1.

[61] Hammad, *Parisian*, 176.

[62] Doumani, *Rediscovering*, 81.

to upper-class urbanites.[63] However, the whole of Palestine was drawn into European trade networks in the aftermath of the Great War.[64]

With greater historical accuracy, when Midhat and his cousin Jamil suggest visiting the Qassem café, the Samaritan store manager, Hisham, bows his head in assent and shakes the tassle of his *tarbush*.[65] A European suit and a *tarbush* (or *fez*) were the uniform of the urban elite across faith groups.[66] Midhat gets married, in the early 1920s, in 'a tarbush of especial tallness, a foulard tie, his softest mouchoir for his pocket, and his shiniest, pointiest Italian boots, with a brown foot and a black toe and a double zigzag stitch adjoining them.'[67] In the

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[63] Midhat notes that suit jackets are squarer than in Paris, imported and local cloth is cut together, and indigenous customisation takes place: to his eyes, 'nothing looked purely foreign.' Hammad, *Parisian*, 242, 243.

[64] Rachel Dedman, 'At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery,' in *At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery*, ed. Rachel Dedman (Birzeit: The Palestinian Museum, 2016), 39ff.

[65] Hammad, *Parisian*, 197. Ottoman minorities often worked as traders, shopkeepers, milliners, and tailors. Lewis and Nachabe Taan, 'Mapping,' 5.

[66] See Caroline R. Kahlenberg, 'The Tarbush Transformation: Oriental Jewish Men and the Significance of Headgear in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine,' *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 4 (2019): 1212–49. In Walid Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1848* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984), 106, we see a group of male activists from Nablus and their lawyer around 1930, in suits and tarbushes.

[67] Hammad, *Parisian*, 346. See note 54 below.

1930s, headwear started to symbolise specific political affiliations, with the *tarbush* symbolising pan-Arab nationalism, the *faisaliya* (Faisal cap) Greater Syrian identity, and the *kuffiyeh* Palestinian nationalism that traversed urban and rural locations. Hammad explores the uprising that revitalized a city formerly mired in clan and class politics, expressed through widespread adoption of the *kuffiyeh* to protect militants during the Revolt of 1936–39.[68]

However, whereas Midhat's Parisian coming of age loosely parallels the emergence of Palestinian and Arab nationalisms, the allegory breaks down in Mandatory Palestine. His Nabulsi peers describe him as *al-Barisi*, 'the Parisian.' His 'pinstriped suit from the Rue Royale' in Paris clashes with 'the local suits,' its precise tailoring – the hallmark of French suits – reflecting that 'increasingly individuated fit was part of the processes by which were forged individuated modernizing subjects.'[69] Although Midhat represents the romance of elsewhere to some of his compatriots, his cousin Jamil is increasingly critical of him and his own dysmorphia is evident from the opening pages of the novel. In France, 'Midhat the Levantine, with his mouchoir and new suit, [feels] thoroughly estranged: the figure of the

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[68] One of the Hammad family wore a *kuffiyeh* over a *tarbush* he refused to remove. Afikra Podcast, interview with Isabella Hammad, 19 March 2021. Midhat never dons a *kuffiyeh*.

[69] Hammad, *Parisian*, 200; Lewis and Nachabe Taan, 'Mapping,' 8. On the hardcopy cover of *The Parisian* is a character in a single-breasted lounge suit in dark fabric appropriate to a European urban environment (concealing the effects of pollution). Jazz Age flair is implied by a lapel pin and round-toed shoes with a ribbon, but the suit does not have the 'cigarette roll' shoulder popular in France in the 1920s. The cover does not show the top of the man's head, perhaps because, in the original image, he wears a European hat rather than a *tarbush*.

Parisian Oriental as he appeared on certain cigarette packets in corner stores.'[70] His embodied experience reflects what Tarik el-Ariss calls 'trials of Arab modernity,' a troubled 'somatic condition' produced by 'accidents and events emerging in and between Europe and the Arab world.'[71] In drawing a 'psychological map of [Midhat's] mind' as an interstitial locus, Hammad transmits the pathos of his story.[72] His sartorial performances are legible as nervous conditions initiated by the encounter with colonial hierarchies. In Jamil's view:

> To be a Parisian in Nablus was to be out of step with the times, locked in an old colonial formula where subjects imitated masters as if in the seams of their old garments they hoped to find some dust of power left trapped.[73]

This 'dandified *alafranga* man'[74] is increasingly out of place as Nabulsis turn towards new nationalist modes of collective self-fashioning. The progressive decentring of both Midhat's worldview and pluralist Nabulsi identity is suggested topologically: in 1920, he opens a modern women's clothing store called Nouveautés Ghada, with a Samaritan partner and

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[70] Hammad, *Parisian*, 158. French designer Paul Poiret, who bridged Orientalism and modernism, likely informs this textual description.

[71] Tarik El-Ariss, *Trials of Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2, 3, 5.

[72] Afikra Podcast, interview with Isabella Hammad, 19 March 2021.

[73] Hammad, *Parisian*, 505.

[74] Lewis and Nachabe Taan, 'Mapping,' 10.

Christian tailor, 'in the new town between Barclays Bank and a sports equipment store.'[75] By 1935, increasing tensions with Jewish settlers in Palestine and Nablus's inland location mean that, as the narrator describes:

> Nablus was not [...] growing at the rate of other towns. Compared with Jaffa and Jerusalem and Haifa and Akka – all open to the sea, to Christian pilgrimage routes and tourism, electrified and full of cinemas – this town was decaying in her provincial backwaters, subsisting on memories of former glory [...].[76]

Midhat's (and his wife Fatima's) dreams of Cairo are permanently suspended because of both the challenges of starting again in another city and a recognition that, in a time of political jeopardy, 'he was a Nabulsi, and everyone in Nablus breathed the same haunted air' and 'had a duty to remain.'[77]

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[75] Hammad, *Parisian*, 395. By 1930, 'veils [...] had thinned into vapours of chiffon [...]; skirts concluded at the knee, and the black stockings on the shelves of Nouveautés disappeared almost as soon as they were laid there.' (395). In an Afikra Podcast interview (19 March 2021), Hammad showed a photograph of Fatima in flapper attire. Traditional dress resurged in the mid-30s, however, when '[g]ender freedom [was] sacrificed for [...] nationalist freedom.' Abdel Rahman, 'Mapping,' 109.

[76] Hammad, *Parisian*, 397.

[77] Hammad, *Parisian*, 397.

It may seem counterintuitive to accompany such a singular protagonist through a meticulously researched urban setting. The juxtaposition arises partly from Midhat's biographical template and the re-immersion of his British-Palestinian descendant in an under-represented urban location.[78] However, Midhat's distinctiveness usefully illustrates the diversity of urban Palestinians at this key historical juncture. We can adapt Rashmi Varma's description of the postcolonial city as a 'conjunctural location in which rural, urban, national, and trans-national are simultaneous geographies' and 'imperial and anti-imperial histories are concurrent events.'[79] As Ottoman administration ceded to European control, Palestine was in social, economic, and political flux. *The Parisian* retrospectively reveals the time-space compressions of capitalist modernity negotiated with constrained agency by individual Palestinian subjects.

Midhat's eccentricity – including his emphasized topological *ex-centricity* – is also a reflexive strategy that draws attention to ways of seeing and being seen; it reminds us that any act of literature/mapping creates 'a meaningful ensemble [...] only provisionally and temporarily.'[80] Hammad has said that 'the material we draw from the world needs to undergo some metamorphosis in order to function, or even to live, on the page.'[81] Conversely, creative

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[78] Hammad, Afikra Podcast, 19 March 2021. Limited other work set in Nablus has been translated into English, notably Fadwa Tuqan's memoir, some of Sahar Khalifeh's fiction, and part of Hala Alyan's novel *Salt Houses* (2017).

[79] Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*. London: Routledge, 2011, 2.

[80] Tally Jr., *Topophrenia*, 2.

[81] Hammad, *Recognizing*, 38.

narration relies on plausible particularities. The author flags *anagnorisis*, the *re*-cognition (*ana-gnorisis*) immanent in the act of reading (*anagnosis*). Fiction asks us to re-cognize what we think we know – a useful injunction in a world that obfuscates Palestinian experience but also a prophylactic against reductive nostalgia. Hammad tells us she initially misrecognized the photograph of her great-grandfather in a dark suit and *tarbush*, assuming it was taken in the Bois de Boulogne and later realising the painted backdrop was in a Jerusalem studio.[82] By extension, Midhat 'al-Barisi' is both fundamentally Palestinian *and* a historical exception who illuminates Nabulsi norms before the fall of Palestine.

The 'Grand Suit Tour' in *Mother of Strangers*

In Amiry's *Mother of Strangers*, too, a European suit counter-intuitively contributes to indigenous 'self-ma[king],' this time in Jaffa on the cusp of the 1948 catastrophe.[83] The paperback cover features a black and white image of a young man in a double-breasted woollen suit, holding a fedora, against a brightly coloured backdrop of a Jaffa orange and that city's historic port area. Like *The Parisian*, *Mother of Strangers* is grounded in biographical fact, transmitted oral histories, and other research.[84] Part I of the novel details a demographically diverse city with a potentially flexible class structure. Due to its leading role in the international citrus economy, Jaffa is represented as relatively open to a modernity made vernacular through the co-presence of diverse national and faith groups and rivalry with the abutting new city of Tel Aviv.

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[82] Hammad, *Recognizing*, 19, 41, 44. See note 93.

[83] Amiry, *Mother*, 4.

[84] Amiry's husband (Tamari) is a leading historian who shares her (partial) Jaffawi heritage.

The novel opens in June 1947, introducing us to a nearly 16-year-old mechanic named Subhi who receives an unexpected summons to repair the water system on a *bayyara* or citrus orchard for an '*isami*, a self-made man' called 'Khawaja' (an honorific) Michael.[85] Michael – implicitly a Christian – rewards Subhi for his work by taking him to a tailor on il Manshiyyeh Street for a suit of Manchester wool with a thin red stripe. On the way there, the employer, dressed in a camel-hair suit and fedora, complains about an anti-Zionist protest reminiscent of the 1936–39 Revolt, an event Subhi's family remembers as 'heroic'. Subhi has been participating in anti-Zionist protests between the Great Jaffa Mosque and Clock or il Shuhada Square.[86] This locating of insurgency *between* the mosque and the clock tower gestures toward a decolonizing indigenous modernity, links 1930's Nablus (seat of the Revolt) and 1940's Jaffa, and expresses Palestinian resistance as a continuous phenomenon.[87]

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[85] Amiry, *Mother*, 5.

[86] Amiry, *Mother*, 34, 31. From a longer historical perspective, the change in name from *shuhada* (martyr) to *as-sa'a* (clock) square and, later, to David Razi'el street, illustrates how this city's toponymy is first Ottomanized, then Hebraized.

[87] Amiry's attention to the space-time (chronotopic) configuration is reinforced when Subhi's dissolute uncle decries his brother's piety as a 'backward' preference for tradition (the five daily prayers) over the 'moderniz[ation' (clock time) the Ottoman sultan tried to introduce. Amiry, *Mother*, 64–65. If Nablus emerged as a centre of nationalist resistance in the 1930s, in the 1940s the encirclement of Jaffa 'unified every class of the Arab population' and 'helped establish [...] Palestinian national identity' with that city as its 'metropolitan embodiment.' Tamari, *Great War*, 88, 98.

The novel's upbeat first chapters accentuate the subsequent shock of Jaffa's downfall in mid-May 1948. When the city is occupied by Jewish militia, Subhi becomes separated from his family and Shams, the girl he loves from the hinterland village of Salameh. Subhi ends up in a refugee camp in Jordan, whereas Shams (who we also follow in Part II) is displaced to Ajami ghetto in south Jaffa. In the Epilogue, Amiry switches to autobiographical first-person to relay that she met Shams and Subhi, separately, in 2018. Subhi showed her the 'remnants of his English suit' – 'what looked like a gray rag with a thin red line' – and described it as 'all that remains of Palestine,' a startling metonymy given British complicity in the loss of Arab Palestine.[88] In her 'Author's Note,' Amiry explains that she stumbled on the (true) story during an 'estranged' and 'distressed' attempt in the 2010s to find her paternal family home. Hearing Amiry and her husband speak about their shared 'anguish,' the taxi driver –Shams's nephew – suggested that the author hear his aunt's 'incredibly story.'[89]

Several chapters in *Mother of Strangers* track the fictionalized Subhi on what he calls his 'grand suit tour' of Jaffa.[90] His visit to Khawaja Michael's *bayyara* affords an initial opportunity for a 'spectacular panoramic' survey, an 'inverted' view of what he normally sees from the coast, and which captures how the city is increasingly dominated by the citrus economy. This vertical 'visual journey' emphasizes Jaffa's new and wealthy neighbourhoods, as well as 'the city's main landmark' and modern symbol, the Ottoman clock tower.[91] When Subhi subsequently moves horizontally across town, first to carry his suit home to Hassan

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[88] Amiry, *Mother*, 267, 268.

[89] Amiry, *Mother*, 271, 272.

[90] Amiry, *Mother*, 47.

[91] Amiry, *Mother*, 20–21, 22.

Bek Street and then on a 'grand show-off tour' wearing it, he walks through the Jewish Market, Suq al Yahud, located between the Tel Aviv's first neighborhood Neve Tzedek and Subhi's neighborhood of Manshiyyeh, the northern quarter built for workers developing the Hijazi railway; then past the station, 'with trains that could have carried him from Jaffa to Jerusalem.'[92] He is picked up by a friend and driven down il-Mahatta (Station) Street, where he disembarks to have his suit 'immortalized' in Sabunjian Photo Studio.[93]

Subhi then trials the impact of his suit at the Café il Tious, or Fool's Café, where labourers from Egypt, Syria, Gaza and nearby villages gather. He is gratified to be 'mistaken for a real *khawaja*' and 'fear[s] that the men's rough and dirty hands might stain his suit,' suggesting that symbolic 'whiteness' adheres to upward mobility.[94] He then goes to Café il Inshirah, with its clientele of 'intellectuals, well-to-do merchants, and politicians' and, '[h]aving passed as one of many who wore elegant suits, [is] drawn into the heated discussions around him' about the looming UN-mandated partition.[95] As does Midhat in *The Parisian*, Subhi listens to different points of view and observes the microcosmic qualities of the cafes that he visits: while ethnic and faith groups sit separately in the Tious, the Inshirah is divided along political party lines. Subhi contemplates heading down King George Boulevard to the art deco Al

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[92] Amiry, *Mother*, 55, 46.

[93] Amiry, *Mother*, 69. While the real Midhat chooses a background for his studio photograph that his descendant reads as the Bois de Boulogne, Subhi chooses a backdrop of Istanbul.

[94] Amiry, *Mother*, 71.

[95] Amiry, *Mother*, 72, 75.

Hamra Cinema, built in 1937,[96] but instead goes to the port to borrow some money from his

disreputable uncle. En route, he muses on the city's political factions, aligned variously with

Jerusalem notables and the Jordanian king, the Palestinian Arab party of Haj Amin Al

Husseini, and the *jihad* of Abdel Qader il Husseini. Through indirect narration, we are privy

to his thoughts on the city's Armenian, Italian, Greek, and Jewish communities and the fact

that Jaffa's wealthy families are immigrants, including from Nablus.[97] Subhi's 'Grand Suit

Tour' – an ironic allusion to the privileged cultural tourism of the nineteenth-century English

gentleman – ends with a visit to a Jewish prostitute in Tel Aviv, under the tutelage of his

uncle; it is, thus, also a portal 'From Boyhood to Manhood.'[98]

As does Hammad, however, Amiry primarily uses the conceit of a suited man walking

through a city to map it socially, economically, politically, and topographically for the reader.

In *Mother of Strangers*, we see that Jaffa, while more extensively influenced by European

culture than is Nablus, remains enmeshed in the Arab world. The third-person narrator offers

insights into this character's cognitive processes, the ocular and auditory imprints the city

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[96] The Al-Hamra is on what became Shariya Jamal Pasha, then Jerusalem Boulevard; it is

now the Alhambra Scientology Headquarters. The glamorous building contrasts with Jaffa's

racialized depiction as crowded, underdeveloped, and criminal: in fact, 'the majority of

International Style buildings constructed in [the] 1930s were erected in Jaffa, the capital of

Palestine, and not in Tel Aviv' (Rotbard, *Black City*, 60). While Alhambra is an apt translation

of Al-Hamra (the palace in Grenada is known for its red hue), the evocation of Andalusian

convivencia is unconsciously ironic in the context of Israel's ethnocentric Basic Law.

[97] Amiry, *Mother*, 57, 59, 63, 70, 71, 65–66, 76.

[98] Amiry, *Mother*, 47 *passim*; 77.

leaves on him, and his (im)mobility and (constrained) access to specific places, depending on his perception by others:

> [Subhi] thought of places he knew, but also of places he did not know. He thought of all the upscale places on King George and in the new Nuzha neighborhood, which intimidated him and which he'd never had the courage to venture into. On his fingers he counted such places: the chic Café Venezia; the lobby of the InterContinental Hotel, where he hoped to encounter one of the many Arab celebrities – singers, actors, writers, and poets – who came to be interviewed by the Near East Broadcasting Station, il Sharq il Adna; and the prestigious il Hamra Cinema, all three located on King George Boulevard. He also thought about visiting the [Christian] Orthodox Club, the football rival of his Islamic Sports Club, where poor Muslim boys like himself were not welcome or allowed in.[99] Subhi wanted to go window-shopping along the glamorous Iskander Awad Street and imagine his Shams in a white wedding dress. He also contemplated taking a stroll along the elegant streets of il 'Ajami and il Jabaliyyeh neighborhoods. True as a mechanic, he had been to many of the fancy villas to fix all sorts of water pumps and engines, but always with greasy hands, dangling trousers, and a toolbox. Finally, if time permitted, he wanted to end his grand tour in the new Istiqlal Bookshop next to the new municipal building also on King George Boulevard.[100]

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[99] By contrast, the Islamic Sports Club admitted Muslims and Christians. Yazbak, 'Jaffa,' 20. Amiry informs us that the Club trained youths to use weapons to defend their homes against Zionist militia (Amiry, *Mother*, 66).

[100] Amiry, *Mother*, 56.

Subhi compares his suit to a 'British passport' that allows entry into spaces still 'segregated' by class and/or faith community.[101] The suit metonymically represents upward mobility in a rapidly modernizing city that, as another 'conjunctural [city] location,'[102] 'provided a vivid example of the meanings of modernity, urbanisation and cosmopolitanism in pre-1948 Palestinian society,' including through its annual Nabi Rubin festival which – as *Mother of Strangers* details – provided a social season, away from the city, where Christians and Muslims, and men and women, could mix with relative freedom.[103]

Amiry's intentions are crystalized if one attempts to reenact Subhi's walk – an impossible task. When Jaffa was annexed, Tel Aviv-Yafo became Israel's first Hebraized city in a deliberate 'act of [toponymic] effacement.'[104] *Mother of Strangers* relays how Manshiyyeh was partly destroyed in 1948 by Jewish paramilitary forces blasting through interior walls to move through the district and gain access to Old Jaffa. When Jaffa falls to Zionist militia, Subhi's suit is taken by a compatriot informant who accuses him of stealing it, and only the jacket is returned. Concomitantly, he mourns 'the remains of his city [...] bombarded or flattened to the ground parts of il Manshiyyeh, empty markets, closed shops, robbed banks, and boarded up villas [...] Like the missing trousers of his English suit [...], most aspects of his life had become "disputed".'[105] Manshiyyeh was eventually razed and 'cleared from the

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[101] Amiry, *Mother*, 56, 49.

[102] Varma, *Postcolonial City*, 2.

[103] Yazbak, 'Jaffa,' 19.

[104] Rotbard, *Black City*, 112.

[105] Amiry, *Mother*, 170.

map.'[106] A park named after British Jewish philanthropist Charles Clore covers the debris of the historic neighborhood. Hassan Bek mosque is still in use, though forbidden from broadcasting the call to prayer.[107] The former station is a small shopping centre. Old Jaffa was partly demolished, first by the British in 1936 and then again in the 1950s; what remains is a Jewish artist colony, heritage-washed park, and fashionable entertainment area. Historic Jaffa stands as 'an encyclopedia of ruins, a dictionary of destruction,' necessitating a turn to 'a historical atlas' – or, I am suggesting, fiction – 'to properly examine the changes which [it] has undergone.'[108]

By ostensible contrast, Nablus remains a city under Palestinian jurisdiction in Area A under the Oslo framework, with Arabic toponymy. However, when Midhat walks from Khan al-Tujjar to Sheikh Qassem coffee shop, Hammad reconstructs an area substantially damaged since the 1920s, due partly to natural disaster (notably the Jericho earthquake of 1927)[109] but predominantly to military incursions by the Israeli army. Conservation architect Nusir Arafat – who advised Hammad on *The Parisian* – shows how the Israeli army forced routes through

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[106] Rotbard, *Black City*, 74.

[107] See Ilana Webster-Kogen, 'The Last Mosque in Tel Aviv, and Other Stories of Disjuncture', *Arts* 10, no. 63 (2021), n. pag.

[108] Rotbard, *Black City*, 111.

[109] Sheikh Qassem coffee shop is on the same street as al-Kabir and an-Nasr mosques, the first damaged and the second destroyed in 1927.

the old city during the Al-Aqsa intifada (2000–2005), by blowing up internal walls[110] – the same technique used in Manshiyyeh in 1948. A Brigadier-General, speaking of the 2002 invasion of Balata refugee camp in Nablus, describes how urban space can be redefined by military tactics, notably 'the method of passing through walls, like a worm chewing and ending up in a different place each time [...] reality is the interpretation of the one who assaults and the one who defends.'[111]

Countering this violently appropriating view, Hammad and Amiry re-imagine effervescent urban spaces as socially, demographically, economically, and architecturally distinct hubs of a Palestinian nation-state before its foreclosure. As I have shown here, and other critics have also begun to map, literary representations of urban Palestine fruitfully complement social history.[112] In both *The Parisian* and *Mother of Strangers*, 'forms of dress and embodiment' are legible as 'critical indices within local, regional, and international debates about

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[110] Nusir R. Arafat, 'Recovery and Reconstruction: An Analysis of the Case Study of the Historic City of Nablus', in *Analysis of Case Studies in Recovery and Reconstruction*, Vol. 1 (Sharjah and Paris: ICCROM and ICOMOS, 2021), 32–89.

[111] Rotbard, *Black City*, 103; Eyal Weizman, 'Walking Through Walls,' *Transversal Texts* (Jan. 2007), https://transversal.at/transversal/0507/weizman/en.

[112] See Ahmed Harb, 'The Image of Jerusalem in Modern Palestinian Literature: A Preliminary Study,' *arcadia* 38, no. 1 (2003): 2–22; Maya Abu al-Hayat, *The Book of Ramallah: A City in Short Fiction* (Manchester: Comma Press, 2021); Nathalie Handal, 'Palestinians and the City,' http://palestine.mei.columbia.edu/cps-palestinians-and-the-city. I lead a 'Countermapping Urban Palestine' project, funded by the Council for British Research in the Levant and the British Academy, that explores these ideas across wider literary writing.

modernity and nation.'[113] In representing the febrile period between Ottomanism and Zionism, Hammad and Amiry deploy the 'gentleman's suit [,] one of those overlooked but enduring symbols of modern civilization,' as Christopher Breward describes it,[114] to condense dilemmas about cultural orientation, individual and collective identity, and social relations, and how these were to be defined in and through public space. These novels are imaginatively persuasive not, primarily, because of the research that underpins them, but, rather, because we walk with protagonists simultaneously embedded in and at one critical remove from their generation, who intimately reveal that geography comprises 'practised,' 'read,' 'recoded,' and storied spaces.[115]

The narrative re-imaginings explored here contribute to a still unfolding history of representational resistance. The significance of imaginative urban Palestinian reconstruction cannot be overstated. On 18 October 2023, Atef Abu Saif wrote from now destroyed Jabalya in Gaza:

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[113] Lewis and Nachabe Taan, 'Mapping,' 3.

[114] The suit combines functionality, style, and adaptability to both conservative and countercultural trends: '[t]hrough its fitness for purpose, its sleek elegance and its social grace it has become a perfect example of evolutionary theory and democratic utopianism made material' (Breward, *Suit*, 7).

[115] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Yair Wallach, *A City in Fragments: Urban Text in Modern Jerusalem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, *Writing Women and Space* (London: Routledge, 1994).

As I think about what kind of future this city faces, if any, I'm compelled to keep writing. Through writing, we can keep places alive, we can put down our memories of the streets that are now rubble, the homes that have now been flattened.[116]

Imaginative writing sustains memory and place as an effable archive. It testifies to mass displacement and destruction and produces templates for a collective return: 'We [writers] can not only stop [places] from being forgotten[;] we can create a map for how they should be rebuilt,' says Abu Saif. Palestinian literature rematerializes lost and ruined places, creatively reconstituting them 'wherever [one] end[s] up,'[117] and connecting displaced Palestinians with each other and wider global audiences.

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[116] Atef Abu Saif, *Don't Look Left: A Diary of Genocide* (Manchester: Comma Press, 2024), 47.

[117] Abu Saif, *Don't Look Left*, 48. My thanks to audiences at Lancaster University, the University of Manchester, and the University of Jordan, and to anonymous reviewers for helping to finesse this article.

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