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Our Family Trees

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Our Family Trees

Senior Project Submitted to
The Divisions of Language and Literature
and Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Juliet Hadid

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2018

This project is dedicated to Siti

I couldn't have done any of this without my advisors, so thanks to Dina Ramadan, for helping me see where this project was going and for your patience while I figured out how to get it there. Thanks to Joseph O'Neill, for your confidence in me. And thanks to Tabettha Ewing, for the first push. Madeline Minke, your interest in this project through all of its reimaginings has been a gift. Thank you. And thanks to my family, especially Grandy and my mother for teaching me how to write. Most of all, thank you, Siti, for sharing your story with me.

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Introduction

This is not a story about the occupation of Palestine, this is a story about my grandmother Naila. She was born in 1954, in a town called Bir Zeit in Palestine. She got married in Mufraq, Jordan, to a man from Yabrud, a small village up the road from Bir Zeit. Actually, he was from Haifa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but he fled with his family to Yabrud in 1948, during al-Nakba.

My Arabic professor asked us to read a short excerpt from a story by Ghassan Kanafani. She handed us photocopies of a textbook page titled “All that’s left to you” which had vocabulary and a few phrases translated on the back. We only knew a handful of words in the whole story. We puzzled through the first paragraph together as a class, and she asked us to come back with 150 words on the topics that featured in the story. I read slowly, with a dictionary on my lap. There were a few words that I knew, many I’d never seen before, and a precious handful that I had heard one time or guessed by context. “ghaabit” was one—I had never encountered the word, but I already had a foggy understanding. It was a verb Kanafani used many times in the two paragraphs I read. The school, the house, and finally Gaza itself receded, or were pulled away into emptiness. I had been casting about for a word to describe this exact sensation when I wrote about my grandfather leaving Haifa, and here it was. Of course, it was in Arabic, so I couldn’t use it. But in 1948, Kanafani fled Palestine as it was pulled into the same aching void that my grandfather described.

On November 27th, 1947, more than half of Palestine was promised to the unborn Israeli state by the United Nations, effective May 1948. The years of the British Mandate saw a

steadily-increasing flow of Jewish migrants to Palestine, as the authors of the Mandate had intended. Factors including the actions of Zionist paramilitary organizations against Palestinian civilians and British troops, as well as strong public opinion in favor of the removal of Jewish WWII refugees from Europe to Palestine, precipitated the British government's decision to terminate the mandate in 1947. The question of Palestine's transition from British occupation to Israeli occupation was put to the United Nations General Assembly, where on November 29th of 1947, the two-year old United Nations resolved that Palestine should be partitioned into a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. All of Palestine, at this point, was populated by Palestinians who had called the same land home for generations. The news that more than half of Palestine would become part of a Jewish state in just six months, in the context of increasing Jewish aggression towards their Palestinian neighbors, was taken with outrage. It was clear that the creation of a Jewish state was intended to facilitate the resettlement of larger numbers of Jewish migrants to Palestine, but the land proposed for their resettlement was obviously already occupied. The UN partition plan did not stipulate what would happen to the Palestinian occupants of the land promised to the Zionist project. It was not a question the UN was prepared to answer, and they knew they would not have to. The Zionist paramilitaries were more than happy to step up and solve the problem by forcing Palestinians from their homes.

Immediately after the UN Resolution, Palestinian leadership, in the form of the Arab Higher Committee, called for a three-day general strike from the 2nd to the 4th of December in protest. December 21st marked the effective beginning of al-Nakba (meaning "the catastrophe")¹. On that day, well-armed Zionist militias commenced attacks on Palestinian villages. The Zionist soldiers numbered almost fifty thousand, and they had already built substantial stockpiles of

1 Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, London: 2011. 95.

weapons and ammunitions in preparation for this moment. Fifteen thousand of these soldiers had been trained by the British army during the period of British occupation. There was no Palestinian army at this point, but poorly-armed armies of volunteers hurried to assemble themselves, both in Palestine and in the neighboring countries. All together they were about half as many as the Zionist forces, and they were too late. The Palestine villagers were overpowered as soon as the war began. Resistance to the assault in many cases meant the simple non-violent refusal to leave one's home, and many resisters were shot for this.

Upon al-Naksa (referring to the war in 1967), Palestinian poetry became a symbol of the resistance, and Mahmoud Darwish has been called the 'national poet'. Darwish was only six when his village was destroyed in 1948. He escaped to Lebanon with his parents, and then returned. They were of the lucky few who were able to sneak back through the land border after the war, but the luckiest found their homes occupied but standing. Darwish found his village razed to the ground. His family were now refugees, though they were able to see the land where their house had stood. They were classified by Israeli law as "present absentees". Absentees are any people who aren't living on their deeded land—military attacks, destruction of their homes, shooting the man who held the deed were all tactics which the Israeli military used to create these absentees. "Present absentees" are people living in Palestine without papers; internal refugees. Their land is forfeit because they left—and the forceful circumstances of their departure are not acknowledged by the law, because the law has been written to allow the Israeli military to annex as much land as possible.

Close to 300,000 Palestinians had been expelled from their homes before Israeli officially declared independence on May 15th, 1948. In the coming days, another 700,000 Palestinians

would be pushed off of their land. The count is indefinite, but it was something around 500 Palestinian villages that were completely demolished during al-Nakba. There were 33 separate massacres, including the infamous Deir Yassin Massacre on April 9th, 1948. There, 107 people were killed in a day, and the village was destroyed. 110 Israeli militiamen attacked the village at the first light of day. They threw grenades into the homes of villagers, killing whole families at a time. A mere seven of these victims were killed in combat, fighting to protect their families. The rest were cut down in cold blood. “Haya Al-Balbisi, a 19-year-old teacher from Jerusalem who was not in Deir Yassin at the time, rushed back to help the villagers. She was shot while treating an injured villager”².

This spring, my Arabic class endeavored to translate a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, one of his poems that everyone knows. It was “Bitaqat Hawiya”, the Darwish poem I’ll quote from later in the project. The name means “Identity Card”, that small document that lets Israelis through the wall and stops Palestinians in their tracks. He published it in 1964 and it was adapted into a popular protest song. For the crime of being it’s author, he was placed under house arrest for three years, 1967-1970. In 1970, he fled Palestine for the second time, seeking his freedom.

The Green Line was the line that marked the end of Israeli territory after the war of 1948. It a cease-fire line, not a permanent border, though it is seen on maps today as the border of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Gaza was under Egyptian rule from 1948-1967, and the West Bank was annexed by Jordan “as a trust in its hands until the Palestine case is fully solved in the interests of its inhabitants”³. Israel agreed to the armistice line, but to their military leaders the war was not over. On the 29th of October, 1956, Israel invaded Egypt in order to take control of

2 Ibid, 96.

3 From a Resolution published by the Arab League Council, cited in Yehuda Z. Blum, *Will "Justice" Bring Peace?: International Law - Selected Articles and Legal Opinions*, Leiden: 2016. 230.

the Suez Canal, an important oil-shipping route. That day they imposed a curfew on all Palestinians living under their occupation. The villagers of Kafr Qasim, a Palestinian village situated on the Green Line north of Al-Quds, were not made aware of this curfew. As they were returning to their homes at the end of the day, forty-eight villagers were shot to death: nineteen men, six women (one of whom was pregnant), and twenty-three children. The youngest victim was eight years old. But I had better let Darwish tell the story:

The olive grove was once green;
It was! And the sky was
A blue forest; it was!
What has changed it tonight?

They quietly stopped our truck
at the curve of the road
and quietly turned us East.

My heart was once a blue sparrow;
It was! And your handkerchiefs were all white, my beloved.
What had soiled them tonight?
I don't understand.

They quietly stopped our truck
and quietly turned us East.

For you I have everything:
Both shade and light,
And a wedding ring
And even an orchard of fig trees.

And tonight I'll come through the window
And bring you jasmine.
Don't blame me if I'm late;
They always stop me on the way.

They quietly stopped our truck
and quietly turned us East.

The olive grove was always green.
It was, my beloved.

But tonight
 The blood of fifty victims
 Has turned it into a red pool.
 Please don't blame me if I can't come;
 They've murdered me, too.⁴

The Armistice Line didn't hold. In 1967 Israel forced the second mass expulsion of Palestinians from their land. This is called al-Naksa in Arabic, meaning 'the setback'. The name positions it as the follow-up to al-Nakba in 1948, the second in a series. It also carries the faith that this series of disasters was coming to an end. The first was a catastrophe, but the next one was only a setback—by this point, there was an organized resistance movement fighting to maintain the homeland, and they sought to reassure people that 1967 was only a setback. With unceasing resistance, soon, this nightmare must end.

The irony is painful. 1967 was not a mere setback to an ultimately successful resistance movement. It was the moment when Israel took military control over all of Palestine. Their hold was not uncontested—in Palestine, the resistance remained strong. But as the state of Israel tested the strength of the rules governing their occupation laid down by the UN in 1947, they found no resistance. The UN did not act to stop their project to ethnically 'cleanse' all of Palestine. No international body stepped up to defend the partition plan or the remaining rights of Palestinians within the part of their country kept for them by the UN partition plan. To the leadership of the Israeli military, this was a green light. No one moved to rectify the human rights abuses and the illegal territory grab the military committed in 1967, and they knew the limits of the UN plan would not be enforced. They could act with impunity.

4 Mahmoud Darwish, "Victim #18", *Splinters of Bone*, trans. B.M. Bennani, New York: 1974. 25-26.

So they did. One historical account describes how easily the military found cause to kill unarmed civilians: “A great many of these wretched people are killed now, picking their own oranges and olives just beyond the [armistice] line... If the Jewish patrols see him he is shot on the spot, without any questions. But, they will persist in returning to their farms and gardens”⁵. This was before the construction of the apartheid wall, when barrier was only a fence which people determined to return to their homes would risk their lives to climb.

Al-Nakba saw the insurrection of the Jewish state and the displacement of some 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, but the war was not over in the the eyes of the Israeli state until all of Palestine was theirs.

In the hours before dawn of June 5th, 1967, Israeli soldiers began the next phase. By June 11th, Israeli troops occupied the Gaza strip, Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. They launched the initial attack on the early morning of June 5th against Egyptian air forces bases. Their goal was to prevent Egyptian planes from defending the Gaza strip. The military attacked East Jerusalem the next day, June 6th. After Jerusalem fell, the rest of the West Bank came under attack, including Bir Zeit. Israeli forces occupied the Syrian region of Golan Heights shortly after. This war was begun to pick up where the 1948 war left off—with the occupation of Jerusalem especially. Upon the conquest of the old city of Jerusalem, the entire Moroccan Quarter was demolished. 100 Palestinian families were ordered out of their homes, and the neighborhood, more than 700 years old, was bombed and razed in order to create the Western Wall Plaza, so there would be convenient access to the wall for Jewish people to pray. During the

5 Public Record Office, FO 371/104778, Lt-Gen. Glubb, ‘Note on Refugee Vagrancy’, cited in Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, London: 2011. 98.

war and the following weeks 430,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes. Many joined the 1948 refugees in Syria and Jordan.

Naila lived in Bir Zeit for thirteen years. She was twelve when she and her family became part of the 430,000 fleeing Israeli occupation, two weeks before her thirteenth birthday.

Chapter one

My mother gave me my first book of poetry. It was called *A Maze Me: Poems for Girls*, by Naomi Shihab Nye. This was my first encounter with free verse, and I spent hours reading the poems and imitating the form. My mother knows how to pick books for people. The poems expressed something about growing up that I felt and didn't yet have the words for. Nye became one of my favorite poets just a few hours after I opened that book.

There was a small author's biography in the back pages, with a photo of Nye and a few short paragraphs about her life. When I was in fourth grade I opened books to their tables of contents and read on from there, and closed them without reading the back matter. It was about two years until I glanced at the biography page. I had seen a book—a novel, not poems—called *Habibi* sitting on my middle school library shelf with the same name on the cover, Naomi Shihab Nye. *Habibi*, meaning “my love”, is one of those words you can't help but learn if even just a handful of your distant relatives speak Arabic. It is like signal flare for all the Arab Americans and their children and their children's children, who grew up estranged from the culture and the language but can recognize the most important words. To me, it was a secret message from my favorite poet on growing up, saying, “Hello again! I write about this part of your life too.”

The novel was about a family like mine on their way back home, to meet the father's parents. A young girl and her brother, who grew up in Texas in the 60s and 70s with an American mother and a Palestinian father. I had not yet been. In fact, Seido's Palestine, with all of its olive and orange trees and rooftops and salty sea breezes, which I knew all about from his stories of growing up, seemed about as likely to me as Narnia. The way that Seido talked about it, one

would think the whole place evaporated into thin air when the Israelis arrived. First Haifa, with all of its donkey carts and fruit groves, gone in a puff of smoke as they fled eastward in 1948. Yabrud and Birzeit were disappeared almost twenty years later, and he did not flee this time, but fought until he was pushed out. You could practically see it—he and his brothers-at-arms cross the Jordan, and Palestine is pulled away, like a star being swallowed by a black hole. But it still existed, and someone could get on a plane and fly there. Naomi did it. I asked my father about it. Three years later, he took us back to meet his family. I packed *Habibi*, which I had never returned to the library.

The author's biography in my first book of free verse told me Nye had grown up sort of like me. Nye's father had come to America many years before ours had, but he was a grown man, leaving his mother and father behind. They remained living in a village in the West Bank called Sinjil. It is smaller than Bir Zeit and bigger than Yabrud, and not very far from either of them. I put an aerial photo of Yabrud side by side with one of Sinjil, to compare our histories. Both are ringed by terraced hillsides full of old olive trees, and in both pictures there is a wide road crossing through the northeast corner of the photo. It is the same road, if you follow it north from Yabrud you will come to the village of Nye's father.

It was not long after I returned from our summer meeting Papa's family that I found another book of hers in a used bookstore. This was free verse again, and all of the poems were about Palestine. It was called *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, but I can't remember a poem about any place but Palestine in the whole book.

Her father, who I had met first in *Habibi*, reappeared in these poems. He spoke odes to the fig tree in the backyard of the house in Texas and I remembered my father carefully

harvesting and curing the first three olives that ever fruited on that twiggy little olive tree we'd planted when we built our house. It never fruited more than eight or nine olives a year, to be honest. Tomales is no place to grow an olive tree. But in Abu Dis, when I spent the fall in university housing over the student dental clinic, where there were olive trees growing in the margins of every street and parking lot, did I see an olive harvest then. I wished Papa's tree had grown like that, handfuls of ripe black olives falling out of the branches with every breath of wind and littering the streets.

Nye also had an uncle called Mohammad (you would be hard-pressed to find a Muslim family without any Mohammads in it). Hers had stayed in Palestine when his brother left, and he was a recluse who hardly ever came down from the mountain. I thought back through every mountain I had seen in Palestine, driven up, walked around, or driven past between towns. Where was Mohammad's mountain? Maybe I had seen it on our way up to Jenin. He was the wise man in her poems, so it would be worth finding.

Suddenly, upon finding *Habibi* in the library, my sisters and I were not anomalies. We were part of a pattern. Her poems on Palestine were where I first encountered the word "diaspora". Now the pattern had a name.

The fall after our trip to Palestine, my sophomore English class was assigned to write a ten-minute persuasive speech. I wasn't a strong speaker by any stretch, but we were given complete freedom over the topic and I knew that if I chose something that mattered I would be less inclined to chicken out. I used all the rhetorical strategies in the book, and I borrowed from my experience in Palestine that summer and the news reports I had been reading since I was able

to read. This was my first attempt at understanding my family's history through an academic lens, but I was confident that I already knew the matter inside and out. For ten minutes, I explained to my classmates about the injustices happening in Palestine, the systems in place which upheld the occupation (our own government among them), and why it was imperative that we take action.

My solution? Don't buy Sabra hummus.

It was a wasted opportunity. I had a captive audience, and I diligently appealed to their senses of pathos, ethos, and logos. I had many of them convinced, by the end of my speech, that there was no moral ground on which the occupation of Palestine could stand. But even as I begged them to act against it, I couldn't see how.

Every time I picked up a newspaper, for longer than I could remember, I would scan the pages for the word Palestine (and reluctantly, Israel, which was easier to find). Sometimes, I would find it on the front page. Usually I would see it tucked into a corner of page B4 in the "World" section. I scavenged papers for the news of my father's homeland, looking closely for some hint of better times on the horizon.

There was a lot said about the promise of the two-state solution, and who was I to say differently? The wall made it hard to conceive of as a solution, but this was the only path to peace that was given any credence in the papers I read. I understood 'peace' as the return of Seido's Palestine. Replanting the trees he remembered. Of course this was the goal.

But with everything I knew, and everything I had read, I couldn't see how to get there. Finally I lit upon the BDS campaign. The aim was to end the occupation, which was vague but

certainly something I wanted. But they had specifics where I needed them, which was regarding the question of what can *I*, as an individual, do to counter this occupation?

Don't buy Sabra hummus.

I'm broadbrushing. The BDS campaign in fact offers very little advice to the individual seeking to act alone. The reason, as I later discovered, is that there is very little that an individual can do besides find some others to team up with and act collectively.

BDS, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, is a series of actions that were put to very effective use against the apartheid regime in South Africa during the nineties. Adoption of BDS policies was widespread—institutions such as national governments, churches, universities, professional associations and many more divested from companies that supported apartheid, engaged in boycott of apartheid products, apartheid universities, films and performers who condoned apartheid, and so on. Governments imposed economic sanctions on South Africa until the end of apartheid. The success came from mass support.

In tenth grade, searching for a way to fix this all by myself, I distilled the movement down to individual actions. We in America are consumers, and consumers can vote with their dollar, so it goes. Sabra hummus is made on occupied Palestinian land, so I asked my classmates to change their consumer practices and refuse to put their dollars into this occupation. Not a bad idea, but not enough.

I first visited Palestine with my family, and the trip was during a relatively calm summer. It was calm in Palestine, anyhow, but this was the summer of 2011, and if it weren't for all the walls, we would have been within a day's drive of Egypt. Tahrir Square was alive with young

Egyptians and their revolutionary wishes for a better world, an Egyptian government that responded to their cries. All of April and May, as I anticipated our trip, newspaper headlines told of the new developments in the uprising that was sweeping the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Would it turn the corner?

We all wondered what would come of it, and we all had high hopes. I wanted to fly to Cairo. I looked up the flight from Amman, and told my dad it was very affordable. “We could just visit for a week?” I thought I was being reasonable.

“It’s cheap because no sane person wants to go there,” he told me, and Siti agreed. But we sat around her kitchen table talking about the Arab Spring for hours while we planned the details of our trip, and for once my mother didn’t complain about having the TV on, she was fixated on the subtitles of the Al Jazeera program.

By now, the dust has settled and new despots have replaced most of the old ones. Naila blames American involvement, and says that Egypt was better off before the uprising. Now, their leader is all too happy to work with the Americans and the Israelis, which always spells trouble for Palestine. He doesn’t seem to be any good for Egypt either.

But that summer, before anyone knew how things would turn out, Naila’s kitchen table saw the birth of many hopeful plans.

“You can see Cairo afterwards,” she told me. “Now, your father’s right. It’s too dangerous. We’ll go back in a few years.”

I wanted to see the revolution. Siti wanted to see the better world everyone was hoping for. In the end, I agreed. It would be better to visit Cairo after Mubarak was gone, and see the country with a new leader and new life. It isn’t happening like we thought it would.

And the Arab Spring never made it to Palestine.

Partly, I was relieved—I knew if protests broke out there would be violence from the Israeli troops, and if there was any violence before we got on the plane, Papa would have canceled our trip. But I wanted all the hope and revolutionary dreams we had for Egypt for Palestine too. My secret hope was that newspaper headlines would spell calm when we boarded the flight, which was about 20 hours total, with a layover in New York (none of us had been to New York before, but we didn't quite have enough time to leave the airport) and thirteen hours to Amman. In Amman, his phone wouldn't work until we got into the city and he found a phone shop where he could buy a SIM card, which would take two hours at least—plenty of time for the youth to take to the streets of Ramallah. And once we were there, I thought, he would see reason. We would join them immediately.

I thought a movement happening simultaneously in many nations throughout the Arab world would be powerful enough, and momentous enough, to throw off the shackles of the Israeli occupation. Strength in numbers.

In hindsight, I'm not so sure. But I spent a peaceful summer getting to know my father's family and his land. Certainly, it could have gone worse.

We arrived at the King Hussein bridge around noon, after an earlier start that turned into an extravagant breakfast and a not-very-late start. Amjed and Bahaa', two of my father's cousins who live in Amman, were joining us for our trip to Palestine. Their parents were staying in Amman, and we did not rush the goodbyes. Amjed and Bahaa' had Palestinian citizenship, given to them by their mother. Their father, Ibraheim, had lost his when my grandmother had lost hers, in 1967, as they crossed the river in the bed of a stranger's truck. Najwa, their mother, had

stayed. She only left Palestine years later, when she was engaged to Ibraheim, and she left on a visa with her citizenship intact. This means her children can go to Palestine and stay as long as they want, and I envy them enormously for that—but there are plenty of strings attached. They have green ID cards, marking them as Palestinian. Citizens of Israeli-occupied land, but not citizens of Israel.

The difference was made clear as we reached the bridge. Ibraheim drove us to the first checkpoint, where we all got out of the car. He got out too, helped us with our luggage, and hugged us all and kissed his cheeks. “Don’t get in any trouble,” he told Bahaa’, his youngest, with only a hint of pleading in his tone.

The soldier at the first checkpoint asked to see our passports. Israeli citizens with blue IDs, like the man in front of us, got into sedans and were driven over the bridge to the Passport Control office. Foreigners, like us, got onto large tour buses. And Palestinians like Amjed and Bahaa’ got onto separate tour buses. We waved to them as we parted ways. Though they had been on this bridge many times before, and knew what to expect, no one had warned us. We thought we would see them again in half an hour or so, as we collected our luggage and resumed our journey to Yabrud—Mapquest said the drive from Amman to Ramallah was just a handful of hours.

We sat on the bus without moving for easily four hours. It was the hottest part of the day in the valley of the Jordan river. The irrigated banana groves out the windows to our left were thriving. The people crowding the non-air-conditioned buses were not.

We each had a full bottle of water—my mother hadn’t known about the extensive wait at the bridge, but she knew plenty about road trips with four kids, and she had come prepared. The

woman across the isle, also visiting Palestine for the first time, had not. She was a bit younger than my mother, and able to cope with the pounding heat, but her mother who sat next to her, dressed all in black and older than Naila, did not look well at all.

“She’s sweating like crazy. Mama?”

The response was too quiet for me to hear from my seat. My mother handed her daughter a water bottle, and she drank it sip by sip, making it last for two hours. When they finally let us off the bus, it took her daughter and my mother both to help her down the steps.

We put all of our luggage on conveyor belts to be x-rayed, and brought our passports up to the window, where we stood in a single-file line. My dad went first, and when it was his turn, the man holding his passport asked him a litany of questions.

We had been prepared for this part. I knew every question the man asked my dad before he said it. I had my dad’s answer memorized. We had spent two hours practicing for this interview the night before.

“Why do we have to know all this? Can’t they just ask you, Papa?” Finn said.

“They are going to ask me. And then they’re going to ask me again, and a third time, and then they’re going to ask you. And all of our answers have to be the same.”

So we had them by rote by bedtime.

“Where are you from?”

When it was my turn, I said “California.”

“And where are your parents from?”

“My mom is from California and my dad is from Jordan,” I told him.

“And where is his father from?”

“From Haifa.”

“And what is the purpose of your trip?”

“To see the country.” (We promised Papa not to call it Palestine.) “And to visit family.”

“Where is your family?”

“Mostly in Yabrud. Also some in Ramallah and Bir Zeit.”

“Are you going anywhere else on your trip?”

“Yes. We’re going to see the Mediterranean and we want to visit Jerusalem and Bethlehem too.” (Naila had insisted that we add Bethlehem, because they like Christians, she said. My mother agreed, and said besides, we should pick up some souvenirs from the Church of the Nativity for Marcy, our next-door neighbor who taught us about the Christmas Story.)

The interview was repetitive—he sent me back to the waiting area, still holding my passport, and ten or fifteen minutes later a woman came to get me. We sat in a nearly identical office and she asked me the same questions in a different order. My answers, which I had practiced carefully, did not change.

One by one, they processed my siblings, my parents, my grandmother, and my aunt. We each collected our passports, visas now attached, and sat waiting in the plastic chairs outside of the interview room, scanning the lines of people for any sign of my dad’s cousins. It had been about five hours since we had parted ways on the other side of the bridge, and we had no idea when they would be let through.

My older sister, Maya, received her visa last. We gathered up all of our luggage and followed my dad out the door of the passport control office, where he found a taxi to bring us to the rental car lot in Jericho. The sun was low in the west but the air in the valley was still hot and

muggy, and we were tired. The road trips we were used to were fast-paced. We were always moving, cruising down the interstate in the left lane. We were used to long trips—we'd driven all the way to North Carolina and back one summer—but we weren't used to all the waiting.

We packed the car, leaving room for Amjed and Bahaa's luggage, and went to a cafe to wait for them. We each got a coffee except Finnian, the youngest. He got a cold Coke. We sat out front because the cell signal was better, and Papa wanted to know if his cousins tried to contact him. He hadn't had any reception on the bus, and we assumed that the boys didn't either, so we had to wait until they got into the passport control office.

We bought a large water bottle from the man at the cafe counter, since we'd finished all our water on the bus, and we waited in the shade of the building while Papa paced up and down the sidewalk in front of us. Just about sunset, he got a text from Bahaa'. They were finally off the bus, and he said he'd keep us posted.

It was finally beginning to cool down to a manageable temperature when Amjed and Bahaa' were cleared to enter and we drove around to pick them up. We'd left Amman in the morning and driven just a few hours to the bridge—less than half the time we spent waiting in the July heat for our Palestinian cousins to be allowed into their country. Finally, hours after sunset, we were leaving the bridge and hitting the road again. I could've complained, but I was just glad our party was intact. There was the nagging fear that Amjed and Bahaa' would not be allowed through, despite their ID cards. It wasn't until they were smashed together in the passenger seat of the rented car with their suitcases in the trunk and Jericho in the rear-view mirror that we felt sure we would be allowed to visit Palestine as a family.

The drive wasn't long, but I was dozing off by the time we could see Ramallah's lights in the distance. I shook myself awake as we pulled into Yabrud. We were staying at Abdul Raouf's house—my grandfather's brother. Abdul Raouf and his wife Shamia were staying with family in Chico, California, and had told us to make ourselves at home. There was a patio in the front, with a flower garden and a plum tree on the right, which I could see in the faint bluish light from the porchlight of the house next door. There was an enclosed front porch and a double metal door, which stuck at first and then made a horrible grating sound as my dad pushed it open. Because all of their children live in America now, Abdul Raouf and Shamia are often away for half the year, and the house is empty.

It felt very quiet as we walked in single-file—my dad had only opened one side of the double door, and said he'd ask his uncle, a mechanic in Bir Zeit, for some oil for the hinges. We spread out, opening doors, flipping switches, and getting our bearings in the unfamiliar house. We found the bathroom and a bedroom, and a very strange second living room adjoining the porch. I found a staircase and bounded up to the roof. It had plexiglass water heaters and clotheslines, and I looked down and saw a trellis of grape vines in the back yard. The light was poor but I could see some fruit. I ran to the other side, to look out over the town, and saw that there were lights on in the windows of the house across the street. A small group of people was walking down the road in our direction, which I thought was a strange thing in such a small town at eleven at night.

"I found Indo-Mei!" called my mom from the kitchen, and I ran back downstairs to help find a big enough pot. We were all tired from the heat, and thought we'd go to bed soon, but I was too hungry to fall asleep right away, and so was she. So was everyone, it turned out, so we

made the whole package of ramen and decided we'd have to go grocery shopping in Bir Zeit first thing tomorrow. Luckily we found tea and sugar in the cupboards while searching for a pot, and we set them out on the countertop to get us started in the morning.

Before the water boiled, there was a knock on the door. My mother looked as surprised as I was, that someone would come to visit so late, but Naila did not seem fazed at all.

"Cleo, go let them in," she told my sister. Cleo went.

"Who?" said my mother.

"Just visitors. I had Wael text Toufahah. They're coming to say hi."

My mother looked horrified. I went into the living room to see who it was. My dad didn't recognize most of them, you could tell from his face, but they knew him on sight and three of the men tried to hug him at once. Naila recognized everybody, and greeted them happily with at least four kisses on each cheek. As she made her way around the room, she would grab the nearest sister and introduce us to whoever she was hugging just then, so I was only formally introduced to about a third of the relatives we met that night. The house was not empty or still any longer, but full of family and chatter. Naila was beaming, quietly reminding her son and daughter who everyone was. Ghada, who had been born in America, remembered everyone better than her older brother could, because she had gotten to visit once when she was a kid. My dad hadn't been back at all since he left as a child. One of the older women who knew English well was taking my mother around and introducing everyone to her. I ducked back into the kitchen where I found my older sister making tea.

"Could you go outside and look for some mint?" she asked me. I found the back door through the dining room, and there was another patio at the bottom of the back steps, this one

covered by the trellis of grapes that I had seen from the roof. It was beautiful, but it blocked nearly all of the light, and I found the mint growing on the far edge of the patio by picking a piece and smelling it.

I gathered a fat handful of short sprigs without counting them. I wasn't sure how many people there were in the living room, I only knew it was a lot, and there were men on the porch, too. After I had all the mint I thought we'd need, I picked a bunch of ripe grapes from above, and brought it all inside. My sister was spooning sugar into cups.

“I don't think that's enough cups.”

“Find me some more.”

I plunked my harvest onto a cutting board and looked through all the cupboards for a second set of cups. I found them in the back of the pots cabinet on a little shelf—count on Shamia to have backups.

We ate the grapes while the tea steeped and spat the seeds through a hole in the kitchen window screen.

Even though it was someone else's house, waking up the next morning after our impromptu housewarming party, I felt at home. I looked across the street and saw the house of relatives who we'd met last night. We weren't the only foreigners in a Yabrud that summer, our neighbors across the street had family visiting from Chicago. Two nights later, July fourth, we sat on the roof with them and watched fireworks light up the sky, courtesy of a wedding across the valley in Silwad.

It wasn't until college that I had the chance to stand against the occupation with a group of people who felt the same. I was always quick to offer my perspective and all the information I had on the matter to anyone who would listen, but I had no one to collaborate with outside of my own family. My friends were supportive, and many of my classmates and teachers were also, but most of the people I met knew very little about Palestine's history and the occupation. Everyone I met who felt strongly about the occupation felt strongly in the other direction—most of them had learned the Zionist version of history from their parents.

I joined a group called Divest freshman year, and one night a week I sat around a table with ten or fifteen other people who had come of their own accord to join forces and work against the occupation. Our goal was to get the college to pull its investments from any companies which profited off the occupation—Boeing, and Halliburton, for example. We set up tables and handed out flyers to raise awareness, and got hundreds of signatures for our petition, and I finally felt like I could see a way out of this, even if it wasn't moving nearly fast enough.

After a meeting, while Aliya and I waited for the shuttle, I leaned in to read the sticker on the back of her laptop. "Imagine Palestine After Liberation" printed on a floral watercolor with a wavy blue backdrop. I asked Aliya if she'd ever been. She has one passport, it is from Lebanon, her father's country. So no. She is not allowed. I wanted to ask her what she imagined when she thought about Palestine, particularly after liberation. Instead I told her when we liberate it, she can see it for the first time without any occupation. With a laugh, she told me to hook her up with any eligible Palestinian boys I knew who had American citizenship.

I imagined many things, before I went there. The wide and fragrant orange groves in Haifa that Abdul Kareem, my grandfather, spoke of are not there anymore. Were they ever?

Mostafa Elostaz, my professor at Al-Quds University, asked me if my grandfather had told me piles of lies about the “old country”. I wish I could answer him. I will never see the Haifa my grandfather told me about, so I will never be able to verify his truths and his lies. When I imagined Palestine, I imagined the smell of orange blossoms on the salty wind. Now, I can see it in my own memories, and I remember the smell of burning garbage that no government will properly dispose of. I want to know what will happen to the garbage after liberation.

I have never seen Palestine in the spring. Summer, fall, and winter, yes. When I picture free Palestine, I picture it in the spring. What about Aliya? Does she see herself standing on top of tall building in the old city, three generations of her family restored to their home, one on top of another? Climbing jasmine vines perfuming the night air? Does she see piles of rubble where the wall stood? I don't think she sees the smoke from burning garbage heaps.

Chapter two

Wael, my father, was six when he got off the plane in San Fransisco with his mother Naila, and Aboud, his little brother. He hadn't seen his father for four years. Abdul Kareem left Jordan while his wife was pregnant with Aboud. When he met them at the airport, he saw his second son's face for the first time. Wael ran towards his father immediately upon spotting him, and leapt into Kareem's waiting arms. Aboud stayed by his mother's side as Kareem strode towards them with his oldest son in his arms, beaming. Abdul Kareem put Wael down and kissed his wife for the first time in four years. Then he knelt in front of her and looked Aboud in the eyes and called him "my son" for the first time, before scooping him up into a hug. Naila had tears in her eyes. So did Kareem. But my dad could not stop grinning. Aboud's face was red from all of the kisses his father planted on his cheeks, to make up for the first three and a half years in which he hadn't kissed his son at all.

They put all of the luggage into the trunk of the car and drove south to Daly City, a suburb of San Fransisco. They could see the Pacific Ocean as they drove out of the city, and the boys in the backseat began shrieking in excitement. Naila cranked her window down so they could smell the salty wind, and smiled at her husband. Abdul Kareem had lived near the sea for the first few years of his life, until Haifa had been occupied in 1948, and he was glad to be near the coast again.

Naila had grown up a two-hour walk from Abdul Kareem's house in Palestine, but they didn't meet until three years after the 1967 war forced her parents to take their children and leave their beloved home in Bir Zeit for a town called Mufrak on the other side of the Jordan River.

The town of Bir Zeit gets its name from the surrounding hills, which are covered in olive trees. Pressing the fruit into oil is one of the primary occupations within the town during the season of harvest. The fall in Bir Zeit is bustling—the whole family, even young children, spend days in the orchards. Deft young boys boast about who climbs the highest and the fastest. There are hearty picnics under the olive trees as everyone takes a break to drink tea and eat their fill. The olives are caught in cloths spread in the grass and loaded into carts.

Naila grew up in Bir Zeit. She was born in the town in 1954 and lived there until she was almost thirteen, except a few summers which she spent inside the walls of the old city of Jerusalem, living with her grandmother. All of this was called Palestine, though it wasn't all that was called Palestine. The coins she counted when she went out to buy coffee and flour and watermelons brought down from Jenin in the summer were Jordanian dinars, but not even the king of Jordan, living on the other side of the river, called it Jordan or anything but Palestine (some old men still called it al-Sham, and some still do, but it is understood that Palestine is part of bilad al-Sham). There was a fence separating the West Bank, including the city of Jerusalem, apart from the rest of Palestine.

Naila never went to the fence, but she said that she has heard you could stand up against it and see through, and touch the fingers of people you knew who had gotten stuck on the other side. There were never any permits, however. If you knew anyone on the side of the fence that had been occupied in 1948, you would not be able to visit them. You would not be able to return to your old home for a day trip, if you had been forced to leave in 1948.

Naila's father ran an auto shop in Bir Zeit. Her mother had her days filled by eight children, and the work of raising them, feeding them, putting them through school, and maintaining the household.

Adnan, the third son, would take Naila and Ibraheim out into the orchards on long and dry summer nights, where they would build campfires and lay on blankets on the grass looking up at the stars. They brought fruit and hard boiled eggs to eat, as well as bread and tea and some pot to boil water in. Naila would reach into the fire and grasp a burning branch by the unlit end, and use it to rearrange the embers and create a fit bed of coals for the pot. Her hands were well-tempered by many hours at the stove, and she could lay them on a hot skillet without burning them. She and her brothers would make camp about an hour's walk from the town, far enough that they felt free from their parents eyes, and neighbors, and they could stir up all manner of trouble without adult intervention, but not too far from help in case there was real trouble.

Walking in the fields outside of Bir Zeit in recent years, this feeling of freedom and privacy is absent. In its place there are concrete sniper towers standing over the grassy landscape, sprouting small clusters of cameras from their roofs and watching in every direction. Sometimes you can see the barrel of an automatic rifle in the narrow openings.

Naila's cousin Walid took us walking through the hills above the town when we visited. We parked near the university gates, but we didn't go in. We walked off the road into a field of tall grass. It was strewn with rocks the size of fruit crates and the only things growing were weeds. Naila and her cousin walked ahead of us—his legs were long and she moved quickly. They spoke in Arabic, in somber tones and low voices. Wael, my dad kept up with their stride but not their conversation. He interrupted often to ask for clarification, and Walid and Naila patiently

explained the unfamiliar words in Arabic. Both Walid and Naila speak English, and Wael is much more comfortable in English than in Arabic, but this was a private conversation. Walid was not comfortable having it in front of my mother. I heard little, and understood less. The topic, I think, was the land. Abdul Kareem's land in Yabrud, which was in the name of Naila and her children. None of them have Palestinian citizenship, not since 1967, and there is the looming possibility that it will be seized from our family for Israeli settlers, jeopardizing the safety of everyone remaining in Yabrud.

I made a game of hopping from rock to rock without touching the ground. I took the easiest path between them and ended up somewhat diverted from the rest of the family, eyes scanning the ground for rocks close enough to land on and not looking up. "Ta'ali, Juliet! Come back here!" Siti called to me from across the field. She jerked her head to point at something behind me, I turned around to see the tower looming out of the grass, closer than I had reckoned. I had seen it earlier, from the car. There was no missing it from the road, it stood in a dotted line of many others by the periphery of Birzeit University campus, like the rooks from a dozen chess sets. But I was forty or fifty feet from the base now and it was vastly more imposing up close. I didn't look for very long. If Siti wouldn't point at it, she feared it was occupied. I didn't want to catch a soldier's eye and find myself staring down the barrel of his gun. I hopped from the rock onto the earth beneath and ran to my grandmother. My sisters and I spent the rest of our walk glancing over our shoulders discreetly and wondering if we were being watched.

Naila's oldest two brothers, Mohammed and Maher, left the country in the sixties. Maher went to Kuwait, and Mohammed went to study at a university in Lebanon. While they were gone, calamity struck.

Naila had an uncle in Jordan, in the town of Mufrak, where she had never been. Her mother knew only her sister-in-law, no one else in Jordan. When they wrestled with the thought of leaving Palestine in June of 1967, Mufrak was the only place they could think to go. They did not know how long they would have to make their decision, or whether the borders would soon be closed off to all travelers, such as is the present situation in the Gaza Strip. Her parents decided to leave rather than face the possibility of never seeing their eldest sons again. They rode in the back of a truck, crowded in with many others fleeing Bir Zeit over the river, with all that they could squeeze into a bundled cloth or a suitcase, nothing else.

What was left behind? Naila and her siblings thought they might move back home in a few years, if things turned around. Maybe their parents already knew better. They left their home, everything too heavy to carry. They left their olive trees and grape vines and sheep in the care of family. Many Naila's aunts and uncles and cousins chose to stay. They left many loved ones behind. And they left anything that didn't seem important enough to bother with—what use were documents and papers and such things when men lay dead in the streets and the city of Jerusalem was under military occupation? There were foreign soldiers marching through Bir Zeit. Naila was worried about her grandmother, and her mother was worried too.

They were pressed close in the back of the truck and they were frightened. Naila had spent her last weeks at home listening to the sounds of automatic rifles, bombs, and roving tanks. The brothers and sisters squabbled with one another during the long ride to their new town, all

trying to act tough. Their mother was not fooled, she knew her children were scared. Naila turned thirteen on the twenty-first of June, sixteen days after the madness began. Gunshots still rang in her ears.

Her father opened an auto shop in Mufrak, the same work he had been doing in Bir Zeit. It wasn't quite starting from scratch, but he had gotten to know the people in Bir Zeit well, and also the particularities of all their cars. In Mufrak, his neighbors were strangers still, though many of the strangers were also refugees, from other parts of Palestine. It did not take him long to settle in, and work up a repartee with his new customers (and their cars).

In 1939, Abdul Kareem was born in Haifa, and spent the first nine years of his life in the family home on the Mediterranean coast. In 1948, his father Abdullah was shot to death by Israeli soldiers while walking home from the orange groves behind a donkey and a cart. The cart was full of oranges, and with the harvest would come some spare money, hopefully, which could be put away in a hidden jar for safekeeping. That was about as close as anyone could come to security in such volatile times.

The soldiers insisted Abdullah empty his cart on the pretense that he might be smuggling arms and ammunition under his crop of fruit. Who can say? Abdul Kareem did not stick around while the soldiers beat his father's body and laid waste to the crop of oranges. He ran all the way home to his mother in their house on the edge of Haifa and told her breathlessly of the terrible news. There were many tears and fearful wails and the remaining members of the family joined so many of their old neighbors and friends in the safer lands east of Al Quds.

The orange groves that colored every single one of Abdul Kareem's stories about Haifa are not there anymore. They have been replaced by dry dirt, pine trees, and houses with red-tiled sloping roofs. There are numerous ways that Israeli laws create an inhospitable environment for the Palestinians that remain among them, and laws that target their land and livelihoods are used very effectively. Take for example the laws regarding black goats. The law against keeping black goats, passed in 1950, was ostensibly to protect the environment, though it now is clear the environment benefits from the goats: increased fire danger that had followed directly from these laws, since there are no more goats to eat the flammable underbrush. 1977 marked the creation of the 'Green Patrol', not a part of the Israeli military, but as far as Bedouin residents of the Naqab and the land around Mount Karmel are concerned, it may as well be. In 1977, there were about fifteen thousand goats in Bedouin herds, grazing the undergrowth. In 2013, their number was about two thousand. Because of the Israeli-planted pines (another invasive species), the undergrowth is vast, dry, and perfect tinder. The goats which the Green Patrol had slaughtered were keeping this tinder in check. More importantly, the goats were a crucial component of Bedouin life in Palestine.

The Bedouin communities were not affluent before the onset of Israeli occupation, but the goats provided many resources which made their lifestyle possible. They were a source of protein-rich food in the form of milk and meat; they were a source of income, as extra milk and meat were sold; and the hides provided shelter, as many stitched together made a comfortable and portable home in the variable Palestinian climate.

The law against the goats was not an accidental attack on the Bedouin livelihoods. This is a recurring phenomenon, it has its roots in the original plans of the British Mandate and the

Zionist Organization to settle the desert lands south of Al Quds. Because of the resilience of Bedouin communities inherent to their transient lifestyle, they were able to remain in the Israeli-controlled part of Palestine despite the war of 1948, in which many of their Palestinian neighbors living in stationary towns saw their homes destroyed and were forced to move into the West Bank and Gaza. This law is an assault aimed specifically at Palestinian Bedouin communities, and the arable land is an accidental casualty.

The land surrounding Haifa in the 1940s looked very different from the dry patches of European pines that grow there today. Much of it was agricultural villages, and many of these have been razed to the ground in the years directly following 1948. Of the land that wasn't built upon, much of it was planted with oranges and limes and olives and apricots and a wide variety of other flora. Some of this grew wild and was not tended, and if it was harvested it was harvested occasionally by the Bedouins and by their grazing herds. Much of it was fruit trees tended by the local farming villages. These trees, planted and wild-growing alike, were torn up from the ground as well, and on top of the rubble, in all the places they could not yet build houses, Israelis planted European pines, which send thick roots down and tough branches up and made it impossible for returning Palestinians to rebuild their homes. Their needles shed from these trees leached acid into the soil and made it barren and inhospitable to the native flora and the common crops. It is no longer possible to grow oranges in much of the land around Haifa.

After his family fled the occupying army during al-Nakba, Abdul Kareem spent the rest of his childhood in Yabrud, a small farming village just up the road from Bir Zeit and north of Ramallah. Yabrud is at the top of a small mountain, or a large hill, terraced and planted with many olive trees, some of which today are too thick for a grown man to clasp his arms around.

Abdul Kareem's house was sat at the north edge of the town looking over a gentle slope, which was flat enough to grow wheat on. There was a small grove of fig trees between the house and the road, and whenever he went walking anywhere, he would take a few figs and put them in his pocket to eat on the road.

The road goes south only one way, and takes you to Ramallah. The northern road has two branches, one of which veers east to Bir Zeit. The other fork is a dead end. It actually connects up to the old road, which spurs from Yabrud in a straight line through the valley to the nearby village of Silwad. Abdul Kareem liked to walk to Silwad, because it would only take him about half an hour and they had a small store. Now, that road still exists, but you will never see anyone walking along it. At the second fork of the road going south, a tall concrete cylinder with cameras on top and small slits in the side to shoot from stands guard over the second fork. Only cars with yellow license plates (indicating that they belong to Israelis) are permitted to use this road, and they do not do so frequently. It is not a direct path from the settlement near Yabrud to any other settlement, and Israeli settlers have little interest in visiting Silwad or Bir Zeit. If they did, they likely would not walk. Now the road is mostly used by Israeli soldiers.

Naila had lived in Mufrak for three years when Abdul Kareem came to her home, looking for his mother's cousin. At this point, he had been stationed in Mufrak by the PLO. Her grandmother, who had come over to Mufrak to live with them, was the cousin he came looking for. A relative from back home had pointed him in her direction, possibly because of Naila, a granddaughter of marriageable age. Abdul Kareem was twenty-nine; it was high time he was married. The PLO pay was sufficient to support a wife and a small family.

Naila was sixteen, she says, and he finally tracked her grandmother down and came by to visit. “And he saw us, and we saw him, and that’s what happened.”

Growing up in Yabrud, Abdul Kareem knew much about Naila’s home. The village is twenty minutes from Bir Zeit by car, and the walking route is slower but more direct, if you are on friendly terms with all the families who own olive groves between Yabrud and Bir Zeit. Usually, he was.

Though he had spent a lot of time in Bir Zeit during his youth and his early twenties, she does not remember ever meeting him. She was young enough then that a man thirteen years older than her would have blended easily in to the crowd.

It was three years since Naila had left Palestine. From the shape her life had taken, and from the continued presence of the occupation, she knew she might never call it home again. Her new state, Jordan, had an uncomfortable relationship with the occupiers. The king of Jordan, King Hussein, was engaged in peace talks with Israel and the US. To the soldiers of the resistance—the PLO—and to many other Palestinians, “peace” under occupation meant surrender. Unmistakably this was the goal of the Israeli government. Palestine was under Israeli control, international law notwithstanding, and if the PLO guerrillas (“terrorists”) would only stop making such a scene, then Israel’s regime would be nicely established. Palestinians wanted peace, to be sure, but there would be no real peace while Palestine remained under Israeli control, only further occupation, further restrictions of autonomy, and further efforts to put all the land in Jewish hands in the name of Zionism. To Yasser Arafat and many other Palestinians, the decision of King Hussein to engage in these talks was a decision to turn his back on the Palestinians and surrender to US influence. He was a traitor.

There was a civil war, in 1970. At King Hussein's behest, the Jordanian military moved on Palestinian refugee camps on September 17th, after several planes were hijacked and forced to land by fighters from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Ceasefire came ten days later, by way of an agreement signed in Cairo. To the refugees, the PLO fighters were heroes, and the king of Jordan had confirmed which side he was on. It wasn't the Palestinian side.

Abdul Kareem married Naila that same year, in the town of Mufarak. He was twenty-nine, she was sixteen. When girls from important families were married in such circumstances, it was justified by political necessity. For Naila and Abdul Kareem, political urgency is part of what brought them together. It was a respectable marriage, of course. There was a family connection from back in Palestine, and he was a PLO soldier. Naila did well for herself, by that metric. And by the next metric—bringing young Palestinians into the world, to counteract the genocide being carried out by way of many Palestinian deaths and many more expulsions from Palestine—she did well, too. She had four children, and three of them were sons.

At age thirteen she had lost her home to a military occupation. Like Abdul Kareem, she felt compelled to fight back. But how does a sixteen-year-old girl living across the river in Jordan join in this struggle? Having Palestinian children is resistance.

Naila is not the only one to think so. A Jordanian woman who moved to Palestine and married a Palestinian man said, "I have produced two demographic threats to the nation of Israel," meaning her two children. That is indeed how Palestinian children are viewed by Israeli authorities. Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, in her book *Birthing the Nation*, quotes the first stanza of a famous poem by Mahmoud Darwish: "Write down, I am an Arab!/ Fifty thousand is my [ID] number/Eight children, the ninth will come next summer/Angry? Write down, I am an Arab!

(Lustick 1980:11)”⁶. The poem was published in Arabic in 1964, and it was subsequently adopted as a song of resistance, heard widely. The idea that having Palestinian children would anger and threaten the Israeli state was pervasive and it was well-backed by Israel’s policy of pronatalism only as far as Jewish families were concerned:

The contradiction between Zionist goals and social goals was made clear by the fate of the Ben-Gurion prize awarded to every woman delivering her tenth child. Created in 1949 to stimulate Jewish natality, the prize was discontinued ten years later, and "one of the reasons was apparently that many Arab women received it" (Friedlander 1974: 57). In order to address this kind of counterproductive outcome, Ben-Gurion later proposed that pronatalist programs be managed by the nongovernmental Jewish Agency instead of the government.⁷

It was clear to Naila growing up that the occupiers did not want women like her having children. And therefore by having Palestinian children, she would contribute to the resistance. She had four. They were all Palestinian, though none of them were born in Palestine. That would not have been her choice, but many of her choices may have come out differently if it were not for the occupation.

There is also the question of her life. What about the rest of her adolescence? War ages you fast.

Her whole life had been touched by it. Until 1967, Palestinians in the West Bank lived under Jordanian rule, without the constant military presence, the checkpoints or the midnight arrests. But Abdul Kareem was not the only displaced person who frequented the town of Bir Zeit. Naila knew many, and she knew their stories. Stories which, like Abdul Kareem’s,

6 Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birth of the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, University of California Press, 2002. Pg. 65.

7 Philippe Fargues, “Protracted National Conflict and Fertility Change: Palestinians and Israelis in the Twentieth Century”, *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, September 2000. Pg. 458.

contained gruesome and tragic murders, midnight attacks on homes full of sleeping children, stories of fleeing in the middle of the night, leaving behind everything you cannot carry, and scattering to the wind. Stories of family members and friends who were never heard from again. Stories of people who were not heard from for years, only to be discovered in a refugee camp in Lebanon, from where they could never return, and where Palestinians could not go even to visit them.

Until the Naksa. Now, her life was one of these stories. Her family and friends had scattered to the wind. Some had stayed behind. Some were now buried. Growing up in an occupied land had shaped her childhood. Growing up as a refugee had shaped her adolescence. The occupation rushed her into adulthood with the weight of a nation in her womb, and her life was shaped by this responsibility.

When we talk about it, Naila defends her parents' decision to leave Palestine in 1967. "They felt guilty because they moved," she told me. But they had to. In 1948, anyone who had stayed in their homes when the land was occupied became isolated. They were cut off from their family and friends. No one could visit; there was no such thing as a permit to visit then. She told me (she never had never seen it, she had heard) that there was a fence between the Israeli-occupied land and the parts of Palestine under Jordanian control in the years between 1948 and 1967. Families who had been separated in the war could go to the fence and see one another, but they could never be together again.

In 1967, her parents Yisra and Rubin had a son working in Kuwait and another studying in Lebanon. Rubin had a brother in Mufarak, Jordan.

On June 7th Israeli soldiers occupied Al-Quds, and Naila's grandmother stayed inside with the shutters closed tight while she listened to the gunfire in the streets below. The next day, they came to Bir Zeit. Naila's mother and father had a choice to make. The stakes were high, and they didn't have long to deliberate. Their neighbors were fleeing in droves—any truck driving east was hailed down for a ride to Jordan, and safety. Many people in Bir Zeit were choosing to stay. Naila's cousin Nejwa and her family locked their doors and kept away from the windows, and didn't leave. Her grandmother stayed put in her home in Al-Quds. They risked isolation, separation from any loved ones who left. Many had already been separated from their family or from dear friends in 1948, although Naila hadn't been born then, and had grown up never knowing these people.

Yisra and Rubin chose to leave.

“But it never happened,” Naila said, the isolation they had feared. The borders of Gaza are sealed tight right now, and they have been for many years. But the West Bank is not under siege in such a way. People can visit. “Visit, only.” she pointed out, “Like me and you, how we went to visit.” We visit with American passports and three-month tourist visas.

Yisra and Rubin had instead consigned themselves to a different type of isolation. They were separated from their home, from their land. They could go back for brief visits, and see their family again, but they would never be able to live in their home. Their children would not grow up in Bir Zeit, and their grandchildren would hardly know the place. Most of their family remained scattered about Palestine—many relatives in Bir Zeit, many in Al Quds, many in small villages. Some, who they hadn't seen for twenty years, had remained in their homes in 1948 when the western parts of Palestine were occupied.

Beyond the pain of having left their home with no possibility of return, there was the pain of having abandoned their nation. Palestine was caught up in a struggle for its very existence. Palestinians were being forced from their land in great numbers, and the only way to prevent the whole nation from being lost to the occupation was for them to resist. The PLO resisted by meeting the Israeli army with the same type of force. Others resisted simply by staying put. Every Palestinian that left Palestine was a victory for Israel. And every Palestinian woman who stayed and gave birth to more Palestinian children was a threat. Naila and her family numbered among those that left, and her parents felt guilty that they hadn't been willing to risk their connection to their sons and stay, for Palestine and for their home.

But Naila understood. She defends their choice—and what kind of a choice is it, really? What parents could say they would risk the possibility of never seeing their sons again? They gave up their house and everything in it, save for some blankets and some clothes to wear. They gave up their land, their life with all their relatives nearby, because they were not willing to lose their sons.

Chapter three

I planned to interview Naila for the second time on a Thursday in January. The day before, the police had come to her house, asking for her son.

She explains to us, “They found a gun in Santa Rosa. A robbery, they thought it was his gun. And of course, he wasn’t here.” She took another drag. “They asked me, ‘You know Mohammed Yasin?’. I said, ‘Yes, I know him. What’d he do?’”

She pauses, giving us time to laugh. Mohammed, her youngest son, is the family troublemaker. It isn’t her first visit from the cops on his account. “‘He have a gun?’, I said ‘Yeah.’ I’m not going to tell them he has more than *a* gun.”

We laugh again, because it’s funny, but it is clear now that she is shaken, and we are nervous to hear how this story ends.

She tells us piece by piece. “I called Hammed at work. Thank god, he answered. You know, sometimes he doesn’t answer. I said, “Mohammed, where’s your gun?! Your handgun, you got it from Wael. They found your gun in Santa Rosa!”

He protested, he was sure they did not. It was in the lock-box under his bed. The police followed Naila through her house, into her son’s bedroom. She knelt by his bed with him on speakerphone, but a policeman immediately intervened and told her to stand aside. (“It’s not loaded!” Mohammed told them through the phone.) He told them the code, and the gun was just where he had said.

On their way out the door, the cops explained that the serial number had been rubbed off, and it was impossible to be sure if the last digit was a six or an eight. Mohammed's gun had ended with an eight.

My sister glances at me uneasily. It was hard to imagine Mohammed, reckless as he can be, getting caught up in something quite like this. But the police had come into the house, which made this a close call regardless of what had actually happened. Naila felt the same way, it is evident from the tightness of her posture today and the fact that she hasn't put the e-cig down at all since coming inside.

I arrive at Naila's house for our interview in my sister's car. She is sitting on the porch steps with her e-cig. She uses it inside, but she keeps her habit of smoking a morning cigarette on the front porch even since she has quit smoking paper cigarettes. It was always as much about the fresh air and the morning sun as it was about the smoke.

Her tension is evident, but I don't pick up on it right away. She explains about the cops and Mohammed's gun comes later, over tea.

Inside a pan of olive oil is on low heat, and it hisses as she scrapes a sliced onion into the pan. Orange lentils are soaking in a dish on the counter.

I grab one of three tea kettles from a drawer. Small, medium, and large, for different numbers of guests. The small one is plenty ample for Naila, my sister and I. As I look for the tea and the sugar in her deep cabinets, she explains to us how she plans to have her kitchen redone. There is a bar, which she has found little use for—like many Muslims, she doesn't drink, and her sons politely leave their beers in the garage fridge—and she wants to have cabinets installed in the space behind the bar and turn it into a pantry. Then, the deep kitchen cabinets will be

exchanged for a wide counter. “So all of us can cook together!” My sister loves the idea, and we look at cabinets in a Home Depot catalog as she whisks the addas. We consider finishes. She prefers a dark, warm stain on maple wood, which is advertised as durable and easy to clean. My sister Cleo says her choice will compliment the stainless steel fridge and stove, which she had installed two years ago.

She’s old enough to retire, and with social security and the money she has saved, she would be able to live comfortably, but she keeps a full-time job at a grocery store nevertheless. She says she needs the money to provide for her children—the youngest of whom are in their thirties and all with jobs of their own—but she means she needs the money to treat her children and herself. She buys plane tickets and flies us to Jordan and to Palestine for special occasions, and she puts the rest into her house. Mostly, into the yard and the kitchen. Her bedroom is clean and comfortable, but nothing is very new. Her kitchen gleams. Her deck and vegetable garden are the gems of the neighborhood (though as her granddaughter I might be biased).

We eat our soup in the kitchen over the cabinetry catalogs. It is simple, she describes the process to us as she whisks the lentils into a pulp. Onion, halved lentils, broth, and a smattering of spices. No blender required.

I try following her recipe later, in my own cramped kitchen in New York. It doesn’t have the same smooth texture that hers always does. I think I lack her patience.

We have the soup first, then hot tea with sugar and mint.

Mohammed, calls her from work. They talk a bit in Arabic, too fast for me to pick up much. Her tone is a few breaths short of angry. She asks him where he was yesterday, in words I

recognize, and I glance at my sister to see if she knows why Mohammed is in trouble. She does not.

“Siti, what’s the matter?” she asks after Siti hangs up the phone, drags harshly on her e-cig.

“Didn’t your father tell you? The police came for Mohammad yesterday.”

“They what?! Siti, why?”

“For his gun.” We sit stunned as she elaborates.

I began in the same place we had left our last interview: the move to Jordan in 1967, al-Naksa. She was young, perhaps thirteen. Her sister was seventeen or eighteen. Naila finds it hard to nail down any dates, but that’s not unusual. It was all a long time ago, a long way away.

When Naila came to the United States for the first time in 1978, she needed her original birth certificate in order to get a visa. She didn’t have it. They had left all the papers behind, taking only clothes and blankets with them as they climbed into the back of a stranger’s truck and rode over the river and into Jordan. Her family had been living in Jordan for years when she applied for the American visa to join her husband in California, and her father had procured Jordanian papers for all of them. But the Jordanian birth certificate did not satisfy the American embassy, and it was her mother who went back over the river to retrieve the original record from an office in Bir Zeit. The record did not match the Jordanian paperwork—the birth date was two years earlier. Everything else was written in Hebrew.

Naila’s mother, Yisra, was not quite sure how come the birth date was different, and Naila is careful not to say which record is the accurate one, but the Hebrewized Palestinian certificate,

printed and stamped by the Israeli government, passed muster at the American embassy and Naila got her visa.

Despite how little they were able to bring with them, Naila's family knew the move was permanent as they prepared to leave. The fear that they would be imprisoned in Bir Zeit, the way that Palestinians who remained in Gaza are imprisoned now, drove them out. Naila's two eldest brothers were out of the country, one in Kuwait, one in Lebanon. Her parents fled with their younger children rather than risk permanent separation from their two oldest sons. In later years it became clear that their main fear hadn't been realized, but it was too late. They had lost their Palestinian citizenship when they left in 1967. Their only way back was through a visa, which could only be obtained with the right kind of passport and a lot of patience. It lasts three months.

Naila recalls her parents realizing that they could have stayed in Palestine without losing their sons. "They feel guilty, because they moved to Jordan...they wanted to stay in their home, they had a house, they had land, and they miss everything because they can't go back. To visit, only." It was not Naila's decision to leave, of course. She was thirteen, or so, and had that many years of experience growing up in post-Nakba Palestine to color her understanding of the Israeli occupiers, but relatively little historical information about them, or about the war in 1948.

Naila did not learn about the war in school at all. The school was run by Jordanians, of course, not Israelis, but the Jordanian king (which was Hussein at the time) was friendly with the Israelis and the Israelis did not want the war taught to Palestinians in school. It was taught in Israeli schools as a war of independence, but in Palestinian schools it was a "corruption", which could not be spoken of.

She did not learn about the war from her parents, who were living in Bir Zeit then, in the same house she grew up in. She says they didn't talk about it, it was just the way it was.

Her grandmother, who was at home in the old city of Al Quds when it began, shut the windows and locked her doors and waited it out. But Naila says she didn't hear very much about the war from her grandmother either.

It wasn't any great mystery. Of course, information about the war was all around her, contained in its aftershocks and remnant effects. She learned about the war by growing up in its choppy wake. Born five years later in 1954, occupied Palestine was the only Palestine she knew. She grew up a few hour's drive from the Mediterranean Sea, but never saw it, or put so much as a toe in its water until she was a widow, and an American citizen with an American passport.

She married a man from Haifa, Abdul Kareem. He was born before the war, and lost his family home and their land when they fled to Yabrud in 1948. He was six or seven when he first became one of the 700,000 displaced Palestinians who had been forced from their homes in the war in 1948. He in his mid-twenties when he left home to fight in a second war, and found himself stationed in Mufarak, in Jordan. This time, not a child refugee but a soldier fighting for his home. After Palestine lost the second war, he could not return.

Among other things, he lost his family name in that war, the one he had carried from Haifa. His identity had become a liability, and he had acquired a family of his own in Mufarak, or at least a wife, the children arriving somewhat after, and he could not give her a name which might put her in harm's way. Hadid became Yasin, and he left for America hastily at the end of the 1967 war, the Nakba, leaving his young wife with her mother until he could provide a home for her.

Abdul Kareem was never able to visit Palestine after that war, but by bringing his wife to America, he made it possible for her to return to her childhood home many years later. After his passing, she visited his own childhood hometown of Haifa for the first time. She knew no one living there, only the family that accompanied her on her visit. She saw Haifa, and the Mediterranean, for the first time in her life two years after her husband's death.

For the year before his death, my grandfather could not speak English. That is how Alzheimer's works. Things are forgotten in more or less the order they were learned. For two years, he could not remember my name. But I'd remind him I was his granddaughter, or let him remember me as some other relative from a past I knew little about. We could talk. I asked him about Naila, he remembered her well. He asked me about his fruit trees. He was too sick to leave his bed, so I went into the yard and came back with eskadinas for him when they ripened. And the next Sunday when I returned, he couldn't remember the word for 'outside' for half an hour, until my dad came in from the garage to translate for us. That night, Papa taught me to write my name in Arabic.

It happened very quickly, and before winter I could only sit by his bed and pick words out of his conversations with Naila, my dad, and his siblings. I learned more Arabic that year than I had learned in the first twelve years of my life combined, and I spoke as much of it as I could for Abdul Kareem, but if there was no one in the room to translate, he would fast forget my handicap and become frustrated when I wouldn't respond to his requests and his questions.

By the next winter, he lay in a white shroud, resting on his side with his face towards Mecca and six feet of dirt over him.

The funeral lasted a week, and it started three days before he died. The doctor came to the house to check on him and told Naila that his death was imminent. He used the phrase, “any day now.” So we packed our duffel bags and sleeping bags and pillows into the car and my mother called the school and got our classwork photocopied, and we moved into Naila’s front room. Abdul Kareem’s bed was in the other living room, the one which adjoined to the kitchen, so that she could be with him while she cooked. It was my mother’s intention that she should not cook while we were there, so that she could be at his side as much as she wanted. We all inserted ourselves into her kitchen and took instructions on how to make all of her usual dishes.

By the first afternoon, she had restored order and reclaimed her spot by the stove. As it happened, the funeral involved quite a lot of cooking, and even her daughter Ghada was too novice for the task. She had five very persistent sous chefs, but she ran the main project—food for the funeral guests, of course (they began showing up two days before Kareem’s death)—but also two enormous platters of cookies, and for once, we were forbidden to eat them.

“For his mosque,” Naila informed us. Ghada helped herself anyways, and no one mentioned it.

We made breakfasts and lunches. She intervened often, taking the knife from me and showing me exactly what size I was supposed to chop the garlic, and adjusting the flame on the stove every time my mother stepped away from it.

My mother was sure she would be happiest spending her last days with her husband by his bed, holding his hand. Not talking, he had lost most of his Arabic by now too. But with him.

“Siti, please, take a break. Let me do that! I can make the coffee,” Jessica insisted. It was American coffee, not Arabic or Turkish, so my mother made it every morning, and Siti was

satisfied with her coffee, but she found something else to keep busy with as soon as my mother had pried the coffeepot from her hands. She hosted a house packed with relatives beautifully, and conducted all the women in the kitchen like a Mozart symphony. But her hands shook whenever they weren't holding a sharp knife or a hot pan, and whenever there was a lull I would find her smoking on the back deck, pretending not to cry.

“Siti?”

“Habibti, what’s the matter? Are we out of oil?”

“No, nothing’s wrong. Are you okay?” I asked her.

“Of course, Siti,” she called me that sometimes, I guessed it made sense in Arabic. “It’s all the smoke in there, your aunt keeps burning the kubbeh.” She took a long drag, stubbed out her cigarette in the ashtray and ushered me inside ahead of her so she could turn on the oven fan.

“Ghada, go see if anyone needs coffee. I’m doing this,” she stated, and took the wire spoon for the kubbeh out of her daughter’s hand. Ghada said something angry in Arabic and stomped out of the room, and my mother handed me the coffeepot.

When the house was full of people and we had been there for a few days, my mother decided she needed a break. I also was yearning for just an hour to spend alone, so we drove to Tomales with my little brother, and told Wael we’d be back before dinner.

My mother got a text as we pulled into town, and turned around in the lot outside of the general store. We didn’t get out of the car, just drove two hours back to Novato. He passed as Naila was in their bedroom, washing up for her afternoon prayer. My dad, who doesn’t often pray, was at his side.

The next day, we went to Target and K-Mart and Marshalls and half the stores in Novato looking for black scarves that weren't sheer, without any luck. Exhausted, my mother drove her brood back to Target and we bought four grey scarves, one for her and one for each daughter, and decided grey would have to do. Everything else we wore to the funeral was black, anyways.

Papa had told us we were covering our hair for the funeral service, but he couldn't tell us how to do it. He didn't know. We spent fifteen frustrating minutes in the hall bathroom with our mother, experimenting in front of the mirror, but without success. Finally Ghada came home with her mother and easily fixed our hijabs. I was alarmed by the straight sewing pin stuck through the fabric inches from my ear, but it didn't become a problem.

We drove to the cemetery in separate cars, and arrived to see that Naila's hair was uncovered. It was usually uncovered, of course, but even Ghada had put a hijab on and Naila was the only woman there with her hair showing. But she wore a thin white scarf around her neck, and as the imam who came to pray over the grave got out of his car, she easily wrapped it around her head into a tidy hijab. Her hair, darkened by henna, shone through, but she wasn't worried about it. Abdul Kareem wouldn't have worried either, he knew who he had married.

Afterwards, we took them off in the car on the way back to Naila's house for tea and a meal with all of the mourners.

I did not see her outside of her house with a hijab on again until we went to the Dome of the Rock together, two and a half years later.

We flew in to Amman, and came to Palestine over the bridge. We were staying with family in Yabrud, the town Abdul Kareem had lived in after the Nakba, but we planned to visit Haifa since that had always been home, in his mind. Wael looked at hotels with his mother,

thinking it would be nicer if we could spend the night, take our time. In the end, we planned only a day trip.

We had avoided Qalandia, the main checkpoint in the wall and the crossing situated between Ramallah and Al Quds, because we had sat in the car for an hour on a hot Wednesday waiting our turn for inspection, and we knew better than to go near it on a Friday.

We took a north road out of Yabrud that morning in our rented Mazda with yellow plates. I hadn't seen much of Palestine yet, besides the routes between Ramallah and Bir Zeit and Yabrud. We'd driven in from Jericho, from the King Hussein Bridge, in the dark and arrived in Yabrud at 11 PM despite leaving Amman at daybreak. So I had seen little of the Palestinian countryside away from the cluster of towns where my family lived. In the daytime, the drive through the terraced hills of olives and the occasionally sweeping wheat field felt like driving through an illustration in a storybook. It took me an hour to recognize the story—it was one that my grandfather had told my siblings and I. Something about a kid walking up and down the terraces all day, between his mother in the house at the top of the hill and his father, down in the field below. To us as children, a story taking place in Palestine could have taken place in Never Never Land just as easily. I knew it was a real place, I knew of the political situation from my father. I had read a few books about Palestine before going to visit. But the drive through the terraces that morning brought all my scattered bits of information into sharp relief. The dreamy Palestine of stories was the same Palestine they talked about on NPR.

I was pulled abruptly from this dream when we arrived at the wall. Naturally, there was a checkpoint and naturally it was manned by soldiers with guns. It was a slow day at the crossing north of Tulkarm. There were two soldiers standing by the booth at the roadside, which looked

something like a tollbooth. There were a few more smoking at the curb in front of a small building. The guns were automatic rifles and my father recognized them on sight, called them by name. They hung on a greyish green strap from the shoulder of each soldier, dangling slack at their waists. As we drove nearer, one of the soldiers at the booth took his gun into his hands, kept the barrel to the ground. My mother shifted slightly so that her body was between the soldier and her son, our youngest sibling. My father put the window down.

The other soldier, the one whose gun remained slack on its strap, leaned down and said something to my father in Hebrew.

He responded, “Uh...what?”

“Oh. Passports, please,” she tried again.

He understood, and reached his hand into the backseat, where we promptly stacked all of our American passports. My sister asked me quietly if I thought they’d want to see her Jordanian passport too, and Naila turned around in her seat and shook her head sharply. So only the American passports were offered.

She asked my dad, “What is the purpose of your trip?” and flipped open his passport, on the top of the stack.

“I’m taking my family to the beach. We’re going to Haifa,” he responded.

She opened the next passport, Naila’s. “Who is she?”

“This is my mother.”

“What is her name?”

My dad had appeared relaxed up to this point, though we knew he resented this whole checkpoint business. But the question indicated that the soldier was suspicious. Things were not

going as smoothly as he hoped. His jaw tightened. He gripped the gearshifter, settled in park, like he was considering throwing it into gear and driving away. The woman with the gun held all of our passports, so of course we weren't going anywhere.

"Naila Yasin," he answered with as even a tone as he could muster.

"I need you to get out of the car."

My dad unlatched his door, but she pushed it closed from outside.

"Hold on. You have any weapons? A gun? For self-defense, maybe?"

He eyed her automatic rifle. "No gun. I have a knife in my pocket. For self-defense."

My mother put her hand over her face and Naila looked furious. The soldier put a hand on her gun.

"Stand up and turn towards the car." She opened his door, and when he stood with her back to him, she took his knife from the pocket of his Carhartts. She handed this off to a soldier who had been smoking at the curb. Their cigarettes were all put out now. He took the knife and indicated that my dad was to follow him. We watched Papa follow the soldier into the small building, and none of us spoke. Naila was white as a sheet.

"You all get out. Take your bags, go in there." Around me, the car suddenly buzzed with movement. I had fixed my gaze on the door that shut behind my dad. I saw a soldier bringing a sheepdog on a harness from another door. "Get out now!" she repeated.

"Juliet!" my mother's voice startled me, and I turned around to find the barrel of an automatic rifle staring me in the face. It was inches from my forehead. I traced my eyes down the barrel to the face of the woman holding it. She had a white blob of gum between her teeth and she looked annoyed.

I jolted, and reached for the buckle of my seatbelt.

“Slow!” she ordered me.

“Sorry,” I responded, and slowly removed my seatbelt, opened the door, and as she lowered her gun I stood and took my backpack from the floor and followed my family to the small building.

We entered to find a miniature version of the airport security line. There was a metal detector, an conveyor belt to feed our luggage into an x-ray machine, and on the ‘clean’ side of the fence, my dad, fishing in his pocket for a cigarette.

We passed through this apparatus without much trouble. Naila refused to take her sweatshirt off, not because she wouldn’t be seen by stranger without her arms covered but because she felt that this entire check was unjustified and wrong, and she wanted to see exactly how far she can refuse to cooperate without invoking consequences. She had made a good bet with the sweatshirt, anyhow, because they let her through the metal detector with it on.

She had cigarettes in her sweatshirt pocket, and took one and lit it at the curb where the soldiers had been smoking when we arrived. My dad asked her for one, but she refused.

“It will kill you, Wael.”

“It will kill you too, Mom.”

We all sat in a row, with Naila in the middle. We watched the soldiers open the hood, the trunk, and all the doors of the rented Mazda so it looked like a shiny beetle preparing to fly. The soldier brought the sheepdog around to every door, and every piece of the car. He sniffed the engine and the tailpipe, all the seats and all around the wheels.

“He’s looking for bombs,” Naila told me quietly.

When the search was over, the woman who had stopped us initially walked over, passports in hand. “Is she really your mother?” she asked my dad.

“Of course I’m his mother!” Naila answered indignantly. Our passports were distributed, and double-checked, and put safely back into their bags. We piled into the small car once again, and drove forward to Haifa, stopping only once to buy lemonade and stretch the tension out of our shoulders.

“It’s our names,” posited my dad. “Our names don’t match.”

“You insisted on changing yours back,” Naila reminded him.

We did not visit her husband’s former house, it has been destroyed. The neighborhood is impossible to recognize from my grandfather’s stories of warm and breezy orange groves, narrow roads hemmed with fruit trees. Haifa itself has become a different place. Though no one in our party of travelers had seen Haifa as a Palestinian city, we had a clear sense of what wasn’t there.

There were wide streets paved in blacktop, parking spaces marked by white lines in front of storefronts that had been built in the 1970s, or early 80s. It felt more like California than Palestine, but not like home at all.

Around lunchtime on a Friday, we walked several blocks in search of a sandwich shop, or a cafe. When we went places as a family, we looked for loud and busy restaurants where we won’t stand out as much—there were ten of us that day, and all very loud. We found an Arab pub serving hummus and fatoosh alongside pub staples like burgers and fries, with several beers on tap. We took a table out front and watched the afternoon unfold beside a wide American-style road in Abdul Kareem’s old town.

The wide streets of Haifa were empty, and the air felt still, even when the wind blew. We all behaved more reserved than usual. Without being told, my siblings and I kept our voices down and our bickering to a minimum that afternoon.

After lunch, we went to see the Mediterranean. The beach was pebbly and the water was warm and calm, like a salty bath. I skinned my knee running on the pebbly beach without my glasses, and the salt barely stung for a moment before the warm water soothed the wound. My sisters and I floated on our backs and raced to the shore and back out and threw water in each other's faces until a group of boys came into the water and swam near us, shouting things in Hebrew. They smiled and laughed at us, and my younger sister waved. One of them responded with a lewd gesture, and more laughter.

Naila stood up and waded into the sea, and shouted to us that it was time to leave. We did not protest.

The drive home was quiet. We came upon the checkpoint, which we recognized from our westward crossing earlier in the day, and slowed down. Ten passports out the window, then safely back into our pockets and handbags. We were waved through with hardly a glance, and on the other side, looking at the wall that splits through the countryside like a fraying seam, we all turned our heads as one and sighed. It was a mix of relief and wistfulness.

Naila broke our silence, telling Wael, "It's good we did not plan to stay the night." She rolled the window down and lit a cigarette, and this time she shared with Wael.

If I asked Naila if she is a feminist, she would say that she is not. Afterwards, she would become guarded and answer any further questions with clipped sentences and long pauses. To

Naila, feminists are exclusively Westernized women, and usually too interested in getting men's attention. She doesn't despise them, she knows her own daughter calls herself a feminist and she is very proud of her daughter for all that she has been able to accomplish. It just isn't how she would describe herself, and she doesn't trust people who try to put her in that box.

Though Naila is a devout Muslim, she does not cover her head when she goes out of the house, and she never has. She covers her head five times a day, prays, and removes her veil. If she goes to pray outside of her home, in a mosque, she will put her veil on while standing at the steps, and then go in. She never puts it on ahead of time, though she notices the disapproving looks she receives from other men and women going in to pray.

This has nothing do to with whether or not she is a feminist. But to many people in the west, the veil symbolizes women's subordination and a Muslim woman's choice not to wear it symbolically aligns her with feminism.

In Palestine, the veil carries an entirely different connotation. It has a connection with the resistance movement dating back to the First Intifada beginning in 1987, and the years leading up to that. Through this, it fast became associated with the religious parts of the nationalist movement, and now it is fairly uncommon to see Muslim women of any political alignment leaving their heads uncovered in public. But when Naila lived in Palestine, the veil was mainly associated with social class—it was worn by women from wealthy Muslim families, and in rural agrarian communities like Bir Zeit it was uncommon.

Though Naila is aware of all these possible meanings which can be attached to her habits of covering her head, her choice was not complicated. Her mother did not cover her head. Her sister did not cover her head. Many pious women in Bir Zeit did not wear any type of veil. It was

not strange for the Muslim women of Bir Zeit to leave their heads bare. Today, it is strange. She noticed a certain kind of pressure on her most recent visits. But she continued in her habit of only covering her head while praying.

To understand the connotations attached to the hijab in Palestine today, it is necessary to discuss the symbol it became during the First Intifada. Before this point, it was not at all uncommon for Muslim women to leave their hair uncovered in public. Those who did cover their heads said as much about their social class as they did about their piety with the hijab. Rema Hammami comments on the upsurge of the hijab as part of a woman's public attire in Palestine—specifically in Gaza during the eighties, and the political influences surrounding that:

The dynamics of the hijab campaign are hard to delineate, because multiple forces worked simultaneously (though not necessarily jointly) to confront women at every turn with demands to wear a headscarf. In Gaza it started with religious youths writing graffiti, then breaking into girls' schools and making speeches. Next, young boys (between 8 and 12) who were empowered by the intifada joined the campaign. If there were no soldiers to throw stones at, women without headscarves made good targets. Politically unaffiliated shabab who felt left out found harassing these women a safe way to express nationalist sentiment.⁸

The hijab was brought into politics during the period before the Intifada as a way for women to display their nationalism, their pride in their Arab roots and in Islam, which was forming strong ties with the nationalist movement. There were many in the Palestinian resistance who were not Muslim—Palestine has been a society of several faiths since before the beginning of Islam—and there were many Muslims who did not consider their religion to be especially related to their politics. Had Naila remained in Palestine throughout this period, she might have aligned herself with this set of activists.

8 Rema Hammami. "Women, the Hijab and the Intifada". Middle East Report 164, (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Research and Information Project, 1990).

There has been tension between the religious fundamentalist parts of the movement and those with more secular politics. This tension has been leveraged against the movement by the Israeli occupiers as a type of “divide and conquer” strategy. The secular parts of the movement have often been the same or intertwined with the leftist Palestinian activists, who were working towards anti-imperialist solidarity between all the facets of working-class society in Palestine since the times of the British Mandate. However, during the Cold War there was a concerted effort on the part of the US government, working mostly through the CIA, to destroy any leftism or communist movements existing in the third world. The secular left in Palestine fell victim to this imperialist project, and it was weakened considerably by American involvement in the region. Meanwhile, the efforts to destroy the Palestinian religious right were muted by comparison, and Hamas’s present-day popularity is evidence of the aftermath of this project.

Naila breaks a lot of the rules which govern women’s conduct in Palestinian society today, some of which are new and some of which are not. The prevalence of the hijab grew significantly after she left, and she never felt much pressure on that front while living in Palestine.

It not acceptable in Abdul Kareem’s family, which Naila is part of since their marriage, for women to smoke cigarettes, and especially for them do so sitting on the front porch and looking into the street. Many women in Yabrud smoke, but they will slip quietly out the back door and stand on the other side of the patio and light a cigarette outside of the view of their husbands and fathers. Naila sits in front of the house with the men, drinking coffee, and lights her cigarette without any embarrassment. Her brothers, who come from the Al-Zettawi family

and are not quite as strict, are embarrassed by this. They'll smoke with her, and chastise her for the habit as they drag on their own cigarettes, but mostly they only say it to tease her. In Yabrud, they are afraid her husband's family takes it as disrespect. But the men in Yabrud learned years ago what Naila was like, and they respect her as the mother of their beloved brother's children, even if she doesn't live by their rules.

To Naila, breaking the double standards of femininity has nothing to do with feminism, and if I ask her about feminism, she hears my mother's voice in the question. Feminists are American, to Naila, and the politics of Palestinian women are more concerned with resisting occupation than whether your brother-in-law approves of your smoking habits.

I asked her if she would consider moving back. Suppose, if the right to return was restored tomorrow? She would not. To visit, of course, she said. But her life is in California now—three of her children remain within two hours from her house, and her grandchildren were all raised in the SF Bay Area. Her husband is buried a pleasant half-hour walk from her house, which used to be their house together. His eskadinia tree still fruits every summer in her front yard. The store they used to run together has passed into her name, and so has the deed to her house. Palestinian law or Jordanian law would have given the property to her three sons, who would have then shared responsibility for the well-being of their mother. Naila is comfortable with the way things have turned out in America. She is glad that she can stay in her home, with her fruit trees living undisturbed, and walk over the hills to see her husband after her Friday morning prayer.

Afterword

In the beginning I imagined this project as a search for the feminist narrative in my grandmother's story. Where did her path cross with the women's movements in Palestine? How did the men in her life, in conjunction with the occupation, shape her choices? I asked her about her mother, and her grandmother, about her marriage. I researched the women's movements of the Middle East during my grandmother's youth and looked for her in their histories, and her in theirs. I tried these questions onto her story at this angle or that one. They didn't fit. She does not talk about her past with these questions in mind. There are a lot of things I could say about the impacts of Israeli occupation on the lives of Palestinian women. But I was not writing about the Israeli occupation or about Palestinian women, I was writing a story about my grandmother. The feminist angle drew me in because I wanted to contradict the narrative that Israel, advertising itself as "the only democracy in the Middle East", brings liberation and progressivism to the women of Palestine, and frees them from the restrictions of a Muslim society. The fact is, I didn't need a feminist analysis to accomplish that. Just telling Naila's story makes it clear how much progressivism Israel has to offer Palestinian women.

In Arabic class, when we were asked to write a response to the topics at play in Ghassan Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*, I wrote about huq al-'auda—the right of return. It is a legally established right of Palestinian refugees, stipulated somewhere in the founding documents of UNRWA. The state of Israel does not recognize it, and there is no really pressure to adhere to UN doctrine unless a member state with a powerful army, such as the US, decides they have a vested interest in enforcing the doctrine in this particular case. Usually this coincides with the discovery

of oil in a country committing human rights abuses or allegedly stockpiling nuclear weapons. So Palestinian refugees have a legal right to return to their own land on paper, but that doesn't carry much weight.

Since Naila fled with her family to Jordan in 1967, and married a man who had done the same, and since they were living with family in a Jordanian town, not in a Palestinian refugee camp, they took Jordanian citizenship. Palestinian refugees have citizenship of no country. They are Palestinians, and they have documents attesting to that, but they are not recognized by Israel, the government that occupies Palestine, so they have no country. Many of them still live within the boundaries of Palestine, in refugee camps. Many are also in Jordan, Lebanon, and some remain in camps in Syria, unable to leave despite horrifying conditions. Palestinian refugees are not allowed to live outside of the camps. They are not allowed to work outside of the camps, though work in the camps is scarce and money scarcer.

The right of return is the promise that one day, when justice prevails, these people will be able to return home. Generations of Palestinian refugees whose lives have been confined to the camps are suspended between the UN and Israel, the world as it is and as it should be. But the day that they will be invited back from limbo and into their home remains unfixed. Somewhere in the future, insists the UN doctrine, from the same councilroom that gave away their land in 1948. The rest of the diaspora, the ones who have gained citizenship elsewhere, have lost that right. Naila's land is deeded to a woman who has no legal right to access it, putting our family's olive groves in a precarious spot.

In Avi Moghrabi's film, *Once I Entered a Garden*, he and the camerawoman go with Moghrabi's friend Ali Al Azhari, Ali's daughter Yasmin and his brother Tamim to their childhood

home. The village was called Saffuriyya in Arabic. In 1948, it was destroyed. Tzippori is the Hebrew name of the Israeli settlement built on top of the ruins. They walk around the land, visiting the site of their old home and speculating as to where exactly things were. This is the first time Yasmin has seen her father's birthplace. They come to a playground, and Yasmin, who is around ten, suggests they go down to it. Ali agrees, but when they get closer he starts reading off of the sign by the path. "This park is for residents of Moshav Saffuriyya. Entrance to strangers is absolutely forbidden" It is written in Hebrew, then Arabic. In Arabic, the name of the town is Saffuriyya—Ali's hometown that has been destroyed. His daughter becomes uneasy and insists they leave, but Ali refuses. "Avi, come film this!" he says. "I am a stranger, here I go," and walks deliberately passed the sign. His daughter protests that he is going to get arrested, and leaves. She marches back up to the road in a hurry but later, after he catches up with her and they rejoin Tamim, she changes her mind. She is prepared to face the risks so that her uncle Tamim can see the sign. She leads the way back down to the playground (hadiqa, a garden) and reads from the sign in Arabic. She stumbles at the word "stranger". The Israeli sign-writer has misspelled it. The word 'stranger' shares a root with the word for longing for one's home. By making Ali out to be the 'stranger' in the garden built on the remains of Saffuriyya, the sign-writer had told the viewers exactly who Ali really is—a man displaced from his home.

Mahmoud Darwish imagined a conversation with an Israeli soldier in a poem published in 1967 called "A Soldier Dreams of White Tulips". He asks the soldier, "And the land? *I don't know the land*, he said./*I don't feel it in my flesh and blood, as they say in the poems.*/Suddenly I saw the land as one sees a grocery store, a street, newspapers./...*All my attachment to the land is no more than a story or a fiery speech!*/ *They taught me to love it, but I never felt it in my heart.*/

never knew its roots and branches, or the scent of its grass”⁹. The poem resonated with me, but not the way Darwish’s poems usually do. I was left with a cold stone in the pit of my stomach. The soldier’s voice is printed in italics, and it is those words that rung in my ears after I closed the book. I, myself, don’t know the land either. I was taught about it through stories—different stories than the soldier heard, I’m sure. I saw it mostly through newspapers, and never knew anything about the scent of its grass until I visited for the first time when I was fifteen.

Does it matter? I am not a soldier seeking to colonize the land. But it matters to me very much. The circumstances which create my distance from the land are different from the soldier’s circumstances in Darwish’s poem. In fact, the reason my grandmother left is the reason he is there at all. That is the reason it matters so much to me to know all about Palestine—she had her home taken away from her before she could give it to her son, my father. I want to know what was lost. But I know just as little as the soldier sent to take it.

My intention with this project was to learn a little more. I sought out my grandmother’s story as a way into this knowledge that was not parsed through the perspective of journalists and historians. I wanted to learn about Palestine, not just the occupation. I have been able to visit twice, and spend a semester at a university just across the wall from Al Quds, but all I know about Palestine is what it looks like today, after seventy years of Israeli occupation. In the first chapter, I wrote about Palestine after liberation—what will it look like? What will it smell like? I said I imagine in it the spring. There’s a comment written in the margin of one draft, pointing at that line and saying “not sure this is very practicable”. I disagree. What about jasmine vines is impracticable? All you have to do is plant them.

9 Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, trans. Munir Akash and Carolyn Forche, (Berkeley: 2013). 165.

Well, it's true—I can't write the step-by-step manual for achieving my fantasy. I can't tell you how to liberate Palestine by next spring. I have never seen it in the spring. I was there for the fall semester, the olive harvest, and I have tried to take those memories and distill the occupation right out of them, just to see what it looks like, but I can't do it. So I turned to Siti and asked her to tell me about growing up in Bir Zeit. What did the town look like before the Israeli soldiers came? I know what it looks like after, I have seen it after. I see videos on Facebook of soldiers dragging handcuffed students into armored vehicles at Bir Zeit university. I have tasted the tear gas they fired on students at Al Quds University. We crowded into the few classrooms with air conditioning, and cranked it up high to purge the air of the gas, and then we all went back to class.

All of my memories of Palestine are like this—the olive harvest, coffee and conversation in stilted Arabic at a cheerful cafe by the campus, and then the occupation interrupts. Three military vehicles drive by, and maybe that's an indication of trouble. That means they might close Qalandia checkpoint early tonight, and anyone who is going home to Al Quds that night hurries out the door. It affects all aspects of life. Trying to have a normal day is an act of resistance.

I can't see a liberated Palestine in my own memories of the place. I am looking to the past for a more hopeful image, to my grandmother's memories. She had thirteen precious years in her home before Israeli soldiers occupied the town of Bir Zeit, but Palestine was not free.

In the end of Darwish's poem, the soldier gives up on the homeland and goes in search of white tulips and an olive branch. "Homeland for him, he said, is to drink my mother's coffee, to return, safely, at nightfall"¹⁰. I am not looking for an olive branch, I am looking for the trees.

¹⁰ Ibid, 167.