

Writing the Indigenous:
Contemporary Mayan Literature in Chiapas, Mexico
and Palestinian Literature in Israel

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington
2013

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Comparative Literature

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Abstract

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Civilization

This dissertation examines contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas, Mexico (1983-2010) and Palestinian literature in Israel (1976-2010). It performs an understudied comparison between the literary traditions of two indigenous minorities emerging from the Global South and the Fourth World. This comparison is situated within the historical context of the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica in 1519-1524 and the establishment of Israel in 1948 as a Jewish state. Both events have created a rupture in Mayan and Palestinian histories and geographies, respectively, thus leading to the minoritization of these indigenous peoples. I study the literature of these indigenous minorities within the context of a geography of destruction, and simultaneously, continuous dispossession and a history of “rebirth.” The overlapping histories of colonialism and nationalism, land struggle, as well as second-class citizenship, which manifests in exclusion, discrimination, racism and oppression of Mayans and Palestinians in the states of Mexico and Israel, respectively, are the grounds for comparison. While keeping in mind their different histories of minoritization and negotiation of indigenous citizenship in a socio-political reality of internal colonialism, this study seeks to understand how the literatures

of these distinct groups articulate narratives and notions of indigeneity, difference, resistance, borders, hybridity, internal colonialism and contact zones, in order to identify the elements that inform the development of indigenous minority literature as 'alternative texts'. Finally, this dissertation aims at contributing to the project of New Comparative Literature and World Literature. This conversation addresses an infrastructural problem and contribute to the project of New Comparative Literature, by creating a South-South dialogue between Middle Eastern and Latin American literatures, and thus foster communication among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world. This dialogue also challenges the periphery-center binary that dominates paradigms of canonization in World Literature.

To my parents,

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Acknowledgments

First of all, I wish to mention with deep gratitude my committee members who, in addition to reading and helping me with various drafts of this dissertation, are my mentors. I am thankful to Professor Cynthia Steele for teaching me about committed scholarship and rigorous research standards. She has always sustained my passion for indigenous studies, feminism, and keen interest in the peoples and cultures of Mexico and Latin America. I am also deeply grateful for Professor Terri DeYoung for her kind support, ongoing encouragement, constant reminders about the importance of textual studies and close reading, and the ethical significance of studying and teaching classical and modern Arabic history and culture in the US. I was also fortunate to work with Professor Monika Kaup, who has taught me not to fear theory. Professor Kaup has been instrumental in helping me conceptualize the theoretical apparatus of this dissertation. From her, I learned to think critically without falling into the trap of discursive moves, or thinking in paradigms that are “trendy, but not true.” I also wish to acknowledge Professor Michelle Habell-Pallan for reminding me to take care of myself, and for teaching me about the significance of embracing critical intimacy in academic research and scholarship. All shortcomings in this dissertation are mine.

Special thanks to the graduate student advisers and the administrative staff at the Department of Comparative Literature: Professor Leroy Searle and Yuko Mera have been a vital source of tremendous help, valuable advice, and constant support. Thank you for picking me up, when I fell down. Tamara Cooper and Marcia Feinstein-Tobey always welcomed me into their offices with a generous smile.

Second, the completion of this degree would not have been possible without the generous funding of the Department of Comparative Literature, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, the Middle East Center, The Simpson Center for the Humanities, The Modern Languages Quarterly Travel Award, and the Chester Fritz Scholarship for International Study, all at the University of Washington. I would also like to thank the Arabic Language Academy in Haifa, Israel/Palestine, for a grant to study Palestinian literature, and the Association of American University Women for an International Dissertation Fellowship that made it possible for me to take time off from teaching to focus on writing. I would also like to acknowledge the Al-Qasemi Academy of Arabic Language and Literature in Al-Qasemi College in Baqa Al-Gharbiya, Israel/Palestine for moral support during my writing and the sharing of their academic resources.

Third, I am thankful for the Palestinian writers who shared their work and insight with me: Salmān Nātūr, Fahd Abū Khadrah, Maysūn Asadī, and Ibtisām ‘Āzim. Grateful acknowledgment is also due the Mayan writers and artists in Chiapas who believed in this project and shared their personal stories and valuable input about literature, politics, aesthetics and history. I hope that this dissertation does justice to the incredible work that they have been doing since the 1980s to further contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas and beyond. Of special mention here are FOMMA, *Sna Jtz’ibajom* and CELALI. I also thank Carlota Duarte, Ambar Past, and Jesús Morales Bermúdez for taking the time to meet me in San Cristóbal to provide a better understanding of the contemporary history of Mayan literary and cultural production in Chiapas. Carlota Duarte and Ambar Past also provided valuable input through their electronic correspondence.

Moreover, I would like to emphasize that it takes a village to write a dissertation. In my case, I have been fortunate to be surrounded with the love and support of various intellectual communities, families and friends. My dissertation village is scattered around the world. In Seattle, I benefited from the intellectual camaraderie of my colleagues in the Department of Comparative Literature, especially Jacinthe Assaad, Nobuko Yamasaki, Nathaniel Greenberg, Sima Daad, Cuate Mexica, Will Arighi, Juan Pablo DiCesare, Tavid Mulder, Andrea Schmidt, Virginia Agostinelli, Milan Vidakovic and Lin Chen. I was fortunate to be a member of different research clusters and graduate student interest groups on campus that were co-sponsored by the Simpson Center for the Humanities: Performing the Gap, Dangerous Subjects, and Indigenous Encounters. I thank my colleagues in these groups for their critiques, support, and intellectual contributions: Raj Chetty, Anjali Vats, Brian Gutierrez, Marisa Duarte, Miranda Berlade-Lewis, and Professor Tony Lucero.

In Eugene, where I completed a Master in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon in 2006, I benefited from the intellectual mentorship of Professors Analisa Taylor, Stephanie Wood, Carlos Aguirre, Linda Kintz, David Vasquez, and Pedro Caro. This dissertation continues some of the conversations that I had with them about borderlands, Chicano/a Studies, Mexican and Latin American literatures. In Eugene, I have also been blessed with the intellectual companionship and sisterhood of Lillian Darwin-López. I am very grateful to Lillian's intelligent comments. Her cheerful presence and commitment to justice have inspired me since our first meeting in a Comparative Literature theory course in Fall 2004.

Very special thanks to my inspirational cohort of feminist scholars, activists, and sisters: Alaa Yousef, Yasmine Bouagga, Lillian Abou-Tabickh, Dima Ayoub, Therese Saliba, Hasnah Toran, Rana Barakat, Jen Marlowe, Wendy Call, Sarah Guthu, Hala Dillsi, Sohaira Siddiqui, Adile Aslan, Asun López-Varela, Heba Baloum, Samar Gbara, Yumna Shehadeh, Khadija Al Rafeea, Nadia Massarweh, Enas Haj Yehya, Zakiya Asali, Safa Hamed, Helen Qasem, Lenna Odeh, Gretchen Grad, Rhoda Kanaanah, Isis Nusair, Nada Elia, Nancy Cruz Dávila, Mercy Verdugo, and Adela (Munira) Bonilia Vidal. Despite the fact that most of them do not live in Seattle, they always offered moral support, wisdom, and sisterhood regardless of the time difference. I was also lucky to be pampered by three gracious mothers in Eugene, Camano Island, and Washington D.C. Jeanne Henriksen, Cathlin Starke and Catherine Linarelli Hammack: you, and your families, made your adopted Palestinian daughter very happy and less homesick. I extend this gratitude to my Mexican *abuelita* in San Cristóbal, Carmen Martinez Estrada too. She took very good care of me when I stayed at her house during my research trip to Chiapas. *Abuelita* Carmen also taught me to learn from the persistence of ants, and to pay attention to the last star that remains hanging in sky in the early hours of the morning. "It is a sign of a good day," she reassured.

I have lived in Seattle since 2006. In this beautiful city I have spent the longest time away from my homeland. Fortunately, I was blessed with a great community of friends who became my family: Nour Chida, Mounir Ghattas, and their son Ali; Sahera Bleibleh, Aisha Kaba, María Santizo and her late daughter Mariam Santizo-Gaplin (RIP), Ziad Zaghrou, Fatima Bahloul, Michael Vicente-Perez, and their sons Joaquin and Mazen, Diana Ovalle, Hwayda Harb and Maged Zaher. They have sustained me with love, support, food and familial friendship that I will continue to treasure for the rest of

my life. My warmest thanks also to my Egyptian-British family in Portland: Maha and Iian Barrett, and their children Maya and Kareem. You opened your hearts and house to me, making me feel at home away from home.

I am also thankful for the generosity of the Palestinian and Arab community in the larger Seattle area: Abed and Husnia Kouttainay, Oraib Khalifeh, Ziyad Zaitoun, Karam Dana, Farhat and Suad Ziadeh, Hussein Elkhafaifi and Susan Benson, as well as Rita Zawaideh. I extend this gratitude to two special individuals who adopted this community: Ed Mast and Demetre Lagos.

The writing of this dissertation would not be possible without the support of two individuals who kept my body together. I am deeply grateful to my surgeon, Professor Issac Meller, at Tel-Aviv Medical Center for his relentless efforts over the last twenty years to keep me on my two feet. My local massage therapist, Celia Costarella, kept my body and spirit in synch, despite the long hours of sitting and stress.

I am also thankful for my former and current housemates, Haneen Ahmad and Daniela Ahmed, for giving up on the kitchen table and putting up with the book chaos that dominated the house. They were too kind to complain. Special thanks to Madison, the dog in the house, who often checked on me when I zoned into my writing territory.

Two last sets of thanks. The first goes to the following individuals who have frequently been my first readers, providing support and insight along the way. My editor, Margalit Persing, has held my hand since my undergraduate studies. My English has improved over the years, because of working with her. In many moments of crisis, she has intervened, as a close friend needs to do. Since 2007, I had the privilege of befriending and benefiting from the vast knowledge of Palestinian scholar and mentor Ibrahim Muhawi. From Professor Muhawi I learned about the magical power of translation, breathing, finding inner-peace, reading poetry aloud, and love for one's homeland. I am thankful for Samer Al-Saber for long brain talks and for teaching me about details. Heartfelt thanks to my colleague and sister, Jacinthe Assaad, for daily midnight phone calls, and for always being there to help with reading, editing and providing creative titles and invaluable critique.

Last but not least, nothing would have been possible without the unconditional love and support of my parents: Samiha and Thabet Equeiq. I could never put in words or reward them adequately for their sacrifices, generosity, kindness, and friendship. Special thanks to my siblings Youssif, Reem, Lubna and Akram, and their life partners, as well as my eleven nieces and nephews. They all have sustained me with international deliveries of goodies from home, and pampered me with love and slumber parties during my annual summer visits home.

Prologue

One of the most frequent questions that I have been asked by almost everyone who has heard the title of my dissertation is: Why Mayans and Palestinians? My answer has varied, depending on the audience and how much they knew about either Mayan or Palestinian history. It has also depended on my energy level, as I was very aware of the amount of explanation that I might have to offer. The reactions, however, have been diverse. Some have been more skeptical about the potential of comparing apples and oranges, while others have expressed enthusiasm and wanted to hear more about “an unusual comparison,” as they have called it. In another attempt to respond to the “Why Mayans and Palestinians?” question, I have decided to share a selection of my dissertation journal. I wrote it during my research visit to Chiapas in 2010. It reveals some elements of my perspective. In the section that follows this journal entry, I will elaborate on some of the issues that I feel are important to address, in order to reflect more on my positionality.

**Dissertation Journal,
January 10, 2010
Chiapas, Mexico**

San Juan Chamula is a Mayan town of 10,000 residents, Chiapas’ largest indigenous town. It is about 10 km northeast of San Cristóbal de las Casas (SCLC), a colonial Mexican city that fell under Mayan (re) conquest during the Zapatista Uprising on January 1, 1994.¹ There is no regular public transportation from the valley of SCLC to the highlands of San Juan Chamula. To reach there, I have to go to the market in

¹ On January 1, 1994, thousands of armed indigenous people took over seven municipal seats and declared war on the Mexican government. They identified themselves as Zapatistas. After twelve days, a ceasefire was decreed and the Zapatistas withdrew to the mountains of Chiapas, where they remain persecuted by the Mexican army.

downtown SCLC to take the service shuttle from an improvised station. The shuttle is either an 8-10 passenger *combi*, or a private sedan. There is a queue for three shuttles. The male Mayan drivers talk among themselves in Tzotzil. I wait for half an hour in the shaded shack of the station, until the first shuttle in line fills up. The passenger load is diverse, to say the least. Apart from myself, and Alex,² a Caucasian Canadian man in his late forties, whom I met earlier at my *mestizo* host family's home in SCLC, there are two international tourists and a Mayan family of four. The ride begins with a short chat in English between myself, Alex and the other German tourists. The driver and the Mayan family are conversing in Tzotzil and some Spanish. In addition to this multilingual soundtrack, our trip is accompanied by the shocks of the bumpy road. The shocks become more frequent, the further we get away from SCLC, as the road up to the mountains turns curvier and dustier. One green summit at a time, the horizon unfolds to reveal the isolated houses of San Juan Chamula, or as the local indigenous Mayans call it, "the navel of the earth".

Throughout the thirty-minute ride, my mind drifts to a ride that I have taken many times in my life. A twenty-minute ride from the Jewish city of Netanya (built on the ruins of the Palestinian coastal village Umm Khaled), where I took my driving lessons at the age of 17, to Al-Taybeh, my Palestinian hometown in what is now Israel. Everything around me looks familiar (except Alex and the German tourists): the tired faces of indigenous Mayans taking a shuttle home because the state does not provide public transportation, the deterioration of the road that gradually increases, the further we move away from SCLC, the striking contrast between an urban setting occupied by a diverse Ladino population, and colorful Mexican houses and a rural landscape that surrounds the

² Alex is a pseudonym.

homes (some incomplete) of an isolated indigenous community, the only bilingual street sign at the entrance of San Juan Chamula, and the parking lot of the shuttle service cars near the vegetable shop and the largest supermarket in town. Ten kilometers and five hundred years of history separate two different worlds: Ladino and indigenous. The contrast is striking, and the gap is huge. At least this is my first impression.

Alex and I decide to take a short hike to explore the town. Alex talks about the difficulty of breathing at a high altitude. He says that he already feels the difference in his shortened breath, and that the atmosphere here reminds him of other mountain areas in Nepal and China, where he has traveled extensively. I tell him that the laundry hanging outside, the wiring on the roofs, the small grocery shops in family houses, and the children playing in the street remind me of my neighborhood. A *Dominos'* Pizza delivery car passes as Alex and I exchange memories of far-away places. Alex expresses his utter disappointment, because globalization has arrived at this remote part of the world and ruined his experience (or fantasy) of the "indigenous world." "Does eating pizza make the people in San Juan Chamula less indigenous?" I ask Alex. "No. But it destroys their authentic culture," he responds.

Alex and I decide to take a break from the 'pizza debate' and walk down the road, near a farmhouse. A small flock of sheep passes. They are led by a Chamula woman wearing a black wool skirt and a *huipil* with colorful embroidery, a traditional Chamula outfit that distinguishes the women here from those in the neighboring Mayan town of Zinacantán. Alex pulls out his Canon camera to take pictures of the sheep. To his dismay, the woman shoos him away with both hands. She says something in Tzotzil. From her commanding tone, we guess that she is angry. Alex shuts the lens of his Canon and

mumbles in English his frustration about what he describes as “the nasty attitude of old women.” As a young feminist woman, I call Alex out on his sexist rubbish. As a student researching Mayan literature, I proceed to educate him about the meaning of his presence with a camera in an indigenous community. I tell him that photography was once banned in indigenous towns, and that it is still banned during religious celebrations in various Mayan towns, including San Juan Chamula, and that violating this law can land him in jail. I say something about priests who supposedly told people that the camera would steal their souls. I add that this false belief took hold, because Chamula believe that each human being has two souls, one that dwells in the human body and the *chulel*, which dwells within an animal. I mention that, among the Chamula, there is also suspicion of strangers, because the presence of outsiders is sometimes taken as a bad omen. I also reckon that some Mayans here may be Zapatista revolutionaries, who probably prefer to remain underground, away from the eyes of the camera. I further speculate that there is a strong sense of indigenous pride among Mayans, who refuse to be reduced to exotic photographic items for tourists. The latter often pass by their villages to witness the living descendants of those who built the pyramids in Palenque, which is the next must-see destination listed in their Chiapas travel brochure. Finally, I try to reassure the frustrated Alex that there must be sheep in Canada and that he can take as many pictures of them there as he wishes! Alex does not seem convinced. We decide to continue walking towards the church downtown. This time, Alex follows Rodolfo’s advice. Rodolfo is our *mestizo* house-mate. He works as a tour guide. He had warned us earlier this morning, during breakfast, against taking pictures in San Juan Chamula, especially inside the church. Alex puts the Canon back into his backpack. He does not look happy!

To put Mayan literature in Chiapas, Mexico into a conversation with Palestinian literature in Israel is not an easy task. In fact, this project is like walking through a land mine of critical issues. (dangerous territory where numerous critical issues are planted like mines). To begin the conversation, the mines must first be cleared. As the above journal entry indicates, there are numerous issues at stake and several indigenous and non-indigenous discourses to be considered. First, my own “indigenous eyes” viscerally experienced the duality of being indigenous and minority in Chiapas, Mexico as much as in Israel/Palestine. These eyes that see and witness the indigenous minority dialectic created the connection, and hence mediate this conversation. These eyes, I argue, are the embodied lenses of my indigenous scholarship.

However, it is important to note that “my indigenous eyes” had a similar moment of epiphany, albeit more intellectual than metaphysical, as in Chiapas. The revelation occurred in the context of my first exposure to Chicano/a literature. In the Fall of 2004, my eyes fell on Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in a “Border Theory” graduate course at the University of Oregon. I can still vividly remember the first reaction I had when I read Anzaldúa’s narrative of Chicano/a history and stories of “people who didn’t cross the border, but the border crossed them”: This woman is telling my story. Palestinians in Israel also have their 1948 story. It happened in *al-Nakba*, the Catastrophe in 1948: the great loss of historic Palestine, the establishment of the state of Israel and the subsequent birth of Palestinians as a minority in their native land. Putting the two stories of 1848 and 1948 into conversation is relevant for comparative indigenous minority studies. And so, I began to study Chicano/a literature and even dedicated a section to it in my comprehensive doctoral exams.

Nonetheless, when I was exposed to the literature of Chiapas at the University of Washington in Fall 2006, in a Comparative Literature course taught by Professor Cynthia Steele, I identified more shared components of indigenous struggle between Mayans and Palestinians. Land rights, autonomy, equal human and citizenship rights, and the ongoing engagement with the state as ‘dangerous subjects,’ were among the most prominent issues. At the same time, I noticed a parallel emergence of indigenous nationalism that, in effect, was informing political mobilization and the formation of a subaltern identity within the states of Mexico and Israel, respectively.

Second, Alex’s gaze and his search for the ‘authentic indigenous’ are also significant. “His eyes” and “my eyes” saw and sought different things in San Juan Chamula. I noticed the laundry and reflected on my feelings of belonging to this Mayan town, while Alex spotted the sheep and the pizza delivery car. Why did we see different things? Is it because Alex is from the Global North, whereas I, as a native Palestinian in Israel, have lived a reality of the Global South? Or is it because of our different reasons for being in Chiapas? After all, I came here to learn about the place and the people whom I read about through my study of Mayan literature. I understood the metaphors, the texts, the themes and the aesthetics much better afterwards. Alex, however, is a world traveler. He has been traveling around the world for the last twenty years. He is thinking of buying a house in a coastal Mexican city on the Gulf of Mexico. He says that it is a good place to retire.

Moreover, Alex and I had different reactions to the Mayan woman. As an indigenous woman and a feminist, I understood her reaction, while Alex was upset when she asked him to “Stop!” Was the reverse gender power dynamics the reason that

bothered Alex, or perhaps the fact that the Mayan woman distorted his Orientalist gaze about how Mayan people (and their animals) should supposedly behave in front of his Canon? How do we explain the resistance of the Mayan woman and her engagement with Alex as an outsider, a Ladino?³ Did she see me as an outsider too, despite the fact that my skin color is similar to hers and I did feel at home in her village?! Did she think we actually have something in common, as Mayan and Palestinian women? Since I never asked her these questions, I don't know the answer. Hopefully, after the Mayan-Palestinian conversation in this dissertation, this enigma will begin to be resolved.

³ Ladino/a is a term used by all ethnic groups in Chiapas to refer to non-indigenous or *mestizo* people.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a comparative study of indigenous minority literature. It examines contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas, Mexico (1983-2010) and Palestinian literature in Israel (1976-2010) as literatures of indigenous minorities that are simultaneously located in the Fourth World and the Global South. Due to the overlapping histories of colonialism and nationalism, as well as the second-class citizenship of Mayans and Palestinians in the states of Mexico and Israel, respectively, their development has been fraught with exclusion, discrimination, racism and oppression.

However, the ongoing struggle of both groups for equal human and citizenship rights has involved indigenous resistance, *ṣumūd* (steadfastness)⁴ and the quest for political and cultural autonomy. From the state perspective, in both Mexico and Israel, these strategies are essentially a threat, because they destabilize the national identity of the state. Therefore, these indigenous minorities are ‘dangerous subjects’.⁵ These dynamics of indigenous minority versus colonial state are a common foregrounding aspect of the Mayan-Palestinian comparison.

⁴ For the transliteration of Arabic I will follow the Library of Congress system throughout the dissertation. I find this system useful, because it allows consistency in locating the authors’ names in the world catalog search. However, if the book is translated into English, I will cite the names of characters and places as they appear in the English text.

⁵ Professor Cynthia Steele (Comparative Literature) coined the term ‘dangerous subjects’ for a faculty-graduate students research cluster at the University of Washington. Entitled “Dangerous Subjects: Contention, Violence, and Control in Latin America,” the research cluster began in the academic year 2009-2010 with support from the Simpson Center for the Humanities. As a participant in this cluster, I learned about the history of violent encounters between indigenous nations and neoliberal states in the context of modern Latin America. These violent encounters revealed dynamics of oppression and control, and they often positioned the indigenous as a threat, or a dangerous subject to the state. My use of the term here is in accordance with this understanding.

Grounds for Comparison:

Mayas in Chiapas and Palestinians in Israel are located simultaneously in the Global South and the Fourth World in a geographical, historical and political sense. Geographically, both minorities live in the Global South, the location of much of the “developing world,” including the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Asia (excluding Japan and Australia). The historical affinities between these societies derive from their mutual recognition of shared experiences and struggles. As Arif Dirlik (2007) points out, countries in the Global South “share a mutual recognition of historical experiences with colonialism and neocolonialism, a history not yet ended of economic, political and social (racial) marginalization, and, in some cases, memories of cooperation or common cause in struggles for global justice in past liberation movements” (16).

Although this study is among the first, if not the first, to identify commonalities between Mayans and Palestinians within the context of the Global South, I did encounter three episodes in Chiapas that confirm mutual recognition. During my research trip to Chiapas in January 2010, where I conducted archival and ethnographic fieldwork, I noticed several Zapatista graffiti murals in downtown San Cristóbal that featured iconography from the Palestinian resistance movement, such as the famous black and white *kuffiyeh* (scarf). Moreover, in an interview with Tzeltal-speaking playwright Isabel Juárez Espinosa, she recalled a group of Palestinian activists whom she met at a series of conferences on indigenous people, which were held in Boston in 2004. Juárez Espinosa recounted that they became friends very quickly as they shared stories about women’s

struggles in workshops about feminism and social justice.⁶

In addition, I also met a Palestinian painter and visual artist, Ḥabīb Maṭar (who identifies himself only as Ḥabīb). Originally from Haifa, Ḥabīb moved to Chiapas in the early 1990s after a road trip in Mexico. He has been living in San Cristóbal since then. Ḥabīb's paintings depict everyday indigenous life in the Highlands in Chiapas. His artwork invokes both classical and modern Mayan motifs.⁷

Politically speaking, Mayas in Chiapas and Palestinians in Israel belong to the Fourth World. Like other land-based peoples around the globe who constitute the Fourth World, they suffer from a long history of oppression and marginalization. They are also different from other minorities, such as immigrants in Europe, North America, and Australia, and from religious minorities in the Middle East, such as the Copts in Egypt. Whether by default or by choice, both Mayans and Palestinians have maintained, at least in part, their distinct linguistic, cultural, and sociological characteristics, and in doing so

⁶I interviewed Isabel Juárez Espinosa on January 25, 2010 at FOMMA's cultural center in San Cristóbal. It is noteworthy that, in addition to these individual and activist-based Mayan-Palestinian encounters, there have been numerous collaborations between Palestinian women and indigenous women and women of color from the Global South. But, as far I know, none of them included a Mayan-Palestinian encounter. Many of these collaborations took place in joint academic feminist publications and political activism. For example, several Palestinian and Palestinian-American women writers and academics contributed to the feminist anthology of Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Louise Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002). More recently, in June 2011, a delegation of eleven scholars, activists and artists from the US, India and South Africa visited occupied Palestine. African-American political activist Angela Davis and Indian transnational feminist and post-colonial scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty were part of the delegation. After their return to the US, the delegation published a statement that identifies a common history of struggle between indigenous people and African-Americans in the US, against racism and colonialism. Indeed, the opening sentence of the statement asserts: "Each and every one of us—including those members of our delegation who grew up in the Jim Crow South, in apartheid South Africa, and on Indian reservations in the United States—was shocked by what we saw" (90). For a complete statement and a call for action against occupation and segregation in Palestine, see Rabab Abdulhadi, Ayoka Chenzira, Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Garcia G. Melissa, Anna R. Guevarra, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Premilla Nadasen, Barbara Ransby, Chandra T. Mohanty, and Chandra T. Waziyatawin, "Palestine Statement: Justice for Palestine: a Call to Action from Indigenous and Women of Color Feminists," *Transforming Anthropology* 20.1 (2012): 90-92.

⁷Ḥabīb's artwork appeared in several galleries and art shows in San Cristóbal. Some of his selected paintings are available online. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/habib/34597117/>>

have remained separate from the surrounding populations and the dominant culture. Their survival has become a source of “indigenist” anti-colonial politics in the Fourth World, as Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill contends. In “I am Indigenist: Notes on the Ideology of the Fourth World” (2003), Churchill argues that his political motivation and justification “draws upon the traditions — the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of value — evolved over many thousands of years by native peoples the world over” (275). For Churchill, these bodies of knowledge and values constitute the “spirit of resistance” (275) that has similarly inspired Indigenous activists all over the world and throughout history.

Whereas the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica in 1519 and the establishment of Israel in 1948 as a Jewish state brought about rupture in Mayan and Palestinian histories, respectively, both events also led to the minoritization of these indigenous people. What is specifically significant about the position of Mayans in Chiapas, Mexico, and Palestinians in Israel, as indigenous minorities, is that they dwell in their native land, surviving in the ruins and inheriting the legacy of those vanquished, displaced and exiled. Historically, however, both minorities are currently at a disjuncture that witnesses the global emergence of the subaltern and the reemergence of the indigenous. Although this new era has been intellectually fostered by post-colonial and subaltern studies since the early 1980s, it is marked by the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities by the UN General Assembly on December 18, 1992.

The struggle for land and equal human rights has been the core issue for anti-colonial clashes with the states of Mexico and Israel. These struggles have also motivated indigenous resistance among Mayans and Palestinians. In the case of Mayans in Chiapas,

their contemporary ongoing struggle for land rights is rooted in the legacy of the Spanish conquest and colonial policies that continued to be part of government policies in post-revolutionary Mexico. In the last two decades, this struggle has been aggravated, due to neoliberalism and globalization. The land struggle among Palestinians in Israel, however, is informed by the physical emergence of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ongoing execution of Zionist settlement ideology. It is also informed by the shifting borders that have resulted from the Israeli-Arab wars.

Historical Review of Indigenous Land Struggle:

In 1712, Mayans in Chiapas revolted against Spanish colonial rule. The Tzeltal Revolt, named after the leadership, which was based in the Tzeltal community of Cancuc, was not the first uprising, yet it is considered the major one (Womack 77). The combination of excessive tribute, crop failures, and lack of alternative employment led to famine in the highlands. To the dissatisfaction of the Church, and despite its condemnation of the phenomenon as heresy, Mayans invoked their religious practices and ethnic consciousness that had been evolving since the 1540s, in order to overcome the famine. Many deserted the Church after claiming that the Virgin Mary had appeared to them in Zinacantán, Santa Marta, and Cancuc (Harvey 40). This revolt is historicized as a quest for indigenous liberation, while its immediate aim was to “achieve autonomy from the church and the colonial government” (40).

Another territorial transformation occurred in Chiapas in 1824. Following the Mexican War of Independence (1810-21), which was an armed conflict between the people of Mexico and the Spanish colonial authorities, there was a period of internal

disputes between rival elite factions about whether Chiapas should be part of Guatemala or Mexico. In 1824, Chiapas officially joined Mexico. It won a certain degree of autonomy, because of its geographical separation from the center, and the weakness of the newly independent Mexican state (Harvey 43). Even today, Chiapas continues to enjoy a strong regionalist sentiment.

Moreover, an important landmark in the history of Chiapas is the Indian Rebellion of 1869, otherwise known as “The Caste War of 1869”. In 1867-70 Mayans in Highland Chiapas adopted a new religious cult and stopped worshipping and trading in Ladino (non-Indian) towns. Their unexpected independence alarmed the Ladino priests, merchants and politicians, who in 1869 launched a ferocious attack on them. While historically the war has been portrayed in terms of religious clashes, Jan Rus (1996) argues that Chamulas did indeed have objective reasons to rebel and that the rebellion was the culmination of years of unrest. He also observes: “The attacks on the Indians in 1869-70 appear to have been little more than the final act of a drama that began when Chiapas’s Ladinos began competing among themselves for control of the state’s land and labor following independence” (45).

Interestingly enough, this rebellion and its political implication for Mayan-Ladino relations in the early twentieth century were documented in many literary works from Chiapas. One of the most prominent examples is Rosario Castellanos’ historical epic, which is also a classic of Mexican literature, *Oficio de tinieblas* (Book of Lamentations) (1962). The novel retells the history of this war through a story about a tragic encounter between a rich Ladino landlord who exploits Mayan labor and a Mayan woman whom he rapes in the 1930s.

Since the late nineteenth century, several transformations in the struggle for land in Chiapas have taken place. During the 1880s and 1890s, the government appropriated one-third of the Chiapas surface area to satisfy booming world markets for tropical plantation agriculture (Coerver, Pastor, and Buffington 75). However, when the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, it had a popular peasant basis, which was reflected in the slogan of one of its leading figures, Emiliano Zapata, who called for “*Tierra y libertad*” (Land and Liberty). The consecutive governments that came after the revolution promised agrarian reforms and land return. Many of these reforms became effective during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934-40 (75).

In the second half of the twentieth century, dramatic economic changes and an increasing indigenous political awareness transformed land struggle in Chiapas. In the 1970s there was a rebirth of agrarian populism, led by President Luis Echeverría’s promise to restore the government’s revolutionary commitment to workers and peasants (Harvey 78). A Federal Agrarian Reform Law was passed in 1971. It called for governmental support for communal lands, *ejidos*. Discussion of a self-sufficient peasant economy and an independent indigenous economy took place in 1974, during the first Indigenous Congress in San Cristóbal de las Casas, which had representatives from 372 Mayan communities (78). Nonetheless, indigenous communities in Chiapas continued to live in a state of land dependency, while seeking work outside their communities.

The long history of land struggle took another dramatic turn in the early 1990s. Labor migration escalated, as most large landowners abandoned the countryside altogether and were replaced by small property owners and *ejidatarios*, or communal holders. It is important to note here that this process already began in the 1930s during

the government rule of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40). Cárdenas promised to implement the vision of the Mexican Revolution by extending his policies concerning agrarian reform, labor unions, and an end to debt contracting and peonage to formally excluded regions, such as Chiapas. However, by the end of the 1930s, Mayans in Chiapas continued to suffer from land poverty, while depending on seasonal migratory labor in the lowlands to feed themselves.

Moreover, Cárdenas's reforms not only failed, but they had also far-reaching negative effects on the economic and social fabric of indigenous communities. For example, the system of *caciques*, which is a pillar of oligarchic power over indigenous communities, was integrated into the new bureaucracies, thus creating more social division. Jan Rus (1994) sums up this history: "To make their reforms work, the Cardenistas and their successors reached inside the native communities, not only changing leaders but rearranging the governments, creating new offices to deal with labor and agrarian matters at the same time that they were granting vast new powers to the officials charged with maintaining relations with the party [*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, PNR] and state" (265).

In addition to this legacy of Cardensmo, rapid urbanization, as well as a population explosion, which occurred partly because of the migration of Guatemalan Mayans in the early 1980s, due to the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), affected the land struggle in Chiapas too. (Coerver, Pastor, and Buffington 75). On January 1, 1994, masses of masked Mayans stormed into San Cristóbal in an armed uprising against the state of Mexico. Led by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation EZLN) (EZLN), they protested against neoliberalism, disguised as

globalization, and the economic policies of the Mexican government, which signed onto the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on that day. They protested against the long history of exploitation and economic disparity, which were to be aggravated by NAFTA and its promise of neoliberal economic reforms. The protests were met by the armed forces of the Mexican army, who also used the air force to regain control of the highlands. By the time of the ceasefire between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government on January 12, the death toll included “13 Mexican soldiers, 38 state police, more than 70 Zapatista soldiers, and from 19 to 275 or more civilians” (Womack 43-44).

Many observers and historians of Chiapas consider the Zapatista uprising a manifestation of indigenous “awakening.” In fact, the manifesto of the uprising is written as a declaration of war. In the first communiqué from the EZLN, titled “*Declaración de la selva lacandona*,” (Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle), the Zapatistas address the people of Mexico. They declare: “Today We Say Enough! We are the product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, during the War of Independence against Spain led by the insurgents; afterwards to avoid being absorbed by American imperialism.” (Womack 247) Although not all Mayas in Chiapas participated in the uprising, Jan Rus and George Collier (2003) observe that there was a collective sense of exhilaration and ethnic pride among Mayans in Chiapas and indigenous people throughout Mexico. They note: “Confronting the army and state, many felt the Zapatistas had struck a blow for all indigenous people” (33).

Undoubtedly, this exhilaration extended beyond the borders of Chiapas, as the Zapatista uprising gained visibility through international media coverage. The influx of reporters and solidarity activists, as well as academics, who continued to arrive in San

Cristóbal from Mexico and abroad after 1994 brought worldwide attention to the Mayan struggle in Chiapas. Indeed, Ana Carrigan (2001) argues that the 1994 Zapatista Revolution remains understood on the international scene as the first postmodern revolution of the 20th century, because it was an “explosion, rising from the submerged roots of Mexico’s forgotten past, caused by a modernization program that menaced the indigenous population with the destruction of everything they hold essential in their way of life” (417). Within this context of “postmodern” revolution, the Zapatistas emerged as an icon of indigenous and global resistance.

Similarly, land struggle has been and continues to be one of the main factors that characterize the minoritization of Palestinians in Israel. Palestinians became a minority in historic Palestine, as a result of territorial transformation and rupture in 1948, after the emergence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. From the Palestinian historical and national perspective, 1948 was the year of *al-Nakba* (the Catastrophe). The uprooting of Palestinians, the dismemberment and de-Arabization of historic Palestine, the destruction of more than 500 villages and towns, and their disappearance from international maps and dictionaries, are among the major aftermaths of *al-Nakba* (Masalha 2-3). With the dispersal and exile of more than 70% of the Palestinian population, the notion of land and the assertion of return to it have formed the basis for national struggle. Thus, the right of return has been recognized as part of the inalienable and not-negotiable Palestinian rights.⁸

⁸ Palestinian refugees make up to 70 percent of the overall Palestinian population. Their right of return has been recognized by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, which has been affirmed yearly since 1948. The resolution states that Palestinian refugees “wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return.” For more on this resolution and the ongoing political and humanitarian discussions of the Palestinian right to return, see Naseer Aruri, *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return* (Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001).

In addition to the Palestinians who continue to live as stateless subjects⁹ in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Occupied West Bank and Gaza, *al-Nakba* resulted in internal displacement. Palestinians who were uprooted from their original homes but remained in Israel were forbidden to return to their homes after the battles had come to an end. In the eyes of the nascent Israeli state, they became present absentees,¹⁰ because they were not able to provide evidence for their presence in the villages and towns during the war in 1948 (Kimmerling and Migdal 171). These internal refugees made up about 15 percent of the Palestinian Arabs remaining within the boundaries of the Jewish state. All in all, about 150,000 Arabs stayed in Israel and became citizens of the state, comprising about 10 percent of the total population in Israel. Their number doubled in the 1960s and today they constitute about 20 percent of Israel's population.

In the official state system, Palestinians were not recognized as a homeland national minority. In state registries they were listed under different overlapping categories and subdivisions: Arabs, Druze and Bedouins as de-Arabized groups, Circassians as an ethnic minority, and Muslims, Christian and Druze as religious communities. In creating these categories the state aspired to fragment Palestinians in Israel as a national unity, and thus enhance their minoritization.¹¹

⁹ The legal status of Palestinian refugees varies. Those in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and some other Arab countries hold a 'Refugee Travel Document' (RTD), whereas Palestinian refugees in Jordan are holders of nationality of convenience – mainly temporary Jordanian passports. Palestinian refugees in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza, on the other hand, are holders of the Palestinian passport issued by the Palestinian Authority (PA). This passport is considered a travel document pending formation of a fully-fledged Palestinian state. For more information on the legal status of Palestinian refugees in international law, see Alex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

¹⁰ This term is part of the Absentee's Property Laws (first version in 1950), which declares that anyone who left the country in 1948, is an absentee, and that his/her property comes under the control of the State. This Law was used only against Arabs, and even in reference to people who remained in the country but who were compelled to leave their land. These individuals are called "present absentees."

¹¹ For more on how the state of Israel used these subdivisions to control the population and to guarantee de-Palestinization, see Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press,

However, in the Arab world Palestinians in Israel were referred to as “*Arab al-dākhil*” (Arabs of the Inside), or Palestinians from inside the Green Line, in reference to their location within the armistice line of demarcation created in 1948, as the *de facto* border between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbors — Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. Nonetheless, a great number of Palestinians refer to themselves as ‘48 Palestinians, or Palestinians in Israel. Some identify as Arab-Israelis.¹²

From the very beginning of their history as an indigenous minority in Israel, Palestinians have lived in a state of internal colonialism.¹³ First, they are not included in the national identity of the Jewish ethnic state. Second, as second-class citizens, they suffer from systematic exclusion and discrimination. Military Rule (1949-66), the Six-Day War in 1967, Land Day in 1976, and the upheaval in October 2000 are major landmarks that reveal their precarious position in relation to the state as subalterns and ‘dangerous subjects.’

Living under direct military rule that lasted for two decades, Palestinians were governed by a military administration that imposed severe travel restrictions, in a relentless attempt to control their movement and labor, in addition to repressing political organizing and free expression. Curfews, roadblocks, and military attacks on civilians were not an uncommon practice in this period. The Kufur Qassim Massacre in 1956,

1976).

¹² For social analysis and a review of psychological studies on Palestinian identity in Israel and the different categories of self-identification, see Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu Baker, *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Also, for more the political transformations of Palestinian identification in Israel, see As’ad Ghanem, “The Palestinians in Israel: Political Orientation and Aspirations,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 26.2 (2002): 135-52.

¹³ In the late 1970s, Palestinian sociologist Elia Zureik was the first one to use this term to describe the reality of Palestinians in Israel. Studying the proletarianization of the Palestinian peasantry, he argued that their condition resembled life in an “internal colony,” similar to Apartheid South Africa and segregation of African-Americans in the US. Zureik was also among the first proponents of a Palestinian autonomy within Israel. For more on his material and empirical analysis of internal colonialism, see Elia Zureik T, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

which resulted in the death of 49 civilians, including 6 women and 23 children at the hands of Israeli border police, is one example.¹⁴ Although military rule was abolished in 1966,¹⁵ Palestinians continued to be considered by the state as potential security risks. As Ilan Pappé (2011) points out, military rule “was replaced with a web of new legislation and rules on the ground which were meant to ensure segregation, obedience and co-optation” (97). This new legislation and rules went hand in hand with a new set of policies that called for the improvement of the social conditions of Palestinians.

As much as the minoritization of Palestinians was enhanced by their confinement under military rule within the borders of the Green Line, their minority position was further challenged after the Six-Day War in June 1967. After the war, often referred to as *al-Naksa* (the Setback) to describe the Arab defeat and the complete occupation of historic Palestine, the borders across the so-called Green Line reopened. During the war, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. All were outside the Green Line. It also occupied Sinai in Egypt and the Golan Heights in Syria. Although this occupation meant the transfer of military rule to the West Bank and The Gaza Strip,

¹⁴ The massacre took place at 4:30 in the afternoon of October 29, 1956, on the same day that Israel and its French and English allies invaded Egypt. The military governor announced a 5 pm curfew in the village of Kufur Qassim, and other villages in the area near the Jordanian border. The border police followed a shoot-to-kill order for all violators. The victims were villagers who were working in their fields and groves on the outskirts of Kufur Qassim. They did not know about the curfew, and they were killed in their return to home. For a detailed account of the massacre and testimonies from the families of the survivors and the national commemoration efforts, see Shira Robinson, “Local Struggle, National Struggle: Palestinian Responses to the Kufur Qassim Massacre and Its Aftermath, 1956-66,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35.3 (2003) 393-416.

¹⁵ Despite the structural dismantling of military rule, its visual power remained. Over the years, sophisticated visual techniques of power were introduced, including aerial photography of Palestinians during demonstrations and the establishment of surveillance police stations in Palestinian towns and villages, among others. See Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, “Palestinian Predicaments: Jewish Immigration and Refugee Repatriation,” in *Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender among Palestinians in Israel*, eds. Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 171-187.

Palestinians in Israel were also able to reunite with their brethren and the larger Arab world across the border, after two decades of separation.¹⁶

After the re-opening of the borders in 1967, Palestinians confronted their minoritization on the national level. While the renewed encounters with their families allowed for reunification, sharing stories and comparing notes about the trauma of *al-Nakba*, it further revealed their different political reality as citizens in Israel. Pappé notes: “The reunion with the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip highlighted their unity of purpose, but it also exposed the conflicting agendas on both sides of the Green Line, if not immediately then soon after” (113). In fact, the 1967 border marked two different political projects. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the political movement focused on liberation from the Israeli occupation. Despite their support for this cause, Palestinians in Israel stressed their struggle for equality within the Jewish state as a priority.

However, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories across the Green Line and Arabs in neighboring countries ‘discovered’ the Palestinians in Israel after the re-opening of the borders. This trend was further strengthened as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) legitimized the Palestinian identity of Israeli Arabs. This legitimacy

¹⁶ Although the so-called Green Line cut Palestinians in Israel off from their families on the other side, border-crossing and infiltration were a common practice. Honaïda Ghanim (2010) observes that families in the village of Marjeh maintained their ties with their Palestinian ancestor families in the village of Dayr al-Ghusun, adjacent to Tulkarim in the occupied West Bank. In so doing, they asserted their resistance to the border and minoritization. Ghanim argues: “For Palestinians, the Green Line could not and would not be conceptualized as a normal fact or *fait accompli*. Between 1948 and 1967, Palestinians living in Israel under strict military control and surveillance consistently attempted to cross the border. Their aim was not explicitly political. They were merely trying to visit their families, harvest their crops, and purchase merchandise. “Infiltrating,” “sneaking,” “evading,” and “penetrating”—all strictly illegal actions as defined by the Israeli state—were, in fact, their way of catching a glimpse, however temporary and curtailed, into their lives as they had lived them before that border brutally crossed them” (111). See Honaïda Ghanim. “Being a Border” in *Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender Among Palestinians in Israel*, eds. Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 109-14.

had an impact on intellectuals and writers in the Arab world, including journal editors, particularly in Egypt and Lebanon.¹⁷ Moreover, Ghassān Kanafānī's novella, *ā'id ilā Ḥayfā* (Returning to Haifa) (1969) is an example of a Palestinian narrative that revisits the history of the border and the formation of Palestinian identity in post-1967 Israel. It is written from the perspective of a displaced Palestinian refugee couple who take advantage of the re-opening of the border to visit their home in Haifa and search for their son who was lost during the chaos of *al-Nakba* in 1948.¹⁸

Land Day on March 30, 1976 is another historical landmark that reflects the political and national struggle of Palestinians in Israel as an indigenous minority with second-class citizenship. It began when the government announced plans to confiscate some twenty thousand *dunams* (acres) of Arab-owned lands in the Galilee, where the majority of Palestinians live. The government claimed that the plan was for “security purposes,” but when it became clear that the same area would soon be settled by Jews as part of the larger plan to “Judaize the Galilee,” Palestinians declared a massive general strike. They took to the streets in demonstrations to protest against what they considered to be the shrinking of their space and government attempts to maintain a Jewish majority in Israel, by settling Jews in areas where Arabs had lived, and transferring Arab-claimed lands to Jewish control (Falah 231).¹⁹ The protestors were met by massive, heavily armed police and border patrol forces. Six Palestinian citizens were killed.

About twenty-five years later, Palestinian in Israel were reminded again of their

¹⁷ On the transformations of Palestinian national identity across the borders of 1967, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ For a discussion of the notion of the border in the novella, see Barbara Harlow, “Return to Haifa: ‘Opening the Borders’ in Palestinian Literature,” *Social Text* (1987): 3-23.

¹⁹ See also Oren Yiftachel and Avinoam Meir. *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

fragile citizenship status, as they were victimized again by the brutality of the Israeli police. After the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa Intifada* in late September 2000, Palestinians took to the streets to protest against the killing and oppression of their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the first two days of October 2000, Israeli police and military forces shot and killed 13 Palestinians, 12 of them citizens of Israel,²⁰ while the Israeli media characterized the protests as traitorous riots, which further fueled the Palestinian sense of outrage. Arab thinker and former member of the Israeli Knesset ‘Azmi Bisharah (2001), who is currently exiled in Qatar, argues that both Land Day and October 2000, or the popular upheaval [*habba sha ‘bīyah*] of October 2000, as he calls it, revealed that there are “clear limits to the toleration of the Palestinian minority, which are also the limits of Israeli democracy” (144).²¹ When Palestinians took to the streets to protest for a national cause, they were repressed and met with bullets.

Research Questions:

It is in the context of this history of land struggle and internal colonialism of Mayans in Chiapas and Palestinians in Israel that my comparative study of indigenous minority literature is situated. While keeping in mind their different histories of minoritization and negotiation of indigenous citizenship in a socio-political reality of internal colonialism, my comparative study seeks to understand how the literatures of

²⁰ Twelve of the fallen were Palestinian citizens of Israel and the other victim was from Gaza. However, in the commemorations and memorial services this distinction was not made, thus asserting that all Palestinians, regardless of their location or legal status, are equally targeted by Israeli bullets.

²¹ ‘Azmi Bisharah elaborates on this in an interview with Carey Roane. He contends: “The limits of Israeli democracy are best exposed when it is confronted with the national question, as opposed to demands for this or that particular right... The most important indicator of the recent popular upheaval is that, all of a sudden, the mask came off it. It became apparent that we are a tolerated population, provided the situation permits. The popular upheaval of last October is not the only instance. On Land Day in 1976 the same thing happened.” (144). For the complete interview see “The Palestinians in Israel: An Interview with ‘Azmi Bishara” *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel’s Apartheid*, ed. Carey Roane (London: Verso, 2001) 139-57.

these distinct groups articulate narratives and notions of indigeneity, difference, resistance, borders, hybridity, internal colonialism and contact zones. My aim is to identify the elements that inform the development of indigenous minority literature as an inherently complex category. Although this category refers to two autonomous bodies of literature, it is characterized by a persisting intersectionality of often overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, fronts and histories: indigenous, national, colonial and global.

The scope of this study is limited to contemporary Mayan literature from 1983-2010, and Palestinian literature from 1976-2010. In 1983, two major events took place in Chiapas. First, the foundation of the EZLN in the highlands on November 17, 1983 marked the emergence of the national indigenous resistance movement. Second, the first collective of contemporary Mayan writers, *Sna Jtz'ibajom* (The House of the Writer), was founded in San Cristóbal in 1983. In collaboration with local Ladino writers and cultural promoters, such as Francisco Álvarez Quiñones, US anthropologist Robert Laughlin, and Mexican-American photographer Carlota Duarte, *Sna Jtz'ibajom* hosted workshops for literature and drama writing.²² For the second time in the history of modern Chiapas, there was literary production in written Mayan languages, specifically Tzotzil and Tzeltal. Some works were published in bi-lingual editions with Spanish translations. These works became part of an ongoing indigenous cultural movement, which has since been referred to as the Mayan Renaissance.

It must be noted that another Mayan writers' collective was established earlier in Chiapas, in 1954. A group of bilingual Mayan cultural promoters, who spoke Spanish, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal, worked in a puppet theatre to promote development programs among

²² Robert Laughlin's wife, Mimi, was also involved in the formation of *Sna Jtz'ibajom*. Carlota Duarte, a dual American-Mexican citizen, was born in the US of a Mexican father and an American mother. She moved to Chiapas in the early 1992.

the Mayan communities. The programs, which focused on public health, education and issues of alcoholism, operated through the *Institute Nacional Indigenista* (INI) (National Indigenist Institute), and its pilot program *Centro Coordinador Indigenista* (CCI) (Indigenist Coordinating Center). Teodoro Sánchez, a Tzotzil promoter was the director for a short time, before the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos joined in 1955. She wrote plays for the troupe and directed it in 1956-57. In the beginning the group was called *Teatro Guignol*, but when it gained wide success in late 1954, the French “guignol” was dropped. The theatrical collective was “Indianized” when its name was replaced with Petul, or “Pedro” in both Tzeltal and Tzotzil, after Pedro Díaz Cuscat, a visionary Chamula who helped organize an indigenous revolt in 1869 (Lewis 382).

While the puppet theater in the 1950s was a cultural movement that was partially institutionalized within local and national anthropological centers, the Mayan Renaissance has enjoyed more independence. Moreover, *Sna Jtz'ibajom* offered literacy programs in Tzotzil and Tzeltal. In addition to writing life histories, folk tales, Mayan myths, native remedies and other aspects of their culture in these languages, some writers from *Sna Jtz'ibajom* recorded their observations on Americans and American culture following their encounters with US anthropologists in Chiapas, and their travels in the US (Vogt 344).

On the other hand, the events of Land Day in 1976 escalated the emergence of Palestinian nationalism among Palestinians in Israel. Expressions of this national consciousness were reflected in a literary boom that included the appearance of more narrative works. Moreover, Palestinians gained visibility in the larger national imaginary. Outside the so-called Green Line, Land Day became recognized as a national event, and

since 1976 it has become a broader commemoration of the loss of Palestinian land.²³ Moreover, 1976 marks a decade after the dismantling of military rule and the re-opening of the borders. This decade witnessed the beginning of increased contact with the greater Arab world and a wider exposure to its literary and cultural production. In the last two decades this contact has been fostered by globalization. Using social media and other media of global circulation, Palestinian writers remain in close contact with Arab writers, readers and publishers, despite the fact that Israel's relationship with the majority of the Arab and Muslim world is defined in terms of animosity and lack of official diplomatic ties.

It is noteworthy that what particularizes this comparative study is its trans-historical and trans-regional dimension. First, to examine Mayan and Palestinian literatures, I had to revisit the history of the Spanish conquest in 1519 and *al-Nakba* in 1948, in order to understand these events as foundational moments in both literary traditions. Sometimes, the five-hundred-year gap has posed a challenge, because it hindered a more comprehensive reading and close examination of the long history of Mayan oral literature. Second, designed as a South-South conversation, this comparative study has been very much invested in creating a bridge between indigenous struggle in Mexico and Palestine/Israel. The creation of such a bridge necessitated close interdisciplinary readings across the spectrum of different fields and histories: Mesoamerican and Latin American history and literature, oral traditions and anthropology, Post-Revolution Mexican nationalism and Zapatista insurgency politics,

²³ For more information on how Land Day became a national holiday among Palestinians in their homeland and in the diaspora and on the promotion of the Palestinian National Organization (PLO) for its commemoration, see Nehad Khader, "Land Day and the Politics of Representation," *Jadaliyya* 23 April, 2013. Web. 1 May 2013.

Arabic studies, history and literature of the Modern Middle East, Zionism, as well as Israeli and Palestinian studies. The result of this interdisciplinary, trans-historical and transatlantic South-South conversation has not only highlighted the loss of the indigenous archive, but also, and more importantly, it has redefined for me the very notion of the archive.

Indeed, to create an indigenous literary archive within the context of post-colonial Latin American historiography and post-Zionism and *Nakba* historiographies, it became crucial to take into account the non-literary, including the oral, the pictorial, the performative and the subaltern. For example, when tracing the roots of contemporary Mayan Literature in Chiapas back to the preservation of indigenous oral tradition following the Mesoamerican-Spanish literary encounter after the Conquest in 1519, Martin Lienhard's (1990) notion of '*la otra historia*' (the other history) became instrumental. The 'other history' of the indigenous oral archive reveals how the Mesoamerican-Spanish encounter led to the consolidation of the Spanish Empire, the canonization of Latin American literature, and the emergence of post-Conquest indigenous literature as 'alternative' texts. The autonomous history of these 'alternative texts,' Lienhard reminds us, originates in the marginalization of indigenous literature in the Latin American canon. It is important to add here that this marginalization is also evident in the modern Mexican canon. Mayan and other indigenous literature, with the occasional exception of some texts from immediately after the Conquest, are still excluded from Mexican literature textbooks and anthologies.

On the other hand, the general exclusion of Palestinian literature from the Israeli-Hebrew canon testifies to the present-absentee category resulting from a Zionist national

ideology based on Palestinian erasure. Indeed, the exclusion of Palestinian literature was already evident in the very early beginnings of consolidating an Israeli-Hebrew canon. In this process, which simultaneously affirmed a national identity of a Jewish majority that embraced Zionism and rejected its Jewish Diaspora identity, especially its oppressed minority tradition, the Arab was invoked and constructed as the marginal Other.

Israeli critic Hannan Hever (1990) attests to this trend. Discussing three short stories from the 1960s that formed the Israeli-Hebrew literary canon, A.B. Yeshoua's "Facing the Forests," Amos OZ's "Nomad and Viper," and "Amalia Kahana-Carmon's "Heart of Summer, Heart of Light," Hever argues that these stories express a Jewish majority consciousness. He asserts: "These stories, in which an empowered majority acts as befits the weakness of a minority, are themselves masterworks of the majority canon"(131). He also adds that these stories established the discourse of the majority by creating an image of the Arab as the marginal Other. In these stories the Arab emerge as "an oedipal substitute," (142) and destroyed Palestinians cities, such as Jaffa/Jaffa are invoked to emphasize "the ruins of [their] Arab past" (143). In other words, the Israeli-Hebrew canon was constructed against the image of Arab-Palestinian defeat and erasure to assert the rebellion of the Jewish majority against the history of Jews as a minority.

In closing, let me remind the reader that there are numerous comparative studies in the context of Mayan and Palestinian histories. However, the majority of these studies have focused on political movements, colonial history, post-colonial criticism, gender and anthropology, within a particular regional discourse. For example, there are several studies on Mayans within the context of the Zapatista uprising and indigenous resistance movements in the Americas. Recently, these studies, alongside hemispheric culture

projects, have been extended to include a comparison with strategies of resistance among Chicano/as and African-Americans in the US. The recent book *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach* (2012) is one example. In their introduction to the book, the editors M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo Aldama, highlight the shared history of discourses of indigenismo, Xicanismo and mestizaje in both borderland studies in the US and indigenous studies in the American hemisphere. They write: “We stress overlapping histories and oppositional subjectivities vis-à-vis colonial forces. In so doing, we engage in the critical production of decolonial methodologies and allow an epistemic space for scholars to discuss the indigenous process of identity formation that challenge imperial discourse” (1). On the cultural and performance studies front, this paradigm is led by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at NYU. The ongoing multimedia project titled *Zapantera Negra*, which explores the artistic and political connections between the Black Panther Party and the Zapatista movement, is another example of this trend.²⁴

On the other hand, the increasing number of comparative political and historical studies on Palestine has focused on South Africa, Ireland and India within an attempt to invoke the legacy of Apartheid and partition, respectively. These studies suggest that talking about the contemporary reality of colonialism in Palestine in terms of these two political phenomena is a useful analytical model and a strategic methodology for decolonization. Ben White’s book *Palestinians in Israel: Segregation, Discrimination and Democracy* (2012) comes to mind here, as an example of a recent study that focuses specifically on comparing the political reality of Palestinians in Israel with the history of

²⁴ Compañero Manuel. “Zapantera Negra: Zapatista Black Panther Art.” *The Chiapas Support Committee Blog on Zapatistas & Mexico*. 19 March 2013. Web. 1 May 2013.

Apartheid in South Africa. Moreover, worthy of particular mention here is the comparative study between Palestinian and Native-American literatures as exemplified in Steven Salaita's book *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan* (2006). Although his book is trans-regional in nature, it is intended mainly to understand the colonial processes from a comparative perspective on the New World and the Near East. Therefore, Salaita devotes special attention to the literary examinations of indigeneity and its representation in Native-American and Palestinian national literature.

Theoretical Apparatus and Methodology:

Given the unusual nature of this comparison, which includes mapping literary traditions in two indigenous minorities emerging from the Global South and the Fourth World, my work builds on the existing theoretical frameworks of minority and indigenous studies within the context of Comparative and World Literature, especially those articulated by David Damrosch (2006) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2003, 2012). Exploring subaltern cultures and an alternative canon will provide a theoretical contribution to the discipline, based on the notion of emergent indigenous minority literature.

Framing my research within Damrosch's theoretical framework of the alternative canon was particularly useful, because it allowed me to examine indigenous literatures that "seem different, speak of different concerns in different voices, and weigh differently against one another" (216). Damrosch emphasizes that establishing an alternative canon is a new direction that Comparative Literature should take, because it creates a world literature canon that moves away from the hegemony of the hypercanon (populated by

older “major” authors), the new marginalization of subaltern writings in the countercanon, and the fading of the shadow canon (populated by old “minor” authors). By creating a conversation within/on the periphery of world literature, my aim is to contribute to the formation of that new canon.

Notwithstanding the colonial history behind the minoritization of Mayans in Chiapas and Palestinians in Israel, I eschew a theoretical lens that overemphasizes their marginalization and subaltern position. In other words, I try to resist an almost natural tendency to examine Mayan and Palestinian indigenous literatures as part of the countercanon. My hesitancy to consider these literary traditions within the framework of the countercanon stems from the fact that this paradigm overemphasizes the aspect of the “counter.” It also highlights postcolonial resistance as the operating model of this canon. Therefore, I avoid this category, in order to not fetishize Mayan and Palestinian literatures as resistance literature. It is also my effort to avoid reproducing a framework of post-colonial colonialism that insists on an essentialist reduction of these literary traditions as “counter.” Nonetheless, my focus on these literatures as autonomous traditions does not disregard the material conditions that inform the Mayan and Palestinian production of literature and culture, such as literacy, poverty, disenfranchisement, and colonial racism.

In addition, comparing Mayan and Palestinian literatures fosters the role of the Global South, which Spivak considers the center of New Comparative Literature. In *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Spivak argues that the lack of communication within the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world is a major infrastructural problem that restricts the permeability of global culture. To overcome this problem, she

argues that it is the task of New Comparative Literature to address the old minorities: African, Asian, and Hispanic. She continues to describe the role of New Comparative Literature as sweeping “the new postcoloniality of the post-Soviet sector and the special place of Islam in today’s breaking world. Not everything for everyone, all at once. But a Comparative Literature format —historical and linguistic — possible, for any slice chosen from any of these places, the background filled in by new reference tools on Franco Moretti’s model”(84).²⁵ The Mayan-Palestinian comparison not only makes minority literature from the Global South more visible in Comparative Literature, but it also creates a conversation that furthers communication between subaltern groups. The aim of this communication is to highlight the diversity in the Global South, while amplifying the different emerging voices from there. In a thematic discussion of the future direction of Comparative Literature during the MLA Convention in Seattle on January 7, 2012, Spivak identified this approach as an attempt to create “global radiance.”

Moreover, while Damrosch describes encounters in the Global South as events that scholars of World Literature should engage with critically, I consider these encounters as examples of emerging stakes that call for a paradigm shift. Encounters in the Global South, I would argue, deserve more than historical documentation or critical

²⁵ In his model for World Literature, Franco Moretti (2006) is less interested in defining what constitutes World Literature, and is more focused on investigating *how* it is constructed. Moretti’s model is based on an understanding of time and geographical space derived from evolutionary theory and Wallerstein’s theory of “world-system”. Employing the metaphors of trees, maps, roots and exchange, Moretti argues that World Literature is best understood in terms of multiplicity of forms that exist in the world. This multiplicity, he contends, is “the result of *divergence* and *branching*, and that bases divergence on a process of *spatial separation*” (219). Relying on Wallerstein’s theory of “world-system”, his model divides the world into three positions: core, periphery and semi- periphery. These three positions create a world that is both one and unequal. Moretti goes on to argue that we must understand World Literature in light of the economic dynamics that result from this world-system: a market of *diffusion* and a literary system of *sameness* (221). For a detailed overview this model, see Franco Moretti, “World-systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, “Weltliteratur”,” *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center). 28.3 (2005): 217-28.

reflection. Here, my vision is specifically more in alliance with Spivak (2012) when she asks: “Is our obligation [in world literature] to challenge ‘*différance*’ to be taken as task or event?” (459). In other words, I see the Mayan-Palestinian comparison as a challenge to the Otherness that has been constructed by Euro-American literary traditions.

Moreover, by heavily relying on writings and examining the literary history of Mayan and Palestinian literatures in a study that is situated in Comparative and World Literature, my dissertation contributes to Indigenous Studies and Arabic Literary Studies in the US. I intentionally focused on writing a literary history of contemporary Mayan and Palestinian literatures, in order to make them available to the world and to include them in histories of World Literature. However, throughout my analysis, I keep a critical eye that engages the local indigenous homeland and its particular history. In so doing, I try to maintain a mindset of “thinking outside the reservation,” while keeping a “frog’s eye perspective” (Wilkins 11). In decolonial research methodology, both critical approaches are considered effective modes to advocate for indigenous rights.

Additionally, my close reading of the Palestinian and Mayan texts relies on engagement with literary criticism and history in both Arabic and Spanish. Some of these sources appear here in English for the first time. This move opts for contributing to the archive of invisible critical traditions that remains missing from the study of both Arabic and Latin American literatures in Comparative Literature departments in the US. Thus, I try to support the need to create new literary history, which Samah Selim (2011) considers vital for the future of Arabic literature. In contributing to this archive, I hope to aid in creating and articulating “new questions of methods and theory that emerge from local — national or regional — contexts rather than as an appendage of contemporary

Euro-American epistemologies and intellectual histories” (735).

Reading Guide:

The structure of this dissertation reflects its conceptual framework. Designed as a conversation, rather than a comparison and contrast per se, this study highlights the significance of mutual illuminations, through reading Palestinian literature in light of Mayan literature and vice versa. Therefore, it was articulated in the following way: Chapters One and Two address a common problem, whereas Chapters Three and Four examine common themes and aesthetics. While Chapter One begins by addressing the problem of minoritization by approaching it first from the Palestinian perspective, while Chapter Two examines the common intersection of anthropology, literature and folklore, by invoking the Mayan tradition first. The choice of whether Palestinian or Mayan literature goes first in the conversation stems from my understanding that the problem addressed in that chapter is more particularly relevant to the ongoing discussions and the critical paradigm of this tradition. Hence, readers are encouraged to change their reading lens accordingly.

Chapters Three and Four, on the other hand, follow a more traditional structure of comparison and contrast. Literary criticism and close reading are the main modes of analysis in these chapters. Both are used in the third chapter to examine the representation of the supernatural in Mayan dream narratives and in a Palestinian fairytale included in a novel. To gain deeper insight into the nature of border crossing and indigenous feminism in the writings of Mayan women playwrights and Palestinian women novelists, literary criticism and close reading, as well as personal interviews with

the writers, were utilized in Chapter Four. All four chapters end with a discussion of possible conclusions that can be drawn about the specific topic examined in each chapter.

In Chapter One, I focus on literary history and the question of minoritization. I outline the challenges of writing a literary history of indigenous minority literature, especially when their historiographies demonstrate the overlap between colonialism and nationalism. I map out how Mayan literature was minoritized by Spanish colonialism and Mexican nationalism. In particular, I review the Hispanization projects that led to the transfer of indigenous languages into Spanish script, through the several indigenous forms of resistance and hybridity under this colonialist endeavor. In contrast, I examine how Palestinian literature in Israel was minoritized by the settlement ideology of Zionism that the Israeli state apparatus continues to execute. Following a different logic of colonial erasure, this ideology led to the exclusion and separation of Palestinians and their literature from the project of the Jewish state and its national literature. Throughout this interdisciplinary, trans-historical and transatlantic comparison, I highlight the loss of the indigenous archive, while calling attention to the very notion of the archive itself.

Chapter Two examines the particularity of the intersection of oral literature, folklore, anthropology and indigenous nationalism in indigenous minority literature in both Mayan literature in Chiapas and Palestinian literature in Israel. I study this intersection through a comparison of the role that Mexican anthropologists, versus Palestinian political writers, played in shaping the beginning of literary engagement with Mayan and Palestinian oral cultures, respectively. To this end, I look at two early examples of canonical ethnographies that focused on Mayan and Palestinian oral narratives: Ricardo Pozas' *Juan Pérez Jolote: biografía de un tzotzil* (1952) (Juan Pérez

Jolote: An Ethnological Re-creation of the Life of a Mexican Indian) and Tawfīq Zayyād's *'an al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha'bī fī filasṭīn* (1970) (About Literature and Folk Literature in Palestine). Although both texts lie outside the time framework of this dissertation, they were selected because they continue to inform a number of critical issues that arise when approaching Mayan and Palestinian literatures, especially the role of oral narrative and questions of indigenous representation.

Narratives of the supernatural and the fantastic are the main topic of Chapter Three. Examining formal and aesthetic aspects of these narratives, I analyze the literary representation of indigenous memory and oral culture. Specifically, I compare Mayan dream narratives and folktales with a canonical Palestinian novel based on a fairy tale. These texts are: Robert Laughlin and Carol Karasik's *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from the People of the Bat* (1988), and Imīl Ḥabībī's *Sarāyā Bint al-Ghūl* (1992), translated into English in 2006 by Peter Theroux as *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale*. Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2006. Through a close reading of these texts, I discuss central motifs and characters. I also look at the way in which the supernatural is used as an aesthetic expression of cultural memory and social critique; and I examine mythology in these texts and its role in establishing an indigenous national narrative.

In Chapter Four, I focus on the works of Palestinian women novelists and Mayan women playwrights who crossed the border of minoritization. In the Palestinian case, I look at works by 'Adanīyah Shiblī, Maysūn Asadī, and Ibtisām 'Āzim. Emerging in the early 1990s, these writers who belong to the third generation of *al-Nakba*, are part of the new generation of Palestinian intelligentsia in Israel that left their villages in the

periphery to study, work and live in the cities of Haifa, Tel-Aviv, and Jerusalem. In their narratives, these novelists revive the Palestinian city as a cultural metropolis and forged literary relationships between Haifa in Israel, Ramallah in the Occupied West Bank, and Jerusalem. With regard to the Mayas, I examine the transnational experience of Mayan women playwrights, such as Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa, who emerged in the early 1980s with plays and performances in Mayan languages as well as Spanish. I discuss their contribution to the Mayan Renaissance, as the first indigenous feminist theatre collective, called *La Fomma, Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya* (The Empowerment of Maya Women). Following a close reading of their works and excerpts from personal interviews with these writers, I map the major tropes that constitute their feminist texts: addressing violence against women, critiquing the gendered notion of the nation, and examining the city as a colonial metropolis that is fraught with racism against the indigenous.

Ultimately, the conclusion of this dissertation attempts to revisit the notion of indigenous minority literature as a category that remains in flux, escaping the dialectics of oppression and resistance that characterize majority-minority dynamics. It also elaborates on some of the limits of this study, including its lack of engagement with the issues of bilingualism and language politics in general, hybridity, translation, and national Palestinian and Mexican literatures.

One Final Remark on Indigenous Minorities:

When coming to grips with the term “indigenous minority,” we should be wary of its contextualized history and political uses. The category ‘indigenous,’ for example, has

a complex political history, according to geographical location in the world. In the US, ‘Native-American,’ ‘Indian-American’ and ‘First Nation’ are common references to indigenous people. In Australia, on the other hand, indigenous peoples have rejected the term ‘Aboriginal’ altogether. They identify themselves according to specific kinship or language groups, while the use of ‘Native’ is considered highly offensive (Shaw, Herman& Dobbs 268). But overall, the racial category ‘Indian’ was created by Europeans after their conquest of the Americas. They applied it to the indigenous inhabitants.

In Mexico, the term *los indios* (The Indians) is used derogatorily against non-*mestizos*. However, with the emergence of *indigenismo* between 1920 and 1940, as a cultural and political movement that championed indigenous rights and the inclusion of Indians as national Mexican subjects (Dawson 284), it has become more common to refer to indigenous people as *los indígenas*, or *el pueblo indígena* (the indigenous people). Then, in the 1970s the Mexican ‘New Anthropologists,’ including Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, rejected the term ‘*indígena*,’ arguing that it was as much a European invention as the term ‘*indio*.’ Still, until the 1990s, members of indigenous groups continued to think of themselves as belonging to specific communities, such as San Juan Chamula or Zinacantán, rather than to ‘*el pueblo indígena*, or even ‘*el pueblo maya*.’ Since the 1990s, and especially the EZLN uprising, a pan-Mayan and a pan-indigenous consciousness has begun to emerge in Chiapas.

In the context of Palestinians in Israel, however, the political use of the term ‘indigenous’ is recent. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, a growing number of political organizations have been increasingly prompting Palestinian consciousness, and demanding recognition of collective group rights. These organizations have reframed

their demands using the language of indigeneity. Oded Haklai (2011) identifies this trend as “the most audacious nonviolent assertion of Palestinians in Israel ethnonational claims” (112).

In this dissertation, I use the term ‘indigenous’ to refer to Mayans and Palestinians as people who are part of the “groups with ancestral and often spiritual ties to a particular land, and whose ancestors held that land prior to colonization by outside powers, and whose nations remain submerged within the states created by those powers” (Shaw, Herman & Dobbs 268).

‘Minority’ is another contested term, because it suggests a *fait accompli*. In the case of Mexico, Mayan-speakers have continued to constitute a majority of the population of highland Chiapas into the beginning of the twenty-first century. Keeping in mind the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the currently unresolved negotiation of maps and Palestinian statehood, the minoritization of Palestinians remains undetermined. Moreover, because Palestinians speak Arabic, which is the language of the majority Arab world surrounding Israel, ‘minority’ becomes a relative term. Regardless of the discursive elements embedded in either notion of minority, my dissertation aims at studying the historical processes of the minoritization of Palestinians in Israel and the Mayas in Chiapas.

Finally, it must be noted here that in the Palestinian context, the notion of the ‘indigenous’ is further complicated by the fact that Zionist immigration from Europe to historic Palestine beginning in 1882 was mobilized by a vision of return to a Jewish ancestral homeland, or *Eretz Israel* (Land of Israel), as it is identified in Hebrew and Zionist literature. Unlike the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica, which was part of

Iberian imperial expansion project, Zionist settlement in historic Palestine claimed a discourse of Jewish Diaspora returning to its 'indigenous' land. This discourse was evident during the first waves of Jewish immigration and settlement, or *aliya* in Hebrew, in the years 1882-1914 when Zionists emphasized legitimacy and authority over the land through the construction of institution to control three factors of production: land, labor and capital (Shafir 41). Indeed, the construction of a modern Jewish indigenous identity was mostly evident in the ideology of conquest of labor, otherwise known as 'Hebrew Labor,' in order to assert a native connection to the land: "The leaders of the Labor Settlement movement, like other Zionists, emphasized Jewish rights in Palestine as the ancestral Jewish homeland. As the same time, they admitted that Jewish immigrants had "to earn" these rights in the present by gaining control of and developing the land" (Shafir 53).

Another expression of Jewish 'indigenous' identity took place after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the creation of Jewish citizenship. For example, in 1950 The Law of Return was enacted. The law based membership on ethnicity- or, in effect, religion- and made all Jewish immigrants citizens upon arrival. In addition to civil rights, Jewish immigrants received the full complement of political rights and a considerable measure of social rights. These rights continue to be denied to non-Jews, including Palestinian refugees and their descendants. Undoubtedly, this context of a Jewish majority in Israel claiming indigenous identity has far reaching and ongoing political effects on Palestinians in Israel as an indigenous minority.

Literary Histories and Genealogies: Roots and Routes of Minoritization

During a symposium about Palestinian literature at Haifa University on March 25, 1982, Salmān Nāṭūr (b. 1949-), a renowned Palestinian writer and playwright, delivered a talk in Arabic entitled “Our Local Literature Was Not Born Out Of Nothing.”²⁶ In his talk, Nāṭūr warned academics about approaching a discussion of Palestinian literature “before and after catastrophe; before and after the war.” Identifying himself as part of the generation that was “born after *al-Nakba*, outside the frame of the official school,” he emphasized that a rich Palestinian literary and cultural heritage already existed in the beginning of the twentieth century. To support his stance, Nāṭūr mentioned twenty-six magazines and newspapers that appeared in Jerusalem between 1906 and 1928. He also listed the names of deceased Palestinian authors (all men) to whom he attributed the legacy of Palestinian literary heritage, including the short stories of Khalīl Baydas (1874-1949), the letters and memoirs of Khalīl al-Sakākīnī (1878-1953), as well as the poetry and literary and political narratives of Is‘āf Al-Nashāshībī (1885-1948), ‘Aref al-‘Azzūnī (1896-1961), Maḥmūd Sayf al-Dīn al- Īrānī (1914-1974), Abū Salmá (1909-1980) and Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān (1905-1941).

A year later, in July 1983, however, Maḥmūd ‘Abbāsī, one of the pioneering literary historians and scholars of Palestinian literature in Israel, submitted a dissertation in Hebrew to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, titled “The Development of Romance and the Short Story in the Arabic Literature in Israel from 1948-1976.” In this seminal

²⁶ The talk was originally delivered in Arabic. The title is “*Adabūna al-maḥalī lām yūlād mīn la shai*”. All quotes from this talk are my own translation. Unless mentioned otherwise, I am responsible for all translations of original material in Arabic and Hebrew.

dissertation, ‘Abbāsī provides important data about the number of Palestinian authors in Israel. He also conducts a quantitative, thematic and stylistic study of the development of the romance genre as the dominant narrative form that emerged after 1948. Unlike Nāṭūr, ‘Abbāsī begins his dissertation by identifying the birth of Palestinian literature in Israel with the establishment of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. He remarks: “The 1948 War is the starting point of Israeli Arabic literature, as it brought about the establishment of the State of Israel” (I). Essentially, ‘Abbāsī asserts that the category “Arab-Israeli literature” could not possibly exist before the establishment of Israel.

One can argue that Nāṭūr and ‘Abbāsī’s distinct approaches to marking the beginning of the history of Palestinian literature in Israel stem from different political sensitivities or ideological tendencies. Yet, regardless of the guiding principle for their periodization, discrepancy in their views is indicative of a fundamental set of questions that concern the historiography of indigenous minorities. How should we consider that moment of minoritization? Does becoming a minority in one’s native land reflect a historical disjuncture, or a rupture with everything and everyone that existed before? Is it the “end” of indigeneity? Are indigenous minorities merely survivors and preservers of a pre-minoritization indigenous past? Conversely, does the “new” history as minorities constitute transformations that are unique, independent and unrelated to any of the dynamics, events and concerns that shaped and informed their “old” history as indigenous and majorities? These questions are paramount in examining how minoritization processes are played out after the colonial encounter.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address all these questions, I believe that invoking the critical paradigm of contact zones is a useful model to engage

some of the issues at stake here, especially the nature of the threshold between the “old majority” and the “new minority”. According to Mary Louise Pratt (1992) indigenous minorities constantly dwell in a contact zone. This zone is “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”(6). Since contact zones occur in the context of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths, the resulting majority-minority encounter occurs in social space where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other.

Are contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas (1983-2010) and Palestinian literature in Israel (1976-2010) in the contact zone? The answer is yes, but. In comparison with the Spanish-Mayan colonial encounter, which from the very beginning involved hybridity, the Palestinian-Israeli contact zone has been more uneven, including discontinuous encounters. In order to understand this contrast and its historical trajectory, we need to examine the historiography of Mayan and Palestinian literatures since the moments of encounter. Thus, we must revisit 1519 in Mesoamerica and 1948 in Mandate Palestine, respectively.

It is important to emphasize at this point that the following analysis is not focused on textual representation of those vanquished, or marginalized, but rather in understanding the historical process of minoritization. Following this historical approach is useful, because it reveals significant dynamics that underline the inception of both literary traditions as indigenous minority literature. In particular, the dynamics that are informed by the polarities of oral-written, colonized-colonizer, and minority-majority

among others. Thus, it is possible to obtain a better grasp of the roots of both literary traditions and the routes and trajectories in their development since their emergence as literatures of indigenous minorities.

I: Literary Archaeology: *Rearchiving the Canon*

One of the most fruitful methods for studying indigenous literature in recent years has been developed by scholars who draw heavily on an approach that I metaphorically describe as archaeological. It follows that such an approach is less interested in ‘digging into’ the textual (and oral) sources of contemporary indigenous texts per se than it is in examining the social existence of these sources and discovering alternative histories. The metaphor of archaeology employed here, which I borrow from Martin Lienhard (1990), is a rhetorical critique, on my part, to call attention to the fact that indigenous histories are often reduced to a matter of antiquity that remains irrelevant to the present.

Moreover, my engagement with archaeology as a historical lens is an attempt to exercise what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) terms a “critical pedagogy of decolonization” (34). This method of coming to know the past is particularly pertinent to researching indigenous communities whose official history was written off by imperial and colonial negation, exclusion, and fragmentation. The potential for such an approach, then, lies not only in retrieving older texts and stories from the past, but also in recovering indigenous stories of that past. This process, Smith argues, is “inextricably bound to recovery of [indigenous] languages and epistemology” (39). Hence, rather than being a study of the textual representation of those vanquished, marginalized or erased, or giving a genealogical naming of their literature, finding and understanding the social context of

indigenous literature prior to colonization becomes a way of “rewriting and *rerighting* [indigenous] position in history” (28). Tuhiwai adds that this approach stems from “a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying” (28).

For the purpose of this research, then, digging into the literary history of Mayan and Palestinian literatures as an archaeologist teaches a great deal about the roots of these literary traditions before the colonial encounter, prior to entering the contact zone. This digging also enables us to see the transformations, or the routes that they took after the encounter.

The archaeological approach, which is the foundational methodology in this chapter, is derived from Martin Lienhard’s *La voz y su huella* (1990).²⁷ This book, which employs literary archaeology to reveal the traces of indigenous literature in the Mesoamerican region and the Andes from 1492-1988, has been considered among the most enlightening sources for the rewriting of Latin-American literary history (Cornejo

²⁷ My reliance on this work and archaeological studies in Latin American literary history as a critical paradigm to trace the origins of both Mayan and Palestinian literatures is motivated by the fact that Latin American literary studies have a longer and more developed record of research of indigenous minorities. In comparison, scholarly attention to indigenous minorities in the Arab-Middle East is a relatively recent phenomenon. Perhaps one of the most prominent reflections of this trend is evident in the growing number of studies that examine the Berber origins of Arabic literature in North Africa. For example, *The Berbers in Arabic Literature* (1982) by H.T. Norris, is one of the earliest and by far most comprehensive studies in English of Berber literature in North Africa since the Middle Ages. In 2008, Muhammad Aswīq published in Arabic one of the first serious attempts to examine the aesthetics and themes of Tamazight poetry in Morocco, titled *Al-shi’r Al-Amāzighī Al-Qadīm: Jamālīyat Al-Balāghah Wa-Su’āl Al-Huwīyah* (Ancient Tamazight Poetry: The Aesthetics of Eloquence and the Question of Identity). And, In his “Rewriting Literary History: The Case of the Arabic Novel” (2008), the well-known US-based critic of Arabic literature, Roger Allen, investigates the invocation of a Berber/*Tamazight* past in the work of the Libyan novelist Ibrahim Al-Kuni. Allen argues that Al-Kuni’s “use of graphic aphorisms from his own Tuareg upbringing in the Southern deserts and the evocation of the earlier tradition of aphorism in Arabic challenge his modern readers to embark on new directions that strongly invoke a past” (9). Allen refers to Al-Kuni’s writing of Berber world vision into the Arabic novel as an example for the need to radically rethink the very historical framework for the development of the genre of the Arabic novel. It is also a call for literary historians to investigate the indigenous forces that inform this genre.

Polar 397). Revealing the ways in which indigenous writers integrated Mesoamerican histories into the Spanish narrative of conquest and salvation, the book undermines the Eurocentric-colonial consolidation of Latin American literature into the *Macondo* fantastic world that characterizes the canonical novel of Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude) (1967). While contemporary Latin American writers go against and beyond the reduction of Latin American literature into creators of exotic and over-folkloric narratives of “magical realism” to be consumed by both North-American readers and neoliberal economists alike (Fuguet, 68-9), Lienhard demonstrates that the role of indigenous literature in shaping the Latin American literary canon is more constitutive than formative of the bearers and preservers of the symbolism related to *Macondo*.

One of Lienhard’s most important arguments about the history of Latin American literature links its beginning to the period following the encounter between the Spaniards and the Mesoamericans in Mexico-Tenochtitlan in the second half of the sixteenth century. At the time, some Indians²⁸ adopted the European script. Lienhard argues that the Indians used the European alphabet on specific occasions, mostly for “diplomatic” necessities and external political affairs to meet the expectations of their European interlocutors. In the framework of actions of ‘revindication’, using European script

²⁸ Many Latin-American scholars tend to use the term “Indian” to designate the indigenous people of Mesoamerica and throughout Latin America, including the Amerindians, Incas, Mayas, etc. Their choice often reflects discursive attention to the colonial construction of indigenous people as a racial Other, denoting that Indian is neither white, nor European. When engaging with the ideas of these scholars, I will remain faithful to their terminology for scholarly purposes. When formulating my own arguments, I will be using the term “indigenous” to indicate that this research is about native people. I also use it to refer to aboriginal people internationally. For further information about the construction of Indian as a racial category of Otherness in both Mexico and Latin America see Guillermo de la Peña, “Social and Cultural Policies Toward Indigenous Peoples: Perspectives from Latin America,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34.1 (2005) and Alexander S. Dawson, “From Models for the Nation to Model Citizens: Indigenismo and the ‘Revindication’ of the Mexican Indian, 1920-40,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30.2 (1998): 279-308.

promised greater benefits (86).²⁹ The European script was used in letters, chronicles, and memos,³⁰ which replaced existing Indian writing and pictorial forms, such as the codices and *kipu* (knotted threads). Lienhard mentions “*El compendio histórico del reino de Texcoco de Ixtlixóchitl*” (The Historical Compendium of the Kingdom of Texcoco de Ixtlixóchitl) from 1608 as a prominent example of this trend.

Although he links the inception of indigenous writings with the adoption of European literacy, or more accurately the European alphabet, Lienhard does not negate or undermine the significance of Indian orality. Moreover, he does not put the oral and the written into a polarity. On the contrary, he considers these “new” texts a hybrid expression of Indian oral memory, infused with an appropriation of the power of writing to subvert the Spaniards’ fetish for writing and their association of the alphabetic system with literacy (Lienhard 74-86).

According to Lienhard, this hybridity, which is manifest in the encounter between the Indian author and the Spanish script, led to two major developments in the history of Latin American literature: the inception of an autonomous indigenous literature and the emergence of a bilingual and bicultural indigenous reader. He notes:

These writings constitute the beginning of Indian-Hispanic writing. They offer a new point of view about the world, which is incipiently personal or subjective. Although they still represent the collective, somehow, the “I” that is manifest in these texts tends to be an individual ‘privileged’ consciousness. As examples of the ground zero of indigenous writing,

²⁹ Due to constraints of space and frequent references to Lienhard’s book, I decided to include here only my translation of the citations from his book, without adding the original in Spanish.

³⁰ The term that Lienhard uses is “*memoriales*” (88). It refers to a particularly European genre of a written public opinion.

these texts still constitute, to a large extent, the beginning from an oral tradition of the collective that recognizes its author. Written in an Amerindian language and/with the support of discursive culture from the indigenous or (Indian –Mestizo) sector, the “indigenous writing”, which seems to lack inception, is, in fact, a tradition of its own (90). [My translation]

Lienhard goes on to affirm that this Indio-Hispanic tradition has an “ ‘*otra historia*’ (Another History), because of its hybrid textual and oral traces (21). He situates this history as autonomous from the corpus of Latin American literature. He further observes that, although these early texts were aimed at the European colonial and hegemonic sectors, they included translations of indigenous visions, ideas and worldviews. This trend not only reflected the emergence of the hybrid indigenous author and the persistence of the oral and visual, but also announced the birth of indigenous readership.

Indeed, Lienhard argues that, although these indigenous early texts were not necessarily written in Amerindian languages, the fact that “they superimposed Western, Indian and *mestizo* codes meant that they were directed at a reading public that was particularly familiar with the various opposing cultural horizons” (94). In other words, the reading audience in mind was not limited to hegemonic groups, but rather to someone who could appreciate the written text and decode the oral memory and discourse embedded in it. This reader thus exhibited cultural hybridity.

II: *Mestizo* Historiography

While Lienhard's literary archaeology is a particularly pertinent methodology for rethinking the location of indigenous literature in Latin American in the context of its autonomous literary history, it is important to situate it within the theoretical framework of other postcolonial Latin American critics and Mexican historians and anthropologists, such as Walter Mignolo (1989), Serge Gruzinski (2002), José Rabasa (2010) and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987). Examining different aspects of Mesoamerican literatures since the Spanish Conquest, these scholars introduced critical findings concerning the encounter between indigenous and Spanish literatures. The different arguments that these scholars articulate regarding this encounter ask for the reassessment of the potential for hybridity under colonialism, and the implications of including hybridity as a critical tool in the subaltern historiography of indigenous people in Mesoamerica. Read in the historical context of modern Mexico, the arguments of these scholars regarding origins and hybridity in post-Conquest Mesoamerican literature illuminate the existing tension between the opposing discourses of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* as contradictory cornerstones of post-revolutionary Mexican modernity and national identity.

Historians tend to agree that 1542 was a significant landmark in the development of post-Conquest indigenous literature in Mesoamerica (Mignolo 63). After all, in 1542 the Franciscans began their alphabetization campaign, which meant the conversion of Mesoamericans to the European alphabet writing system. In the beginning, the campaign was limited to members of the indigenous Aztec elite, and the Nahuas of central Mexico were the first to adopt the Roman script. However, Mixtecs, Yucatec Mayas and other

Mesoamericans soon followed and began rendering their spoken languages into Roman alphabetic form as well. As a result, between the 1540s and the end of the colonial period in the early nineteenth century, Mesoamerican writers produced great quantities of written records in their own languages, using the Roman alphabet, while writing in Nahuatl spread rapidly, to become the dominant language of expression in the latter half of the century (Restal, Sousa, and Terraciano 11-20).

It is important to note that, despite the fact that Nahuatl became the post-Conquest lingua franca, Mayan languages also survived. Educated Mayans, for example, used the Roman alphabet to secretly transcribe their own ritual and historical texts, which had previously existed only in hieroglyphic form. The high literacy of these educated Mayans who occupied the office of *ah tz'ib*, or “scribe”, and their command of the different Mayan writing systems, including the hieroglyphs, led to the preservation of two great sources of classical Mayan literature: the K'iche' epic *The Popol Vuh*- and the Yucatec *Maya Book of Chilam Balam* (Coe 220). However, Mignolo and Rabasa indicate that a close examination of the historical context in which the alphabetization occurred reveals much of the violence behind the Spanish colonizers' expansion and “civilizing” agenda. Hence, gaining a deeper insight into the history of colonial violence in Mesoamerica allows for a better understanding of the context in which the hybridity of the Roman alphabet and indigenous literature emerged.

According to Mignolo, the Castilians not only created a tyranny of the alphabet, but they also failed to consider Mesoamerican writing systems and orality as literacy. He adds, “From the friar's point of view, [the alphabetization] was for the good of the natives who would have the chance of changing their own “wrong” traditional and

barbarous behavior to the “right” new and civilized one” (69). Arguing that dehumanizing Mesoamericans for their “lack of letters” (62) became a pretext for the destruction of Mesoamerican cultures and systems of beliefs, Mignolo goes on to assert that Castilians were able “to build a pedagogical, administrative and philosophical apparatus based on their conception of language and of a hierarchy of human beings with respect to their lack, or possession of, alphabetic writing” (58).

Nevertheless, Mignolo calls attention to the fact that Mesoamericans resisted this trend through a calculated appropriation of European script and a preservation of orality as literacy. Although the alphabetization apparatus facilitated the friars’ use of European script in their attempts at Christianization of the indigenous Mesoamericans, the latter “used the [European script] to stabilize their past, to adapt themselves to the present and to transmit their own traditions to future generations” (70).

Indeed, a prominent example of this trend is the preservation of the *Book of Chilam Balam* and the collective act of reading or listening to it. The *Book of Chilam Balam* was written in Yucatec and in European script, with transcriptions in alphabetic writing of the old hieroglyphic or “painted” códices. Mignolo further notes: “[that] the natives would read the book in their assembly; that some of them were read following the rhythm of the drums; that others were sung, and still others were enacted” (70). Reading the “book,” then, became linked to an oral performance that included a collective listening, an act that in its very existence defied the colonizers’ notion of literacy.

While Mignolo describes how the hybridity between the Roman alphabet and Mesoamerican orality revealed the colonial violence that was embedded in the Castilians’ glorification of the written letter as literacy, Rabasa argues that the inflection of colonial

epistemic violence went hand in hand with the preservation of Mesoamerican codices after the Conquest. Examining the production of the Codex Mendoza in the mid-sixteenth century, Rabasa maintains that the Spaniards subordinated the *tlacuiloque* (the indigenous painters and writers of history) to Spanish historiography and interpretations. As a result, the Codex Mendoza reproduced images and histories that legitimized the *encomienda* system-- grants of tribute and labor (but not land)-- from indigenous communities that were given as a reward to the Spaniards who participated in the Conquest.

In the Codex Mendoza, the *encomienda* system appeared as a natural continuation of the Amerindian world. Rabasa argues that the Codex Mendoza, which consists of three parts, including a pictographic account of the history of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, tributaries of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, and a description of the life cycle of the average Aztec at the time of the Conquest (21), was produced for a European audience. The Codex was not intended to solve legal disputes among Amerindians or to identify superstition and idolatry (22). Therefore, the document did not provide information “*about the past*,” but was reproduced as a document “*from the past*.”

Furthermore, Rabasa claims that the general lack of information about the interpreter who wrote the glosses, and the supplementations of the pictographic text, with alphabetic narratives about the colonial domination and exploitation of the Aztecs during the history of Mexico- Tenochtitlan, is an indication of the ideological manipulation that accompanied the reproduction of these texts. Manipulating the indigenous past and the collective memory of this past, the Codex Mendoza became a tool to justify the *encomienda* by demonstrating “how the exercise of colonial domination and exploitation

was not alien to the pre-Columbian order” (25). The hybridity of the Codex Mendoza, then, exemplifies the relationship between epistemic violence, the Spanish socioeconomic policies towards the indigenous Mesoamericans and the production of the latter as subaltern.

Whereas Mignolo and Rabasa warn of the violence underlying the emergence of hybrid indigenous literature in the sixteenth century, Gruzinski (2002) outlines the innovative processes that this hybridity introduced as part of the rampant *mestizo* mechanisms occurring in the Americas at the time. Much like other forms of *mélange* that characterized the sixteenth century in the Americas, ranging from biological crossbreeding that created new mixed racial identities, to cultural crossbreeding that resulted in “*mélanges* between individuals, imaginative faculties, and lifestyles originating on four continents (America, Europe, Africa, and Asia)” (Gruzinski 31), the encounter between European and Mesoamerican writing techniques introduced innovations that had far-reaching consequences. Indeed, Gruzinski argues that one of the effects of the technical innovation of replacing the ancient codices with alphabetic writing, manuscripts, and books, was the introduction of a new relationship to information, which eventually became secularized. He writes:

The adoption of the surprisingly efficient medium of writing competed with the multiple connotations of traditional glyphs and colors. The use of alphabetic writing also modified the selection and editing of data, imposing the pace of linear narrative. Even more determining were European painting techniques, which were limited to depicting realities

situated in another time or place, whereas Indian “paintings” made divine forces present and almost palpable (46).

As the indigenous painting techniques exemplify an innovation that secularized information, one cannot but wonder about the agency of indigenous Mesoamericans and their contribution to the formation of post-Conquest Spanish, as well as Amerindian art and literature. Were indigenous writers and artists mere recipients of the new reality of hybrid literatures, or did they actively participate in it as producers?

According to Gruzinski, the answer to this question lies in the examination of the *mestizo* mechanism in the triple light of the Conquest, Westernization and mimicry. He argues that, in light of the chaos of the Conquest, the accelerated Westernization processes, which included forced Christianization and the perfection of mimicry of European systems, the indigenous Mesoamericans adopted *mestizo* processes to survive. Their replication and appropriation of European features were part of “makeshift” processes. Nevertheless, indigenous writers and calligraphers, who mastered writing and copying to rival the quality of the printing press machine level, were soon integrated as workers into the economic and technical world of Western origins. More important, their work was not mere mimicry, but rather a source of inventiveness and the *mestizaje* process. Gruzinski notes: “Since the indigenous version of reproduction was always accompanied by interpretation, it triggered a cascade of combinations, juxtapositions, amalgamation, and superimposition caught in the cross fire of mimicry and *mestizo* mechanism” (63).

Following Gruzinski’s delineation of the pivotal role played by indigenous Mesoamerican writers in the creation of new hybrid literature and the production of

meanings and interpretation in Mexico since the mid sixteenth century, we are confronted with these conclusions. First, Mexican and Latin American literatures are incomplete without the inclusion of indigenous voices. Second, indigenous Mesoamerican writers demonstrated agency and innovation in creating Spanish literature, while sustaining a link to their indigenous literary heritage.

Although the dynamics of this *mestizo* process involved forced alphabetization, epistemic violence and perfection of mimicry, as Mignolo, Rabasa and Gruzinski respectively illustrate, I would argue that this process encapsulates the evolution of an indigenous minority literature. Within this process of hybridity, continuity amidst rupture becomes evident, thus reflecting the occurrence of minoritization. Although there was a transformation in form, or a shift from orality to European alphabets, continuity is evident in the fact that indigenous epistemology did not disappear. In other words, contemporary indigenous literature was not cut off from its roots, despite the hybridization process.

However, in light of the above discussion of hybridity and *mestizaje* as foundational aspects of Latin American literature and indigenous literary history in Mexico, it is important to note the predicament of *mestizaje* as a double-edged theoretical framework. On the one hand, as Lienhard and Gruzinski have demonstrated, writing the history of post-Conquest indigenous literature and defining the very notion of Latin American literature cannot be undertaken without taking into account the critical role of hybridity processes. On the other hand, scholars and advocates of *indigenismo*³¹ in

³¹ *Indigenismo* refers to a set of social and cultural policies toward indigenous peoples in Latin America. At the core of this ideological movement is the denouncement and rejection of the exploitation of the natives and a striving for cultural unity, social integration and equal human rights and citizenship. For detailed reading about the development of *indigenismo* in Latin American political discourse, see Nancy G. Postero

Mexico warn against the racial discourse that underscores *mestizaje* as an ideology of de-Indianization. Both Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987) and Aníbal Quijano (2000) provide useful analysis of the employment of *mélange* in modern Mexico as a political tool of marginalization and erasure of the indigenous past and thus the exclusion of the contemporary Mayan from the history of modern Mexico.

In *México profundo: una civilización negada*, (*México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*) Bonfil Batalla argues that Mexican modernity was based on discrimination against that which is Indian and denial of any real connection with Mesoamerican civilization. Addressing his fellow Mexicans, he says: “The clear and undeniable evidence of our Indian ancestry is a mirror in which we do not wish to see our own reflection”(18). He goes on to suggest that, although modern Mexico appears to assert the presence of the Indian through depictions in murals, museums, sculptures, and archaeological sites that are open to the public, the Indian “is treated essentially as a dead world. It is a unique world, extraordinary in many of its achievements, but still a dead world”(55). To illustrate his point, Bonfil Batalla describes the artificial separation between the glorious Indian past and the living Indian present at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. He argues that relegating contemporary Indian history to the second floor, to occupy a segregated space, locates the living Indian in an expendable space: the living Indian is neither connected to the glorious past, nor does he or she belong to the present.

Quijano also believes that Mexican modernity is based on the exclusion of the Indian. He notes that, as in other Latin American countries, Mexico inherited from

and León Zamosc, *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

Spanish colonialism a legacy of Eurocentric modernity. This model imagined modernity and rationality as exclusively European products and experiences. It was also built on a binary, dualist perspective on knowledge. So, the different types of relationship between Western Europe and the rest of the world were codified in the following dichotomies: East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe. Even within this oppositional model, Quijano argues, the Indian was excluded. He observes: “the only category with the honor of being recognized as the other of Europe and the West was “the Orient”—not the Indians of America and not the blacks of Africa, who were simply ‘primitive’” (542). Hence, if *mestizaje* in modern Mexico is an exclusionary ideology that promotes the repression of all that is Indian and Mesoamerica, one cannot but ask: How does contemporary Mayan literature situate itself in relation to *mestizaje*? This question should inform, in my opinion, literary criticism and studies of Mayan literature as an oppressed tradition.

After five centuries of suppression of the Mayan languages, contemporary Mayan literature began to emerge in the 1980s. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the full historical account of the last five hundred years, it is significant to note that the process of Hispanization that began shortly after the Conquest is still going on in modern Mexico. The general outcome of this long process of Hispanization, which became institutionalized following the emergence of Mexico as an independent state in 1825, entailed a reaffirmation of assimilation ideology, or to echo Bonfil Batalla’s term, *de-Indianization*.

Indeed, after Mexico’s Independence in 1825, great emphasis was put on creating a homogenous national identity. Thus, cultural pluralism was denied and language

policies were directed at the eradication of indigenous languages that were classified as inferior ‘dialects’. Although the status of indigenous people improved slightly after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which constitutionalized equal education policy for all citizens, indigenous languages were still marginalized. The education of indigenous peoples, which began in 1923, targeted the assimilation of indigenous people into national life by improving reading and writing skills in Spanish. However, a series of different language policies on the state level, in addition to local programs and initiatives that recognizes literacy as an indigenous cultural right, reveal the complicated history of indigenous bilingual education in modern Mexico and Chiapas.

One of the dramatic shifts in indigenous language education took place in 1939, when the first Assembly of Linguists and Philologists recommended the use of indigenous languages in the educational and literacy program for adults. This new concept of indigenous language education was taken even a step further in 1940, following the first Inter-American Indigenista Congress. In their concluding remarks, the participants asserted that indigenous education must take into account the local language, culture, and personality of the students. This new trend was expanded in 1948, when the newly established National Indigenista Institute (INI) trained indigenous teachers to educate students in two languages and cultures, which would pave the way for bilingual education in the 1970s. Yet, despite these developments, bilingual education did not become an official state policy. In fact, in 1993, after changing Article 4 of the Constitution, which refers to indigenous rights, the general Education Law formalized the teaching of Spanish as the national language, while leaving the promotion and development of indigenous languages as a secondary matter.

From the Mexican state's point of view, indigenous languages and culture remain secondary to Spanish. In 1959, government-issued textbooks were distributed for free in Mexican schools. However, these books, which emphasized cultural homogeneity as the ultimate expression of Mexicanidad and national unity, became available for indigenous children only in 1980 (de León Schmidt Díaz 24). This development took place two years after the federal government took control of bilingual and bicultural education by establishing *Dirección General de Educación Indígena* (The General Directorate for Indigenous Education) in 1978. Since these textbooks became available in schools for all indigenous children at no cost, they came to be known as "Indian Free Textbooks," with emphasis on "Indian" first. In 1992, the curriculum for these national free textbooks was reformed, including additional introductions to regional history and geography (de León Schmidt Díaz 24).

Interestingly enough, the attempts at bilingual education continued to treat indigenous languages, including Mayans, as secondary to Spanish. This is evident in the fact that, when linguists introduced these languages to their native speakers in indigenous areas in the 1940s, they did not develop phonemic alphabets for them. Instead, they followed the same spelling redundancies that characterize the Spanish alphabet, in order to promote Spanish language acquisition and acculturation (Bricker 75). In 1980, these textbooks became available in schools, for all indigenous children, at no cost.

While the status of indigenous languages and bilingual education remains a point of contention between the Mexican state and indigenous organizations, an unexpected party has also embraced indigenous languages: the Protestant Church. The history of the Protestant Church in Mexico goes back to the mid nineteenth century, but Protestant

missionaries arrived in Chiapas in the 1930s. Then, Protestant Bible translators moved to the state, where they hoped their work would help advance literacy (writing and reading according to the European model) among the peasants. To win the hearts of indigenous converts, the Protestant Church evangelized them in their native languages. This trend is evident in the fact that there is a Bible in Tzotzil, and literacy rates are higher in native-languages-speaking communities that are Protestant (Collier 58-59).

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that, after the EZLN uprising, the Mexican government signed the San Andrés Accords with the Zapatista movement on February 16, 1996, which recognized linguistic, cultural, and ethnic pluralism in Mexico and Chiapas. But the Mexican government has not honored the peace accords of San Andrés, and yet bilingual education in Chiapas did become more central as a result of the uprising (García And Velasco 4). In 2001, two institutions supervising bilingual education were established: the *Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* [Bilingual and Intercultural Education] (CGEIB) and the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena* [General Directive of Indigenous Education] (DGEI). The CGEIB developed a transitional bilingual education policy that required teaching in the *lengua originaria* [original language]. For example, in the first and second grades, indigenous languages would be used 80% of the time. In the third and fourth grades, the time would be equally divided between indigenous languages and Spanish, while in the fifth and sixth grades, 80% of the time would be devoted to Spanish (García and Velasco 4).

More important, these bilingual education programs were fostered locally by an emerging group of indigenous teachers. For example, in 1995 a collective of Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Chol teachers formed the *Unión de Maestros de la Nueva Educación para*

México: UNEM [The New Education Union of Teachers for Mexico]. This union developed a teaching philosophy that emphasized intercultural and bilingual education as basic components of ethics and citizenship (Bertely Busquest 73). Several of their publications, especially the booklet *Los hombres de y las mujeres de maíz: Democracia y derecho indígena para el mundo* (Men and Women of Corn: Indigenous Democracy and Law for the World), reflect this philosophy, while it serves as a tool for the teaching of literacy (75).

In the context of this linguistic reality, contemporary Mayan writers began to write. While writers have been emerging from various linguistic groups and communities throughout Mexico since the early 1980s, Zinacantán, where Tzotzil is spoken, is one of the communities that has supplied the largest number of writers in the state of Chiapas, and several of them have played pivotal roles in the formation of indigenous writing associations and journals. With the establishment of *Sna Jtz'ibajom, Cultura de los Indios Mayas A.C.* (The Writers' House, Mayan Indian Culture, Inc.) in San Cristóbal in 1983, the Ladino city has become the center for an emerging semi-independent Mayan cultural and literary production. At the same time, this traditionally Ladino city has become Indianized, with the influx of indigenous refugees from the wars between Catholics and Protestants in the Tzotzil villages. In the early 1990s, the group divided and a feminist theater collective, *La Fomma: La Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya* (Strength of the Mayan Woman), was formed. Both groups continue to play a central role in the production of Mayan poetry, narrative and theater in Chiapas, winning national and international recognition.

III: The Genesis of the Present-Absentee

Thus far our analysis of the literary history of contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas has been undertaken within the theoretical framework of Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone. Demonstrating how hybridity and *mestizaje* emerged as phenomena of a colonial encounter,³² our analysis, which is based on literary archaeology, has revealed the transformative changes that took place when a colonizing minority of Spaniards came into contact with a colonized majority of indigenous Mesoamericans in the mid-sixteenth century.

As discussed above, this encounter altered indigenous Mesoamerican literature, while playing a pivotal role in the constitution of the very category of Latin American literature at the same time. As I will discuss later on, the effects of this encounter remain relevant to Mexican literature in general, as well as to Spanish-language literature and Mayan literature in Chiapas.

When examining the literary archaeology of Palestinian literature in Israel, however, this mechanism of the contact zone does not mirror what occurred following the Spanish-Mesoamerican colonial encounter. The contact zone of the Palestinians-Israelis is a multidimensional space, in which several encounters took place over intersecting, yet often conflicting and constantly evolving, historical trajectories.

On the one hand, Palestinian literature in Israel is an extension of modern Palestinian literature, which emerged together with the rise of Palestinian nationalism

³² It is important to note that Pratt describes other phenomena of the contact zone. In her work about the Inca and Spanish encounter, she identifies transculturation, a notion that she adopts from Cornejo Polar, as one of the dominant phenomena. See Mary Louise Pratt, "Apocalypse in the Andes," *Américas* (English Edition) 51.4 (1999): 38-47 and Antonio Cornejo Polar "Mestizaje, transculturación, heterogeneidad," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40 (1994): 368-71.

under the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s (Kimmerling and Migdal 6) and its later enhancement under the British Mandate in 1920-1948, its “disappearance” during the *al-Nakba* in 1948 and its later rebirth in 1960s (Khalidi 27). On the other hand, because of being “in Israel,” Palestinian literature by default has been in constant opposition to Zionism, since its inception in the late 19th century in Europe, as a movement of Jewish nationalism, through its colonial settlement project beginning in Mandate Palestine, until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.³³

In this context of rupture, negation, and hostility, Palestinian literature in Israel emerged. Inheriting the legacy of Palestinian history in the aftermath of *al-Nakba*, it became ‘fragmented’ as the homeland branch of Palestinian literature. On the other hand, it emerged as minority literature in the shadow of a Zionist national and cultural project, which expressed hostile attitudes towards Palestinian identity, Arabs and Arabic. Moreover, it was marginalized in the institutionalized Israeli state’s policies concerning its indigenous Palestinian national minority.

In light of this, I argue that Palestinian literature in Israel emerged in a multidimensional space of several colonial encounters dominated by the dynamics of negation, conflict, exclusion, rupture, control, isolation and marginalization. Therefore, the minoritization of Palestinian literature in Israel encapsulates the tension between Arabic and Palestinian literatures, on the one hand, and Hebrew and Israeli literatures, on the other.

³³ Benny Morris asserts that the historical interconnectedness between Zionism and Israel is evident in the fact that Israeli statehood changed the trend of Zionist historiography. He notes: “ In 1948, the history of Zionism became the history of the State of Israel, its domestic growth and its relations to the world, Diaspora Jewry, and the Arab surroundings. The historiography moved from comprehensive histories that emphasized Zionism’s common features to the story of Zionism’s unique development in individual countries.” See Benny Morris, *Making Israel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007) 54.

Perhaps one of the most prominent features of the first Zionist-Palestinian encounter is negation. While the Spanish-Mesoamerican encounter echoed the ideology of the Conquest that was justified on the grounds of superior morality and civilization, the rationale for Zionist settlement in Palestine in late 19th century Europe was mostly based on the negation of even the existence of a people called Palestinians. In execution of their principal justification for Conquest, the Spaniards began, as early as the fifteenth century, their Hispanisation and Christianization of the indigenous Mesoamericans. They also destroyed the cosmological system developed in Mesoamerica over thousands of years, on the pretext of abolishing human sacrifice, which was a traditionally limited religious practice performed by the Aztecs (Hamnett, 55). As in other European colonial projects, *mission civilatrice* characterized the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica. Zionist visionaries in Europe in the late 19th century, however, were not interested in the cultural transformation of Palestinians. Informed by Israel Zangwill's slogan: "a land without people, for people without a land,"³⁴ Zionism considered Palestine an empty terrain. The focus of Zionist *mission civilatrice* was the land of Palestine, the destination for their cause and pilgrimage.

In the *Question of Palestine* Edward Said argues that Zangwill's slogan not only reflected mainstream Zionist ideology, but also resembled Western travel accounts to the Orient written in the 18th and 19th centuries, both of which considered the existence of

³⁴ Although this slogan has become to be one of the most famous and popularized articulations of Zionist ideology, there are contradictory information about its origins. Especially see, Diana Muir. "A Land without a People for a People without a Land" *Jewish Virtual Library*. Web. 27 December, 2011. Another well-known Zionist slogan that denied the existence of Palestinians is undoubtedly attributed to the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, (1969-74). In a statement to the *Sunday Times* on 15 June, 1969, Meir said : "There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist." Meir, Golda "Selected Quotes" *Golda Meir Center for Political Leadership*. Web. 27 December, 2011.

Palestinians as a matter of interpretation, rather than presence. In the travel accounts, for example, texts written by Chateaubriand, Mark Twain, Lamartien, Nerval and Disraeli described the Arabs on the land as uninteresting and underdeveloped. Said argues that this representation stripped the land from its Arab inhabitants in the Western imagination. He asserts: “Almost always, because the land was Palestine and therefore controlled, in the Western mind, not by its present realities and inhabitants, but by its glorious, portentous past and the seemingly limitless potential of its (possibly) just as glorious future, Palestine was seen as a place to be possessed *anew* and reconstructed” (9).

Said’s argument about the Zionist and Western representations of Palestine as an empty land that possesses a great potential for reconstruction highlights the erasure of the Palestinian in these representations. The persistence of the idea of the ‘absence’ of Palestinians from the land was not limited to Zionist and Orientalist travel literatures in late 19th century Europe. In fact, this ‘absence’ accompanied the actual Zionist settlement in Mandate-Palestine, particularly the Second *Aliya*³⁵ (1904-1914) and Third *Aliya* (1919-1923) that created the *kibbutzim* and *Yishuv* living systems. Both waves of Zionist immigration and settlement witnessed the exclusion of the indigenous Palestinians from the project of Jewish national homeland building.

Historians concur that in both periods, recent Zionist immigrants from Europe, as well as British-Mandate Palestine-born Jews, focused on the cultivation of the “new

³⁵ *Aliya* is a Hebrew word, which literary means ascent. In this historical context, it refers to Jewish immigration and settlement in Mandate-Palestine. The term is still in use in reference to contemporary Jewish immigration to Israel. For further details about the etymology of the word and its overlapping meaning in Hebrew and historiography, see Baruch Kimmerling, “Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire: The Case of Israeli-Jewish Historiography,” *Postzionism: A Reader*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008) 102-20. *Yishuv* is a Hebrew word meaning settlement. It refers to the historical period of the early 20th century to describe the Zionist settlement in Mandate-Palestine and the establishment of pre-Israel state Jewish communities.

Jews” who would accomplish the task of creating a Jewish state. Central to this process was the ‘Hebrew only’ policy, which promoted the “conquest of labor” (*kibush ha’avoda*), and “Hebrew labor” (‘*avoda ivrit*’)(Lockman 66). ‘Conquest of labor,’ the manifestation of labor Zionism, was intent on replacing Arab workers with Jewish workers whenever possible. A parallel process took place in the social and cultural realms, including the creation of Hebrew culture. Revival of Hebrew from a Biblical language to a modern secular language, as well as the creation of a new social and cultural identity of the “native Jew,” called ‘*tzabar*’³⁶ (Sabra) (Almog 4), were among the most prominent manifestations of this trend.

Throughout this process, Palestine’s indigenous Arabs were excluded and widely perceived by Zionists as either a nuisance to be removed or an exotic but irrelevant part of the country’s purportedly barren landscape. Although both processes were exclusionary of the indigenous Arab Palestinians, Zionists tried to communicate in Arabic, the language of the Arab-Palestinian majority at the time. Yet, this trend was not common. Nevertheless, these attempts, which can be perceived as an indication of an encounter with the indigenous Palestinians, were either motivated by Zionist ideological interests, or more specifically related to the adoption of Oriental culture as a major characteristic of the archetype of the Sabra.

Indeed, one of the earliest examples of Zionist interest in Arabic took place in Mandatory Palestine in 1925, with the publication of a Zionist-sponsored Arabic newspaper called *Ittiḥād al-‘Ummāl* (Workers Union). In *Comrades and Enemies: Arab*

³⁶ “*Tzabar*,” is the Hebrew word for prickly pear cactus. According to Almog, “even before it became a symbol for the country’s Jewish natives, the *tzabar*, or “sabra,” cactus appeared in paintings, stories, and songs of local artists and was cited by visitors as one of the outstanding visual elements of the Palestinian landscape” (4).

and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948, Zachary Lockman asserts that one of the most prominent attempts of socialist Zionists at organizing labor to serve the Zionist project in Mandatory Palestine was through seeking out an Arab-Jewish alliance (69). The creation of Arab-Jewish workers' solidarity was evident in the inclusion of a handful of Arab workers in the organization of trade unions, generally known as the *Histadrut*. Established in Haifa in 1920, the *Histadrut*'s primary purpose was to foster the settlement of Jewish workers in Mandatory Palestine and to build a Jewish commonwealth. As an initiative to develop links with the Arab working class, the *Histadrut* started *Ittiḥād al-'Ummāl*. This publication appeared weekly with a pressrun of 500 copies that were distributed free to Arab railway workers. Yet, it did not take particular interest in either Arabic or Arab culture.

In fact, *Ittiḥād al-'Ummāl* was “a means of propagandizing in favor of Zionism among the literate Arab publics in Palestine and beyond, as well as of countering the strongly anti-Zionist stance of most of the country's Arabic press” (Lockman 91). In accordance with the ideological stance of the labor-Zionist movement, *Ittiḥād al-'Ummāl*, which was edited by a *Histadrut* official, Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, and Dr. Nasīm Ma'lūl, a Jerusalem-based publisher and journalist, who was later replaced by his wife and another Arabic-speaking Jew, included numerous articles setting forth the history, ideology, and achievements of the *Histadrut*. It also “sought to introduce its readers to socialism by publishing in serial form classic texts by Ferdinand Lasalle and others, and to European literature through translations from such writers as Maxim Gorky and Oscar Wilde” (Lockman 91). Needless to say, *Ittiḥād al-'Ummāl* had a very minor impact, if any, on Arab Palestinian press culture.

Among the basic tenants for constructing a Sabra cultural identity during the 1930s and 1940s was the affirmation of nativism as a rejection of anti-Diaspora identity, more specifically leaving Europe behind. The Sabra was the new identity to distinguish Israelis from Jews (Almog 6). The imitation of the Arab and the adoption of Oriental symbols, including Arab customs, music and apparel, particularly the *kuffiyeh*,³⁷ as a kind of local fashion were the salient features of the Sabra. These modes of cultural appropriation were encouraged and seen as an assertion of a local identity. Language was part of the process too.

According to Almog, the Sabra archetype fashioned the Arabization of the spoken language. He notes:

[Arabic words] could be found in jokes, curses and names, as well as in fiction writing. Some of these words kept their Arabic pronunciation and meaning, some retained their pronunciation but their meanings changed, and some were either deliberately or inadvertently mutilated and became new words. Words such as *ahsan* (okay), *inshalla* (God willing), *abadai* (strong man), *dahilak* (on your life), *jam'a* (gang), *mabsut* (happy), and *ma'alesh* (no matter) were not only widely used but became part of the Sabra vocabulary (198).

One might think that the appropriation of Arabic words was a sign of developing a close relationship with the indigenous Arab Palestinians. However, Almog argues that this was not the case. He emphasizes: “The use of Oriental symbols, especially in the area of language, was also meant to create a common codex of Sabra experiences, customs, and

³⁷ *Kuffiyeh* is a traditional Arab headdress or scarf wrapped around the neck.

mentalities and so enhance Sabra uniqueness (and thus, indirectly, its superiority)” (199). More specifically, he notes that the use of Arabic words was more common among members of the *Palmach* generation, who played a decisive role in shaping the Sabra stereotype and myth, and made their way into both the Israeli literary and military establishments as the “young guard” who published their works at the end of the 1930s and 1940s and at the same time fought in the 1948 War that led to the establishment of Israel (Almog 13). The frivolous use of Arabic words, then, was meant to create an internal vocabulary linking the Sabra experience to those who spoke it.

IV: Literature in the Segregation Zone

The establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in 1948 and its counter-event (or aftermath), the Palestinian *Nakba*, had devastating effects on Palestinian life and culture. These historically dramatic events not only resulted in the dispossession of the majority of Palestinians from their land and property, but also led to their prolonged displacement and exile.³⁸ When describing the consequences of both events on Palestinian literature and culture, Palestinian critics and *Nakba* survivors often lament gravely the destruction of entire cities that were vibrant cultural metropolises, such as Yaffa (Jaffa) and Haifa.³⁹ They also describe 1948 as a catastrophic year that brought about the shattering of the entire cultural infrastructure that underlay the Palestinian literary and artistic communities that flourished, because of the highly political Palestinian newspapers,

³⁸ See especially Walid Khalidi. *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992) and Benny Morris. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁹ For personal testimonies about the destructions of the cultural life in Yaffa and Haifa watch *Ightiyāl al-Madīnah* (The Assassination of the City). Dir. Ramez Kazmouz. Al-Arz TV, 2011. Film.

which had blossomed in 1908, following the Young Turks' Revolution, and the Restoration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908, that brought relative political freedom and a proliferation of the local Palestinian press (Abū Ḥannā 101-16).⁴⁰ In their descriptions, narratives about ruins, fragmentation and minoritization are salient.

When examining Palestinian literature in Israel at the very end of 1948 and during the following decade, all three narratives of ruin, fragmentation and minoritization are prevalent. First, Palestinian literature was in a state of ruin, fragmentation and suffering from the aftermath of *al-Nakba*. In comparison with the quality of Palestinian literature that was produced before *al-Nakba*, literary scholars argue that Palestinian fiction “underwent a marked deterioration” (Ghanayem 10). The main reason for this, they assert, is *al-Nakba*. Ghanayem notes: “The mass emigration among the educated urban population [left] only a relatively small number of young writers at the beginning of their literary careers, such as Imīl Ḥabībī (1921- 96), Hanna Ibrahim (1927) and Najwā Qa‘wār Farah (1923). In fact, most Palestinian intellectuals working in the fields of journalism and literature were new and inexperienced” (10).

It is noteworthy that the “deterioration,” of Palestinian literature, as Ghanyyem rightfully points out, is symptomatic of the larger minoritization process that Palestinians in Israel went through after *al-Nakba*. Put in Krimmerling and Migdal's words: “Arab

⁴⁰ The emergence of the Palestinian press coincides with the political realities that characterized the Ottoman rule in Palestine and the British colonial Mandate of Palestine. The 1908 Young Turks' Revolution contributed to a dramatic rise in the publication of Palestinian newspapers. For instance, “before 1908, there were three newspapers, whereas 32 papers were established between 1908-1914” (53). See Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 53. Several of these newspapers emphasized a local identity based on a connection to the land. For example, *Al-Karmil* appeared in 1908. It was named after Mount Carmel in Haifa. In 1911, *Filastin*, the Arabic name of Palestine, was published in Jaffa. However, following WWI many of the local newspapers were interrupted before they resumed their publication after the establishment of the British Mandate and despite the heavy censorship imposed by the British. Nevertheless, the newspapers continued to play a pivotal role in encouraging collective action against the British and the Zionist settlers. See especially, Mustafa Kabaha, *The Palestinian Press As Shaper of Public Opinion 1929-39: Writing Up a Storm* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2007) 1-70.

society in Israel had entered the 1950s as traumatized and quiescent. Much of it was displaced physically and was in the process of becoming further uprooted socially, as it moved from agriculture to day labor. Literally and figuratively, Israel's Arabs constituted a fenced-in community- a small minority in a now-Jewish sea" (187).

However, thanks to the survival of one major newspaper, *al-Ittiḥād* (Unity), Palestinian literature was able to recover from its "deterioration," in the aftermath of *al-Nakba*. Published by the Communist Party (*ha-Miflagah ha-komunistit ha-Yisra'ilit-MAKI*) in Haifa in 1944, *al-Ittiḥād* became a literary cultural center that offered a platform for emerging Palestinian poets and writers (Abū Ṣāliḥ 47). Yet, it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that *al-Ittiḥād* would regain its cultural influence. Then, it became home for a generation of young activists-poets who would later become widely recognized by the Arab world as *Shu'arā' al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets). In fact, its literary monthly literary journal *al-Jadīd* (The New; first published in 1951) fostered the generation of Resistance Poets and helped them break the cultural embargo imposed by Israeli Military rule imposed from 1948-1966.

Indeed, after analyzing over 140 issues of *al-Jadīd* that were published between 1953 and 1967, Maha Nassar (2010) argues that this literary magazine created a Palestinian-Arab counter public within Israel. She maintains that the Palestinian writers, activists and intellectuals who wrote for *al-Jadīd* contributed to enhancing the cultural and political awareness of Palestinians in Israel, as well as, the broader Palestinian cultural sphere. Nassar goes on to conclude that their contribution became more visible after they reunited with their fellow Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and beyond after the 1967 War; a trend that demonstrates that "the isolation of

Palestinians in Israel from the broader Arab world was not as impenetrable as it is sometimes depicted” (335).

The twin processes of repression of Arabic and control of the Palestinian Arabic-speaking population were most likely among the first manifestations of the institutionalization of the State of Israel. These processes occurred through the institutionalization of Hebrew as the official language of the state⁴¹ and the homogenizing mechanism of Israeli society, as well as the establishment of Military Rule to govern and monitor the Palestinian community in Israel from 1948-1966. Above all, this process led to the significant isolation and exclusion of Arabic and Palestinian writers and to the general minoritization of Palestinian literature, at least until 1967. Six months after its establishment on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel founded the Academy for Hebrew Language in Jerusalem. This academy played a very critical role in institutionalizing Hebrew as the official language of the state and a homogenizing basis for Israeli identity. Hebrew was the language of the new nation and the unifying factor for the diverse collective of Jewish immigrant groups that descended from different cultural backgrounds. Pappé notes:

The ‘melting pot’ process, began in 1948. The model community consisted of the veteran European Jews, who had already become modern Israelis under the influence of the Hebrew revival, the militarism of Israeli society, and the settlement ethos, all colored by Marxist, socialist and

⁴¹ Although Arabic is an official language in Israel, there is clear inequality in the opportunities granted to Arabic-speakers as compared to Hebrew-speakers to enjoy and use their language in official and public forums. In practice, the status of Arabic is vastly inferior to that of Hebrew in terms of the resources dedicated to its use. For more on the marginalization of Arabic in Israel see Ilan Saban and Muhammad Amara, “The Status of Arabic in Israel: Reflections on the Power to Produce Social Change,” *Israel Law Review*. 36 (2002): 5-40.

nationalist narratives. Hebrew courses for new immigrants were the most important means of indoctrination. In November 1948, an academy for the Hebrew language was founded in Jerusalem, and policed the different potential dialects, keeping them within the fold of Zionist idioms and ideals. No less relentless was the fight against the use by Arab Jews of Arabic (169).

It is important to note here that the repression of Arabic among Arab Jews, especially recent immigrants from Iraq in the early 1950s, is one of the most prominent examples of the hostile attitude that the Israeli state and society expressed towards Arabic. This attitude, however, would have important consequences for the cultural identity construct of Mizrahi (non-European) Jews for generations to come.⁴² Paradoxically, this attitude influenced, to a certain extent, the emergence of Palestinian literature in Israel as pan-Arab. When several recent immigrant Iraqi-Jewish writers and poets were trying to reconnect with their repressed Arab identity in the 1950s, they sought out contact and collaboration with their peers in the Arab-Palestinian literary community. For instance, Ishak Bar Moshe (b. 1927-), David Tsemah (1993-1996), Sasson Somekh (b. 1933-) and

⁴² On the cultural identity crisis of Iraqi-Jews see Shohat, Ella Habiba "Reflections by an Arab-Jew." *Bint Jbeil: Frontier of Our Soul*, n.d. Web. 28 December, 2011. Here, Shohat emphasizes the negative effects on the identity of the Arab-Jew that result from the general hostility towards Arabic and Arabs existing in Israel, which intensified further with the Arab-Israeli conflict. She narrates: "War, however, is the friend of binarisms, leaving little place for complex identities. The Gulf War, for example, intensified a pressure already familiar to the Arab Jewish diaspora in the wake of the Israeli-Arab conflict: a pressure to choose between being a Jew and being an Arab. For our families, who have lived in Mesopotamia since at least the Babylonian exile, who have been Arabized for millennia, and who were abruptly dislodged to Israel 45 years ago, to be suddenly forced to assume a homogenous European Jewish identity based on experiences in Russia, Poland and Germany, was an exercise in self devastation. To be a European or American Jew has hardly been perceived as a contradiction, but to be an Arab Jew has been seen as a kind of logical paradox, even an ontological subversion. This binarism has led many Oriental Jews (our name in Israel referring to our common Asian and African countries of origin is Mizrahi or Mizrachi) to a profound and visceral schizophrenia, since for the first time in our history Arabness and Jewishness have been imposed as antonyms" (2).

Shimon Ballas (1914-1983) were among the prominent Jewish-Iraqi writers who taught Arabic in Palestinian schools and contributed to *al-Ittiḥād* and its literary magazine *al-Jadīd* regularly. Their efforts culminated in 1954 with the establishment of “*Jam ‘īyat anṣār al-adab al-‘arabī*” (The Association for the Supporters of Arabic Literature), which focused on the moral and financial support of Palestinian and Iraqi-Jewish writers (Abū Ṣāliḥ 23). The convergence between these two groups facilitated the post-*Nakba* recovery process of Palestinian literature in Israel. Nevertheless, the noted Palestinian historian, critic and *al-Ittiḥād* ‘s chief editor, Imīl Tūmā, argues that Iraqi-Jewish writers had a minor influence on the revival of Palestinian literature in Israel. He writes:

When the wave of Iraqi immigration came to our country, it did not carry any prominent writers in Arabic literature. Most of these immigrant writers were young writers who were struggling to have a voice in the nationalist and racist atmosphere in Israel that was hostile to Arabs. Their contribution to Palestinian literature was transient and temporal, because as soon as they shifted to write in Hebrew [in the 1960s], none of them remained in contact with the Palestinian literary scene (41).

Although it is important to keep in mind Tūmā’s reservation about the contribution of Iraqi-Jewish writers to the furthering of Palestinian literature in Israel, it is also crucial to note that recently there has been increasing evidence of a resurging encounter between Arab-Jewish writers and the Palestinian cultural and literary scene in Israel. With the reemergence of identity politics discourse in Israel since the early 1990s, which came to be known in Hebrew as “*hashed ha ‘idati*,” (the ethnic demon), the assertion of an Arab-Jew identity has been on the rise. A prominent example of this trend is the popularization

of Mizrahi music and the establishment of social institutions and NGOs that assert Arab origins and Muslim cultural heritage. In fact, these organizations, such as “*Hakeshet Hademocratit Hamizrahit*” (The Mizrahi Rainbow Democratic Coalition), which was established in 2003, highlight Mizrahi identity as the common ground for a collective fight for rights in land, employment and education, etc. Another example is the rising trend of literary figures that emphasize the Mizrahi-Palestinian-Israeli connection in their work.⁴³ Almog Behar (b. 1978-) is among the most prominent young writers in this milieu. A poet who writes in Hebrew, Behar writes about being an Iraqi-Jew while being an anti-Israeli occupation activist. His work was translated into Arabic in 2010 by emerging young Palestinian writers, and appeared in the vanguard of Palestinian web-based cultural and literary journals in Israel, such as *Qadita*.⁴⁴ However, at this point, it is still too early to determine the scope and the implications of this encounter in shaping the literature of the emerging generation of Palestinian and Mizrahi writers.

More evidence of the isolation of Palestinian literature in the 1950s, as a result of institutional Israeli state exclusion, is the lack of state financial support for Palestinian writers. In comparison with their Jewish peers, Palestinian writers were denied both government grants and membership in the Hebrew Writer’s Union. Under the pretext that the Union is only for writers in Hebrew, Palestinian writers, even those who wrote in Hebrew, such as Rashid Hussein, were not allowed to join the Union, despite the fact that

⁴³ It is important to note here that this movement was more than identity politics, but more an attempt of Jewish of Arab origins to reclaim their ethnic and cultural identities. In comparison with Jews of European origins, many Arab-Jews saw their marginalization in Israel as racial discrimination. Others forged alliances with Palestinians as part of their anti-racist struggle. For more on the history of Arab-Jews and the recent development of reclaiming Arab identity see Ella Shohat, “Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text*. 21.2. (2003) 49-74, and Smadar Lavie. “Writing against Identity Politics: An Essay on Gender, Race, and Bureaucratic Pain,” *American Ethnologist*. 39.4 (2012) 779-803.

⁴⁴ Behar, Almog. “Nablus, 1967.” *Qadita.net Culture and Politics*. 13 January 2011. Web. 28 December 2011. Al-Tayyeb Ghanayem, Rojeh Tabour and Sasson Somekh translated the collection of poems from Hebrew to Arabic.

membership was given to other Jewish writers who published in Yiddish and other European languages (Zureik 183). The institutionalization of military rule only added to this isolation, by cutting the Palestinian literary community off from the Hebrew literary establishment and the Arab world.

That being said, military rule is possibly the perfect illustration of an Israeli establishment that contributed to the isolation and segregation of the Palestinian literary culture. Although Palestinians who remained within Israel after *al-Nakba* were formally recognized as citizens in the declaration of the state on 14 May 1948, they were subject to heavy military rule from 21 October 1948. The military administration was based on the mandatory emergency of 1945, “which in fact gave unlimited control to the military governors over the Palestinian community” (Pappé 639). Under the military administration that was imposed on almost 75 percent of the Palestinian population in the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Naqab, Palestinian political and economic life in Israel were greatly restricted. These measures of control included severe restrictions on movement, prohibitions on political organization, limitations on job opportunities, and censorship of publications.

For example, in 1956, the Israeli army killed 49 Palestinian farmers in the village of Kufur Qassim in the Triangle area for “violating” the curfew imposed on their village. Unaware that a curfew had been ordered, the farmers were returning home from working their farmlands when they were shot dead. In the political realm, attempts by Palestinians to form political parties with nationalist agendas to run for the Israeli Parliament (*Knesset*), such as *al-Ard* (The Land), were forcibly stopped and their association outlawed (Jiryis, 1976, 13-55). Writers who wrote in the Communist Party press and

spoke out against the official line of the government in Israel were subject to imprisonment and house arrest and to expulsion from their government-paid jobs, primarily teaching (Ghanayim 1-17). In fact, a special unit of the military called General Security Service (*Shin Bet*) was in charge of monitoring and cracking down on literary and political activities that were perceived to be a threat to the fundamentals of the newly established state.

Indeed, Palestinian national poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh was among those who suffered greatly from the *Shin Bet* and Israeli police harassment at the time. Darwīsh was arrested multiple times, once for “traveling without permit” but usually for no stated reason. Throughout the 1960s, the authorities prohibited him from leaving Haifa, and after 1967 he lived under partial but permanent house arrest, being forced to report home by sunset each evening and to remain there until morning. In 1971 Darwīsh inevitably left the country, to live in exile for the rest of his life. In 1973 Darwīsh wrote a memoir, *Yawmīyāt Al-Ḥuzn Al-‘ādī* (Journal of Ordinary Grief),⁴⁵ in which he narrates some episodes from his imprisonment. When a prison inmate asks him about the reason for his arrest, Darwīsh responds: “I threw a poem at the conquerors’ car, and it blew them up. They arrested me, and charged me with mass murder”⁴⁶ (Muhawi 50). In another episode, Darwīsh describes to his persecutors in an Israeli court the irony of their arresting him for moving without a permit. He admits: “I have another confession as well: “I enjoy the weather in the city of Haifa, and the weather belongs to the State of Israel and not the city of Haifa. I do not have a permit to enter the weather because the sky I see above me does not belong to Haifa, and I do not have a permit to sit under the sky” (Muhawi 67).

⁴⁵ I’m using here Ibrahim Muhawi’s English translation of the book. See Maḥmūd Darwīsh. *Journal of an Ordinary Grief*, Trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2010).

During the eighteen years of military rule, Palestinians in Israel were forbidden from having contact with their Palestinian families and relatives across the border, as well as with the larger Arab world. In 1960, for example, “Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein was arrested and imprisoned for the high crime of possessing six issues of an Egyptian newspaper and two copies of a Lebanese magazine” (Hoffman 290). In fact, many Palestinians who grew up under military rule tend to describe those years using repeatedly the metaphors of ‘being an orphan,’ and ‘being cut off.’ The poet, critic and writer of short stories and children’s books Fahd Abū Khaḍrah (b. 1939-), for instance, says the following: “We were cut off from our Palestinian brethren and did not have access to the Arab world. We were in complete isolation. Books from neighboring Arab countries were smuggled in. And when books made it to us, there would be only a very few copies and they would circulate them among us and sometimes make handwritten copies of them. For me personally, with the lack of access to the Arab poetry scene of the time, I went back to the Arabic classics and reread pre-Islamic poetry and other older texts.”⁴⁷

V: Conclusion

This examination of the literary history of contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas and Palestinian literature in Israel cannot possibly summarize the whole history behind the emergence of both literary traditions. However, this history reveals the different processes of minoritization that the two traditions underwent. In the literary history of Mayan literature, the route to minoritization involved *mestizaje*. The hybridity of oral Mayan traditions and the European alphabet has been a form of repression of

⁴⁷ I interviewed Fahd Abū Khaḍrah at Al-Qasemi Arabic Language Academy in Baqa Al-Gharbiya in February 14, 2010.

indigenous voices. But it has also operated as a tool for maintaining continuity through conquest and colonialism. The literary history of Palestinian literature, on the other hand, unveils a minoritization route of double marginalization. The articulation of Zionism, as the ideological foundation of Israel as a Jewish national state, is manifest in the state's institutionalized systems of negation, exclusion and control. In other words, Palestinian literature is marginalized as both an indigenous and a national minority.

While these findings are useful for enhancing the historiography of indigenous minorities, they are also important for the purpose of literary theory. Comprehending the dynamics of minoritization in Mayan literature in Chiapas and in Palestinian literature in Israel allows us to understand how literary practices in the margins emerge as what Lienhard terms “alternative texts”. According to Lienhard, “literary practices in the margin often involve certain situations of confrontation between hegemonic sectors and societies, sub societies or marginalized, ‘ethnic,’ or ‘popular’ sectors (my translation, 96). The intensity of this confrontation is variable, because it is characterized by the imbrication of differences or cultural and social antagonism. Capturing the scope of this confrontation and understanding its inner dynamics, including moments of clashing and resistance, allows us to notice how the “alterative text” is produced.

To conclude, we are left, then, with the following questions: Is the “alternative text” a hybrid re-creation, or simply performance “from below” of the majority text? Or, is it an independent textual object, like what minority literatures are understood to be? As my analysis in the following chapters demonstrates, there is a persistent, although not always similar, intersectionality in both Mayan and Palestinian literatures. This process is different, I would argue, because of the distinct dynamics in each contact zone. In other

words, the intersectionality that emerged in Mayan literature as a result of mestizaje is different than the one that resulted from the exclusion of Palestinian literature. However, despite this difference, the process itself is evident in the two traditions. In addition, I would argue that this process constitutes Mayan and Palestinian literatures as an “alternative text”. However, the production of this text is multidimensional. It involves convergence with ethnography, oral history and mythology, emerging indigenous feminism, and ongoing clashes with the colonial, as well as new global encounters. Hence, a route of minoritization based on the binary of either hybrid re-creation, or of performance “from below,” leads to a dead end.

- II -

Anthropology, Folklore and Literature Paths to Indigenous Cultural Memory

"And you, do you believe that we are bandits?" I ask.

Old Antonio exhales a long wisp of smoke, coughs, and shakes his head. I get up my courage and ask him another question. "So who do you think we are?"

"I'd rather you tell me," he says and looks me straight in the eyes.

"It's a long story," I say. And I begin to tell about the times of Zapata and Villa and the revolution and the land and the injustice and the hunger and the ignorance and the sickness and the repression and everything. And I finish with "and thus we are the Zapatista Army of National Liberation." I wait for some sign from Old Antonio who never stopped looking at me during my speech.

"Tell me more about that Zapata," he says after another puff and cough. I begin with Anenecuilco, then I follow with the Plan de Ayala, the military campaign, the organization of the villages, the betrayal at Chinameca. Old Antonio continues to stare at me until I finish.

"It wasn't like that," he tells me. I'm surprised and all I can do is mumble, "No?"

"No," insists old Antonio. "I am going to tell you the real story of this so-called Zapata."

Old Antonio takes out his tobacco and rolling papers and begins his story, a story where old and new events mix and get lost in each other, just as the smoke from his cigarette and my pipe mix and get lost in each other.

"Many stories ago, when the first gods- those who made the world we're still circling through the night, there were those two other gods- Ik'al and Votán."

— Subcomandante Marcos, *Questions and Swords* (13-17)

La historia de colores (The History of Colors) (1996) and *Preguntas y espadas*

(Questions and Swords) (2001) are two well-known collections of folktales from the

Zapatista Uprising that broke out in Chiapas on January 1, 1994.⁴⁸ Both collections,

published in the form of picture books, feature the character of Viejo Antonio, an elderly

man from Chiapas. Viejo Antonio is a Mayan elder written about extensively⁴⁹ by

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the Ladino⁵⁰ spokesperson of the *Ejército Zapatista*

de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or EZLN). Viejo

⁴⁸ The EZLN was founded in Chiapas on November 17, 1983, but the armed uprising took place on January 1, 1994. For a detailed history of the EZLN and personal testimonies from its members see G. Muños Ramírez, Laura Carlsen, and Arias A. Reyes, *The Fire and the Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008).

⁴⁹ Marcos has said that he based the character on an actual old man that he met in the mountains of Chiapas, who has since died. It seems likely, however, that many of the stories are fictionalized.

⁵⁰ Ladino is a term used by all ethnic groups in Chiapas, to refer to non-indigenous or *mestizo* peoples, including foreigners.

Antonio's folktales are narrated in the setting of Zapatista fighters seeking refuge in the highlands of Chiapas. In both texts, Viejo Antonio is represented as the transmitter of Mayan mythology and an icon of indigenous wisdom that enlightens Marcos about history and politics. Critics of Zapatista literature classify these folktales as *neo-indigenista* (Schuettler 53). Marcos' focus on the narratives of Viejo Antonio revives a long tradition of *indigenista* literature, which essentially consists of representations of indigenous peoples by Ladino or non-indigenous authors, often expressing sympathy with indigenous suffering and/or solidarity with indigenous struggles. As *neo-indigenista* texts, these folktales emphasize the superiority of indigenous culture. These folktales qualify as *neo-indigenista* because "The perspective is indigenous, the value of indigenous culture and worldview is stressed; indigenous input in national politics and economic policy is promoted; and autonomy for themselves and all Mexicans, is a primary goal" (Schuettler 54).

While the first collection was taken from an actual communiqué that Marcos addressed to the Mexican people on October 27, 1994, the second collection is a sequel that was published on January 1, 2001, in commemoration of the Seventh Anniversary of the Zapatista Revolution. In both collections, Marcos is the interlocutor who listens to Viejo Antonio's stories, told in the dialect of Spanish spoken by Mayans in Chiapas, which is heavily influenced by Mayan languages and is described by Marcos' friends as "bad Spanish." In the second collection, Marcos clearly states: "Por mi voz habla la voz del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional" [Through my voice speaks the Zapatista Army for National Liberation].⁵¹ Both collections appeared first in Mexico. The bilingual Spanish-English editions were printed in Hong-Kong and published in the US by

⁵¹ The phrase appears in footnotes throughout the book.

Cinco Puntos Press in Texas. Both collections were supported financially by the Lannan Foundation,⁵² which is a US-based organization “dedicated to cultural freedom, diversity and creativity through projects which support exceptional contemporary artists and writers, as well as inspir[ing] Native activists in rural indigenous communities.”⁵³ These details about both collections are important, because they reveal the international attention that Zapatista folktales have received, and the dissemination of Mayan mythology outside Mexico through the global circulation of Zapatista literature. This mode of globalization of the spoken words of the Mayans through international solidarity with the EZLN has often resulted, abroad, in conflating the categories of contemporary Mayan literature with Zapatista literature, although Marcos is not Mayan and the narratives that he writes is not Mayan literature. This inaccurate conflation of Zapatista and Mayan literatures has obscured the ancient history of Mayan folktales, as well as the fact that they emerged as a popular and foundational genre for contemporary Mayan oral literature.

Indeed, in 1986 a literary contest for indigenous people in Chiapas was organized. It was one of the pioneering efforts that followed the emergence of the first collective of contemporary indigenous writers in 1982, *Sna Itz'ibajom* (The House of the Writer). The contest was coordinated by local institutions, indigenous organizations and national education centers, including the State of Chiapas, *Centro de Investigaciones*

Humanísticas de Mesoamérica, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and

⁵² There was a huge controversy associated with the publication of *La historia de los colores/ The Story of Colors* in 1999. It had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, which was abruptly withdrawn after reviewing a copy of the manuscript and a biography of the author, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. However, Cinco Puntos Press released the book after receiving financial support from the Lannan Foundation. For more details on this controversy, see Marcos, *Conversations with Durito: Stories of the Zapatistas and Neoliberalism* (New York: Autonomedia, 2005), 23.

⁵³ According to the mission statement of the Lannan Foundation website at <http://www.lannan.org/about>.

Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas (UACH), Patronato Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, and the Museum of Na-Bolom, among others. The literary works were submitted in different Mayan languages and translated by the participating authors into Spanish. According to poet and judge Juan Bañuelos (1989), “el fin [de este concurso literario] es estimular y rescatar de la memoria colectiva, de la ‘biblioteca viviente’ en que se han convertido estos pueblos, las fábulas, cantos, leyendas, proverbios, cuentos, poemas o alguna otra manifestación literaria transmitida oralmente” [The goal of this literary contest is to stimulate and salvage from the collective memory-- from the “living library” that these people have become-- fables, songs, legends, proverbs, stories, poems, or any other literary manifestation that has been orally transmitted] (4). This contest culminated in the publication by UNAM of a bi-lingual collection of indigenous stories in 1989, entitled *Cuentos y relatos indígenas*⁵⁴ (Indigenous Stories and Tales). In his introduction to the book, Bañuelos highlights that this collection is significant, because of the anthropological importance of the stories and their rich literary expression, which goes beyond their social and cultural value.

These two distinct episodes in the creation of a platform for oral Mayan narrative attest to the political and anthropological interest in the folklore and oral culture of contemporary Mayan literature. What are the literary implications of these two different modes of engagement with oral Mayan narratives? How does the EZLN’s involvement in documenting Mayan folktales inform questions of Mayan political representation? What role do cultural and anthropological institutions, on both the local and national levels, play in the preservation and reproduction of Mayan oral history? These questions are

⁵⁴ The title of the book appears only in Spanish. Subsequently seven additional volumes have been published.

significant, because they call for further research into the historical development of Mayan literature. They also require an interdisciplinary critical engagement with the Mayan text. Keeping in mind that there is a very limited amount of scholarship on contemporary Mayan literature to begin with, addressing these questions will most certainly contribute to furthering this field and enriching both Mayan literary history and criticism.

In this chapter, I invoke these questions to allude to the intersection of oral literature, folklore, anthropology and indigenous nationalism. This process is evident in both Mayan literature in Chiapas and Palestinian literature in Israel. I examine this intersection through a comparison of the role that Mexican anthropologists, versus Palestinian political writers, played in shaping the beginning of literary engagement with Mayan and Palestinian oral culture, respectively. To accomplish this, I look at two early examples of canonical ethnographies that focused on Mayan and Palestinian oral narratives: Ricardo Pozas' *Juan Pérez Jolote: biografía de un tzotzil* (Juan Pérez Jolote: An Ethnological Re-creation of the Life of a Mexican Indian) (1952) and Tawfiq Zayyād's *'An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha 'bī fī fīlasṭīn* (About Literature and Folk Literature in Palestine) (1970).

The chapter is divided into two sections: analytical and theoretical. In the analytical section, I review the different socio-historical and political dynamics, as well as the aesthetic aspects that inform and stem from ethnography in these two foundational texts. In the theoretical section, I reflect on this comparison in an effort to illuminate the particularity of this intersection in indigenous minority literature, while demonstrating that this particularity is the result of the inevitable tension that characterizes the

intersection of anthropology and literature in a colonial context. I argue that the interest in the oral tradition in *Juan Pérez Jolote* exemplifies the efforts of Ladino anthropologists to redeem the indigenous, while perpetuating Chamula as the cultural Other, whereas the interest in oral tradition in *‘An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha ‘bī fī filasṭīn* demonstrates the efforts of Palestinian Marxists to reclaim indigenous memory, in order to save the oral Palestinian archive.

I: Oral Narratives: Re-creating Memory in Ethnography and Cultural Nationalism

For anthropological, historical, and literary reasons *Juan Pérez Jolote* has been considered a foundational text in contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas, as well as of the Mexican novel. First published as a book in 1952,⁵⁵ this narrative about the coming of age of Pérez Jolote, a young Mayan man from the village of San Juan Chamula, near the colonial city of San Cristóbal, is the result of pioneering Mexican anthropological field work in Chiapas. It appeared first in 1948, in *Acta Anthropologica*, a publication by non-Mayan students at *Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia de México* (ENAH). Four years later it appeared in the series *Letras Mexicanas del Fondo de Cultura Económica*. It has gone through numerous editions since then. The book was also translated into several languages, including English, German, and French. Although there are no studies to attest to the popularity of the book among Tzotzil speakers, it must be noted that the Spanish version was adopted by Mexican high schools as a canonical

⁵⁵ For more details about the ethnographic research setting of the book, see Mercé Picornell Belengue, “Etnoficción latinoamericana: sobre interpretaciones de *Juan Pérez Jolote*,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 20 (2006): 135-52. The author also mentions that, during the Zapatista Uprising in 1994, the book was translated for the first time into Tzotzil, the language of its protagonist (135). However, she does not provide any information about the translator, and despite extensive research, I was unable to track down the Tzotzil edition.

Mexican novel, along with Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). In addition, Mexican director Archibaldo Burns adapted the book into a fictional film with the same title, *Juan Pérez Jolote*, in 1977.

Narrating his biography in first-person in Spanish to the Ladino anthropologist Ricardo Pozas (1912-1994), Pérez Jolote describes major dramatic events that shaped his life as an indigenous Mayan: a violent upbringing that caused him to run away from his alcoholic, abusive father, survival of child labor and exploitation on different Ladino-owned *fincas*, incarceration due to false charges of murder, fighting as a mercenary in opposing fronts of the Mexican Revolution, and finally returning to his village, where he struggles to speak Tzotzil again, while readjusting to a traditional Chamula lifestyle.

Juan Pérez Jolote, as I will elaborate shortly, marks an important historical landmark on different fronts. On the local level, its publication reflects the intersection of Mexican anthropological research and *indigenista* literature in Chiapas in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The focus on a narrative from rural Chiapas, with a Mayan man from San Juan Chamula as a native informant, characterized both traditions at that time, further enhancing the centrality of Chamula as an “ethnographic reference” for anthropologists (Tejera Gaona 180).⁵⁶ This trend was more pronounced in Pozas' later work, *Chamula*, in 1959, which revealed his political concerns for the Mayans in San Juan Chamula. After the publication of *Juan Pérez Jolote*, he developed a keen interest in studying the internal

⁵⁶ Elaborating on the ethnographic reference, Héctor Tejera Gaona asserts: “Para quienes investigan en Chiapas *Chamula* sigue siendo una referencia etnográfica fundamental tanto para establecer comparaciones entre la situación actual y lo acontecido hace cuarenta años, como para comprender mejor el proceso sociopolítico en que se encuentra inmersa la comunidad indígena chiapaneca.” [“For those who study Chiapas, Chamula continues to be an ethnographic reference, both for establishing a comparison between reality and what happened forty years ago, and to better understand the socio-historical process that engulfs the indigenous community in Chiapas.”] (180). For more on Pozas' work in San Juan Chamula, see Héctor Gaona Tejera, “En memoria de Ricardo Pozas Arciniega,” *Nueva Antropología* 13.45 (1994): 179-83.

dynamics in the Mayan communities. Therefore, when *Chamula* was published, it revealed the theoretical contradictions that dominated Mexican anthropology in 1950s, including the debate between culturalism, functionalism, and Marxism (180).

On the national level, as indigenista ethnography, the text marks a historical overlap between the Mexican national and cultural imagination. Specifically, it illustrates the tension between the distinct discourses of *indigenismo* and the representation of the indigenous in the collective cultural and national Mexican imaginary. Moreover, it occupies a crucially significant position in Latin American literary history, as a text that generated critical questions concerning the generic tension between the ethnographic novel and the *testimonio*.

Juan Pérez Jolote: The Construction of the Modern Maya

Locally, *Juan Pérez Jolote* marks a critical moment in Mexican anthropology and indigenista literature in Chiapas in the late 1940s. As an ethnographic narrative, the text employs the perspective of Pérez Jolote as a native informant telling his life story. Pérez Jolote's identity as a Chamula and a rural cultural Other is portrayed as representative of all Mayans in Chiapas, despite their ethnic and linguistic diversity. The emergence of Pérez Jolote as a native informant foreshadowed the trend of anthropologists employing Mayan men and women to work as "cultural promoters" in educational programs, alcoholism prevention, road construction and public health (Lewis 614). These programs were designed by *Mexico's National Indigenist Insititute* (INI), which established its pilot Coordinating Center in the Chiapas highlands in 1951. In these programs bilingual Tzeltal and Tzotzil became promoters translating culture to Ladinos and were recognized

by the INI as good mediators between the non-Spanish speakers, or those with little spoken Spanish, and the Spanish-speaking Ladino world. Pérez Jolote plays the same role in Pozas' narrative. In fact, Pérez Jolote was Pozas' translator in his work as an ethnographer.

Moreover, as an ethnographic text featuring a Mayan protagonist, *Juan Pérez Jolote* is considered among the foundational works of *El ciclo de Chiapas* (The Chiapas Cycle), a concept that was coined by Joseph Sommers in the 1960s (Morales López 77). This *indigenista* literary movement emerged in the early 1950s and concerned itself with exploring indigenous themes and characters. Following the narrative paradigm of The Chiapas Cycle, which focused on indigenous and Ladino relations, while often positioning the indigenous as suffering from inferiority and inequality (Morales López 78), *Juan Pérez Jolote* replicates the story of the doomed Indian. Throughout the text Pérez Jolote occupies a liminal position across the Chamula-Ladino divide. He is trapped between two irreconcilable social realities: his Chamula identity, which he represents as a native informant, and Ladino culture, where he is destined to exploitation and ridicule, because of his Chamula identity.

On the anthropological front, *Juan Pérez Jolote* is the result of Pozas' fieldwork in Chamula in the 1940s. Pozas first arrived in Chamula in 1942, where he spent six months investigating the economy of Chamula while gathering cultural details (Antonio Castro 13). He returned in 1945 to resume his ethnographic research. For Pozas, the personal encounter with Pérez Jolote was a welcome anthropological methodology for writing about Chamula as a culture. Therefore, he turned the narrative of his native

informant and translator into a story. This trend is asserted in the editorial note that prefaces the first edition of the text in 1948:

La que ahora presentamos nació del trabajo de campo efectuado en el Estado de Chiapas, de fines de 1945 a principios de 1946, por una expedición en la que tomó parte el autor. Ricardo Pozas, etnólogo del Museo Nacional de Antropología. Fue entonces cuando conoció a Juan Jolote y cuando concibió la idea de aprovechar el relato que de su vida le hiciera el chamula para dar a conocer, en forma de biografía, algo del ambiente cultural que caracteriza al grupo tzotzil. [It was then [during his field work] that [Ricardo Pozas] met Juan Pérez Jolote and when he conceived the idea of taking advantage of his life story as a Chamula to raise awareness, through a form of biography, about the cultural environment that characterizes the Tzotzil group.] (Castro 13).

It is important to note that, in this preface, the writer emphasizes the educational value for non-Mayans of studying Pérez Jolote's culture, for the betterment of the conditions of indigenous communities in Chiapas. This culture is identified by Pérez Jolote's locality as a resident of the *municipio* of Chamula and his linguistic identity as a Tzotzil speaker. However, throughout the text and in the title of its 1962 English translation, *Juan the Chamula: An Ethnological Re-Creation of the Life of a Mexican Indian*, Chamula and Tzotzil are used interchangeably to describe Pérez Jolote's *difference*. This conflation of locality and language is important to highlight, because it reveals the construction of Pérez Jolote as a cultural and ethnic Other.

Historically speaking, identification according to *municipios* is an important element of contemporary Mayan culture. It dates to the mid-nineteenth century, when, partially because of colonial policies, *municipios* evolved as unique cultural isolates. Gary H. Gossen (1999) asserts: “ Each *municipio* had its characteristic dialect of an Indian language, colorful traditional clothing, a particular variant of a civil-religious hierarchy of ritual officials, and a particular cycle of public ritual observances in honor of the saints. This pattern survives today in many of the *municipios* of the Central Highlands” (82). However, this identification by community shifted in the 20th century, following the different linguistic distinctions that both Mexican and international anthropologists and historians of colonial and modern Mayan peoples created.

For example, in an anthropology symposium titled “Indian Mexico Past and Present,” held in 1965 at The University of California, Los Angeles, Mexican anthropologist Fernando Cámara identified Mayans according to their different languages to describe their belonging to different subcultures. For instance, he classified Tzotzil speakers among the tribal and traditional Indians who formed another Indian subculture that needed to be integrated into the mainstream Mexican socioeconomic lifestyle (Bell, 104). Jan De Vos (1998) argues that the classifications as such, which academic scholarship on Mayans created, gained wide recognition among indigenous peoples themselves in the tropical rainforests of Yucatán, in the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala. Thus, the Mayans adopted the custom of identifying themselves ethnically based on their language. These languages are 25 in total, including Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, Mame and Lacandón (494).

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the word “Chamula” has been

used in Mexico to refer to all indigenous people in Chiapas. Carlota Duarte, a Chiapas-based U.S. photographer, notes: “Based on direct experience, the word Chamula has been used in Mexico to refer to indigenous peoples in Chiapas in a generic manner: Chamula to mean any indigenous person, regardless of ethnicity or community/*municipio*. There are collections of photos in the *Fototeca Nacional* in Pachuca that use this word to identify photo contents. This fact no doubt has some residue in Mexican intellectual/anthropological life.”⁵⁷

As a rural Chamula, a Tzotzil and a member of a tribal and traditional Indian subculture, Pérez Jolote’s Otherness in relation to the Ladino world is established. This Otherness is not only a marker of his *difference* from Ladino identity and the Spanish-speaking world, but also a source of his subordination and inability to fit into Mexican modernity. Indeed, there are many incidents in *Juan Pérez Jolote* that allude to Pérez Jolote’s struggle with modernization. At the core of this struggle are Pérez Jolote’s attempts to reconcile the rural-urban and Mayan-ladino divide. His struggle particularly intensifies when he returns to Chamula and his return is described as a crisis that entails mental and cultural dislocation. Pérez Jolote reflects: “While my mother was making the tortillas I remembered a lot of things I’d forgotten: my mother’s dreams, the stories old people like to tell, their joys and sorrow...” (47). On the surface, Pérez Jolote’s crisis seems to be related to his homecoming after a prolonged period of geographical and mental disconnection from his village. However, when he is mocked later on by his people for acting like a ladino, Pérez Jolote’s crisis is indicative of an issue that is larger than someone who is suffering from reverse culture shock. He narrates:

And now everything seems strange, I can’t talk with people and I’ve

⁵⁷ Carlota Duarte, “Re: Mayan Literature,” Message to the author. 4 Apr. 2012. E-mail.

forgotten the customs... what am I going to do? I'm ashamed to dress like a Chamula, but they won't like it if I don't. I can't go out into the village because they'll look down on me, they'll talk about me... My father heard what they said after I arrived: "Look, there's that Juan. They say he's been out killing people. He's practically a ladino now." I didn't want to stay in my village, but I couldn't leave again, either (48).

Because Pérez Jolote can neither leave Chamula nor stay there, he is trapped in a liminal space between two worlds: the Mayan and the Ladino. According to the people in Chamula, venturing out into the Ladino world is fraught with danger and corruption. Hence, the only place for a Chamula to be is Chamula, because the gap between the two worlds is described as unbridgeable.

Nationally, *Juan Pérez Jolote* is a seminal text, because it demonstrates the integration of *indigenismo*, as an ideology of 'saving and redeeming the Indian,' into the Mexican cultural imagination. On the one hand, Pérez Jolote's story is told to elicit national sympathy for the second-class living conditions of indigenous people in Chiapas and Mexico at large. On the other hand, Pérez Jolote became an icon for cultural nationalists reclaiming the Indian roots of the modern Mexico nation. In both cases, however, Pérez Jolote's oral account illuminates the definition of *indigenismo* as "a discourse by non-Indians about Indians; a discourse that maintains a hierarchical social relationship between those who speak and those who are spoken about" (Tarica xi).

Certainly, in the introduction, Pozas states that the goal of his narrative is to increase awareness in Mexico about the reality of indigenous communities, "a culture [that] is undergoing profound changes because of its contact with our own [Mexican]

civilization” (1). Pozas’ concern for the survival of indigenous communities reflects two anxieties regarding change and contact. Here, the indigenous cultures are depicted as endangered by their contact with a superior, and more powerful, modern Mexican civilization. This representation of a hierarchal cultural dynamic is a common practice in salvage ethnography.

Indeed, James Clifford (1986) argues that salvage ethnography is concerned with the disappearing object, and its main themes are “the vanishing primitive [and] the end of the traditional society (the very act of naming it “traditional” implies a rupture)” (112). This pattern of redemptive ethnography, he goes on to argue, involves moral authority. Clifford adds: “It is assumed that the other society is weak and ‘needs’ to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future). The recorder and interpreter of fragile customs is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity” (113).

While Pozas takes the moral authority to represent a “vanishing primitive” (to use Clifford’s words), his attempts to increase awareness about life in San Juan Chamula reflect an initiative to facilitate the assimilation of Chamulas, as well as indigenous people in general, into the Mexican nation. It is important to note that Pozas’ perspective about understanding the indigenous for the purpose of assimilation characterized *indigenista* Mexican literature in the early 20th century, which embraced the emancipation ideal and agrarian reform promoted by the Mexican Revolution (Sommers 21-22). It was also evident in writings by revolutionary *mestizo* nationalists who advocated for the modernization and nationalization of the Indian, not only in Mexico,

but also throughout Latin America, a trend that many critics, including Antonio Cornejo Polar (1980, 1994), identified later on as ‘noble Orientalism.’⁵⁸

Octavio Paz’ reflection on the significance of *Juan Pérez Jolote* to the collective religious identity of modern Mexico is perhaps the perfect example to illustrate the Orientalist dimension of indigenista discourse. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (1961), one of the canonical texts about identity in Mexico, Paz refers to Pérez Jolote’s syncretism of Mayan and Catholic beliefs to exemplify a cornerstone of Mexican identity: *mestizaje*. Paz admires Pérez Jolote’s religious practice, because it transcends both the Mexicanization of Catholicism and the power of the Virgen de Guadalupe, Mexico’s most popular religious, cultural and national symbol. More important, he argues that Pérez Jolote elucidated a major theological question for “The Mexican, [who] is a religious being and his experience of the divine is completely genuine. But who is his god?” (106). Specifically, Paz quotes a passage from *Juan Pérez Jolote* that describes Pérez Jolote’s visit to his Chamulan church, to demonstrate that he resolved this enigma. Pérez Jolote’s god is both the ancient earth-gods and Christ:

This is Señor San Manuel here in his coffin; he is also called Señor San Salvador or Señor San Mateo; he watches over the people and the animals. We pray to him to watch over us at home, on the road, in the fields. This other figure on the cross is also Señor San Mateo; he is showing us how he

⁵⁸ In “Indigenismo and Heterogeneous Literatures: Their Double Sociocultural Statute” (100-115) and “Mestizaje, Transculturation, Heterogeneity” (116-119) (both translated by Christopher Dennis,) Antonio Cornejo Polar elaborates on this term by arguing that indigenista literature inhabits a mode of production that adopts a “Westernized sign” (112) and “presupposes a distant reader that exists in a world far from the universe of the Indian character” (112). Thus, indigenista texts, which reflect a mestizo ideology of Indian assimilation, produce a romanticized and ahistorical image of the Indian. While the soul of the Indian remains the thematic focus in these texts, it also symbolizes exotic Otherness. For further readings on the prevalence of this trend in indigenista literature in Mexico and the Andes, refer to both essays mentioned above in Ana Sarto and Alicia Ríos, *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

died on the cross, to teach us respect...Before San Manuel was born, the sun was as cold as the moon, and the *pukujes*⁵⁹ who ate people, lived on the earth. The sun began to grow warm after the birth of the Child-God, Señor San Salvador, who is the son of the virgin (107 in Paz, 94 in the English translation of *Juan Pérez Jolote*).

Paz emphasizes the particularity of Pérez Jolote's double invocation of the indigenous Mayan myth of creation, including the sun as an attribute of divinity, and Christ, whose presence activates nature. According to Paz, Pérez Jolote's double religious consciousness reveals a historical continuity between the pre-Conquest Mayan religion and Catholicism in Mexico in the 20th century. Paz asserts: "Nothing has been able to destroy the filial relationship of our people with the divine. It is a constant force that gives permanence to our nation and depth to the affective life of the dispossessed" (108). This emphasis on Pérez Jolote's sharing of a historical and religious background with the rest of Mexico suggests that his beliefs are neither alien, nor 'primitive,' and therefore, Pérez Jolote can belong to the modern Mexican nation.

Paz's invocation of Pérez Jolote to demonstrate that his religious beliefs as an Indian are foundational for Mexican national identity is problematic, for two reasons. First, as Estelle Tarica (2008) persuasively argues, Paz's celebration of Pérez Jolote's hybrid religious identity perpetuates the innocence-guilt paradigm, which Catholic liberal theologians created in the early years of Spanish colonialism to humanize the "Indian". In this sense, Paz builds on the indigenista discourse of Bartolomé de Las Casas in the mid

⁵⁹ The Chamulas believe that each human being has two souls; one, the *chulel*, dwells within an animal, while the other dwells within the human body. A *pukuj* is the *chulel* of a warlock.

sixteenth century, which claimed that Indians were fully human, because they embraced Christianity.

According to Tarica, “in the *indigenista* discourse dating to the early years of Spanish colonialism, [...]the difference between humans and barbarians was determined according to an underlying distinction between innocence and guilt. Las Casas argued that Indians were fully human, rather than barbarians because they were innocent of the inherited stains- racial and religious- carried by other infidel populations dominated by Spain, such as Jews and Moors” (16). In other words, a moral innocence was attributed to Indians, because of their willingness to submit to evangelization. Tarica concludes that, because of this process, Las Casas was able to “destigmatize Indians” (17). Hence, in celebrating Pérez Jolote’s --seemingly untroubled--hybrid spirituality, Paz suggests that there is no conflict between Christianity and Mayan religions, which ultimately reasserts Las Casas’ notion of Indian innocence.

Second, Paz’s invocation of Pérez Jolote as an idealized spiritual being is symptomatic of post-revolutionary Mexican indigenismo, in which the concept of “Indian” has been constructed as both a national ideal and a national problem (Taylor 2). Paz’s call on Pérez Jolote as the icon of the Indian spirit of modern Mexico, and the manifestation of the unbroken filial relationship between Mexicans and the divine, is symbolic of the construction of the Indian as a national ideal.

Finally, *Juan Pérez Jolote* occupies a critically significant position in Latin American literary history. Because the book is a textual recreation of Pérez Jolote’s oral narrative, which is mediated and organized by Pozas’ ethnographic research and his anthropological editing process, it has created a theoretical debate about its generic

affiliation. Is it an ethnographic novel, or a historical forerunner of a *testimonio*? Or, perhaps, is it the first indigenous novel in Mexico? The engagement of literary critics with these questions has situated *Juan Pérez Jolote* in larger theoretical and hemispheric contexts beyond the local borders of Mayan literature in Chiapas. In *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging* (2008), Analisa Taylor sums up some of the issues that are at stake in these questions. She notes:

[Despite] the fact that it is narrated in first person, Pozas calls the text a biography. This alerts us to the fact that Pozas is not surrendering complete narrative authority to his interlocutor. Pozas has opened the door to what will become an intense questioning of the distinction between the subjectivity of the referent and that of the author in later testimonial texts. As a ghost-written autobiography related orally to an interlocutor who records, organizes, and resequences the narrative, the line between the voice of the speaker and the voice of the writer is nearly invisible to the reader, inviting speculation but no real resolution to the question of whose vision of Chamulan life is being told (45).

The visibility or invisibility of the line between the *voice of the speaker* and the *voice of the writer* in *Juan Pérez Jolote* is significant, because it highlights the problem of authorship and representation in contemporary Mayan literature. It is also important because, as a historical trajectory, I argue, it marks the transition from *indigenista* literature (writing about the Mayan), to ethnographic literature (writing with the Mayan), to more recent literary and cultural productions, in which the Mayan speaks for

him/herself. Since the appearance of the first Mayan writers collective,⁶⁰ *Sna Jtz'ibajom* (The House of the Writer) in 1982, several independent and semi-independent Mayan cultural entities have emerged. With a plethora of Mayan productions in literature, photography, arts, publishing and theater, this era has come to be known as the beginning of a Mayan Renaissance. These cultural productions assert self-representation through the use of various Mayan languages and the adoption of a Mayan perspective. Although the cultural workers in these projects are mostly Mayans, there are Mexican involved, as well as North American anthropologists and artists, who have assisted in setting up the infrastructure for many of these projects.

For example, established in 1982 in collaboration with the poet Ambar Past,⁶¹ who was born in the U.S. but became a Mexican citizen in the 1970s, *Taller Leñateros* is a publishing house that aims at the conservation of Mayan languages and arts, while maintaining a Mayan tradition of living in harmony with nature. Their books are handmade and printed on recycled paper.

⁶⁰ Another collective of Mayan writers was established earlier in Chiapas in 1954. It included both Mayans and Ladinos, most notably writer Rosario Castellanos. A group of bilingual Mayan cultural promoters, who spoke Spanish, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal, worked in a puppet theatre to promote development programs among the Mayan communities. The programs, which focused on public health, education and issues of alcoholism, operated through the *National Indigenist Institute* (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, or INI) and its *pilot Indigenist Coordinating Center* (Centro Coordinador Indigenista, or CCI). Teodoro Sánchez, a Tzotzil promoter, directed the troupe for a short time before the Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos joined in 1955. She wrote plays for the troupe and directed it in 1956-1957. In the beginning the troupe was called *Teatro Guignol*, but when it gained wide success in late 1954, “the French “guignol”, was dropped, replaced by the name Petul, or “Pedro” in both Tzeltal and Tzotzil, after Pedro Díaz Cuscat, a visionary Chamula who helped organize an indigenous revolt in 1869” (Lewis 382). For a more detailed history of the troupe see Stephen E. Lewis, “Modernizing Message, Mystical Messenger: the Teatro Petul in the Chiapas Highlands, 1954–1974” *Americas* 67.3 (2011): 375-97.

⁶¹ Ambar Past is now a former US-citizen. She gave up her US nationality and became a Mexican citizen several years ago.

In addition, in 1992, the Mexican-American⁶² photographer Carlota Duarte founded the *Chiapas Photography Project/Archivo Fotográfico Indígena* with support from individual contributions and small institutional grants for art projects. Later she secured support from the Ford Foundation.⁶³ About twenty⁶⁴ ordinary Mayan women and men from different communities have been trained as photographers. Using the camera as a form of artistic expression, they have taken photographs of scenes, people, and themes from their rural and urban surrounding, including photographs of markets, agricultural activities, animals, maize and chile, to document their daily life in Chiapas. The photos are collected in books, alongside narratives penned by the photographers who captured them. The narratives appear as trilingual text, including the specific Mayan language of the photographer, and its translation into Spanish and English. Several of these Mayan visual artists have participated in national and international photography exhibits. One of the earliest photography books, *Camaristas: fotógrafos mayas de Chiapas* (1998), co-authored by Duarte and the photographer Maruch Sántiz Gómez, an award-winning Tzotzil-speaking artist, reflects on the significance of photography as a visual medium to create and perpetuate the cultural memory of Mayans. In a narrative titled “Sbel jol ko’ontonkutik xchi’uk lok’tob bailetik- Nuestra voz, nuestra imagen- Our Voice, Our Image,” she notes: “It is very important that we indigenous people take photographs of our own cultures so that other indigenous people in Mexico and other countries know us.

⁶² Carlota Duarte, a dual American-Mexican citizen, was born in the US to a Mexican father and an American mother. She moved to Chiapas in 1992.

⁶³ A three-year partnership between the Chiapas Photography Project *Archivo Fotográfico Indígena* and the Flint Institute of Arts (FIA) in Michigan began in 2010. The partnership promotes activities in both Mexico and the US.

⁶⁴ According to the “20 Years” Report of the Chiapas Photography project, published in 2012, there are 22 photography artists in residence.

In this way we can preserve and show our traditional cultures and share them, so that future generations can learn and remember” (31).⁶⁵

Documentary filmmaking has also been among the visual expressions of Mayan self-representation. Supported by the EZLN and in collaboration with autonomous Zapatista communities, the Chiapas Media Project/Promedios de Comunicación Comunitaria was established in 1998.⁶⁶ Many of the films produced have focused on the theme of Mayan autonomy, both political and economic, and the Zapatista struggle for land, water, education and human rights. *Svokolik vatz'i viniketik sventa Mut Vitz. The Strength of the Indigenous People of Mut Vitz* (2000)⁶⁷ is a Chiapas Media Project film that exemplifies this trend. The documentary features the collective communal production of coffee by the people of Mut Vitz. The peoples' awareness of the particularities of the local environment is portrayed as a key factor in the success of the harvest. In the documentary, Mayan farmers explain the significance of using natural fertilizers to improve the quality of the coffee. They also describe the importance of cutting weeds with machetes in ways that facilitate the flow of rain water in the land, without endangering the propagation of the weeds, which are crucial for the preservation of the rain forests in the region. In addition to discussing environmentally related issues, which help make the cultivation of coffee a sustainable process, the people of Mut Vitz

⁶⁵ Carlota Duarte, *Camaristas: fotógrafos mayas de Chiapas* (México: Centro de la Imagen, 1998).

⁶⁶ This wave of documentary filmmaking began in the early 1990s, with the assistance of local filmmakers and distributors, including Taller Experimental de Video and later on The Chiapas Media Project, which is a Chicago based bi-national partnership. Yet documentary filmmaking in Chiapas began in the 1950s. For more details on these documentaries, see Luna Saavedra and Isis Silvia, “La selva de nitrato: historia del cine en Chiapas” in Roberto Sepúlveda, *Arte moderno y contemporáneo de Chiapas* (México: Coneculta/Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Chiapas, 2000), pp. 190-237.

⁶⁷ Chiapas Media Project, *Svokolik vatz'i viniketik sventa Mut Vitz. The Strength of the Indigenous People of Mut Vitz* (Chicago, IL: Chiapas Media Project, 2000).

speak in the film about their economic ability to manage the coffee harvest autonomously.

Among Mayan writers, there is a consensus that anthropology, as a discipline, has played a pivotal role in the development of contemporary Mayan literature. On January 13, 2010, I interviewed writer and critic Enrique Pérez López, the chair of CELALI (Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígena- State Center of Indigenous Languages, Arts and Literature).⁶⁸ In charting the development of contemporary Mayan literature, Pérez López identified anthropology as the formative lens. He said: “The first ten years in our literature were dedicated to the recuperation of Mayan history and tradition, including oral history and music. Collecting these stories was an important anthropological endeavor. Later on the imagination of Mayan writers played a major role in recreation of our oral tradition into history. Literary creation.” When I asked him about the distinction that he made between anthropology and literature, Pérez López responded: “For me literature is about creativity. I think that only in the late 1990s Mayan writers ventured out into writing creative texts, mostly in poetry and narrative. There was a need to have knowledge of Spanish literature as well as the indigenous languages, Tojolobal, Cho’l, Tzotzil and Tzeltal.”

On the other hand, a co-founder of the first Mayan writers’ collective, *Sna Jtz’ibajom*, Francisco Alvarez Quiñones, argues that anthropology played an important role in the rise of contemporary Mayan narrative, due to the almost total neglect of Mayan literature in Mexican literary criticism. He asserts: “ Mexican scholars don’t know

⁶⁸ CELALI, the state-sponsored organization of indigenous writers, was founded in 1996. It organizes literary workshops and publishes works by emerging Mayan poets and writers, and also organizes drama workshops and exhibits of Mayan arts, including sculpture and paintings. The main office is in San Cristóbal de las Casas, but there are 18 cultural centers in the villages to promote women weavers, art workshops, and music.

indigenous literature. It does not exist for them. Octavio Paz does not think it exists. He never traveled to the indigenous parts of Mexico. Most of the research has been in anthropology. There was no body of literature, but oral literature existed, including different versions of the *Popul Vuh*.⁶⁹ To follow up on Alvarez Quiñones' observation about the marginalization of Mayan literature in Mexican literary criticism, it must be noted that this trend has changed since 1994, when a major Mexican newspaper, *La Jornada*, began dedicating more attention to issues related to Chiapas and the Zapatistas in its monthly literary magazine *Ojarasca*, which originally was titled "*México Indígena*" (Indigenous Mexico). In fact, the director, Hermann Bellinghausen, based in San Cristóbal and Mexico City, began to report more regularly about Mayan cultural productions.

Another acknowledgement of the contribution of anthropology to Mayan literature was made in 1982, during a meeting of Mayan writers and US anthropologists. Albeit critical of the commitment of foreign anthropologists to Mayan literature, a Mayan writer is quoted as saying: "You have awakened our interest in our culture ... You have published many studies, but always in other countries where we never see the results...we would like at least to put on paper our customs for the sake of our children and grandchildren" (Breslin 80; in Laughlin 3).

'An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha'bī fī filasfīn: Salvaging Palestinian Orality

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948/ *al-Nakba*, Palestinians in Israel

⁶⁹ I interviewed Francisco Alvarez Quiñones at FOCAMAZ on January 14, 2010. Alvarez Quiñones himself is not Mayan. However, as a poet, critic, and translator, since the early 1980s, he has been involved directly in the production and dissemination of contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas, Mexico and worldwide.

have gone through an accelerated, yet complex process of politicization. Throughout this process, attempts have been made at reconfiguring a political system that would be able to represent the needs of an indigenous national minority within an Israeli political establishment that is mobilized by Zionism. Until the mid 1950s, the activism of Palestinians in Israel centered on three main parties: the government party MAPAI (*Mifleget Po'ale Erets Yisrael* [Land of Israel Workers' Party]), MAPAM (*Mifleget ha-Po'alim ha-Me'uhedet* [United Workers' Party]), and MAKI (ha-Miflagah ha-Qomonistit ha-Yisraelit [the Communist Party of Israel,] hereafter referred to as the CPI),⁷⁰ the only non-Zionist party. From 1955- 1970s, the CPI was the central and just about the only political force predominant in the Palestinian community.⁷¹ However, its dominance was challenged in the early 1970s when paramilitary and extra parliamentary parties and movements arose and consolidated their position within an emerging atmosphere of rapid, but controlled political pluralism (Ganim 5). This trend was manifest in the appearance of numerous local organizations and the establishment of several parties,

⁷⁰ Until 1965, MAKI was a joint Jewish-Arab party that considered class struggle a basis for Jewish-Arab political partnership. The party split in 1965 over ideological differences over support of pan-Arab nationalism and the politics of the Soviet Union concerning Arab nationalism in Egypt and Iraq. Most of the Jewish members of the Communist Party remained in Maki, while most of the Arab members and a few Jewish members, including MK Meir Vilner, joined the new party *Rakah*, which viewed the Zionist Movement as a nationalistic middle-class movement serving imperialist interests, and the Six Day War in 1967 as an act of Israeli aggression. In 1989, *Rakah* changed its name back to *Maki*. For more details about the history of Maki, see Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁷¹ *al-Ard* (The Land) was another non-Zionist party. It was established in 1959 by a group of young nationalist/pan-Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. Its activities focused on issues that were most urgent to Palestinians then, such as the right of return, and on issues specific to Palestinians within Israel, including the cessation of the military government and land confiscation, and the extension of social and economic rights. In 1965, and the following six years of state crackdown on the party with allegations of promoting an anti-Zionist agenda, *al-Ard* was banned by the Israeli government, and many of its activists were imprisoned or exiled. During its years of activity, *al-Ard* issued a newspaper. They called it *al-Ard*, to symbolize the attachment of Palestinians to their land. The newspaper was widely circulated and critics describe it as a cultural expression of the first resurgence of Palestinian nationalism after 1948. For more information on the history of *al-Ard*, see Leena Dallasheh. "Political Movement of Palestinians in Israel: The *al-'Ard* Movement," *Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender Among Palestinians in Israel*, eds. Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2010) pp. 21- 38.

including the Sons of the Village, the Islamic Movement, the Progressive Movement and the Democratic Arab Party.

Palestinian literary critics and historians, such as Maḥmūd Ghanāyīm (1995 & 2008), Muḥammad Khalīl (2009), and Sayf al-Dīn Abu Ṣāliḥ (2010) concur that the CPI played a critical role in furthering Palestinian literary culture in Israel. Under the ideological apparatus of Arab nationalism and Communism, both Leninist and Marxist, the CPI took a keen interest in the education of the masses through the dissemination of Arabic and Palestinian literature to preserve and promote Arab-Palestinian national identity. These efforts took place in the CPI's journals and literary publications, mainly *al-Ittiḥād* (Unity)⁷² and its seminal literary supplement *al-Jadīd* (The New),⁷³ which was first issued in 1951, and its magazine of society and culture, *al-Ghad* (Tomorrow), which appeared in 1954. These publications became the platform for emerging Palestinian poets and writers. In fact, they were the vanguard of local outlets for Arabic letters, or *adab maḥallī*, Palestinian literature in Arabic produced within the borders of Israel.

Indeed, between 1948-2000 about two-third of the submissions in *al-Ittiḥād* were penned by local writers, while more than half of these texts were poetry (Abu Ṣāliḥ 65).

With the general absence of other literary journals, the CPI's press contributed to the

⁷² The CPI published the first issue of *al-Ittiḥād* in Haifa in 1944. Before becoming a daily in 1983, it appeared once or twice a week.

⁷³ *Al-Mujtama'* (Society) was another literary journal. The poets Mīshīl Ḥaddād (1919-1996), Jamāl Qa'wār

(b. 1930-) and Rāshid Ḥusayn (1936-1977) launched the first edition in 1954. The journal was not affiliated with any political party and encouraged young writers. Jewish writers of Iraqi origins, most notably Salim Shashoua

(b. 1930-) contributed regularly. *Al-Mujtama'* became a venue for short stories, although it went out of press in 1959. It resumed its activity in 1979 as a quarterly before it went out of press again and finally in 1996. For more about *al-Mujtama'* see Saif al-Dīn Abu Salih *Al-Haraka al-Adabiya al-'Arabiya fi Isra'īl: Thuhuriha wa tatawureha min khilāl al-mulḥaq al-thaqāfi ljarīdat il-ittihad 1948-2000*. (The Arab Literary Movement in Israel: Its Reflection and Development in *al-Ittiḥād* Literary Supplement Newspaper 1948-2000). Haifa: The Arabic Language Academy, 2010. 35. See also Michel Hadad's autobiography *Min Dhikrayātī* (From My Memories) (al-Nāṣirah: Rābiṭat al-Kuttāb wa-al-Udabā' al-Filasṭīnīyīn fī Isrā'īl, 1991).

emergence of the Palestinian short story through the publication of short texts by young writers. The majority of these writers were affiliated with the CPI. Most of these short stories professed a Socialist Realism that was influenced by and reflective of the aesthetic and thematic concerns of the Marxist ideology of their Communist party (Khālil 34 & Ghanāyim 21).

Apart from the press, the CPI promoted Arab-Palestinian literary culture through the organization of poetry festivals in the 1950s and 1960s. These festivals were political–populist–literary events, although often replete with danger for those who attended them in ‘violation’ of military rule. The festivals, which were based on a model of spoken-word-political participation, were organized in Palestinian villages like traditional Palestinian weddings. The poets, mostly *shu‘arā’ al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets), played their traditional and quintessential role of documenting the history of their people and recited lyric poetry to the large masses who attended these festivals. A sense of urgency prevailed in their poetry, and their need to write for the “masses” pushed them to use the ‘*amūdi*⁷⁴ form (Furani 293). This rhyme, however, which is a traditional form of Arabic poetry that consists of hemistiches of equal length or metrical, was abandoned

⁷⁴Pillar-based is the literal translation of ‘*amūdi*. It is a conventional form of Arabic poetry that relies on mono-rhyme and monometer. This form is often used to depict an experience, conveyed in a boisterous speech style. For more on the difference between the traditional, classical, pre-Islamic ode form of *amūdi* and modern free verse, *shi‘r al-ḥurr*, see Sa‘d Da‘bīs, *Ḥiwār ma’a al-shi‘r al-ḥurr: baḥṭh fī al-khaṣā’iṣ al-fannīyah al-mushtarrikah bayna al-shi‘r al-ḥurr wa-al-shi‘r al-‘amūdi* (Iskandarīyah: Mu’assasat Shabāb al-Jāmi‘ah, 1971) 43-4. Moreover, ‘*amūdi* was not the only form employed. The Palestinian poets experimented with several types of rhythm and poetic traditions for different political and aesthetic aims. Samīh al-Qāsim, who is one the prominent figures *shu‘araa al-muqawamah* (Resistance Poets) and has been long associated with free verse, tells Furani in an interview: “The question is what you do with restrictions. If the poet masters the meters he becomes free. . . . The poetic meters are restrictions for a starting poet. For an able poet, they cease to be restrictions. The poet who has not mastered the meters faces a restriction.” The point is that rhythm is a discipline entailing the measuring of sound, or at least a capability for doing so. And, in realizing modernity, in searching for its putatively dissociable secularity, this illiberal disciplinary capability has become increasingly obsolete. Neither its notion of “freedom” nor its tradition of truth formation is able to secure a citizenship in the secular world Arab poets have come to inhabit” (298).

by their contemporary peer Arab poets, who delved into modernizing Arabic poetry with *al-shi'r al- ħurr* (free-verse, which allowed flexibility in structure and enjambment, usage of one foot to nine feet in a given line, and expansion or contraction of lines to fit the natural flow of thought. Even more, “The traditional sound structures, the pre-modern rhythmical architecture, of verse remained intact when the poetic product was initially erected on a modern ideology of socialist realism” (294). The return to *'amūdi*, then, was not only an ode to the classics in Arabic poetry, but also an assertion of Marxist perception of the poet as a political being who mobilizes the masses. In this case, the Palestinian poet leads his people in their *ṣumūd*⁷⁵ against Israeli military rule.

For the CPI, Arabic and *turāth*, (tradition or heritage) were cornerstones for bolstering an indigenous Palestinian cultural identity. To protect Arabic in its classical form, *fushā*, rather than the local vernacular or spoken dialect of Palestinian *'āmiyya*, was considered a high priority. To maintain *fushā* was key to keeping the Palestinian community in contact with its mother culture: the Arab nation. Moreover, Palestinian members of the CPI advocated for the production of Palestinian literature in *fushā* as an act of resistance against Zionist agendas to de-Arabize the Palestinians in Israel. For example, on January 1961, the CPI issued a pamphlet in Arabic (*fushā*) accusing the Company of Arabic Books, which was supervised by the United Worker's Party (MAPAM) of distributing to the market books and magazines in Arabic “that has no

⁷⁵ *Ṣumūd* is a Palestinian ethos of resistance and steadfastness. In *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), Raja Shehadeh elaborates on the historical context of the word. He notes: “*Sāmīd* means ‘the steadfast’, ‘the persevering.’ It is the name coined during the 1978 Baghdad Conference for the one and half million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. It was then that the Arab politicians outside acknowledged the urgency of stemming the mass exile of Palestinians from the occupied territories and of trying to halt the Israeli government’s expropriation of the huge tracts of land on the West Bank. We, who had been living under occupation for ten years, were now called on to be *samidīn* and urged to adopt the stance of *sumūd*: to stay put, to cling to our homes and land by all means available. A special pan-Arab fund, *Amwal es-sumūd*, was set up to help us combat the collapse of our social and economic fabric, caused by the Israeli colonization of our land” (vii).

other aim than brainwashing [Palestinian] youth and drowning [them] in swamps of national and civic nihilism” (Kanafānī 23).⁷⁶ However, in the same month, Moshe Piamenta, an Israeli linguist and scholar of Oriental studies, delivered a talk at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem titled “Language and Style in Modern Arabic Literature.” He emphasized the need for the use of Palestinian *‘āmiyya* in literary production and called on local Palestinian writers to abandon *fushā* and forget about it altogether (Kanafānī 24).

The CPI’s advocacy for *fushā* and *turāth* reflects not only a Palestinian national concern, but also the Marxist ideological view of the writer. In one of his earliest essays on this matter, “Al-insān hadaf al-adab wa-mawḍū‘uḥu,” [The People: The Aim and Subject of Literature],⁷⁷ Imīl Ḥabībī (1921-1996), one of the co-founders of the CPI, reiterated that literature is essentially the literature of the folk. Hence, it is inseparable from the heritage and folklore of the people. Ḥabībī went on to describe the characteristics that distinguish the writer of the folk. He argues: “In accordance with the Marxist view of folk literature, the writer should be humanist, socialist and progressive in content, and nationalist in form” (40). Ḥabībī goes on to discuss the significance of realism in folk literature and its relation to the aesthetics of nationalism. He writes:

⁷⁶ My translation from the original in Arabic.

⁷⁷ Imīl Ḥabībī, “Al-insān hadaf al-adab wa-mawḍū‘uḥu,” *al-Jadīd*, March 1954. 35-43. In the original title of the essay in Arabic, Ḥabībī uses the word “human” for “the people.” In effect, the title in Arabic captures more accurately the universal approach to literature that Ḥabībī and his fellow Communists adopted. It is noteworthy that throughout his literary career, even after he left CPI in 1989, Ḥabībī continued to strongly believe in the idea of the writer as someone who writes for the people. In June 1992, Ḥabībī attended a conference for Arab and Jewish writers in Haifa. He stirred a heated debate among the writers when he declared: “The writer is like a Falafel vendor. He should deliver the material that his clients ask for: the story. However, he should rise above the level of his merchandise, the Falafel, or the clients. The writer must bring mutual respect to this relationship of trade and commerce.” (89) Ḥabībī’s words appeared in the following Hebrew news report: Porat, Shai. “Imīl Ḥabībī Hoshev shisufer ho kmu mukher Falafel.” *Yediot Ahronot* (Kut Hatsafun) 12 June 1992. I am responsible here for both translations of the essay in Arabic and the news report in Hebrew.

Realism in literature obligates the writer to work within the national framework of literature. If the writer is realist and devoted to life, then, certainly he is nationalist in his style and form. The writer must be aware of the customs and traditions of his folk. He needs to be familiar with their fears, hopes, dreams and anxieties and their manifestations in proverbs and other forms of expression. The writer must possess intimate knowledge of the geographical details of his country's landscape, its land, grass, trees, birds, and animals (42).

In the same vein of Ḥabībī's notion of folk literature and the folk writer, Tawfīq Zayyād (1929-1994) wrote *'An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha'bī fī filasṭīn* (About Literature and Folk Literature in Palestine) in 1970. The book is one of the earliest documentations of Palestinian oral culture in Israel. Zayyād himself was a political writer, an activist and a member of the CPI serving in the Israeli Knesset. He was elected in 1975 as Mayor for Nazareth, the largest Palestinian city in the Galilee in Northern Israel. Nazareth used to be a small town, but after the decline (more accurately destruction and loss) of the major Palestinian coastal cities of Yaffa and Haifa during *al-Nakba*, it became an important cultural and political center for Palestinians. Zayyād stayed in his position as mayor and Knesset member until his death in 1994. He died in a car crash while on his way to meet Yasser Arafat in Jericho after the Oslo agreements.⁷⁸ Zayyād is widely recognized in Arabic and Palestinian literature for his translations from Russian literature and his translation of the major works of Nazim Hikmat, the national poet of Turkey who was

⁷⁸ Information about Zayyād comes from *al-Sira al-dhatia* (Biography), and *al-Faris* (The Knight). No author is listed. Both published by *Muwasasat Tawfīq Zayyād*. Web. 10 March. 2012.

persecuted for his Marxist political activity. He was also popular (in English translation) with most of the leaders of the Modernist movement in the Arab world.

As a member of *shu‘arā’ al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets), Zayyād performed in many of the poetry festivals and his fierce poems of courage and resistance were popularized later on as anthems of *ṣumūd*. In fact, some of his poems have been adapted to music and have become part of the lively tradition of Palestinian and songs of struggle, mostly notably his 1966 “Ashuddu ‘ala ayyād īkum” (I clasp your hands).⁷⁹ In 1975, Lebanese musician, Aḥmad Qa‘būr performed the poem in protest against the Civil War that broke out in his country that year. In 2006, *DAM*, the pioneers of Palestinian hip-hop, featured Zayyād’s voice reciting the poem in the song “Gharīb fī bilādī” (A Stranger in my Own Country).⁸⁰

‘An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha‘bī fī filasṭīn (About Literature and Folk Literature in Palestine) is divided into three parts. Part one includes the essay “min ajl inqādh al-adab al-sha‘bī al-filasṭīnī” [Toward Saving Palestinian Folk Literature] (21-67), which Zayyād published in *al-Jadīd* in April 1967. Here, he discusses saving folk literature from the danger of oblivion. He also documents several popular Palestinian peasant songs from the Galilee, as well as stories and songs that Zayyād himself composed about Palestinian folk heroes who took part in the revolt against the British in 1936-1939. Part two, entitled “mulāḥazāt asāsīyah wa- dirāsāt ḥawla al-shi‘r al-‘arabī al-thawrī al-filasṭīnī” [Major Remarks and Studies on Arab-Palestinian Revolutionary Poetry] (69- 170), is Zayyād’s attempt as a critic to argue that Palestinian poetry in Israel after *al-Nabka* is a

⁷⁹ Zayyād, Tawfīq. *Ashuddu Tawfīq.kum*. al-Nāṣirah, 1967. The collection is not available in English yet. However, its title was translated as *Warmly I Shake Your Hands*. See Salma K. Jayyusi. *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. 327.

⁸⁰ *DAM. Dedication*. S.l.: Red Circle Music, 2006.

continuation of Palestinian revolutionary poetry that began in the 1930s. He also includes a reflection on the underdeveloped state of theater in Arabic in Israel. Here, Zayyād performs the multiple double tasks of cultural historian, literary ethnographer, and critic. In addition, in part three, “‘an al-madhbaḥah wa al-‘udwān” [About the Massacre and the Aggression] (171-221), Zayyād plays the role of investigation journalist and oral historian. He travels to the village of Kufur Qassim in the Southern Triangle area, in order to collect testimonies about the massacre that took place 1956.⁸¹ Throughout the book, Zayyād demonstrates his skills as Marxist critic, revolutionary folk poet, and, finally, as I argue, a native Palestinian cultural anthropologist.

In “min ajl inqādh al-adab al-sha‘bī al-filasṭīnī” [Toward Saving Palestinian Folk Literature], Zayyād highlights the superiority of folk literature. He argues that because folk literature is created by an outstanding poet, whose “I” is the *people*-as a group, it is collective and sustainable. He adds: “Folk literature has evolved over epochs, and various generations have added to it. However, it has preserved its essential form and content, so that it arrives in our age pure, distilled, strong, and powerfully expressive” (23).⁸² Zayyād continues to describe the threats that put folk literature at risk of being lost. Specifically, he mentions the geographical and local particularity of songs and oral stories. He claims:

⁸¹ In 1956, the Israeli army killed 49 Palestinian farmers in the village of Kufur Qassim in the Triangle area, for “violating” the curfew imposed on their village. Unaware that a curfew had been ordered, the farmers were returning home from working their agricultural farmlands when they were killed. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address Zayyād’s documentation of the oral history of the massacre as told by the people in Kufur Qassim. It is sufficient here to note, that Zayyād’s text, I argue, is probably the first anthropological attempt to record this tragedy. For more details about the massacre and discussions of the Israeli military court records see “From Deir Yassin to Kfar Kassim,” in Ṣabrī Jiryis’ *The Arabs in Israel*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.137-157. Also, Robinson, Shira. “Local Struggle, National Struggle: Palestinian Responses to the Kafr Qasim Massacre and Its Aftermath, 1956-66.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 35.3 (2003): 393-416.

⁸² My translation from the original in Arabic.

“The songs in the Galilee are different than the songs in the Triangle.⁸³ Also, the stories of the struggle against the Turks and the British are not similar to the lullabies, elegies, wedding songs, donkey drivers cheers, or fishermen chants “ (24).

Zayyād further adds that it is the human and national obligation of Palestinian poets and writers to collect these different songs and stories. “To document them is to preserve a treasure of folklore,” he asserts. However, he alerts these writers, or whoever wishes to pursue the documentation of Palestinian folk literature, to the obstacle of *‘āmiyya*, or “a disfigured language,” (28) as he describes it. Although Palestinian folk literature is expressed in *‘āmiyya*, Zayyād urges its preservation through “translation” into *fushā*, or “the proper correct language,” (28) as he calls it. For Zayyād, Palestinian folk literature in *fushā* means reaching a wider audience: the Arab world at large. Though he was a Marxist, he was also a nationalist. Therefore, to document Palestinian folk literature in *fushā* is to nationalize it. It is also an assertion that Palestinians are a vital part of the larger “Arab nation”.

It is important to note here that Zayyād’s advocacy for the use of *fushā* is exemplary of the *‘āmiyya*-*fushā* dilemma that Arab writers who were both Marxists and Arab nationalists had to grapple with. On the one hand, to write in *‘āmiyya* was in tune with their Marxist ideal, because it was the language that the folk, the marginalized classes, spoke. Yet, it was not the language used in elite poetry. To deliver the voice of this folk, then, in what was, essentially, a foreign idiom, was the task of the Marxist writer. Palestinian national writer Ghassān Kanafānī, for example, dedicated a collection

⁸³ Palestinians live in three main regions in Israel: the Galilee in the north, the Triangle in the center, and in the Naqab in the south.

of Palestinian stories to Umm Sa'd,⁸⁴ a peasant Palestinian woman who becomes a refugee in 1948. Palestinian critic Fayṣal Darrāj argues that Umm Sa'd is not a singular heroine, but rather a figure that represents the archetype of the positive hero, who is characterized by particular historical circumstances. In direct reference to a quote from Kanafānī, Darrāj continues to argue, Um Sa'd's voice is "the voice of the Palestinian class that paid a high price for the defeat" (125).⁸⁵ On the other hand, to write in *fushā* is to assert the connection to the *turāth* (heritage) of the Arabs. So, to write in *fushā* is to continue the tradition and to engage with the classical Arabic texts.

It must be noted that the *āmiyya-fushā* dilemma intensified under Western colonialism, especially during British colonial rule in Iraq and Egypt. The British followed a policy of "divide and rule". They encouraged the Iraqis and the Egyptians to write in their vernacular under the pretext of fighting illiteracy (Stadlbauer 2). Also, whether explicitly or implicitly, they undermined the propagation of *fushā*. For example, during the British colonialism of Egypt, from 1882 to 1922, the colonizers restructured Egyptian society according to Western ideals of modernity and economic progress. Among other projects, they initiated anti-Arabic, pro-English language policies that assigned symbolic value to these languages. Arabic was depreciated because it was perceived as chaotic and random, while English was projected as being modern, prestigious, and desirable. Then, the mission of the Arab nationalists was to fight the logic of the British and thus more emphasis was put on writing in *fushā*. Religious conservatives had a similar reaction. Fueled by anti-Western sentiments and historical

⁸⁴ Kanafānī, Ghassān. *Umm Sa'd: Qiṣaṣ Filastīnīyah*. Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 1969.

⁸⁵ Darrāj, Fayṣal. "Al-sh'ab al-baṭal fī al-tārīkh: Bayna "Um Sa'd" Ghassān Kanafānī wa "al-'Ajūz" Afnān Qāsim." *Shu'ūn Filastīnīyah*. Bayrūt: Markaz al-Abḥāth fī Munazzamat al-Taḥrīr al-Filastīnīyah. 49 (July 1975): 120-128.

nostalgia, they argued for the superiority of *fushā*, the language of the *Quran*, by strongly anchoring its “purity” in Muslim Arab history, morality, and nationalism (Stadlbauer 2 & Haeri 63).

The *āmiyya-fushā* dilemma in the context of Israel resonates with these dynamics. The position that Habībī expresses in his last interview exemplifies why writing in *fushā* remains a priority for the Marxist-nationalist Palestinian writer in Israel. He notes: “More important than anything, I worship the Arabic language! I love it! I may not be different than others in this matter, but what separates me from other writers, is that I don’t go to the printing house with my manuscript unless I make sure first that the language is correct. And because we live in a society that contaminates our language, I feel ready to write a literary work. I go back to read the classics, mainly the Quran” (20).⁸⁶ For Habībī, to write in *fushā* is to resist “[the contamination] of [his native] language,” an act that he explicitly attributes to Israeli colonial policies.

Moreover, Zayyād’s cultural vision as a Marxist-nationalist Palestinian writer in Israel is evident in the second part of the book, “mulāḥazāt asāsīyah wa- dirāsāt ḥawla al-shi‘r al-‘arabī al-thawrī al-filastīnī” [Major Remarks and Studies on Arab-Palestinian Revolutionary Poetry] (69- 170). Here, he reconciles his dedication to both Communism and Palestinian nationalism. Indeed, Zayyād argues that Palestinian poetry in Israel has maintained its revolutionary spirit, despite the rupture of *al-Nakba*. He attributes this process of cultural *ṣumūd* to the Palestinian literary elite, including poets and intellectuals, as well as, to members of the oppressed classes, who are always struggling.

⁸⁶ Imil Habībī: “Al- ḥiwār al-’akhīr: Anā māni’at al-sawā’aiq al- filastīnīyah.” Interviewed by Aḥmad Raḥīq ‘Awād, Munthir ‘Amir, Liāna Badr and Zakarīā Muḥammad. *Mashārīf*. June/July 1996- Issue No. 9: 12- 27.

Asserting that “[his] people have won the battle of remaining [on the land],” (81) Zayyād goes on to elaborate:

The poets and writers of the revolutionary word have contributed to this achievement. They have always stood at the heart of the battle, fueling the eagerness of the people, and creating art. When history records this period, the struggle of our people will dictate itself on historians. In addition, our revolutionary poetry won’t disappoint the historians of revolutionary Arabic poetry in the contemporary era. From day one, we have achieved the fateful unity between the intellectual, the maker of culture, the poet, the writer, the proletariat, the peasant, the student and the ordinary folk-man. This has been our weapon. With it, we won the battle of remaining (81-82).

Interestingly enough, Zayyād juxtaposes Palestinian literature in Israel, or the literature of those “who won the battle of remaining,” in relation to Arabic literature, while emphasizing the ability of this minority literature to be widely recognized within the corpus of the larger canon of Arabic literary tradition. In fact, before making this statement, Zayyād invokes a verse from the pre-Islamic classical Arabic poet, Imru’u al-Qays, to assert his own steadfastness as a Palestinian who remained on his land, despite the attempts of the State of Israel to displace more Palestinians and force them into exile, to join their displaced nation. The reference to Imru’u al-Qays is in itself a poetic gesture that Zayyād makes to demonstrate his familiarity with the high culture of Arabic literature. In an earlier part of this manifesto of *ṣumūd*, Zayyād declares: “We shouted in

their faces: Here we shall stay! And we used the oath of Imru'u al-Qays: In the name of God, I shall stay here/ Even if they beheaded me and cut my ties with you" (80).

Moreover, this "fateful unity" envisions a Palestinian nation that is not only united across class, but is also attentive to underprivileged classes. This political ethos becomes particularly evident in the third section of the book, as Zayyād attempts to write an oral history of the Kufur Qassim Massacre. Ten years after the massacre, he arrives in the village to collect testimonies, in order to create a historical account of the event. He interviews survivors and records stories from the families of the peasants who were killed. He juxtaposes their testimonies against the official testimony of David Goldfield, an Israeli soldier who witnessed the massacre. In fact, he includes in his narrative sections from a document of Goldfield's recorded testimony at the Israeli military court in 1956. This juxtaposition of the oral testimonies of the people of Kufur Qassim, versus, the written testimony of the Israeli military, not only reveals the dynamic of victim and perpetrator, but also Zayyād's advocacy for the voice of the oppressed.

In addition, Zayyād emphasizes that his initiative to collect testimonies is part of the Communist Party's attempts to contribute to the commemoration of this collective memory. It is important to note that the commemoration of the massacre of Kufur Qassim was then, and continues to be, a popular theme in local Palestinian poetry. Adina Hoffman (2009) observes that poets rallied to commemorate the dead of Kufur Qassim in their verse, while they defied military closures to sneak into the village and read their poems on the anniversary of the bloodbath. She adds: "They were frequently arrested for doing so. Literary memorials were held every year on that date throughout the country,

and the poetry of [Kufur Qassim] became, in a sense, a genre unto itself---and a particularly dramatic one at that” (261).

However, in this particular narrative, Zayyād does not represent himself as a poet, but rather a historian, or a Communist activist who came to Kufur Qassim to support the oppressed. In a moment of ideological pride, he describes the warm welcome he and his fellow Communist receive when they arrive in the village. He recounts: “As soon as you get out of the car, some young men recognize your fellows, who are holding *al-Ittiḥād* in their hands. You see them calling each other’s attention, while smiling: Communism is here. And they hurry to us. These are the people” (182-3). In a self-referential mode, Zayyād asserts that the Palestinian Communists are the leaders of their own people. They are also the guardians of the masses and their memoirs. Interestingly enough, Zayyād juxtaposes Palestinian literature in Israel, or the literature of those “who won the battle of remaining,” in relation to Arabic literature, while emphasizing the ability of this minority literature to be highly recognized within the corpus of the larger canon of Arabic literary tradition. In fact, before making this statement, Zayyād invokes a verse from the pre-Islamic classical Arabic poet, Imru’u al-Qays, to assert his own steadfastness as a Palestinian who remained on his land, despite the attempts of the State of Israel to displace more Palestinians and force them into exile, to join their displaced nation. The reference to Imru’u al-Qays is in itself a poetic gesture that Zayyād makes to demonstrate his familiarity with the high culture of Arabic literature. In earlier part of this manifesto of *ṣumūd*, Zayyād declares: “We shouted in their faces: Here we shall stay! And we used the oath of Imru’u al-Qays: In the name of God, I shall stay here/ Even if they beheaded me and cut my ties with you” (80).

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II: Oral Narratives: Between Colonial Ethnography and Indigenous Archive

Whereas anthropology, as a discipline, played a pivotal role in promoting literary interest in oral Mayan narrative in Chiapas through the publication of *Juan Pérez Jolote*, it was cultural nationalism that fostered the documentation of Palestinian oral culture in Israel. One of the striking contrasts between Mayan and Palestinian literature is the intervention of Ladino anthropologists, writers and artists in Chiapas in furthering these literary traditions, unlike the Palestinian case, in which Palestinians themselves were involved in promoting their own work.

As mentioned earlier, Pozas was a Ladino anthropologist from Mexico City, and his ethnographic work in Chiapas coincided with the literary activity of “*El Ciclo de Chiapas*” (The Chiapas Cycle). This group included Ladino writers who worked in the coordinating center of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (The National Indigenista

Institute-INI) in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Moreover, their literary texts exhibited an amalgam of ethnography and literature, including ethnographic essays, *testimonio*, fiction and *indigenista* novels. Above all, these texts demonstrated deep engagement with indigenous Mayan orality. The narratives were based on the writers' close observation of indigenous peasants in their regions and a documentation of the evolution of Indian/Ladino relations, and the escalating transformation of society in the Chiapas highlands (Lienhard, 298-99). Rosario Castellanos' autobiographical novel, *Balún Canán* (1957), as well as her second novel, *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962) [The Book of Lamentations], which is a fictionalized account of a Mayan uprising, are prominent examples of these texts. Additional examples include the novel *Los hombres verdaderos* [Real Men] (1959) by the linguist Carlo Antonio Castro and *Benzulul* (1959) by Eraclio Zepeda.⁸⁷

This tradition of ethnography-based narrative changed the spectrum of discourse regarding the distinction between fiction, *indigenista* literature, and *testimonio*. For example, Jesús Morales Bermúdez's novel *On O'tian: Antigua palabra* (1984), which is a fictionalized reflection of the indigenous world in Chiapas, particularly the Cho'l, juxtaposes the various elements that characterize this discourse (Lienhard 299). In fact, the intertextuality between fiction, *indigenista* literature, and *testimonio* is not only evident in this novel, but is also a common feature of Morales Bermúdez's work. As Brian Gollnick (2008) rightfully argues, "All of Morales Bermúdez work affirms

⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion of the ethnographic dimension of the *indigenista* literature of the Chiapas Cycle, see Micael Morales López's *Raíces de la ceiba: literatura indígena de Chiapas* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa, División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Departamento de Filosofía, 2004) and Brian Gollnick's "El ciclón de Chiapas: El desarrollo reciente del indigenismo mexicano". *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana*. 25. 49 (1999):199-216.

indigenous culture as a source of social and political identity, but at no point does it posit a dichotomous relationship between the Ladino and indigenous worlds” (Gollnick 140).

On January 25, 2010 I interviewed Morales Bermúdez in Chiapas about the anthropological roots of contemporary Mayan literature. His response, rightfully, I believe, summarizes the limits of argument about the anthropological foundations of contemporary Mayan literature. Morales Bermúdez notes: “The writer does not have to be an anthropologist. It might have been that anthropologists brought attention to the experience of indigenous people in Chiapas, but Mayan literature has something to say to the world as a body of literature on its own. However, writing in indigenous languages is a recent development, and there are more people who speak the languages than those who write them. Mayan literature, as written text, needs more time to develop its own set of styles, including motifs, metaphors and other aesthetic elements. This process also includes an increase in readership and criticism.”⁸⁸

In contrast, Palestinian writers who were affiliated with the MAKI (ha-Miflagah ha-Qomonistit ha-Yisraelit [the Communist Party of Israel, hereafter referred to as the CPI⁸⁹]) were the ones who led the efforts to document Palestinian oral culture. Like the poets of *shu‘arā’ al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets) in the 1950s-1960s, these political activists and writers, who were frequently imprisoned for political reasons, were

⁸⁸ I interviewed Jesús Morales Bermúdez in his office in CESMECA in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

⁸⁹ Until 1965, MAKI was a joint Jewish-Arab party that considered class struggle a basis for Jewish-Arab political partnership. The party split in 1965, over ideological differences regarding support of pan-Arab nationalism and the politics of the Soviet Union concerning Arab nationalism in Egypt and Iraq. Most of the Jewish members of the Communist Party remained in Maki, while most of the Arab members and a few Jewish members, including MK Meir Vilner, joined the new party, *Rakah*, which viewed the Zionist Movement as a nationalistic middle-class movement serving imperialist interests, and the Six Day War in 1967 as an act of Israeli aggression. In 1989, *Rakah* changed its name back to *Maki*. For more details about the history of Maki, see Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

motivated by a notion of urgency to protect their Palestinian heritage. They considered the documentation of Palestinian oral memory a battle against the threat of extinction that resulted from the loss of Historic Palestine and the socio-geographic dislocation that followed *al-Nakba*. These attempts would be recognized later in the Arab and Palestinian cultural sphere as national and popular manifestations of *ṣumūd* (Steadfastness).

Whether through the integration of Arab customs and Palestinian folklore in poetry (Sulieman 180-2), or the actual collection of Arab and Palestinian folksongs, tales and popular words of wisdom, the emphasis was on the assertion of *ṣumūd*: a physical connection to the land of Palestine, like an old olive tree deeply rooted in the earth. The ethos of *ṣumūd* translated into the refusal to move away despite political, economic and physical injustice. Zayyād'ay '*An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha 'bī fī filasṭīn* is the perfect example to illuminate how *ṣumūd* is used to figure poetic quest as one of the main tropes used by *shu 'arā' al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets), and a manifestation of Palestinian culture performed by an official member of CPI.

As the previous discussion indicates, the intervention of Ladino anthropologists in the documentation of oral Mayan culture in Chiapas, versus the involvement of native Palestinian Marxist writers in furthering Palestinian oral and literary culture with national aspirations, is an important contrast that distinguishes the literary history of both cultures. *Juan Pérez Jolote* exemplifies the efforts of Ladino anthropologists to redeem the indigenous, while perpetuating Chamula as the cultural Other. '*An al-adab wa-al-ādāb al-sha 'bī fī filasṭīn*, on the other hand, demonstrates the efforts of a Palestinian Marxist to reclaim indigenous memory, in order to save the oral Palestinian archive. While Pozas' ethnography highlights the question of Mayan representation, the focal point for

Zayyād's ethnography is to collect folk poems and songs, in order to further Arabic, in its *fushā* form, and to preserve Palestinian oral memory. When collecting testimonies from Kufur Qassim, he also functions as a Marxist national historian who champions the cause of the oppressed masses, in this case, his own people.

However, before delving into an analysis of the reasons for this contrast, I must point out that Pozas, in fact, went on in the 1970s to become one of the pioneering Marxist Mexican anthropologists. After the publication of *Juan Pérez Jolote*, he called for the integration of class as a critical paradigm in ethnographic research on indigenous communities. In his book *Los indios en las clases sociales de México* (The Indian in the Social Classes of Mexico) (1971), which he co-authored with his wife Isabel Horcasitas de Pozas, he employs a theoretical model of structural-Marxism, to demonstrate that capital circulation and the labor market in Mexico perpetuates indigenous poverty (Tejera Gaona 182).

It is also important to note here that, although the majority of anthropologists in Chiapas are Ladinos and US-based scholars, there has been a growing number of local Mayan anthropologists. The first Mayan to receive a Ph.D. in anthropology was Jacinto Arias, in the 1980s. His book *El mundo numinoso de los mayas: estructura y cambios contemporáneos* (The 'Numinous' World of the Mayas: Contemporary Structure and Changes) (1991) is one of the pioneering Mayan ethnographic works that has examined the role of the sacred in everyday life. He has also contributed to Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frischmann's multi-volume and bilingual anthology, *Words of the True Peoples: Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers* (2004-7). In fact, Arias' ethnographic studies on modern Mayan spirituality should be considered, I would

argue, a companion to literary criticism on contemporary Mayan literature. Moreover, the majority of intellectuals working to promote Mayan literature today are Mayan.

To return to our discussion of the contrast, then, how do we account for these dramatic differences in the two bodies of literature? What can we learn from the process of documentation of an oral Mayan narrative by outsiders in Ladino ethnography, versus the example of Palestinian writers choosing to construct a resistance literature of their own? The answer to these questions lies in the nature of different concrete socio-economic conditions on the ground in Chiapas, Mexico versus Israel/Palestine. This contrast also reveals different moments in the development of anthropology as a discipline and its encounter with indigenous communities in a colonial context.

First, the fact that, among Mayans in Chiapas, illiteracy has been more rampant than among Palestinians in Israel is a likely explanation for this contrast. And the reason for this reality may be related to the long and complicated history of colonialism in Chiapas, which resulted in living conditions of poverty and illiteracy.

The colonialism that Mayans experienced since the Spanish Conquest of 1519-24 is five centuries longer chronologically than the colonial reality that Palestinians have experienced since 1948. In fact, since 1519, Mayans have struggled against multiple colonial rules: the Spanish (beginning in 1519), the birth of the Mexican Republic and the rule of a neocolonial Creole elite (beginning in 1821), followed by the French intervention and the emergence of the Mexican nation-state after the 1910 Revolution. The latter perpetuates the subalternity and the internal colonialism of the indigenous people in Mexico to this day. This continuous, yet complex, colonial history has created an economic order that is based on the exploitation of indigenous land and labor. The

encomiendas and the *repartimiento* are two prominent early examples of colonial economic systems that created long-term poverty among the indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica in general, and Mayans in Chiapas, in particular. The *encomienda* was the economic infrastructure that dates to the beginning of Spanish settlement. The Spanish Crown offered grants to colonist settlers, conferring on them the right to demand tribute and forced labor from the indigenous communities. This system, which was codified in The New Laws propagated by Charles V in 1542, also prevented the *encomenderos* and other Spaniards from living permanently in the indigenous pueblos, or from ever residing there for more than a few days (Wasserstrom 17). The *repartimientos*, on the other hand, was an agriculture system that compelled the indigenous communities to grow indigo or to transform cotton in exchange for goods, like dried beef or knives. This system not only altered traditional agricultural habits, but also removed much wealth from the indigenous population, through taxation and tribute (Wasserstrom 43). Both systems had a tremendously negative effect on the indigenous people of central Chiapas, who by 1821 had abandoned their traditional agricultural occupation and were already living in extreme conditions of debt servitude.

This economic reality of marginalization continues today in the form of internal colonialism, as indigenous people in Mexico, in general, and Mayans in Chiapas in particular, suffer from abject poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and the hardship of making a living as migrant farm workers. This complex historical process, which has violated the fundamental human rights of these indigenous people for the last five hundred years, has created a reality of native poverty that distinguishes them from other Mexicans (Tinajero & Englander 164-65). Indeed, statistics gathered in the early 1990s show that, although

Chiapas is the most important producer of coffee and bananas in Mexico and the producer of half of the country's hydroelectricity and one-quarter of its natural gas, half of the population of 3.7 million was malnourished, and 60 percent earned less than the minimum wage (\$1500 a year) (Dawson 46). Among other Mexicans, these numbers have perpetuated the view that Chiapas is backward and on the periphery of the nation, if it is not ignored altogether.

Moreover, concerning illiteracy, the numbers in Chiapas continue to be higher than the national average. According to a 2006 report by the *Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa* [INEE] (The National Institute of Educational Evaluation), "the illiteracy among indigenous adults [in Chiapas] is triple the national average, with 22.1% for indigenous people, but only 7.5% for the non-indigenous population" (Tinajero & Englander 172).

This reality of indigenous poverty and illiteracy in Chiapas was a fertile ground for the intervention of Mexican and international advocacy anthropologists, mostly from the US. As mentioned earlier, these anthropologists already had great scholarly and cultural interest in Mayan civilization. Also, several Mexican anthropologists, such as Morales Bermúdez, became *indigenista* writers themselves who were sympathetic to the struggle of indigenous people in Mexico, as well as Mayans in Chiapas. One of the forms in which these anthropologists and writers expressed their solidarity with the Mayans involved collecting and preserving Mayan oral literature and folktales.

In contrast, the involvement of native Palestinian Marxist writers in furthering Palestinian oral and literary culture with national aspirations in the 1970s, as exemplified in the work of Zayyād, occurred in a context in which Palestinians enjoyed a relatively

high rate of literacy. They were also beginning to undergo an accelerated process of politicization. Although at a clear disadvantage compared to the Jewish population, in 1970-1971 75.6% of the Palestinians between the ages of 5-15 attended schools, versus 95.0% of Jews. And in 1972-1973, Palestinians were 23% of the student population in Israeli universities (Zureik 151 & 154).

It should also be noted that, prior to *al-Nakba*, about half of the young Palestinian population was literate.⁹⁰ According to Ami Ayalon (2004), in the mid-1940s, Arab students in state and private educational institutions together made up about 40-45% of the country's school-age population (23). While these numbers refer to students who were enrolled in modern educational institutions that were established by the British in Mandate Palestine from 1917, they exclude those who had acquired reading and writing skills in the few hundred traditional Muslim educational systems that existed at the time, such as *kuttab* and *madrasah* (Ayalon 20). In these non-state institutions, which focused on religious education, pupils learned to recite sections from the Quran. They also had classes in Islamic law, Hadith, exegesis and Arabic.

Moreover, Zayyād's work appeared at a time when both Palestinian university students and writers were leading the politicization process among Palestinians in Israel. In 1971, Palestinians enrolled in Israeli universities established the Arab Academic Union in Israel. Similar to the objectives articulated by the first Arab Student Committee that was established at the Hebrew University in 1958, this national union organized around political activities. Members made demands to end the confiscation of Palestinian-Arab

⁹⁰ Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi notes that in 1948 the overall literacy among Palestinian Arabs in 1948 did not exceed 30 percent. See Rashid Khalidi. "Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900-1948." *Journal of Palestine Studies*. 36.1 (2006): 81-82.

land, improve in the situation of the Palestinian minority, and recognize that the Arabs in Israel are part of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation (Zureik 175). This atmosphere of politicization and assertion of a Palestinian national identity among the intelligentsia welcomed Zayyād's interest in documenting Palestinian folk culture and heritage.

Second, the contrast between Pozas' and Zayyād's ethnographies reveal two distinct moments of tension that characterize the intersection of anthropology and literature in two different colonial contexts. These ethnographies constitute different projects too. Indeed, Pozas wrote *Juan Pérez Jolote* in the context of Mexican anthropology, which was influenced by American anthropology, which has been identified since the 18th century "as one of the world's foremost laboratories for anthropological science, a science Americans proceeded to establish upon the basis of detailed first-hand study of the Indian" (Krupat 63). Moreover, Pozas was a student of Manuel Gamio, one of the pioneers of Mexican anthropology and *indigenismo* who was also trained in the US in the 1920s, by one of the founding fathers of anthropology, Franz Boas. Following in the steps of Boas, both Gamio and Pozas promoted the genre of ethnographies to further the public significance and utility of anthropology as an applied scientific discipline. Arnold Krupat argues that this interest in ethnography in its Boasian tradition reflects the convergence of anthropology and literature. He notes:

Some anthropologists shifted towards engaging the interest of an audience not strictly professional by attempting literary forms of writing, couching some of their observations about Native people and cultures in autobiographies elicited from them, and, most particularly, in fictional

narratives about those cultures and people. Whatever the philosophical influence of Boas's thought and on that of his students, I believe that the view of literature they had would have inclined them toward the traditional capacity of literature to provoke the reader to moral imagination, and hence to moral action. (68)

In light of this, Pozas' ethnography stands as a literary text on its own, while recording Pérez Jolotes' oral narrative becomes Pozas' call for action. However, despite its literary merits and aspirations for bringing about social change, this ethnography cannot be considered an indigenous Mayan narrative. For example, Morales López argues that it is based on Pozas' scientific knowledge as an anthropologist of the indigenous communities in Chiapas, which reflects the fact that his "acercamiento al mundo indígena no es intuitivo o meramente subjetivo" [closeness to the indigenous world is not intuitive or merely subjective] (78).

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of *Juan Pérez Jolote* that is particularly relevant to our discussion here is the fact that, as an ethnography based on a fictionalized oral account of a Mayan biography, the text is embedded with many tensions that result from its location on a threshold. *Juan Pérez Jolote* was written at the moment when the paradigms in Mexican anthropology were shifting from scientific to cultural. Indeed, the paradigm that dominated post-revolutionary Mexican anthropology in the 1920s and 1940s was applied anthropology, which examined indigenous communities in terms of class. In the 1950s, however, there was a shift towards cultural anthropology. Led by Mexican anthropologists Manual Gamio and Alfonso Caso, this paradigm advocated for the acculturation of the Mayans, or Indians, as they called them, to solve their abject

poverty as *campesinos* (peasants) (Dawson 290-91). Hence, at this threshold, we must ask: How should we read *Juan Pérez Jolote*? Is it a text that reflects the history of this paradigm shift? Should we focus on Pozas' sympathy for the Mayans as an oppressed class and native culture, and thus reexamine his 'outsider' role as an indigenista Ladino anthropologist? Or, is it more critical to highlight how the text juxtaposes indigenous Mayan culture vis-à-vis colonial modernity in Mexico? While these questions involve different levels and forms of reading *Juan Pérez Jolote*, they exhibit a major tension that results from the encounter between anthropology and literature.

Zayyād's ethnography, however, is situated in a different historical and geographical terrain, where the intersection between anthropology and literature in a colonial context is embedded with different epistemic and political dynamics. First, Zayyād's ethnography coincides with a period in which the mode of ethnographic engagement with Palestine is described as absent.⁹¹ According to Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz (2011), during this absent mode there was a rise of peasant and refugee studies, because "mainstream anthropology disengaged from Palestine in the decades following 1948, [thus] facilitating a predominance until the 1970s of Zionist scholarship in Palestinian ethnography" (476). Therefore, we can read Zayyād's ethnography as

⁹¹ In charting the history of anthropological research about Palestine since the nineteenth century, particularly the practice of ethnography, Furani and Rabinowitz identify four modes: biblical, Oriental, absent and poststructural. While in the first two modes, Palestine received attention from Biblical scholars who "depicted Palestinians as residual biblical relics who can be easily incorporated into a Christian European patrimony," (477) and German and local scholars who focused on customs, habits, folklore and social forms which generated Palestinians as Oriental subjects, the third mode is characterized by "mainstream anthropology disengaged from Palestine in the decades following 1948, [thus] facilitating a predominance until the 1970s of Zionist scholarship in Palestinian ethnography" (476). The poststructuralist mode, however, has enabled since the late 1980s, the ethnographic admissibility of a Palestine absorbed in national struggle" (476). This admission facilitated the recognition of Palestinian dispassion and enabled the employment of the vocabulary of memory in ethnographic texts. For more details on this historical process, see Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz. "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40.1 (2011). 475-91.

redemption of this absence. His concern with salvaging and preserving Palestinian *turāth* and folk memory are not only an endeavor of a Marxist asserting national culture, but also an attempt to keep Palestine alive as an ethnographic site.

Moreover, Zayyād's ethnography and interest in documentation of *turāth* coincides with the efforts of other Palestinian cultural activists on the other side of the border, the so-called Green Line, who shared a similar concern for salvaging memories of Palestine and establishing an archive of destroyed Palestine. Ibrahim Muhawi (2012) points out that the 1960s already saw the beginning of a series of ethnographic projects led by Palestinian cultural activists and academics in the West Bank and Diaspora to document Palestinian oral memory. Muahwi argues that "Perhaps the dawning realization that expectations of return were unrealistic has led Palestinians to keep extensive records of Palestine as it was before 1948" (400). He further asserts that "these Palestinian cultural activists were aware of the danger to Palestinian memory and heritage." (401) Among these initiatives, he lists the foundation of *Jam'iyat In'āsh al-Usrah* (literally, "The Society for Revival of the Family") in al-Bireh in 1965, which focused on "the preservation and revival of Palestinian culture and heritage through a number of activities, such as training young people in the folk arts, collecting and archiving material touching on folk arts, and the publication of the Journal of Heritage and Society (*Majallat al-Turāth wa-al-mujtama'*), with articles about all aspects of Palestinian popular culture and folklore" (401). He also refers to a series of collaborative monographs on the destroyed Palestinian villages that was published at Birzeit Univeristy Research Center under the direction of Sharif Kannana in the mid 1980s. He also mentions the publication of his own book, *Speak Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab Folktales in 1989*, which

“was undertaken in the spirit of safeguarding Palestinian memory and culture by bringing Palestinian oral heritage to the world” (401).

What distinguishes Zayyād’s ethnography from these memorial projects is its focus on the significance of folk memory for the preservation of Palestinian archive within Israel. To remember Palestine is to restore *ṣumūd* and this emphasis on the duality of *turāth- fushā* is fundamental to this political and national ethos. In fact, Zayyād’s concern with folk memory in this context is indicative of his attempts to assert indigenous nationalism. This trend is significantly different than the Palestinian ethnographic studies from the 1920s-1940s, which focused on the life of Palestinian peasantry to resist Westernization.

Indeed, Salīm Tamārī (2009) points out that during the British Mandate (1920-48), there were several attempts at local ethnography. In particular, he recalls Palestinian intellectual and ethnographer Tawfīq Kan‘ān and his preoccupation with Palestinian nativism. Tamārī elaborates: “ [Kan‘ān] Cannan and his circle were driven by one overriding preoccupation: that the native culture of Palestine and that of peasant society in particular, was being undermined by the forces of modernity. They saw it as their task to document, classify, describe, and interpret this threatened culture” (97). He goes on to argue that Kan‘ān circle followed a reductive approach and saw the Palestinian peasantry as a native group that have maintained a life style that is depicted in biblical narratives. Tamārī notes that for the circle, and [Kan‘ān] Canaan himself, the peasants of Palestine represent- through their folk norms and material artifacts---the living heritage of all the accumulated ancient cultures that appeared in Palestine (principally the Canaanite, Philistine, Hebraic, Nabatean, Syrio-Aramaic, and Arab)” (98). However, in comparison

with [Kan‘ān], Zayyād’s concern with the folk norms of Palestinian peasants reflects Marxist sensibilities. Moreover, rather than overemphasizing the indigenous cultural roots of Palestinians, Zayyād is more interested in national resistance. He archives Palestinian oral history and collective memory to affirm *ṣumūd*.

To sum up, the above comparative analysis and discussion of the utilization of oral Mayan and Palestinian narratives in ethnographic texts has revealed that, despite its different manifestations, anthropology as a discipline, and ethnography as its practice, have played an important role during the foundational years of these literary traditions. In addition to privileging oral literature, ethnography has asserted the fragile position of Mayan and Palestinian literatures as minority texts that belong to people who are trying to revive and keep alive their cultural memory, while fighting to establish their traditions against a hegemonic culture.

Then the questions to be asked here is: Did the Mayan and Palestinian literary productions that had appeared in the years after Pozas’ and Zayyād’s texts follow this ethnographic path to literature? Does oral narrative dominate contemporary Mayan and Palestinian literature? As my close readings of Mayan and Palestinian narratives demonstrate in the next two chapters, there is an ethnographic residue in both literary traditions. However, there are several postmodern narratives, dramatic plays, as well as short stories and novellas that reveal a different route: Mayan and Palestinian literatures have gone beyond the ethnographic.

- III -

Tales From Fantastic Lands: Indigeneity, Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Supernatural in Mayan and Palestinian Literature

"Aquí en Chiapas son nueve veces diferentes nuestras palabras, nueve veces es su gracia, nueve veces es su formación y creación distribuidas en nueve rincones de la tierra chiapaneca; ahí entre los valles y montañas, morada de los hombres y mujeres verdaderos los *batz'i viniketik antzetik*, legítimos dueños de estos jirones de cielo y tierra bajo la mirada de *Jch'ul totik*, el padre sol y *Jch'ul me'tiku*, la madre luna."

— Enrique Pérez López, "Prólogo," *Cuentos y relatos indígenas*, 1995

[“Here in Chiapas our words are nine time different, nine times in their grace, nine times in their formation and creation, distributed in nine corners of the lands of Chiapas; there between the valleys and mountains, home of the true men and women, the *batz'i viniketik antzetik*, rightful owners of these shreds of heaven and earth under the gaze of *Jch'ul totik*, the father sun, and *Jch'ul me'tiku*, the mother moon.”]

— Enrique Pérez López, "Prologue," *Indigenous Tales and Stories*, 1995

"أكتب، أكتب عن كنوزي التي احتضنتها صدور دواشكي. لدي حزمات من أنوار الصبا، رسائل الحب الأول. لدي قصائد خبأها فتیان بين أوراق كتب مدرسية. لدي أساور وأقراط وغويشات.. لدي عقود تتعلق بها قلوب ذهبية إذا فتحتها وجدت في القلب الذهبي صورتين: له ولها. لدي يوميات، بخطوط دقيقة حيية، وبخطوط عريضة واثقة، عن تساؤلات: ماذا يريد مني؟ وعن إيمان مغلظة: يا وطن! فهل تعدني بأن تكتب عن كنوزي حتى تهتدي الأشباح الهائمة إلي؟"

(إميل حبيبي ، "أم الروبابيكا"، 1969) !

"Go on, write something! Write about the treasures from the inside of my sofas. I've got whole bundles of young people's treasures here: first love letters, poems hidden by boys in the pages of school textbooks, bracelets, earrings, bangles, chains with gold heart-shaped pendants that you open to find two pictures inside, his and hers. I've got diaries in shy, delicate handwriting and others in broad, confident hands. They're full of questions: What does he want from me? And full of binding oaths for the homeland. "Will you promise to write about my treasures, so the roving spirits can find their way to me here?"

— Imīl Ḥabībī,⁹² "The Odds-and-Ends Woman," 1969

⁹²Emile Habiby is the official spelling of the author's name as it appears in the English translation of his work. However, I will be using the Library of Congress transliteration version, Imīl Ḥabībī, in order to maintain consistency with the spelling of his name as it appears in his works in Arabic.

In his prologue to *Cuentos y relatos indígenas de Chiapas*, which includes Mayan tales in five different languages, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Cho’l, Tojolobal, and Zoque, and their translations into Spanish, Enrique Pérez López emphasizes the significance of transmitting the Mayan word as it demonstrates the spiritual connection of its people to their land in Chiapas. Pérez López not only advocates circulating the Mayan word in relation to Chiapas as its native territory, but also invokes the names of the Mayan gods of the sun and the moon, to assert its cosmic roots. In Imīl Ḥabībī’s short story “*Umm al-rubābika*” (The Odds-and-Ends Woman) (1969),⁹³ on the other hand, the imperative to write about the displacement of Palestinians is intertwined with roving spirits. The protagonist, an eccentric elderly woman from Haifa, purchases odds-and-ends sold at a warehouse. In collecting these relics from the past, she hopes to preserve the memory of those displaced Palestinians who were exiled in 1948, and then again in 1967, leaving behind their homes and, in most cases, all belongings. She asks the narrator to write about her “treasures,” in order to hasten the return of these Palestinians, or the “roving spirits,” (Jayyusi 459) as she calls them.

In both Pérez Lopez’s prologue and Ḥabībī’s short story, the supernatural emerges as an indispensable feature of Mayan and Palestinian collective memory. The supernatural is important for telling stories about the ancestral nation that dwelt in the writer’s current geography. This notion shared with the writers a common language, landscape and myths. How the supernatural functions and what are its manifestations in contemporary Mayan and Palestinian narratives are the main questions here.

In this chapter, I examine the supernatural in Mayan and Palestinian folktales. I

⁹³ I’m relying here on the English translation of the story as it appeared in Salma K. Jayyusi, ed, *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 454-9.

argue that, in both literary traditions, the folktale, which relies on intergenerational oral narrative and the supernatural, serves a dual political function. First, it operates as the perfect medium for relating to an indigenous past, and reconstructing an oral historical account of that past. Second, it restores indigenous memory to assert Mayan and Arab-Palestinian ethnicities, respectively. Therefore, gaining an insight into the representation of the supernatural in Mayan and Palestinian folktales illuminates the trinity of indigeneity, ethnicity and nationalism, which, I go on to postulate, characterizes the folktale as a political genre in these cases of indigenous minority literature.

Within this context, I intend to further elucidate the supernatural literary elements, by comparing Mayan dream narratives and folktales with a canonical Palestinian novel based on a fairytale. These texts are: Robert Laughlin and Carol Karasik's *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from the People of the Bat* (1988)⁹⁴ and Imīl Ḥabībī *Sarāyā Bint al-Ghūl (Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale)* (1992). I ask: how does the supernatural in these texts, which are amalgams of folk tales, legends, myths and oral memories, invoke the indigenous? How does the supernatural construct the indigenous past, as well as the indigenous present? What are the central motifs of the supernatural? These questions are paramount in examining how the supernatural played out in traditional Mayan and Palestinian folk tales, legends and myths, and how they function in contemporary Mayan and Palestinian narratives of indigeneity, ethnicity and nation.

⁹⁴ The book appeared first in 1988 under the title *The People of the Bat: Mayan Tales and Dreams from Zinacantán*. The edition that I am using here, *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from the People of the Bat*, appeared in 1996.

I: Mayan Visions: Present Resistance from an Indigenous Past

Contemporary Mayan writings in Chiapas invoke the supernatural world in different forms, including legends, folktales and dream narratives. Some Mayan writers use these forms to tell stories that have moral subtexts. Others refer to the supernatural to repeat, via the written word, ancient sayings handed down by their Mayan ancestors, thus reconnecting to their oral history and preserving Mayan genealogy, memory and knowledge. Indeed, since 1990 the Mayan writers' collective *Sna Jtz'ibajom* has published more than nine works with supernatural themes, including numerous collections of folktales and ethnographic documentation of local spiritual ceremonies and religious carnivals.

Writer and critic Enrique Pérez López from CELALI (Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígena—National Center of Indigenous Languages, Arts and Literature) points out that this trend is characteristic of the first decade of contemporary Mayan literature, as writers were concerned with a recovery of their Mayan history and oral tradition. He further adds that these tales have played an important role in Mayan literacy educational programs in the communities. He elaborates: “The transcription of oral literature and common legends was not only foundational for the textualization of Mayan literature, but was also important for circulating the literature as textbooks among children and adults in the communities who knew these stories by heart, but never read them, because reading in Mayan languages was not offered in schools.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ From a personal interview with critic Enrique Pérez López in CELALI's office in San Cristóbal on January 13, 2010.

In addition to their prominence in local publications, Mayan folktales, legends and dreams have gained attention recently from national publication houses, as well as anthropological scholarship and literature in English translation. For example, in 2000 the *Programa de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Mesoamérica y el Sureste* (The Program for Multidisciplinary Research on Mesoamerica and the Southeast), which is part of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) (National Autonomous University of Mexico) published a series of oral traditions and indigenous narratives, including bi-lingual editions in Tzotzil-Spanish of the tales *Jsemet pixol = El Sombrerón* and *Ya 'yejal j-ik'al = El negro cimarrón*.⁹⁶

Moreover, since its extensive anthropological field works in Chiapas, which dates back to 1957, the Chiapas Harvard Project and its alumni have published more than forty books and monographs, more than two hundred articles, and a variety of other scholarly and literary works (Vogt 363). Major works in the field of Mayan literature include collections of tales and dreams by Robert Laughlin and Carol Karasik: *The people of the Bat: Mayan Tales and Dreams from Zinacantán* (1988), which was reprinted in 1996 as *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from The People of the Bat*,⁹⁷ and Gary Gossen's *Four Creations: An Epic Story of the Chiapas Mayas* (2002).⁹⁸ Among the other works that have appeared in English, in independent local and US publications, are several Zapatista folktales published by the Texas-based Cinco Puntos Press after the

⁹⁶ See Mariano López Calixto Méndez, *Jsemet pixol: El sombrero* (San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, México: Programa de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Mesoamérica y el Sureste, UNAM, 2000), and Antonio Gómez Gómez, *Ya 'yejal j-ik'al: El negro cimarrón* (Mexico: Programa de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias sobre Mesoamérica y el Sureste, UNAM, 2000).

⁹⁷ See Robert M. Laughlin and Carol Karasik, *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from the People of the Bat* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

⁹⁸ For oral Mayan literature, in particular, see Gary H. Gossen, *Four Creations: An Epic Story of the Chiapas Mayas* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002) and Ambar Past, Xun Okotz, and Xpetra Ernánides. *Incantations by Mayan Women* (Chiapas, Mexico: Taller Leñateros, 2005).

uprising in 1994, and Ambar Past, Xun Okotz, and Xpetra Ernández's *Incantations by Mayan Women*, which was published by Taller Leñateros in San Cristóbal in 2005.

The supernatural is particularly evident in Mayan dream narratives. Dreams, which appear frequently in folktales as an integral element of the plot,⁹⁹ are a major pillar of faith in Mayan religious and mythological traditions, as documented in the pre-Columbian books: the *Chilam Balam* or "Jaguar Translator" books of Yucatán, and the *Popol Vuh*. In both texts, which were among the very few hieroglyphic books to survive the burning of the Christianizing missionaries, dreams and divination are depicted as manifestations of prophecies and expressions of the Mayan concept of cyclical history.

Indeed, Dennis Tedlock (2010) observes that the treatment of dreams as a source of important information is prevalent among contemporary Maya, especially the K'iche' daykeepers. He notes that this belief dates to the first dreamer, the Blood Moon deity. In *Popol Vuh*, Blood Moon, the daughter of the Blood Gatherer, acquires the name of *ak'axtok'*, a "trickster," after speaking with the decapitated head of One Hunahpu, one of the sons of the first of all daykeepers of the Mayan calendar. Blood Moon encounters One Hunahpu's skull, which takes the form of a fruit dangling from a tree at the Place of Ball Game Sacrifice. The skull spits upon her hand. As a result, she becomes pregnant with twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. They grow up to become Mayan heroes who constantly defeat their enemies through trickery and great powers. In this story, Blood

⁹⁹ I am referring here in particular to Trinidad B. Cruz's folktale collection *Lo'il Ta Bats'i K'op Tsotsil: Relatos Tsotsiles* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Sna Jtz'ibajom = Cultura de los Indios Mayas, 2001). For example, in "Relato de una Muchacha," (A Tale of a Young Woman), by María Rosenda de la Cruz Vázquez (97-102), a young woman falls into a river near Zinacantán during her outdoor search for firewood with her grandmother. A young man saves her life, but three months later, she dreams about running into a black woman in the river. The dream continues to haunt her for three days and causes her severe illness. While the family seeks the help of a local healer (*curandero*) to treat the young woman, she recovers on her own, relying on supplications to God, or "*Nuestro Señor*," (102) as her mothers says. Coinciding with the recent increasing conversion of Mayans into Evangelical Christianity, the tale emphasizes the benefits of believing in Jesus as a healer, versus traditional Mayan medicine.

Moon is crowned as “the first of all lucid dreamers, [because] she is so attentive that her dream becomes self-explanatory” (Tedlock 321). Indeed, when she sees the skull spit in her hand, she looks and finds no trace of saliva. Then, the skull explains, “It’s just a sign I’ve given you” (Tedlock 320). This sign symbolizes a dream.

Moreover, the five chronicles in the Chumayel manuscript of *Chilam Balam* reveal that the Mayan concept of time is not linear, but cyclical. The future and the past are not disconnected, but they exist in reciprocal relation to each other, based on what happened and what is about to happen: “All of these chronicles express the notion that events occurring during scores whose names have the same number may be similar, but not identical. Thus, a relatively recent event may be read as having been prefigured by an event in the more distant past, or it may be read as prefiguring a future event” (Tedlock 249). This notion of time is foundational for Mayan faith, since it underlines the notion of cosmic harmony. According to the Mayan cosmic vision, there is a salient intersection between all domains of the universe, including environmental geography, the human body, animals, and plants, feelings, morals, aesthetics, meteorology, astronomy and social relations. In fact, “the whole world of things seen and unseen provides a matrix of interlocking metaphors that link one domain to another in a highly redundant synthesis of that that exists” (Edmonson 66).

Robert Laughlin and Carol Karasik’s *Mayan Tales from Zinacantán: Dreams and Stories from the People of the Bat* (1996) is a pivotal collection of contemporary Mayan dream narratives.¹⁰⁰ The book is divided into two sections: “In the Land of the Night Sun: Dreams,” which includes selected dream narratives by nine Mayan men and women from

¹⁰⁰ Although the book is co-edited by Laughlin and Karasik, only Laughlin will be mentioned in the in-text citations, because he collected the dreams and wrote the introduction.

Zinacantán and “The Burden of Days: Tales.” Apart from several notes in the appendix to explain Mayan terminology and to provide a glossary for motifs, both types of narrative are presented as autonomous texts of oral literature, without Laughlin’s observations or interpretations. Yet, before delving into a discussion of the supernatural dimension of these dreams, it is important to provide here a brief biography of Laughlin, in order to better understand the context of his work as an advocacy anthropologist who played a foundational role in furthering contemporary Mayan literature.

Laughlin arrived in Chiapas from the US in 1959, to begin his fieldwork on Tzotzil Chiapas during the formative years of the Chiapas Harvard Project. He lived in Zinacantán, where he learned Tzotzil and conducted anthropological studies of everyday Mayan life. He worked closely with two local informants, Romin Teratol and Anselmo Peres, who shared stories about Mayan history, religion and culture. Laughlin was well received among the Zinacantecos, and he was “affectionately known as *Lol Bik’it Nab* (Lawrence Little Lake, from his surname Laughlin” (Vogt 373).

Laughlin’s field research and political commitment to Mayan studies resulted in critical contributions to the emergence of contemporary Mayan literature. As a Smithsonian curator, he spent more than twelve years studying modern and colonial Tzotzil lexicography, which culminated in the publication of *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantán* in 1975. With more than 30,000 entries, the dictionary is considered “the greatest dictionary ever published on an American Indian language” (Vogt 373). In addition to publishing numerous monographs and studies on Tzotzil oral history, worldview, dreams, prayers, ethnobotany and history in Tzotzil, Spanish, and English, Laughlin organized the foundation of the Chiapas writers’

cooperative *Sna jtx'bijom* (House of the Writer) in 1982. Laughlin's most recent publication, *Monkey Business Theatre* (2008),¹⁰¹ charts the history of contemporary Mayan theater and includes several previously unpublished plays in English.

Examining the representation of the supernatural in the dreams of Laughlin's collaborators, Romin Teratol and Anselmo Peres, I argue that the supernatural world is portrayed in terms of power struggles. Specifically, motifs of the supernatural world that have origins in Mayan cosmology are incorporated into their narratives to illuminate the representation of hierarchal relationships that exist not only among Mayans of different generations (young and old), but also between Mayans and Ladinos/as. The dream narratives invoke religious syncretism, tricksters, witchcraft and elements from the natural world, such as animals, to address intergenerational conflicts in the Mayan community. They also reveal a political vision of self-reliance and Mayan autonomy. Finally, I argue that this representation of the supernatural world is indicative of a notion of modernity that incorporates both Mayan rationality and agency. This notion challenges the hegemonic notion of modernity that prevails in modern Mexican society, which excludes Mayans, as well as the rest of indigenous peoples, and positions them in a master-slave relationship with the rest of Mexico.

Romin Teratol has nineteen dreams in the collection. In these dreams, Teratol is constantly defending himself against the attacks of wild beasts and murderous men, Ladinos in particular. He also appears to be running away from seductive women. His wife emerges often as the victim of his scolding and near-mortal assaults. In most of the narratives, Teratol notes that he wakes up from his dreams terrified and troubled by the visions he saw. Moreover, he often ends his narrative with an interpretation of the dream,

¹⁰¹ Robert M. Laughlin, *Monkey Business Theatre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

which sometimes he reconfigures together with his wife, who listens carefully to his recollection of it.

In Teratol's dreams there are two types of recurring motifs: positive and negative. Flying away, going up the hill, and the Holy Father Saint Lawrence appear as signs of positive development, whereas a black cow, a bull, and Ladinos/as represent a bad omen. In "I Ride a Flying Cow," Teratol dreams that a Chamulan gives him a black cow and orders him to fetch something. As soon as he mounts the cow, it jumps up and they both fly away. On their return trip, the cow gores him, and then it speaks. It promises to cure his wounds. Teratol wakes up from his dream healed. However, when he recounts the dream to his wife, she mocks him: "'Who knows what it means?' she said. Joking, she told me, 'Probably it's because you are a witch. Why else would you dream of black cows?' But I think it's probably a bit of torment. That's what I tell myself" (45).

Regardless of the reason for the different interpretations that Teratol and his wife attribute to the dream, the invocation of the black cow as a bad omen in a dream that includes a Chamula is particularly important. Since the rise of Zinacantán in 1542 as the Indian "capital" of Chiapas, there has been a constant rivalry with the neighboring town of Chamula, whose people even today remain at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy in Chiapas. Therefore, a dream about a Chamula giving orders to a man from Zinacantán represents humiliation. The black cow hence conveys Teratol's suffering from enduring such humiliation.

Moreover, the ongoing Mayan struggle for land and economic rights appears transparently in Teratol's dream, "I work in the Belltower, Give Advice, Distribute Corn. " Teratol dreams about running into a Ladino priest, or a "gringo," (46) as he calls him.

The priest inquires about George, a Ladino who came to Zinacantán to buy land. Teratol informs him that he must be at the magistrate's office, where the people from Zinacantán have gathered to discuss the current corn crisis. Teratol's encounter with the priest leads him to the magistrate, where he realizes that his community is struggling on two fronts: indigenous land rights and inflated corn prices. Teratol's dream demonstrates that both problems are interrelated, since they appear in the sequence of the dream as a double crisis: political and spiritual. This crisis is manifest first in Teratol's conversation with the priest:

“Why has he come to speak to the magistrate?” I asked.

“Because he has bad chest pains. He is in great pain, so he's come to buy a little land from the magistrate.”

I began to wonder what use the land was to him. “Probably it's for him to be buried in,” I said in my heart.

“Why do you look so unhappy?” asked the priest. “Can't such a thing be said?”

“Isn't he buying a little land so he can be buried on it? Isn't he dying?”

“No, he is simply buying some land.”

“Ah, then you can't say he is buying a little land so that he can work on it,” I told him.

“Yes of course, that's right!” he said. (46)

In this exchange, Teratol's disapproval of George's plans to buy indigenous land in Zinacantán echoes as a death prophecy, which reflects his resistance to Ladino land acquisition. In addition, the crisis reappears at the end of the dream. Teratol sees stacks of

corn being sold to the people of Paste', who are dying of starvation. Earlier in his dream, people from Zinacantán are seen offering candles and praying that the price of corn will come down, unlike the people from the hamlets, who gave away money for the ceremony to end their food crisis. When he wakes up from his dream, Teratol has mixed feelings about the meaning of what he had seen:

“Lord, if only I had a lot of corn, I’d sell some too.”

“How much of your corn would you sell? Could you feed the whole hamlet?” she asked. And then I woke up.

When I woke up this morning, I said to myself, “God, My Lord, could that dream have been good or bad?” I think some of it probably had to with

Our Lord and some of it probably was persecution. (47)

Teratol’s identification of religious and political elements in this dream is evident in his conflicting interpretation of the good and the bad. Will he satisfy God, if he sells corn? Keeping in mind that corn is sacred in Mayan mythology, his dilemma takes on a religious dimension. In the story “About the Origins of Ladinos,” in Chamula oral tradition, corn (maize) is portrayed as a gift from God:

Our Father decided to make another people as well, in the hope that they would turn out better [than the first Ladino, who was born after a *mestiza* had sexual intercourse with a dog]; that is when he made the Indians. At first they could not talk, only laugh, but when he brought them maize (parts of his body), they began to move and talk. (Gossen 310)

While selling corn is portrayed in terms of economic persecution,¹⁰² helping the people

¹⁰² In the last few years, there has been an agricultural and economic crisis in the cultivation of corn in Chiapas. Partly because of technologies of genetically modified corn and US market demands, natural corn

by feeding them corn is depicted as a religious deed, as implied in the image of feeding people from the 'body of God.' In fact, the interlocking metaphor of feeding from the body of Christ-maize reflects a Catholic-Mayan religious syncretism. It is noteworthy that Laughlin points out a different interpretation of this dream. He notes:

It is believed that an individual's possessions are representative of himself, have acquired his soul. Corn, shares its soul with the farmer, his family and his farm tools. Thus, the loss in one's dream of a horse, money, or clothing imperils one's own health. To sell corn is to lose one's child. To lose one's hoe is to lose one's crop. (Laughlin 9)

The second dream narrator in Laughlin's collection is the shaman Anselmo Peres. In his selection of five dreams, which he narrated to Laughlin in Tzotzil during a time when he was going through a legal struggle to clear his name from accusations of witchcraft (54-56), the supernatural world is represented through interaction with animals. Snakes, dogs and cows are recurring motifs. These animals are not only personified, but they are also portrayed as Peres' major enemy. They appear to be constantly chasing after him.

In "We are Chased by Cows, We Kill Them, a Chamulan and I Take a Leg," for example, Peres recounts how, one day while he was on his way with friends to plant corn in the lowlands, he was attacked by cows, Ladinos and their dogs, respectively. To escape death he runs into a cave, but when he comes out, he finds that all his friends have been murdered. Moreover, in "I Am Chased by Snakes, Saved by a Man, Given a Cross and a

in Chiapas became endangered. In 2002, farming communities and corn producers in Mexico and all of Central America signed an agreement to protect the cultivation of natural corn. The agreement called for the creation and maintenance of natural corn seed banks and urged against the introduction of transgenic corn. For more details on this agreement, corn and its cultural history in Chiapas, see Emiliano Meza Guzmán and Carlota Duarte. *Ixim =: Maíz = Corn* (México, D.F: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2004).

Drink,” he describes a conversation he had with a group of snakes that followed him to avenge the execution of a fellow snake at the hands of Peres himself. The association of animals with death reflects the ominous characteristics that people in Zinacantán attribute to earth. According to Laughlin, the image of Ladinos as dangerous land patrons underlines this notion. He claims: “Since the Earth Lords are thought to be Ladinos, to meet with a Ladino in one’s dream is to confront death” (9). He further adds that snakes are considered the Earth Lord’s daughter, “So encounters with serpents and women alike may have horrifying connotations” (9). In light of this, one can suggest that the supernatural world in Peres’ work mirrors a Zinacantecan reality. And so, it becomes a venue to critique Ladino domination.

In the 1980s, Peres shared another dream-legend with Laughlin, “El esqueleto volador” (“The Flying Skeleton”).¹⁰³ This narrative is about the mysterious behavior of a young man, Mariano, from Zinacantán. Mariano is described as a troublemaker, because of his disobedience and disrespectful attitude towards his parents. Concerned about his misconduct and its effects on the well-being of the family, his uncle steps in to help. He asks Mariano to modify his behavior and to stop wandering aimlessly in the streets late at night. However, when Mariano refuses to accept his uncle’s advice, the uncle decides to follow him, in order to find out if he is involved in any morally suspicious activities. With Mariano’s father approval, the uncle leaves his house at night and, accompanied by a friend, he tracks Mariano. From a dark corner in the bushes, they observe Mariano undress next to a cross that stands in the middle of a meadow, where different crucifixes are hung. Suddenly they hear Mariano repeat some spells. His body catches on fire, his

¹⁰³ The dream appears in the collection *Relatos tzeltales y tzotziles. Lo’il Maxiel: Antología*. Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1994. However, it was published first as a separate pamphlet, in the 1980s. 73-84. All translations from this dream narrative are mine.

skin melts at the foot of the cross, and his skeleton flies into the sky. Shocked and terrified by the scene, they reach for their rosaries to seek divine protection from Mariano, who has become, as far as they are concerned, the manifestation of the devil.

At the center of this legend is the use of religious syncretism between Catholicism and Mayan beliefs. To break Mariano's deal with the devil, the uncle decides to use holy water and salt, as prescribed in old Mayan traditions. He informs Mariano's father:

Recordarás que el abuelo contaba que en tiempos de sus padres se dio un caso igual y que un ancianito recomendó que se cubriera de sal el cuerpo del endemoniado y se arrojara agua bendita sobre su carne, con lo cual se acaba el maleficio. [Remember when our grandfather told us that during the times of his parents there was a similar case and that an old man recommended that they cover the body of the possessed with salt and throw holy water on its flesh to end the spell] (81).

The combination of the holy water, the burning body next to the cross, the spells of the witch demon and the flying skeleton illustrates the religious syncretism between Catholic symbols and Mayan beliefs. One of the most significant examples, however, of Mayan beliefs incorporated into this syncretism is the skeleton. Micaela Morales López (2004) notes that the motif of the bare body is among the dominant eschatological myths among the Mayans (132-35). She points out that the gods of the underworld, in general, are considered gods of death, who have their counterpart in human sorcerers. She asserts that, for the Tzotziles, in particular, the bare body symbolizes the gods of death. Tzotziles believe that the gods of death manifest themselves in the forms of "*yalem bek'et* (el

descarnado) o *kitsil bak* (huesos ruidosos)” (134), which are “the body stripped of flesh” or the “noisy bones”.

The legend also ends with this syncretism. Although at this point Mariano is considered dead, due to the effects of salt and holy water, which supposedly prevented his flesh from reuniting with his skeleton, his spirit comes back. Several nights after Mariano’s disappearance, the uncle notices a skeleton sitting on top of the cross in his patio. The skeleton curses at him, and a few hours later the uncle is found dead in his bed.

According to Jacinto Arias Pérez (2004), Mariano’s demonic behavior, which persists even after his death, is an example of the preoccupation with the supernatural world that distinguishes Chiapanecan Catholics. He argues: “They already live in the invisible world at the same time that they live in the visible one. The soul persists after death, but its existence in the ‘other world’ is not very different from its existence in ‘this world’; the former is just a continuation of the latter” (123). While Mariano’s behavior in both worlds is similar, suggesting little hope for reformation, his vengeance on his uncle affirms his victory. One can conclude, then, that in the intergenerational conflict between Mariano and his uncle, the former’s rebellion against the authority of the older generation eventually pays off.

The representation of the supernatural world in these Mayan dreams and legend reflect a notion of time according to which the past, the present and the future are interconnected. According to Morales López (2004), in oral Mayan narratives, which emerge from the Indian imagination, there is a nuanced production of magic to overcome suffering in daily life. Tracing the coexistence of two worlds, reality and dreams, in indigenous narratives to the Mesoamerican notion of the universe as a quadrangular form

(92-93), Morales López goes on to assert that the supernatural bridges the two worlds. She further adds that, while the real world represents the perception of a raw reality of everyday oppression, misery and uncertainty, the world of dreams and the dead is filled with moral messages expressing trickery, irony and sarcasm. These stories often feature the characters of the Ladino, *mestizo* or “*caxlan*” as pure representations of the devil (93).

The persistence of the supernatural world in contemporary Mayan dream narratives, as discussed above, calls attention to the nature of the relationship between Mayan reality in Chiapas and narratives of modernity in Mexico. The supernatural is employed to address local concerns, such as generational conflicts within the community. It is also invoked to critique social problems, in particular, Ladino domination and discrimination against the local Mayans. Moreover, it is used to convey moral messages, including the assertion of self-reliance and hard work, as fundamental premises for Mayan autonomy. In these contemporary Mayan dream narratives, we witness a vision of modernity that incorporates Mayan myths as sources of rationality. They also portray an image of Mayans as people who are actively involved in shaping their own history and culture, as Indians in modern Mexico. This picture challenges the hegemonic notion of modernity that prevails in modern Mexican society, which excludes the Indians and relegates them to the status of the silenced and oppressed.

Indeed, in *México profundo: una civilización negada* (1987), Guillermo Bonfil Batalla argues that Mexican modernity was established on discrimination against that which is Indian and denial of any real connection with Mesoamerican civilization. Addressing his fellow Mexicans, he says: “The clear and undeniable evidence of our Indian ancestry is a mirror in which we do not wish to see our own reflection” (18).

Bonfil Batalla goes on to suggest that, although modern Mexico appears to assert the presence of the Indian through his/her depictions in murals, museums, sculptures, and archaeological sites that are open to the public, the Indian “Is treated essentially as a dead world. It is a unique world, extraordinary in many of its achievements, but still a dead world” (55). However, as these dream narratives demonstrate, the Indian world is not dead. Although Mayans remain excluded from the hegemonic discourse of modernity in Mexico, their dream narratives suggest that the Mayans themselves do not consider their world as part of Mexico’s dead past. On the contrary, Teratol and Peres’ dreams invoke the indigenous past and Mayan cultural and spiritual ancestry, to address contemporary issues in Mexico, including national problems, such as the corn crisis.

Like Bonfil Batalla, Aníbal Quijano (2000) also believes that Mexican modernity is based on the exclusion of the Indian. He notes that, similar to other Latin American countries, Mexico inherited from Spanish colonialism a legacy of Eurocentric modernity. This model imagined modernity and rationality as exclusively European products and experiences. It was also built on a binary, dualist perspective on knowledge. So, the relationship between Western Europe and the rest of the world was codified in the dichotomies of East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe (542). Even within this oppositional model, Quijano argues, the Indian was excluded. He observes: “The only category with the honor of being recognized as the other of Europe and the West was ‘Orient’—not the Indians of America and not the blacks of Africa, who were simply ‘primitive’” (542). Nonetheless, Teratol’s and Peres’ dreams challenge these binaries. As hybrid narratives, which include a supernatural subtext based on a Mayan concept of cyclical time and a

syncretism of Mayan religious beliefs and Christianity, these dreams resist Eurocentric modernity.

II: Ogres and Refugees: Narrating an Autobiography of a Nation in a Palestinian Fairytale

Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter is Ḥabībī's final novel. He finished writing this semi-autobiography in 1990, but it was published two years later by the London-Cyprus based press Riad El-Rayyes Books. Palestinian novelist Anton Shammas translated the novel into Hebrew in 1993 and it received critical attention in Israeli literary circles.¹⁰⁴ In 2006, Peter Theroux translated the novel into English, thus adding it to his list of translations of canonical works of Arabic fictions, such as Najīb Maḥfūz's *Children of the Alley*, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's *Cities of Salt*, and Ilyās Khūrī's *Yalo*. Yet, before delving into a discussion of the novel, it is important to present a concise biography of Ḥabībī to contextualize its autobiographical elements.

Ḥabībī was born in Haifa in 1921. After graduating from the Arab Orthodox High School in 1939, he worked in Haifa's oil refinery. At the same time he studied petroleum

¹⁰⁴ Israeli writer and critic Yaira Ginossar, for example, points out that when the novel was translated in Hebrew in 1993, it received nine reviews in less than three months in the major Israeli newspapers and literary journals, in addition to the seven reviews it received in 1991 when it first came out in Arabic. However, he notes that the novel received a "mixed reception" (580). On the one hand, it was treated as an autonomous text, and Ḥabībī was praised for the high artistic style. Some reviews highlighted the narrative's break from the linear form of a classical Western novel, and categorized the fairytale as a postmodern memoir with universal themes, such as regret and longings. On the other hand, several reviews focused on Ḥabībī's political intervention with a national text that is heavily invested in the assertion of the Palestinian narrative. In fact, Ginossar observes that the appearance of the novel in Hebrew translation was a major discovery of the disconnect that existed between Palestinians in Israel and Jewish-Israeli majority. Ḥabībī's integration of ancient Arabic history and literature into his modern narrative, he argues, "was an indication that Arabs and Jews lived in completely separate cultural worlds" (582). For Ginossar's discussion of the novel in Hebrew see his article "Saraya, Bat Ha-Shed Ha-Ra' le-Imīl Ḥabībī: hitkablut ha-yetsirah be-musafī ha-sifrut 1991-1993." *'Iyyūnīm Bi-Teqūmat Yiśrā'el: Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv and the State of Israel: a Research Annual*. Sede Boqer Center. 7 (1997): 546-582. The article is in Hebrew. The citation above is my translation.

engineering for two years through correspondence course with the University of London. From his early youth, Ḥabībī had been involved in the Palestinian literary and cultural scene as well as in official politics. In fact, describing his life-long attempts to juggle the dual careers of politician and writer, he often used the analogy of a man trying to find balance while carrying two watermelons under one arm.¹⁰⁵

From the outset of his public career as a national writer-politician, Ḥabībī's literary and political paths intersected. In the early 1940s, he chaired *Nādī al-Sha'b* ("The People's Club"), a cultural and political club for Palestinian intellectuals in Haifa. In 1942 he abandoned his study to work as a news announcer for the Palestinian broadcasting station in Jerusalem. In 1944, he co-founded *'uṣbat al-taḥarrur al-waṭanī fī filasṭīn* (The National Liberation League in Palestine), which eventually became the Israeli Communist Party (RAKAH). In line with the official position of the Soviet Union, the league was the only Arab Palestinian party to support the 1947 UN Partition Plan. In 1948, he became the chief editor of RAKAH's Arabic language newspaper, *al-Ittiḥād* (The Union). In 1951, he was elected for the Knesset (The Israeli Parliament) as a member of *Miflagah Kommunistit Yisraelit*, (The Israeli Communist Party), commonly known as MAKI.

Ḥabībī continued to write throughout his political career, but after his resignation from political life in 1972, he devoted himself to his writing and journalism as editor of *al-Ittiḥād*. He published novels, short stories, plays, and editorials. In 1991, he started a publishing house, "Arabesque," and in 1995 he founded a monthly literary journal,

¹⁰⁵ In the last two documentaries about his life, Ḥabībī confessed that he failed at keeping the balance and that he should have focused on his literary career, because the political system failed him. See interviews with Ḥabībī in Dalia Karpel, *Imil Ḥabibi: Nisharti Be-Hefah = Emile Habiby: I Stayed in Haifa* (Tel Aviv: Transfax Film Productions, 1998), and Mohammed Bakri, *Jenin Jenin & Since You Left: Two Documentaries by Mohammad Bakri* (Seattle, Wash.: Arab Film Distribution, 2010).

Mashārīf. His collection of short stories, *Sudāsīyat Al-Ayyām Al-Sittah: Riwāyah Min Al-Arḍ Al-Muḥtalla*, (Six Stories for the Six Day War) in 1968 gained him visibility in the Arab world, and his classical satirical novel *Al-waqā'ī 'Al-Gharībah Fī Ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī Al-Naḥs Al-Mutashā'il* (The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist) in 1974, continues to be regarded among one of the best works in Arabic fiction. In fact, in *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (1995), Roger Allen identifies the novel as “a unique contribution to modern Arabic fiction, not only for its sardonic wit, but also because it presents its readers with an intertextual feast” (73-4). In 1990, Ḥabībī received the highest Palestinian honor, the al-Quds Prize, and in 1992, Israel’s most prestigious award, the Israel Prize, for his literary career. He died in Nazareth in 1996.

The fairytale of *Saraya, the Ogre’s Daughter* revolves around a series of mysterious encounters between Saraya, a girl held captive by an ogre, and the narrator. Saraya first appears from the sea on a moonless night on the shore of what once was Al-Zeeb in the summer of 1983. From his fisherman’s seat on a boulder, the narrator reminisces on a girl with the same name whom he knew in his childhood, and who later disappeared into “the abyss of exile” with her family. He becomes obsessed with discovering who the girl was. His quest takes him into Arab myth, his own past, and the history of al-Zeeb, a Palestinian coastal village north of Acre that was destroyed during *al-Nakba*. As the fairytale unfolds, it weaves in chapters from Ḥabībī’s autobiography alongside political commentary and critical reflections on his literary career. In fact, sometimes in the novel, the reader cannot distinguish if the first person refers to the narrator, or Ḥabībī himself disclosing details from his own personal history.

Saraya, the Ogre’s Daughter is written as a transgeneric narrative. It is a

patchwork of memories and intertextuality, including frequent digressive references-- from philosopher Ibn Tufail, ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Muqaffa’, Wuthering Heights to Albert Einstein, to diverse intertextual quotes from the Qur’an, the Old and the New Testaments; classical Arabic poetry and history; and Russian literature by Tolstoy, Gorky, and Lenin. The narrative also includes self-referential sections and word plays in which Ḥabībī comments on the text itself. In fact, at one point, he addresses the translator Shammas directly and dares him to find the Hebrew equivalent of what he was writing (178).

The supernatural dimension of the fairytale is evident in the enigmatic style of the book and Ḥabībī’s nebulous prose. The narrative relies on playful evasiveness as Ḥabībī flits from place to place and from time to time, seldom serving up anything solid and unequivocal. He mixes fact and fiction and explains the historical through the fantastic. The fairytale is, after all, as Ḥabībī introduces it, a “*khurafīyya*, something that amazes,” that “launches one into a world of associations . . . but defies precise definition” (8). It is noteworthy that in the Arabic edition there are a total of 147 footnotes, which embeds another vertical subtext within the narrative. This text within the text creates an effect of hypertextuality that requires the reader to move back and forth between texts and shifting reading. These footnotes do not appear in the English translation. They include historical references, a glossary, and numerous citations from Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh’s encyclopedia *Bilādunā Filasṭīn*,¹⁰⁶ which documents the historical geography of Palestine.

Moreover, the supernatural is evident in the enigma of Saraya. Although the narrative explicitly states that Sarya is the narrator’s boyhood companion, she might or might not have been a real girl. Late in his life, she appears to him again, as youthful as

¹⁰⁶See Muṣṭafā Dabbāgh, *Bilādunā Filasṭīn* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ṭalī‘ah, 1965).

ever, the symbol of something intangible and elusive. Two weeks before his death on May 2, 1996, Ḥabībī continued to insist that the figure of Saraya was a product of pure imagination and fantasy.¹⁰⁷

Although Ḥabībī's *khurafiyya* is written as a fantastic narrative that bears the effect of amazement, it is deeply rooted in the realities of the Palestinian history. Saraya appears in 1983 during "the summer of the sixth war, the war against Lebanon" (15). She calls out to him and says: "The homeland longs for its people Abdallah. Have you forgotten about us?" (35). The fairytale also reflects Ḥabībī's own history, who like his fictional counterpart in Saraya, was born in Haifa and never left. A realistic account of this history appeared a few year later after the publication of the novel.

Indeed, in the January issue of *Mashārīf* in 1996, Ḥabībī dedicated his regular editorial to a reflection on the meaning of Palestinian reunions after sixty years of separation that resulted from the displacement of *al-Nakba*. Six months before his death, Ḥabībī reminisced on his youth and his friends who went into exile. He also celebrated reconnecting with some of them that were allowed to return to the Occupied West Bank and Gaza after the Oslo Accord in 1993. Describing his condition as a Palestinian who remained in Haifa after it fell under Israeli rule, he pens: "The catastrophe of my generation of Palestinians is its trauma. We were to become absentees in our own homeland, and we endured the absentification of our memory, nation, and ancient history. This is how our situation was then, in those times. A strange situation; as if all us were

¹⁰⁷ That was Ḥabībī's response to the question if the novel was real. For the complete and last interview with Ḥabībī, see Dalia Karpel, *Imil Ḥabibi: Nisharti Be-Hefah = Emile Habiby: I Stayed in Haifa* (Tel Aviv: Transfax Film Productions, 1998).

transformed into ghosts with a trickster's magic" (11).¹⁰⁸

In *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter* the supernatural plays a dual role. Paradoxically, the supernatural conveys as well as resists two outcomes of *al-Nakba*: a temporality of present-absent and spatial rupture. The narrator is the present-absentee. His presence on the ruins of Al-Zeeb triggers his memory of the Palestinian absence, while the phantom of Saraya reminds him of the rupture between what/who used to be then/there and what/who exits now/here. And at this intersection of broken-time and broken-place, Ḥabībī's narrative emerges with a direct engagement of the supernatural as a potential route to examine the past through fragments of memory and place.

The narrative navigates a slippery terrain of memory/place by maintaining a constant duality of a present-absent mindset, both in relation to time and place. Therefore, time and place exist on the threshold between two contradictions: reality versus fiction, truths versus lies, existence versus non-existence, and Ḥabībī, versus the narrator. In fact, the lines between who/what is present versus who/what is absent remain blurry throughout the narrative. This blurriness is enhanced by the persistence of the supernatural world, as the narrative continues to be haunted with the mirage of Saraya as well as the spirits of the demolished village of Al-Zeeb.¹⁰⁹

The mythical figure of Saraya sustains its mystery as it metamorphosizes from the actual ogre's daughter who appears in the popular Palestinian folktale "*Sarāyā bint al-*

¹⁰⁸ Imīl Ḥabībī, "Qaṭrah qaṭrah: Ashbah bisharḥ al-mā' min sharbat mā'." *Mashārīf*. 6.1 (1996): 5-12. Citations from the essay above are my translation.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Zeeb, situated on the shore of the Mediterranean between Acre and the Lebanese border, was a large village, with a population of approximately 2,000 and an area of some 10,000 *dunams*. The village was attacked with mortar fire by the Jewish forces in May 13-14, 1948. Many of its inhabitants fled and the rest were expelled from the country or transferred to the nearby Palestinian village of al-Mazra'a. For more details about the history of the village and the decision to change its name in Arabic from Al-Zeeb to Akhziv, see Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984), and Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

ghūl,” to a representation of a Palestinian young female refugee, to a former childhood lover of Ḥabībī and his ultimate muse. With every different appearance that Saraya makes in the narrative, there is a distinct tone and sentiment to describe her character, yet she remains unattainable. The first time Saraya appears, she comes in the form of a sister that might have been killed by her brother for bearing an illegitimate child, yet the brother keeps asking about her while it is not sure if he is in denial about what he did or sincerely wondering about her loss:

The voice was hers, and it called to me as once it did- now loving, now scolding.

Had she finally come back to me? Had she returned from among the living, or as a ghost from among the dead?

Should I pronounce her name loudly, for all the world to laugh at me, or weep for me?

“Saraya!” (38)

In another episode, the narrator is depicted sitting on the boulder of Al-Zeeb fishing at night, when a vision of Saraya appears again. This time, he speaks directly to Saraya, his childhood lover/the Ogre’ daughter. In a moment of nostalgic flashback to the girl who used to hold his hand and take him on secret excursion to Mount Carmel in Haifa before she became a refugee, the narrator is thrilled to speak to the apparition of Saraya:

Come, my phantom, come out, O ghost of Saraya, from beneath the shrubs at the bottom of the rocky *wadi*. Laugh, laugh loudly to break the spell, so our friend might be restored to his normal, monotonous life! (50)

However, this unsettling, yet desired encounter with Saraya is short lived as the next time Saraya appears, the narrator expresses guilt for his ability to forget. He asks: “Do I see in your eyes a reproach, from which my conscience has averted its gaze all my life, afraid of losing that certainty?” (38). In this encounter with Saraya’s eyes, Ḥabībī conveys the dilemma of the present-absentee: How can he come to terms with the absence of those who had gone, despite the fact that he is dwelling in their ruins? The reproach in Saraya’s eyes becomes a call to those who remained to collectively resist national amnesia. Saraya’s eyes urge them to keep the memory of the refugees, as if this virtually live memory foreshadows their inevitable return:

Here his rock, tumbling from the heights of Mount Carmel, hits an obstacle, and rolls off course: You, absent dear ones, must not be content with a nymph you can take to your beds as a substitute for a homeland, believing “you may choose whatever form for her you like.” Nymphs live only in Paradise. Saraya, however, and despite the dust heaps of oblivion, is flesh and blood! (77)

Saraya’s appearances challenge the notion of a broken time by revealing a pre *al-Nakba* past, which surfaces in the present time of Palestinians in Israel as an unstable mirage full of guilt, yearning, nostalgia and visions of Palestinian return. Saraya’s appearance is then a symbolic gesture to the residual. It emphasizes the fact that the Palestinians who remained on the land continue to dwell in the ruins, inheriting the legacy of those vanquished, displaced and exiled.

In her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym draws a useful distinction between “restorative” nostalgia and “reflective” nostalgia. Restorative

nostalgia, which characterizes nationalist and nationalist revivals all over the world, as she argues, concentrates on the *nostos*—returning to the lost home. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, concentrates on the *algia*—the longing and the sense of loss, or “the imperfect process of remembrance,” (40) as she puts it. Boym further adds: “Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time”. Boym’s notion of these two distinct modes of nostalgia illuminates the Palestinian narrative here. Saraya’s appearance exemplifies the *nostos*, or the return of the refugee to her lost home, derived by her deep *ḥanīn*, or longing for home. The narrator’s memory of Saraya, however, represents *algia*. It is a memory of lost Palestine. It is also reflective nostalgia that conveys his sense of exile, *ghurbah*. But, since he is among those who remained in the homeland, this *ghurbah* is internal-exile.

Moreover, her resurrection from the Palestinian ruins paradoxically revives the memory of the village of Al-Zeeb. However, this revival engages critical reflection-recollection on the place as it used to be while simultaneously trying to capture with a critical gaze the transformations, or more specifically, Judaization, in whatever remained from Al-Zeeb:

His colleagues were busy readying the coals and wood for broiling the meat and fish in a corner of the State of al-Zeeb prepared by their cousin, for this purpose. They used it as had other vagabonds, some from beyond the Sea of Darkness. They were the first ever to put grilled meat into the mouths of their Ashkenazi cousins, and the first to put its fragrant smell into their Slavic noses. Before our cousins came, they knew nothing of

charcoal's superiority to the little electrically heated pipes they call a grill (until they were reached by Americanization, at which point they began to call it a "barbecue"). We didn't ask them to change this curious name in return for teaching them how to charcoal broil. In fact, we asked of them nothing- in the way of recompense or gratitude- except that they think of us as consumers of grilled meat rather than of meat that was fit to be grilled and then consumed. Who taught them to say *manqal* (brazier) instead of barbecue? Without any warning, we found them one day referring to the grill by this name, pronouncing the "q" as Egyptians pronounce their hard "g"- the way our Bedouin forbears used to say it: *mangal*. (36)

In this recollection of the life of the fishermen in Al-Zeeb, the narrator does not invoke or reclaim the village as a lost paradise. Yet, he highlights the living spirit of Al-Zeeb by pointing out its long-standing tradition of grilling meat. Despite its physical destruction, Al-Zeeb remains alive, since its culinary tradition has survived the Judaization of the village and the Israeli appropriation of its language and cultural history.

The supernatural in *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter* constitutes the Palestinian national narrative through its representation of the temporality of the present-absent and spatial rupture. The narrator's encounters with Saraya reflect his present-absent temporality and elusive state of being. Moreover, his invocation of the spirits of Al-Zeeb reflects his attempts to write *against* spacial rupture, erasure and the displacement of the people of Al-Zeeb. Both of these trends are foundational elements of the Palestinian

narrative of *al-Nakba*, and they have manifested themselves in Palestinian literature in two domains: fragmented form and irony.

In *The Question of Palestine* (1979), Edward Said argues that there is a paradox of contemporaneity for the Palestinians. On the one hand, the present “cannot be “given” simply (that is, if time will now allow him either to differentiate clearly between his past and his present or to connect them because the 1948 disaster, unmentioned except as an episode hidden within episodes, prevents continuity. On the other hand, the present is intelligible only as an achievement” (158). In *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1999), Said continues to elaborate on this paradox in the context of literature. He argues: “The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction is its formal instability: Our literature in a certain very narrow sense is the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent” (38). Following Said, I contend that the elusive dimension of Ḥabībī’s narrative reflects the formal instability of Palestinian fiction.

In “Irony and the Poetics of Palestinian Exile,” (2006) Ibrahim Muhawi observes that irony, as a practice that unites literary form with historical experience is characteristic of the exilic presence-absence experience of the Palestinian people. While he identifies this trend in the writings of Palestinians in external exile, including the memoirs of Edward Said and Maḥmūd Darwīsh and the short stories of Nasri Hajja, he argues that irony was equally evident in the works of Palestinian writers in Israel, such as Samīh Qāsim, and Imīl Ḥabībī, who “live in a state of internal exile, caught on the horns of a dilemma” (34). This dilemma of the present-absent, Muhawi, rightfully argues, applies to all Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel: “The land on which they live is their homeland, but the dominant culture is not their culture and the country is not their

country. Their civic status as citizens is compromised by the fact of their not being Jews” (34). Muhawi continues to argue that irony in Palestinian literature, in both external and internal exile, redresses the imbalance in the equation of presence and absence through some sort of reversal of the condition that has created the present-absent state of affairs in the first place. He concludes: “The simplest reversal is to negate the negation by mean of a heroic or mock-heroic affirmation” (35). In *Saraya, the Ogre’s Daughter*, reversal occurs when Saraya emerges from the sea as a refugee from exile who reminds the narrator of his own internal exile.

It is important to note here that Ḥabībī’s reflection on the etymology of the word fairytale in Arabic at the very beginning of the novel exemplifies both the irony and elusiveness of his narrative. It also demonstrates the tension between fiction and autobiography. In his attempts to emphasize that *Saraya, the Ogre’s Daughter* is only a *khurafiyya*, a fairly tale, Ḥabībī invokes numerous variations from the three-letter root of the word *kh-r-f*. Among these variations, he includes *khurafa*, “a man who offers up — by way of excuse- the claim that he had acted under a genie’s spell,” (9) “or perhaps senility—*kharaf*,” (9) and “*khareef*,” (10) which means autumn. In pointing out to the fragility of truth telling or writing about the past, including his own personal history, Ḥabībī stresses the fictitious aspect of his narrative. In other words, he asserts the difficulty of reclaiming that past or representing it accurately. He confesses:

I am neither a scholar nor a critic. But I have found myself able — since I realized that it was in fact impossible to “carry two watermelons under one arm” — even in the autumn of my life, or my *khareef* — to make up for the gains of the “philosophy of science” that I missed while immersed in

the illusions of the “science of philosophy (10).

This episode is also telling in that it problematizes the nature of the Arabic language, and the organic relationship of words to one another. In attesting to the different possible meanings that derive from the root *kh-r-f*, and the particular vernacular history of each word, Ḥabībī refutes the notion that Arabic is a vital component of Palestinian national identity.

Setting the narrative of *Saraya, the Ogre’s Daughter* on the ruin of Al-Zeeb, Ḥabībī resists oblivion and the absentification of the village, in an attempt to defy the spatial rupture in Palestinian geography. However, this act of resistance is not simple. The discontinuous emergence of Saraya as a spirit-ghost from Al-Zeeb reveals the challenge of reviving the history of ruins. Since Saraya comes and goes in the narrative, she has no permanence. Therefore, she is not the sole reference for writing the memories of Al-Zeeb. Hence, the narrator resorts to the actual history of the village, in order to anchor his revival of its memory.

Indeed, there are several anecdotes in the novel in which the narrator recalls Roman history. Retelling stories about the history of the village and narrating how the locals used to bury their dead on the hill, where Roman skulls were found is one example:

The searchlight guided him to the soldiers’ position on top of the hill. All he had to do was feel his way forward, reach a small rise, then climb over two stone steps he knew well. When he reached the nearby rise--a sandy mound—he went off to the right a little, avoiding the searchlight. It was a site that villagers of al-Zeeb had chosen long ago as the burial ground of

their dead. Later on, Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh taught as in his encyclopedia that the skulls in the hill-of-skulls went back to Roman times. In my day it had been violated by human hands, the sea, the wind, until the openings of graves were revealed on the side we used to pass by (42).

Invoking the Roman roots of Al-Zeeb conveys its long history, while highlighting the fact that the narrator's knowledge of this history comes from a Palestinian encyclopedia. Moreover, when the narrator points out-- with partial nostalgia and partial realism--that Al-Zeeb has evolved over the years, he demonstrates that as an indigenous person who enjoys historical continuity with the land, because he has a very intimate knowledge of the place.

In *The Object of Memory* (1998), Susan Slyomovics argues that "Palestinian have developed the capacity to see palimpsests: Jewish Israeli Achziv functions as a sign for Palestinian Arab al-Zīb"(117). She adds:

In response to the loss of homeland, Palestinian writers have developed a sense of place, self-consciously reimagining a Palestine to which one may attach. Palestinian writing embraces the conviction that only the Arab language, in either its classical literary form or vernacular form, speaks the truth of the real inhabitants of the ancestral homeland. Like many Palestinians who remained on the soil of historical Palestine after 1948, [poets] seek consolation in the belief that the Israelis will never know or love the land as intimately as Palestinians or speak in accents appropriate to the place. The cultural and linguistic landscape will never reflect Jewish

Israeli tastes or values”(172-3).

In light of this, the revival of Al-Zeeb is established through the affirmation of a Palestinian linguistic and cultural identity of the village. When Ḥabībī’s describes the Palestinian cultural practice of grilling meat, he uses a word from the Palestinian vernacular, *manqal*, rather than a more classical one in *fushā* Arabic, such as *mijmarah*. On the other hand, his ironic critique of the fact that Israelis have adopted a Bedouin pronunciation of *mangal*, illustrates his criticism of Israeli culture trying to claim authenticity, while appropriating, what is commonly, yet arguably, considered the original Arabic.

Moreover, Ḥabībī’s assertion of indigeneity through the narrator’s invocation of the linguistic and cultural history of Al-Zeeb exemplifies resistance to spatial rupture. Similarly to the literature of village memorial books that displaced Palestinians in the diaspora have been writing since *al-Nakba*, Ḥabībī’s narrative identifies Palestinians in relationship to their landscape. In her essential work on the Palestinian village memorial books, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*, Rochelle Davis (2011) observes: “Palestinians cite the many civilizations that pre-dated the modern period as proof that through these histories they themselves have had a long existence on this land” (199). She also notes that this notion of genealogy and land-based identification are particularly foundational aspects of Palestinian nationalism. Davis elaborates:

This conception of the Palestinian past— as a continuous movement of time that shaped Palestinians into the diverse group they have become— imagines the Palestinian homeland as a *place* the history of which has

shaped who Palestinians are today. In this view, Palestinians understanding of their history as people is not only tied to the creation of the modern nation-state, but also invoke an inheritance of all that has happened on that land for everyone who has been there...this way of thinking in terms of a land-based identification category is in opposition to the ethnic and religious identification that defines Israeli identity as a Jewish state for a group of people identified as Jews (although it does give citizenship to non-Jews) (201).

Davis' emphasis of the significance of land in Palestinian nationalism and its assertion of indigeneity becomes even more important, if we take into account the current political context of Palestinian lives in and outside this land: Palestinian refugees living in exile, Palestinians in Israel living in a state of internal-colonialism since 1948, and those in Gaza and the West Bank living under military occupation and Apartheid since 1967. In these different realities, which share a common history of lack of control over the homeland, an anti-colonial narrative highlighting land-based identification emerges as a foundational expression of Palestinian national identity.

It is thus clear that situating *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter* in Al-Zeeb not only commemorates the destroyed village and resists spatial rupture, but also asserts a rooted sense of Palestinian nationalism and indigeneity. Henceforth, Ḥabībī's fairytale becomes a political text reinforcing a Palestinian national and historical narrative. However, instead of delivering this narrative from the podium of the Israeli Knesset as a political speech, Ḥabībī tells a fairytale.

III: Conclusion

So, what do dreams and stories from the people of the bat, and from the daughter of an Ogre, tell us? First, they reveal stories about the contemporary reality of each group. They convey images about the political and social struggles of the Mayans in Chiapas, including land rights and Ladino oppression. They also relate stories about the dispossession of Palestinians after *al-Nakba* and the internal-exile of Palestinians in Israel. In both sets of narratives, the ancestors are magically invoked, in order to help the Mayans and the Arab-Palestinians make sense of their present.

In fact, in Mayan, as in Palestinian literature, the supernatural serves a political function that goes beyond the fantastic. It is political, insofar as it simultaneously expresses and constitutes both indigeneity and Mayan and Arab-Palestinian ethnicities, respectively.

In indigenous studies, oral narratives, especially stories about ancestors, legends, dreams and fairytales, are considered an essential medium for ethnic identification and history-making. These narratives express an indigenous sense of landscape, community and place. They also write histories. After the colonial encounter, indigenous people worked up these histories, or historical interpretations, “in order to explain their plight to themselves, and so helped themselves to survive” (Attwood and Magowan, xiii). According to this paradigm, the invocation of the past, through remembering common myths and spirits, articulates an indigenous identity that affirms a historical linkage with pre-colonial ancestry.

Second, the supernatural element in the Mayan and Palestinian narratives indicates that the two indigenous minorities are reclaiming a history as people who

belong to an ethnic majority that existed prior to the moment of minoritization. Not only do they have memories, stories, myths and dreams in common with this (forgotten) ethnic majority, but they also live in the same landscape where all these narratives occurred. Following Stuart Hall's (1996) and Anthony D. Smith's (1996) notion of rooted ethnicity, I conclude that, in the Mayan dream narratives and the Palestinian fairytale, one can observe a construction of ethnicities that are associated with a cultural and historical legacy of a place.

Indeed, Hall argues that ethnicity is constructed in history, through one's positionality in relation to the past. He writes: "There is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from some *place*, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions" (348). In other words, a shared history of place is an integral element of ethnicity. However, it must be noted here that Hall does not essentialize ethnicity in relation to place. Describing the interest of immigrants who live in ethnic enclaves in the marginal societies of the British Commonwealth in rewriting the history of the world, and not only their own, Hall concludes that ethnicity "is no longer contained within [that] place as an essence. [Ethnicity] wants to address a much wider variety of experience" (349).

Smith shares a similar definition. He asserts: "An ethnic community is a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity" (447). For Smith, sharing a common territory is foundational, because it allows ethnic groups to become national. He explains that "What is less often appreciated is that, to become

national, shared memories must attach themselves to specific places and definite territories. The process by which certain kinds of shared memories are attached to particular territories so that the former become ethnic landscapes (or ethnoscap^{es}) and the latter become historic homelands, can be called the ‘*territorialization of memory*’” (454). It follows, then, that contextualizing memory in a specific topography having a particular cultural meaning highlights the duality of memory and place in the construction of ethnicity.

Both the Mayan dreams from Zinacantán, and the Palestinian fairytale about a spirit of a refugee roaming on the shore of Al-Zeeb, are narratives of memory that construct Mayans and Palestinians as ethnicity, respectively. In the dreams and fantasies from Zinacantán, Mayan ethnicity is constructed and reasserted through motifs that reflect geographical identification with the landscape of Chiapas, as well as the historical continuity with beliefs and dreams, as they are manifested in Mayan religion. In Ḥabībī’s fairytale, on the other hand, Palestinian ethnicity is professed in the stories that emerge from Al-Zeeb. Paradoxically, this village becomes a site for telling stories about the historical roots of Palestinians, while its ruins stand as monuments of *al-Nakba*, thus testifying to conquest, settler colonialism, dispossession, erasure and oblivion.

Furthermore, the political function that the supernatural serves in both the Mayan and Palestinian narratives also marks an aesthetic difference from the tradition of magical realism in Latin American literature, as well as the dream narratives in Arabic literature.

Since its emergence in 1949 with Alejo Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* (The Kingdom of This World) and its “aggressive assertion of Latin America’s ontological difference from Europe,” (Warnes 5) magical realism “promoted the celebration of the

primitive, the emphasis on aesthetic experimentation, and the deliberate and self-conscious assault on rationalism” (Warnes 5). Jorge Luis Borges emphasized further this distinction, when he asserted later on the superiority of Latin American culture over its European counterpart, and called for treating ideas from Europe with “irreverent, philosophically minded magical realism” (Warnes 5).

With the Latin American Boom in 1960s and 1970s, and the flourishing of literary works from Latin American countries amidst wide international recognition, as represented by Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) (1967), which won the Nobel Prize in 1982, magical realism became the aesthetic language for radical questioning of reality. Relying heavily on modernism, magical realist novels moved away from tradition to write postmodern fiction, while at the same time examining the paradoxical nature of the existence of Latin America on the margins of Western society (Schroeder 25). In this context, these novels developed a language of magic. What distinguished this trend of magical realism, some critics argue, is the fact that magic in these texts “may have the effect of unmasking the real, showing up its claim to truth to be provisional and contingent on consensus” (Warnes 9).

In the case of Mayan dream narratives, however, magic, or supernatural, does not appear as a mode of questioning reality, but rather as an expression of a fundamentally different notion of reality. The supernatural in the dream narratives of the people of the bat reveals political and social critique of indigenous reality in modern Chiapas from a Mayan cosmic understanding of reality. Jacinto Arias Pérez (2004) sums up this trend:

In the existential framework, the supernaturalistic outlook of Chiapanecan Catholics is an explanation of human interaction with

the world; interaction which, sublimated (they say) by grace, becomes a channel for supernatural life. The Tzotzil-Tzeltal's interaction with the world and fellow humans, on the contrary, is not taken as a means, but as an end in itself; interaction with the invisible world is aimed at maintaining the harmony of the tangible habitat of humankind. (123)

In the Palestinian case, however, the supernatural appearance of Saraya in Ḥabībī's fairytale, is best understood in the context of dreams discourse in early Islamic history and classical Arabic literature. In both traditions, dreams represent special authority, intimacy and inner vision.

Indeed, in her study of dream narratives in early Islam, Leah Kinberg (2008) argues that, in the first three centuries of the Islamic era, dreams played a didactic role in Islamic theology and literature. Dreams appeared in debates about the merits of Qur'anic study (and recitation) and the transmission of Prophetic saying, *ḥadīth*. In these debates, dreams imparted special authority, because they were considered "deliverers of truth from the next world (*dār al-ḥaqq*) into this one" (30). In addition, Kinberg contends that, since the daily experiences related in dreams served as a means to measure the relationship between acts in the present world and rewards in the next, thus helping decipher the enigma of divine retribution, dreams became "the ultimate source of profound knowledge, authoritative enough to settle major communal disputes... including the relative status of the Quran and the *ḥadīth*" (30).

Moreover, studying the different manifestations and visual interpretations of dreams in Islamic mysticism, Nadia Al-Baghdadi (2006) concludes that intimacy and

inner vision sought through dream made for individuation and subjectivity. Therefore, she adds, dreams emerged as central to autobiographical mystic works in Medieval Arab literature, including al-Imām al-Tirmidhī diaries and Ibn ‘Arabī’s visual experiences. Both works, Al-Baghdadi summons, build on Imām al-Ghazālī’s notion that “Intimacy in the relation with God can be reached through unveiling and inner vision and not through illusion and empty imagining” (137).

Although Ḥabībī invokes the vision of Saraya in the context of this literary tradition of dream discourse, the constant metamorphosis of Saraya and her different appearances throughout the fairytale, which manipulates illusion and fantasy, as Ḥabībī himself insists, does not allow for authority, intimacy or inner vision. Here, I would argue, the political text of the supernatural is manifest. Since Saraya is denied the intimacy, inner vision and authority of being a dream, her return becomes possible. Alternatively, as an “alternative text,” Ḥabībī’s fairytale is a futuristic Palestinian narrative of return.

In conclusion, the supernatural as a political text in the Mayan dream narratives and the Palestinian fairytale discussed above characterizes the emergence of Mayan and Palestinian literatures as “alternative texts”. This alterity, I conclude, stems from the fact that they create a particular, localized, and distinct discourse of magical realism and dreams.

She Dwells On The Border: Indigenous Women Writing

The emergence of Mayan women writers in Chiapas, Mexico and Palestinian women writers in Israel in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked an important historical moment in the development of both Mayan and Palestinian literary traditions. This trend involved several forms of border-crossings, which ultimately shifted the discourse about the confinement and marginalization of indigenous minority writings. Perhaps more than their male counterparts, and due to their reality as female subjects who endured multiple forms of oppression, including the patriarchal social order and colonial racism, Mayan and Palestinian women writers contested in their own work the boundaries of both minoritization and national imagination. They reclaimed their agency as indigenous women who have a voice that expresses their own reality and resistance to the different oppressive orders that surround them.

In this chapter, I focus on a group of Palestinian women novelists and Mayan women playwrights. These writers crossed and contested several borders in their own writings, as well as in their own personal lives as pioneering indigenous women. In particular, I look at the work of prominent Palestinian women writers who belong to the third-generation of *al-Nakba*: Adanīyah Shiblī, Maysūn Asadī, and Ibtisām ‘Āzim.

These writers are part of a generation that was born after the 1966 dismantling of Israeli military rule,¹¹⁰ and the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai

¹¹⁰ As mentioned in previous chapters, during Military Rule (1949-1966) Palestinians in Israel lived in complete segregation, and were prevented from having any contact with the wider Arab world and their fellow Palestinians. They also lived under heavy state surveillance that imposed restrictions on their movement and freedom of speech. However, after the 1967 Six Day War, this barrier between Palestinians in Israel and their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza was eliminated. Among the direct results

Peninsula, and the Golan Heights, commonly known as *al-Naksa* (The Setback). They came of age in the 1970s–1990s, while making headway in gaining education and access to the workplace, and in forging new grounds in collective and public organizing (Nusair 101). In addition to their work as novelists, Shiblī, Asadī and ‘Āzim are journalists by training.¹¹¹ They are also part of the emerging Palestinian intelligentsia in Israel that left their villages in the periphery to study, work and live in the cities of Haifa, Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem.

In comparison, I also examine the works of Mayan women playwrights, such as Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa, who emerged in the early 1980s with plays and performances in Mayan languages, as well as Spanish. Both Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa left their Mayan villages, Zinacantán and Aguacatenango, both located in the Chiapas highlands, and moved to the city of San Cristóbal, where they came to prominence as the first indigenous women playwrights in Mexico. They were also part of a cultural movement that came to be known as the Mayan Renaissance. In 1994, they established *FOMMA, Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya* (The Empowerment of Maya Women). As a feminist theatre collective and an organization of Mayan women in San Cristóbal, FOMMA focuses on indigenous and women’s rights and provides workshops and programs to promote literacy, cultural preservation and education.

What I intend to accomplish in this comparison is to demonstrate how these

of this “reunification” was increased contact with the greater Arab world and a wider exposure to its literary and cultural production.

¹¹¹ Shiblī studied Journalism and Communication at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She also holds a Ph.D. in Media & Cultural Studies from the University of East London. Asadī studied journalism in Tel-Aviv, and she is an affiliated reporter with the Communist Party newspaper, *il-ittihād*, in Haifa. ‘Āzim has been working as a journalist, producer and correspondent for DW-TV-Arabic in Berlin since 2007. She continues to be their correspondent in New York after she moved to the US in 2010. She also writes regularly in the cultural section of numerous leading newspapers in Arabic, including *al-akhbār* in Lebanon and *al-Jazeera.net* in Qatar.

Palestinian and Mayan women writers have contributed to Palestinian and Mayan literatures in general, while simultaneously forging a path for indigenous feminist writers who continue to challenge the division and power relations of minority-majority. Following a close reading of their works and personal interviews with these writers,¹¹² I map the major tropes that constitute their feminist texts: addressing violence against women, critiquing the gendered notion of the nation, and examining the city as a colonial metropolis that is fraught with racism against the indigenous.

I: Journeys Across the Motherland: Palestinian Women Novelists Crossing the Green Line¹¹³

Adanīyah Shiblī, Maysūn Asadī, and Ibtisām ‘Āzim are not the first Palestinian women novelists in Israel. Since *al-Nakba* in 1948, Palestinian women have contributed to Palestinian literary culture through the preservation of Arab and Palestinian oral traditions and folksongs. They have also written poems, narratives and short stories, which have appeared in local newspapers and self-published books. Among this pioneering generation of women who survived *al-Nakba*, writers such as Su‘ād Qarmān (b. 1927) and Najwā Qa’wār Farah (b. 1932-) should be noted for verses and narratives that address women’s issues, the loss of Historic Palestine and its aftermath, and other political concerns. These writers were followed by the first post- *al-Nakba* generation of

¹¹² Due to personal circumstances and objection to the categorization as women writers, Shiblī’ declined to be interviewed during the time of writing this chapter. She wrote: “In fact, I do not define myself according to gender. My definition is simple. I write in Arabic. Concerning other issues; well, they all become part of the writing process.” Shiblī, ‘Adanīyah, “Re: An Article about your Novels.” Message to Amal Equeiq. 27 Aug. 2012. E-mail.

¹¹³ After the emergence of Israel in 1948, the new state’s limits were determined by the cease-fire agreement in 1949. This agreement resulted in an armistice line that designated Israel’s borders with Jordan (then Transjordan). This armistice line, known as the ‘Green Line’, created territorial division between Palestinians in Israel, who became to be known as Palestinians of “*al-dākhil*” (Inside), or Palestinians/Arabs of 1948, and Palestinians of “*al-diffah*” (The Bank), in reference to the Palestinians who lived in the newly separated territory known as the West Bank.

Fātmah Diāb (b. 1951), Sihām Dāwūd (b. 1953), Shawqīyah ‘Urūq (b. 1957) and Asia Shiblī, (b. 1958-), who wrote journalistic pieces, poetry, short stories, social and literary criticism in the daily newspaper of the Communist Party, *il-ittiḥād*, and its literary supplement, *al-Jadīd*, as well as in independent and commercial weekly newspapers, such as *Kul al-‘Arab* and *al-Ṣinnārah*, to name but a few. However, apart from Najwā Qa’wār Farah¹¹⁴ and Sihām Dāwūd,¹¹⁵ the literary production of these women writers received little attention from Palestinian, or Arab critics beyond the borders of the so-called Green Line. A relative amount of critical attention, however, was given to Palestinian men writers, especially the generation of *Shu‘arā’ al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets).¹¹⁶

The invisibility of this first and second generation of Palestinian women writers in Palestinian and Arabic literature reflects a larger political and cultural trend, which includes “the marginalization of Palestinians in Israel within the larger Palestinian nationalist discourse, which often dismisses them as co-opted by the Israeli state of which they are citizens” (Kanaaneh & Nusair 25). In this context of marginalization, Palestinian literature in Israel received attention mostly from Palestinian critics in Israel, who described it as *adab maḥallī*¹¹⁷ (local literature). The very few Israeli academics

¹¹⁴In comparison to the other writers, both Najwā Qa’wār Farah and Sihām Dāwūd received more attention from both local and national Palestinian literary historians and critics. Their work was featured in Salma Khadra Jayyusi’s *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992), Nathalie Handal’s *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2001) and Mahmud Ghanāyim’s *Al-madār Al-Ṣa‘b: Riḥlat Al-Qiṣṣah Al-Filasṭīniyah Fī Isrā’īl* (1995). In a section dedicated to women’s short stories from the 1970s’, Ghanāyim’s also addressed the work of Shawqīyah ‘Urūq and Asia Shiblī.

¹¹⁵ Sihām Dāwūd’s poems were also translated into Hebrew. See Sihām Dāwūd and Sasson Somekh. *Ani Ohevet Bi-Deyo Levanah: Shirim* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat po‘alim, 1981).

¹¹⁶ See chapter 1 and 2 of this dissertation for a brief discussion on *Shu‘arā’ al-muqāwamah* (Resistance Poets) and their contribution to Palestinian culture and literature during the Military Rule in 1949-1966.

¹¹⁷ For example, Nabih El Qasim, one of the earliest and most prominent Palestinian critics uses this category to distinguish the particularity of this literary tradition from national Palestinian literature. The titles of his canonical studies reflect this trend. See Nabīh Qāsim’s study on Palestinian short stories, *Dirāsāt Fī Al-Qiṣṣah Al-Maḥallīyah*. ‘Akkā al-Qadīmah: al-Aswār, 1979 and his later book on Palestinian

who studied it, however, did so in Middle East Studies departments in Israeli universities, and they categorized the work as “Arab-Israeli” literature. Yet, in both cases, works by Palestinian women writers were underrepresented.

The invisibility of Palestinian women writers, both locally and nationally, is further enhanced by their gender identity and their marginalization as women who belong to an indigenous national minority. Palestinian feminist, Nahla Abdo - Zubi, attests to this paradigm. She declares:

For most of my life as a Palestinian (with Israeli citizenship), I was always reminded that I have no place or space in my own homeland, reminded I was inferior to the non-Palestinian (Jewish) citizens of Israel, all of which was done not in the name of a straightforward patriarchal rule against women, but rather against ‘me’ as a member of an ‘inferior,’ ‘backward,’ and ‘alien’ nation. My very presence and belonging has often been denied. The overwhelming obsession of the Jewish state with my national identity, was expressed, among other ways, in the confiscation of land, the Judaization of Palestinian land, the imprisonment and silencing of critical voices, the distortion of our history in textbooks at schools, the denial of Palestinian citizens of equal access to labor, education, political and other areas of the public sphere, had the impact of subsuming my feminist identity under my national one. (Abdo - Zubi and Lentin 7)

In her introduction to *Palestinian Feminist Writings: Between Oppression and Resistance*

poetry, *Iḏā‘ah ‘alā Al-Shi‘r Al-Filasṭīnī Al-Maḥallī*. S.l.: Dār al-Mashriq lil-Tarjamah wa-al-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr, 1987. On the other hand, Israeli critic Ami Elad uses the term Israeli Arab writers when he discusses Palestinian literature in Israel. See Ami Elad. *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture*. London: F. Cass, 1999

(2007), Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian notes that the reality of Palestinian women in Israel entails several forms of oppression that operate in a hierarchal order. First, being part of an oppressed indigenous minority who lives in its homeland, “a Palestinian woman in Israel suffers the consequences of national oppression. She is also part of a nation that still suffers oppression in the Jewish state. Moreover, she suffers from male-led patriarchal and social oppressions” (25). Nevertheless, Shalhoub-Kevorkian commends Palestinian women for developing creative strategies to dismantle both power relations and these different systems of oppression despite the complexities, intersections and the hierarchy of patriarchal oppressions involved.

In this context of Palestinian feminists fighting invisibility and negotiating a consciousness of resistance to the intersecting and multiple forms of colonial, national and gender oppressions, Shiblī, Asadī, and ‘Āzim emerged as novelists. The literary history of their debut novels including, Shiblī’s *Masās (Touch)* (2003), Asadī’s *Kalām Ghayr Mubāḥ* (Forbidden Talk) (2008) and ‘Āzim’s *Sāriq al-Nawm: Gharīb Hifāwi* (The Sleep Thief) (2011), reflects this context of Palestinian feminists dismantling power relations and borders. But, before proceeding to discuss the works of Shiblī, Asadī, and ‘Āzim, we must recall here the larger history of Palestinian women novelists, in order to better understand the context of gender and border crossing.

Noted Palestinian feminist critic Amal Amireh (2003) argues that the Palestinian literary national narrative is erotic and male. She writes: “Palestine is metaphorized as a woman, and the Palestinian is represented as a male lover, a groom, and a defender” (750). Within this narrative, defeat and humiliation are prominent experiences that solidify the nation and its collective consciousness. The narrative of defeat and

humiliation results from the loss of the land as well as the military loss in both *al-Nakba* in 1948 and *al-Naksa* in 1967. And according to this gendered narrative that equates nationalisms with male virility, “The Palestinian male fails to possess the land; [and] the homeland [...] is a female body possessed by others” (751).

Palestinian women novelists, both in the homeland and the diaspora, have written against this inscription of a gendered nation. This trend is particularly evident in the works of canonical novelists, such as Saḥar Khalīfah (b. 1941-) Liyānah Badr (b.1952-). Indeed, Barbar Harlow (2002), for example, asserts that Khalīfah’s novels highlight the intersection of feminism and nationalism, through an emphasis on women’s voices and women’s spaces in the Palestinian national agenda of state-building. She identifies Khalīfah’s third novel, *al-Ṣabbār* (Wild Thorns) (1976), for its invocation of the issues of women and family in a narrative that critically examines the Palestinian question. In this novel, Harlow argues, women are marginal and peripheral characters, because of the historical context of the narrative, which is situated in the interim between the June War of 1967 and 1973’s October War both of which ended in an Israeli military defeat of Arab armies: “The conflicting narratives of nationalism and developmentalism that ground the novel’s progression must yield ground to the exigencies of that other narrative tension [that is] so dramatically performed in the brutal death of the Palestinian bride: the sexualized and gendered tension between a nation’s honor and it’s people dishonor” (123).

Moreover, in her review of Badr’s novel on Palestinian exile, Therese Saliba (2002) points out that the novelist commits a highly political act by feminizing the nationalist struggle, when she rewrites gendered metaphors of the nation, as well as the

master narrative of war. For instance, in *Būṣlah min ajl ‘abbād al-shams* (A Compass for the Sunflower) (1980), a narrative of siege and exile during the 1960s and early 1970s, the dialogue between genders figures as a critical aspect of the emergent Palestinian nationalist discourse. This narrative, Saliba argues, “challenges romantic notions of Palestinian revolution, and [the protagonist’s] belief in this “beautiful revolution” is ultimately met with disillusionment as she contends with the realities of gender and class oppression with the Resistance Movement and repeated siege from the outside” 143). Hence, the works of both Khalīfah and Badr, critique masculine narratives of nationalism by putting women at the center.

In a similar fashion to Khalīfah and Badr, Shiblī, Asadī, and ‘Āzim, write against the inscription of the gendered nation. However, what distinguishes their work as Palestinian novelists in Israel, is their negotiation of border crossing in a fragmented Palestinian geography, as well as their engagement with the city as a space that encompasses a paradoxical encounter: a Palestinian national imaginary, on the one hand, and a colonial present, on the other.

In comparison with the first and second generation of Palestinian women writers in Israel, however, the literature of Shiblī, Asadī, and ‘Āzim crossed the border, both physically and metaphorically. Their narratives gained national, and even global recognition. For example, the three novels mentioned above were published across the so-called Green Line, by the Ramallah-based *A. M Al-Qattan* Foundation for Culture and Education in Palestine and the Arab World, the Bethlehem-based *BADIL* Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights and Beirut-and Germany-based *Dar Al-Jamal (Al-Kamel)*, respectively. In addition, Shiblī’s novels and short stories appeared

in English, French, German, Italian, Hebrew and Korean translations. Several of Asadī's short stories have been translated into English, and selections from 'Āzim's novel have appeared in both German and English.

"From the tragedy of the oppressed woman in the village to the trauma of the lost city"¹¹⁸ are the words that Maysūn Asadī' (b. 1963) uses to describe the survival skills that she developed during her move from her hometown village of Deir al-Assad in the Galilee to study and work in Tel-Aviv/Jaffa¹¹⁹ in 1987. For Asadī', the transition to the big city involved a dramatic encounter with a different form of racism and violence. First, she was not able to rent an apartment in Tel-Aviv, because of her Arabic name. Second, as a social worker, she worked closely with Palestinian families in Yaffa, where she was exposed for the first time in her life to rampant gang crime and drug abuse in gentrifying Arab neighborhoods.¹²⁰ Asadī' recalls: "I grew up in a very patriarchal household with my father and brother thinking that it is ok to beat women. I left for Tel-Aviv/Yaffa to work as a mentor for Arab and Jewish youth in dialogue programs. Moving for work was a way for me to escape from the violence of my father. But, I kept sending him and my family portions of my income to legitimize this escape. Even more, I had to deal with the difficulty of being an Arab woman in Tel-Aviv. I asked a Jewish friend from work to rent a place for me under his name, while I was romantically involved with a Palestinian man.

¹¹⁸ Interview with the author in Haifa on September 11, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Jaffa used to be the largest city on the coastal plain in the center of historic Palestine during the time of the British Mandate. I will be using its Arabic name, Yaffa, because it is recognized as such in Palestinian history and literature.

¹²⁰ Since *al-Nakba* and the displacement of the majority of its Palestinian inhabitants, Yaffa has suffered from economic and social marginalization, thus becoming the neglected backyard of the Tel-Aviv metropolis. Today, the city is populated by a Jewish majority, and the Palestinian minority is concentrated in the western quarters of Ajami, Jabaliyya, the Flea Market, and the Heart of Jaffa. Since the 1990s, public housing has become gradually privatized, and the ongoing processes of demolition-renewal- conservation led to rapid gentrification of the Palestinian neighborhoods. For more on the ethnic division in the city and its gentrification, see Itzhak Omer, "Spatial Configuration of Land-Uses and Arab-Jewish Residential Segregation in Jaffa," *Built Environment* 37.2 (2011): 199-212.

For the longest time, the Jewish landlord thought that I was having an affair with two men.”¹²¹

Coming of age as a victim of domestic violence in a Palestinian village and in the decay of the lost city of Yaffa are prominent themes in Asadī’s first collection of short stories *Kalām ghayr mubāḥ* (*Forbidden Talk*) (2008). Throughout the twenty-two short stories, Asadī uses irony, colloquial references and several “bold” titles, such as, “*al-ba’abūs*” (The Middle Finger), “*Ḥammālat al-dala*” (The Bra of Coquetry), and “*el-Ḥub kāfir*” (Love is an Infidel) to tell narratives that challenge social taboos about women and their bodies. These taboos range from confessions of married women about their sexual fantasies to the silence that surrounds the misfortune of a young woman who is murdered by her family members for having a love affair. For Asadī, both confession and silence reflect the social control and oppression of women and their bodies. While confessions occur in the private space of women, silence is a collective public act. Yet, both modes have the purpose of hiding stories about women and their bodies.

In “*Shāy, baskkūt wa sukkar*” (Tea, Biscuits and Sugar), for example, the narrator, a young girl, is mystified by the erotic atmosphere and the sensuality that dominates a monthly waxing party that women in her village organize. Recognizing the girl’s observational talents, the women ask her to guard their “sugar party” (51).¹²² For tea and biscuits in return, the girl’s task is to alert them to any imminent danger, particularly men visitors or the owner of the house returning from his work. The girl turns the window into her watching tower. She sits there, to monitor with her eyes the movement in the world

¹²¹ Phone interview with the author on August 2, 2010.

¹²² Selected stories from *Kalām Ghayr Mubāḥ* were recently translated into English. They appear in Jamal Assadi, and Martha Moody, *Loud Sounds from the Holy Land: Short Fiction by Palestinian Women* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes from this book will come from this translation.

outside, while her ears are focused on hearing the stories that women tell inside, as they undress joyfully in preparation for the waxing ritual:

The women's stories about their husbands were automatically translated in my imagination into real scenes. I saw every woman with her husband performing what she told us, as if she were in a delightfully pornographic play. Sometimes I didn't give the men any role in my plays, because I didn't like them or their bad habits (55).

Hearing the women describe their sex life in graphic detail, the girl is confused about their behavior. She is unable to celebrate their sharing as openness or liberation from taboos. Rather, she calls it "pornographic play". Although one may wonder about the possibility of a young girl being aware of what a "pornographic play" means, the employment of the term in the narrative bridges the innocence of a child with adult speech. The girl speaks in the tongue of women. But her perception of their sex life as an act of "pornographic play" where men have "bad habits" too, conveys her criticism of these women and men. For the girl, sex violates social norms. Yet, she does not understand why some women can talk publicly about sex, while others pay with their lives for being associated with it. Curious and troubled about the social double-standard concerning sex, she refers to the women in search for answers:

I looked at them and said, "Do you love men? Do you love kissing and making love?"

"Yes, each with her own husband," one of them said.

"But you talk so dirty and impolitely!"

"Perhaps not politely, but since it is among us, women, dirty talk is

allowed.”

“Is love allowed?”

“Why, of course! *Allah* [God] makes love legitimate.”

“If that’s true, why was Salwa, who loved Aayed, killed?”

“She was killed because she was not married.”

“Why wasn’t Aayed killed, too?”

“Aayed was a man...” (56)

The girl’s role as both a witness and the guardian of a ritual that she is not part of constitutes her positionality as an insider/outsider in her community. As the guardian of the waxing party, she becomes an insider to the group. As a witness, she is skeptical about the narratives that she hears about women, sex and Salwa’s murder. Hence, she is an outsider. This double positionality of the girl as an insider/outsider informs the critical perspective of the female narrators and protagonists in Asadī’s other stories.

When I asked Asadī if this double positionality reflects her own personal perspective as a Palestinian feminist novelist writing about the “dirty laundry” in her community, she said: “As a social worker, I listened to many stories of battered women. I was sympathetic and empathetic to their pain. My job required me to help them heal and improve their living conditions. As a journalist and a writer, I was and still am critical of the oppressive reality that created these stories, including Salwa’s murder. To write about these women and Salwa was my call for social change.”¹²³

In several stories, the female narrator or protagonist reveals a narrative about women who struggle with discrimination and gender oppression in their local communities. Yet, they still long to be part of the nation that this community belongs to.

¹²³ Interview with the author in Haifa on September 11, 2012.

For these female narrators and/or protagonist, there is tension between gender and nation. This tension is poignantly evident in Asadī's most recent work *Lamlam ḥarīm wa-qīṣaṣ ukhrā* (A Collection of Women and Other stories) (2012).¹²⁴ Here, Asadī invokes the gendered notion of family honor to criticize social norms in her local community as well as the patriarchal constructions of the Palestinian national narrative. In the story “‘ā’ida ilā Hayfā”, (Return to Haifa) Asadī creates a feminist adaptation of Ghassān Kanafānī's 1969 canonical novel ‘ā’id ilā Hayfā (*Return to Haifa*). The feminist adaptation begins with the title. It is changed from “‘ā’id” to “‘ā’ida,” to convey that the protagonist is a female returner. Moreover, unlike the symbolic trope in Kanafānī's narrative, which is based on the interpersonal dynamics of father-son-national honor, Asadī's trope focuses on the dynamics of father-daughter-family honor.

In Kanafānī's novel, the return to Haifa is an assertion of the Palestinian national right of return. This assertion is manifest in the story of a Palestinian couple, Sa‘id and Safīyah, who, on their return to Haifa after the opening of the borders¹²⁵ in 1967, to look for their son, Khaldūn, lost during the family's forced displacement during *al-Nakba*. However, once home, they find out that Khaldūn is fighting in the Israeli army now and that he has been raised as Dov, by the Jewish couple that took residence in their home. Shocked by Khaldūn's identity and his renunciation of his biological parents and heritage, Sa‘id realizes that he has lost his son permanently and totally. For Sa‘id, the loss of Khaldūn is equal to the loss of his city, his homeland and the Palestinian cause. The story ends with Sa‘id reassuring Safīyah that redemption will come from their younger

¹²⁴ Asadī, Maysūn. *Lamlam ḥarīm wa-qīṣas ukhrā* (Hayfā: Maktabat Kull Shay’, 2012).

¹²⁵ After the war in 1967 and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, all Palestinian territories fell under Israeli rule, and movement across the so-called Green Line was resumed for the first time, after being outlawed in 1948.

son, Khālīd. Unlike Dov, who has no loyalty to his people, Khālīd plans to join the armed resistance to reclaim his homeland. Sa'īd concludes: "Dov is our disgrace. Khālīd is our remaining honor" (136).

However, in Asadī's story, the return to Haifa is the personal quest of a young Palestinian woman claiming her right to meet her lover. For the female protagonist, Halimā, Haifa, unlike her northern village, is a city that offers freedom. In Haifa, she can unite with her lover away from the suspicious eyes and gossiping tongues of the people in her village. However, going to Haifa is not an easy matter. When Halimā asks her father for his permission to go to Haifa to meet her girlfriends, he beats her up for what he considers a violation of family honor and proper female conduct. Her mother and the rest of her siblings do not intervene to save her from her father's blows. Although in pain, Halimā wakes up the following morning with her mind set on returning to Haifa. She sneaks out after her father leaves for work. As soon as she arrives in Haifa, she notices a lovers' scene that transforms her life. The dramatic ending of the story captures this transformation. After Halimā returns to her home in the village, her younger brother, Rāmi, threatens her with a mocking performance of her father beating her up after finding out about her trip to Haifa. In response, Halimā laughs hysterically. The narrator says:

The boy thought that she liked his brilliant imitation, but he did not realize that at the same moment she was seeing two sides of the same coin: First, a father beating his daughter for her disgraceful behavior and her wish to travel to Haifa. Second, a father walking hand in hand with a Russian young woman his daughter's age (85).¹²⁶

Seeing her father in the arms of a Russian young woman, Halimā is released from fearing

¹²⁶ All quotes from this story are my translation.

his strict rule. She is also able to recognize the hypocrisy in his gendered notion of family honor. Therefore, returning to Haifa offers the possibility of liberation from the patriarchy in the village. Halimā's transformation suggests that a woman's path to liberation involves crossing the border from the village to the city. This border crossing entails a process of dismantling patriarchal rules and notions of gendered nations. In Haifa, everyone's honor was called into question: Palestine, Dov, Sa'id, Halimā and her father.

In contrast to the narrative of return to Haifa, in "*Uhdurī fawran...nahnu behājat lakī*" (Come Immediately...We Need You) (2008), the return to Yaffa does not promise the utopia of redemption or liberation. In this story, the protagonist is a woman physician who voluntarily left her native Yaffa to study and live in Milan, Italy. There, she meets her Iraqi husband. One night, during their wedding anniversary celebration, she receives a phone call from the hospital requesting her attendance at an emergency. After operating on the patient, she finds out that he is originally from Yaffa. The encounter with his elderly parents outside the operating room becomes a dramatic juxtaposition of two Palestinian narratives of *al-Nakba* in the diaspora. The elderly couple became exiled from Yaffa due to their displacement during *al-Nakba*. Her presence in Milan, however, is due to her flight from living in conditions of *al-Nakba* in present day Yaffa. Reflecting on her native city after this encounter, the woman narrates:

There, I belonged to a Palestinian family that endured a different type of *Nakba*. We were not refugees or displaced. We remained in the city where my grandparents lived, but I don't know what happened so that all members of my family were contaminated. I don't know either how I

succeeded in my studies and enrolled in a university amidst this infested environment. But, apparently the wind blow against what the ships of my family desired (54).

The “different type of *Nakba*” that the woman’s family endured includes three *Nakbas*: the death of her father and older brother in non-heroic circumstances, and the madness of her younger brother. The father, who joined the Israeli police, dies from an exploding landmine while he was fixing a car on the border with Lebanon. The older brother is shot to death by a criminal gang near the beach in Yaffa. He is murdered shortly after his release from prison where he had served five years for selling and abusing drugs. The third *Nakba* hits the family when the younger brother mistakenly takes a dose of drugs that lead to his hospitalization in an mental institution.

Although not described as a *Nakba* event, the protagonist describes her mother as another catastrophe in the family. The “strong and mighty” (55) mother is portrayed as a controlling figure that dominated the family, while constantly embarrassing her daughter with her behavior. Not only did she volunteer for the Israeli police twice a week, but also she found joy in putting on the siren and chasing undocumented Palestinian workers from Gaza and the West Bank in a police car. She also embarrassed her daughter during their weekly trip to the hairdresser, where they bleached their hair to a blond color that did not match their skin color. Needless to say, the encounter with Yaffa in the diaspora did not bring good memories. Awakened by her lack of nostalgia, the protagonist narrates:

I woke up in the middle of the night. I went to the balcony and I lit a cigarette and began remembering my place of birth. The city of Yaffa that I deeply detest. I detest Yaffa that the poets and creative people flirt with. I

detest its orchards and its famous oranges. I detest its streets and alleys where I played and learned the history of each stone. I detest its port that was our playground and place of upbringing. Most of my memoirs from this city keep me away from here. Everyone sings for Yaffa and I am the native of Yaffa, and I don't love it, and I don't love Fairuz when she sings to it. Therefore, I'm here and I don't want to return (54).

However, at the end of the story, the protagonist returns to visit Yaffa. In a rather abrupt ending that cuts the dramatic flow of the story, the protagonist is portrayed walking happily down the streets of Yaffa. She admires every stone that she sees. She also shouts expressions of gratitude to her husband for buying her a ticket to Yaffa as an anniversary gift.

It is noteworthy that in the story, the protagonist invokes the character of a young woman from the Galilee whom she met at Tel-Aviv University. The latter is acknowledged for taking part in "reforming" the protagonist by encouraging her to continue her studies and recruiting her to the Communist Party. The protagonist describes the encounter with this fellow student as a moment of transformation in her life. She notes:

I joined the Communist Party. Then I began educating myself. I participated in the distribution of flyers that called for defending workers, the poor and the Arabs in the country. And I felt how vain my life has been when I was in Yaffa (57).

What is interesting here is the fact that in all of Asadī's stories discussed above the girl or the woman from the village in the Galilee is portrayed as having a potential to either

liberate the city or being liberated by the city. When I asked Asadī' about this aspect of her writing, she responded: "Working in Yaffa transformed me. As I witnessed closely the violent reality that the Palestinian community lived, the gentrification of their neighborhoods and the Judization of the of al-'Ajamī by rich Jewish-American immigrants, I began writing reports to *il-ittiḥād* (The Communist newspaper in Haifa) about the conditions in Arab neighborhoods in mixed cities. Then, I went to Tel-Aviv Univeristy to study journalism. The personal became political. I was liberated from the village, but I also tried to liberate the city."¹²⁷

In 2008, Asadī's stories crossed a border beyond Haifa and Yaffa. She wrote a children's story about the Palestinian right of return titled "Bayt Buyūt"¹²⁸. In Bethlehem, she received the *BADIL* Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights Award. This national recognition not only brought attention to her work across the border of the so-called Green Line, but also fostered her interest in writing children's literature. In her children stories, Asadī' is particularly interested in expressing unconventional ideas and subverting stereotypical images. For example, in a story about a meeting with a wolf, the reader learns that the wolf is a trustworthy character, unlike its stereotypical image in "Little Riding Hood." Explaining her choice to subvert such an image, Asadī says: "In order to deconstruct images and notions of self and identity, you should start at an early age. I wanted the children who read my stories to question authority and conventional representations of everything, including gender."¹²⁹

"The most talked-about young writer on the West Bank" is the description that

¹²⁷ Phone interview with the author on August 2, 2012.

¹²⁸ A literal translation of this title is "House, Houses". However, in essence it refers to a popular children game.

¹²⁹ Phone interview with the author on August 2, 2012.

highly acclaimed Egyptian-British novelist Ahdāf Soueif uses to introduce ‘Adanīyah Shiblī. This recognition appears on the front cover of the English translation of Shiblī’s first novel *Masās* (Touch).¹³⁰ Soueif’s words of praise are circulated as a common point of entry to review and discuss Shiblī’s work. They have also become Shiblī’s hallmark among English-speaking literary scholars, including Barbara Harlow, a prominent US-based critic of Palestinian literature.¹³¹

This association of Shiblī’ with the West Bank is particularly interesting for the following reasons. First, she was born in 1974 in the village of ‘Arab el-Shiblī in the Galilee on the other side of the border, or the so-called Green line. Second, it stresses the fact that she gained national recognition in Ramallah, where she twice received The Young Writer’s Award (Palestine) by the A.M. Qattan Foundation, in the years 2001 and 2003.¹³² This border-crossing identification reflects Shiblī’s own personal history. She was born and raised as a *fallāha* (peasant) in the Galilee. She worked on her family’s farm as a shepherd and a farmer. On the West Bank, she gained cultural prominence as a promising young writer. In crossing the border(s) Shiblī marked a critical moment in Palestinian literature: she reconnected two politically and historically separated Palestinian geographies.

Before delving further into how Shiblī’s narrative re-opened the border in the post-Oslo period, it must be noted that a similar moment of re-opening the borders occurred in 1967. The process began in the early 1950s when Arabic literary journals

¹³⁰ The novel was first published in Arabic in 2002 by Dār al-adāb in Beirut. An English translation by Paula Haydar appeared in 2010 by Clockroot Books in the US.

¹³¹ See Barbara Harlow, “Touch,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40.3 (2011). 119.

¹³² She also received an award in 2000 for her literary essay “al-riyādīyāt wa-taḥtahā al-ḥubb wa-wa-taḥtahu al-lughah” (Math and underneath Love and Language). She came in third place after ‘Alā’ Ḥulayḥil, who won the second award for his novel *Al-Sīrk* (The Circus).

published in Israel — particularly *al-Jadīd* — created a counterpublic sphere (Nassar 334). This counterpublic, which challenged Zionist discourse, emerged from the publication of literary texts that enhanced cultural and political awareness of Palestinian citizens of Israel. After the 1967 War, however, this counterpublic became more tangible. Then, “Palestinian writers, activists and intellectuals in Israel were reunited with their fellow Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and beyond [...] and they played a vital role in the development of a Palestinian public sphere more broadly” (Nassar 334). Yet, what is different in the context of Shiblī is the fact that her personal life and professional and literary careers are rooted on both sides of the border, thus engaging two counterpublics. For Shiblī, the so-called Green line does not exist. International borders are permeable too.

Indeed, after graduating with an MA in Communication and Journalism from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2001,¹³³ Shiblī began working with young artists in a Palestinian cultural foundation in Ramallah and Jerusalem. Until 2004, she lived in Ramallah. In 2009 she earned a PhD from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of East London (UEL). From London she moved to Berlin to take a position as one of the 2011-12 postdoctoral fellows for Europe in the Middle East, the Middle East in Europe research institute. She has published short stories and essays in such literary magazines as Ramallah’s *Al-Karmel*, the Beirut literary periodicals *Al-Adaab* and *Zawāya*, and Alexandria’s *Amkenah*, to name a few. Despite the border-crossing experience that characterizes Shiblī’s literary history and her transnational career path,

¹³³ Since I was unable to conduct an interview with the writer, I could not verify the accuracy of these dates. Biographical details mentioned here are based on several interviews with Shiblī. These interviews are available online. See <http://www.goethe.de/ins/eg/prj/mal/arl/anz/ads/arindex.htm>, <http://www.baliadvertiser.biz/articles/ubudwriters/2007/adania.html>, and <http://www.baliadvertiser.biz/articles/ubudwriters/2007/adania.html>.

the border remains dramatically absent from her narratives.

In fact, Shiblī writes *against* the border. In her narratives, geography and place are turned into abstract motifs, thus reflecting thematic and aesthetic preoccupation with alienation. This trend is particularly evident in her first novella *Masās* (Touch) 2002 and the short story “May God Keep Love in a Cool and Dry Place” (2006).¹³⁴ In both texts, the characters suffer from chronic alienation, which leaves them out of place. Although both texts are situated within Palestine, the characters are decontextualized from the geographical and historical realities that surround them.

Masās is a novella in five vignettes: “colors,” “silence,” “movement,” “language,” and “the wall”. The narrative in each vignette is a metaphysical mediation on the title. The plot focuses on a singular young Palestinian girl who touches, sees, and listens to try to make sense of her mysterious world. She is the youngest in a family of eight sisters and two brothers, and thus she appears as the quintessential unreliable narrator. The death of one brother, the mourning of her mother and her early marriage are three major events in her life. The novella’s prose is poetic and heavily depends on both sensuality and textuality.

The girl’s alienation is evident throughout the novella. Her siblings mistreat her, and her mother stops bathing her after having a dream about an old male neighbor stabbing her bare left leg. The little girl feels even more abandoned when the eighth sister replaces the mother in the shower. At the very beginning of the first vignette, the little girl appears wandering around alone in a silent landscape. There, she finds solace and develops a deep attachment to nature. Colors become the language in which she

¹³⁴ This is the title of the story as it appears in translation by Jack and Sara Fageer in Jo Glanville’s *Qissat: Short Stories by Palestinian Women*. London: Telegram, 2006. Despite extensive research, I was unable to track down the original story in Arabic to verify the title.

processes the topography around her:

Sometimes colors disappeared from nature, and all that remained was green on the mountain, yellow on the hay, and blue on the sky in summer. Before the end of the spring, the green and red crayons got used up because there were so many anemones, yet it seemed the pink crayon, would last through many winters (4).

Another manifestation of alienation occurs in the little girl's reflection on language. In the fourth vignette, she associates her family's neglect with failing her first Arabic class. Not knowing the meaning of the word dictation, she is unable to complete her first dictation homework. But since "at home everybody [is] busy talking to somebody else" (52), she does not manage to get help; which results in an "X" on her notebook from her teacher on the following day. Since then, the little girl's attempt at learning language is fraught with fragments. One night, these fragments become the only tool she has to make sense of a story. However, she is unaware that this story is a narrative that connects Palestinian history and geography:

Every night the little girl would go to bed at sleepiness's command, but this night she went to bed at the mother's. From time to time, she would hear bits of words: "imals," "ker," "Allah," "dren," "tards," "ratila," through the door separating her room from the living room where the family had gathered. "Ratila" was especially difficult. Then she heard the television set click on, though the sound hardly made it through the door, but "ratila" became "abra and tila." After more repetition, "Sabra and Shatila."

Sabr was cactus, and cactus plants, wherever they would be found, were always the same, never decreasing and never increasing. So she did not know if *sabr*: cactus had a *shatla*: a seedling form. She slept until the sound of honey being stirred into milk woke her. She followed it into the mother's and the father's room. (56)

This invocation of the history of the massacre of Palestinians in the refugee camp of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon in 1982 through the etymology of the words *sabr* and *shatla* is a powerful employment of Palestinian resistance iconography. The allusion to cactus, which is a long-standing symbol of Palestinian *ṣumūd* (steadfastness), is a gesture towards writing a Palestinian national narrative.

However, this gesture is one of the very few moments in the novella in which an explicit reference to either Palestinian history or geography is made. The narrative of the little girl continues to revolve around her alienation in nameless places, because Palestine is not only a taboo, but also a word that is potential for erasure:

The girl stood at the end of the schoolyard, looking down at part of a *sabr* plant the size of a donkey, which was blocked from view by a donkey standing in front of her. She stood there waiting for the donkey to go so she could store the missing part of the plant in her memory. The eyes fixed on the donkey were unable to prevent the ears from hearing a nearby conversation. "Oh my God," "Sabra and Shatila." "The pictures on the news." "How horrrrrrrrr" rang the bell singling the end of morning recess.

In the middle of the class, a loud "Yeeeeeeee" rose out of the

mouths of some of the students, and everyone turned toward it. The teacher came over it to the desk, on which the hands resting held a ruler with the word *Palestine* written across it.

The teacher gave the student a choice between erasing the word or throwing the ruler away in the trash bin in the corner. (57)

Palestinian geography becomes more abstract as names of places are invented and distance on the map is measured through stagnated movement. The little girl's encounter with a place called Tallouzia, which Shibli recognizes in a footnote as "a made-up place name" (59) exemplifies this trend. Nevertheless, this made up name is an implicit ironic invocation of the small rural village of Talluza, which is 10km North of Nablus:

She climbed onto the veranda railing and looked out at the road, searching for the father's car among the rest of the cars.

She tried to count how far away Tallouzia was. Thirty cars for the father's car to get there, another thirty cars for him to return, and twenty cars for his stay there. If he didn't come by then, she would count twenty more cars.

The metal railing was warm, so she pressed as much of her body against it as possible, continuing to watch the cars.

So far, twenty-five cars.

The warmth of the railing had changed to heat, as there were not more than three clouds in the sky. (59)

Mapping the distance to a non-existent village by counting unmoving cars reflects the little girl's skewed perception of space. She identifies her geography with the reality of

checkpoints. To move across the map is to count the number of cars stuck at the checkpoint! Hence, imagining the distance to Tallouzia through the pace of going through a checkpoint conveys a representation of spatial stagnation in Palestine.

However, and perhaps less allusive, the final vignette, “the wall”, marks another moment of alienation. The little girl is married off and separated from her family. Her departure from the house is portrayed through a setting, using a wall. While the mere existence of a wall represents artificial separation, the little girl’s embrace of it conveys her desperation.

Although the symbolism is implicit, the image here is a critical reflection on the damage caused by a bigger wall: the Apartheid Wall. This Wall not only surrounds Palestinians, but also blocks their horizons. As much as the little girl is unable to let go of the wall, Palestinians are struggling to imagine and envision beyond the Wall. The narrative ends with a critical gesture towards mental occupation:

Time passes and so do the sisters, edging closer to the end, while the girl’s embrace of the wall intensifies.

Everyone is looking at her, and she looks back.

At the wall.

It encompasses all vision. Between the bumps on it, she strings lines in every direction, and the closer the end of the line of sisters, the harder she squeezes her fingers around the bouquet. Between the bumps she strings lines with her eyes. She cannot escape it.

They cannot wait any longer. The procession of cars must start moving.

The car rides into the distance with the girl as a bride inside it. Her eyes

are fixed on the rearview mirror, watching the house move away (72).

The fact that the novella ends with the physical blockage represents the actual reality of Palestinian confinement. It also reflects the dead-end route that has characterized Palestinian narratives since the First Intifada in 1987, which became more pronounced in the post-Oslo period, beginning in 1993. Describing the transformation of Palestinian literature after the First and Second Intifadas, in 1989 and 2002, respectively, Fayṣal Darrāj (2006) argues that Palestinians began to write a different literature, taking the lived reality as their point of departure, and distinguishing “dreams” from “realities”. Three features characterize the writings from this period, including Shiblī’s novels. First, he argues, there has been a limited description of representative lives in stark detail and as they are lived, exposed and bare, and remote from any optimistic-or pessimistic-ideologies and wishful thinking. Moreover, there was a decision “to remain rooted in the bleak everyday, day in and day out lives of their characters, almost as in a nightmare and without any referral to a near or distant future; and finally, the extinguishing of any and all certainty, replacing it with doubt, possibility, and expectation-less waiting”.¹³⁵ As the last vignette ends against the erection of a wall, Shiblī points out the limits and the limitations of Palestinian realities.

In light of this, alienation is a recurring theme in Shiblī’s work. For example, in “May God Keep Love in a Cool and Dry Place” (2006), the struggle of a young Palestinian woman alienated within a romantic relationship is at the center. As distance between the woman and her lover grows, sharing time together, even over breakfast, becomes a torment. Similarly to *Masās*, the story is not situated in any particular place,

¹³⁵ See Faisal Darraj, “Transformations in Palestinian Literature,” *Words without Borders*. Nov. 2006. Web. 20 May 2013.

although there is reference to *al-Nakba* and the Wall in the background. Yet, this reference is embedded in the subtext. For instance, the woman narrates that she met her lover at the fiftieth anniversary of *al-Nakba* during a music concert in commemoration of the Catastrophe. Two years later, this memory marks another catastrophe: she realizes the rift in their relationship:

How the fifty-second anniversary of the Catastrophe is approaching, and she did not even notice the passage of time. If she slows down her eating, the tears will seep out. Eating quickly held them back, and at this mere thought she almost cried. (151)

The story ends with the woman's decision to leave. Imagery of blockade and suffocation caused by the presence of a wall justifies her decision: "even the neutral white wall [that] becomes tiring for the eyes that are glued to it unwillingly" (162).

It must be noted that this mode of alienation that characterizes Shiblī's narratives is better understood within the context of the novelist's identification with an emerging generation of Palestinian writers who are less concerned with crude symbolism or political writing as a genre. In a recent interview in an Algerian newspaper, *Djazairnews*,¹³⁶ Shiblī' asserts that she belongs to a generation that does not resemble Darwīsh or Kanafānī. She states: "We are a generation who writes about love and beauty, and it is unfair that we are categorized only as revolution writers."¹³⁷ Shiblī continues to argue that despite the difficult circumstances in which they had lived, the generation of Darwīsh had enjoyed more freedom of expression. Whereas Kanafānī and others dealt with one form of occupation, the generation of today faces multiple forms of occupation. She

¹³⁶ April 10, 2010.

¹³⁷ Quotes from the interview appear here in my translation. For the full interview in Arabic see <http://www.djazairnews.info/culture/46-2009-03-26-18-34-49/37050-2012-04-01-17-35-08.html>

concludes, “In fact, we don’t have the freedom to write, because occupation has many faces.” In light of Shiblī’s statement, it becomes possible to identify alienation as an expression of a reality doomed by multiple forms of occupation.

Moreover, one of the most interesting moments in this interview is Shiblī’s juxtaposition of her work in relation to national male Palestinian writers, such as Kanafānī and Darwīsh. This association is another example of the absence of borders in her own perception of her work. She identifies with the larger history and canon of Palestinian literature, rather than *adab mahālī* (local Palestinian literature in Israel), or minority literature. However, it must be mentioned here that in a very recent panel about Palestinian novels in Israel,¹³⁸ which was held in Nazareth by the Arab Culture Association, Palestinian scholars argued that alienation is the prominent theme that characterizes the third phase in the development of the Palestinian novel in the territories of 1948, as they referred to it.

This phase includes novels from the period following the first Intifada until now. Manār Makhkhūl, for instance, argues that novels from this period, and particularly, the ones that were published after Oslo, focused on narratives in which Palestinians reconsidered several issues related to their identity and their national and political rights. Several novels from this era include folklore stories or contemplation on the *Nakba* and its implications on the meaning of Palestinian identity and existence in Israel. The assertion of a collective Palestinian identity is a common thread in these novels. Another prevalent feature is narratives that describe alienation as the *de facto* existential condition of Palestinians living inside the so-called Green Line. Makhoul concludes that the search

¹³⁸ The panel was held on October 10, 2012. I summarize her the major points addressed in the discussion that was led by Palestinian scholars Juhaina Khatīb and Manār Makhkhūl. For the full report in Arabic see: <http://arabs48.com/?mod=articles&ID=95180>.

for solutions for this alienation in the Palestinian past and present has been a common concern for the novelists from this generation.

“I wrote about Haifa, because I could not write about Yaffa. I am too emotionally attached to Yaffa, my grandmother’s hometown. My relationship to this city is embedded with both love and pain. Because of my grandmother’s memory, there is an unfinished business with Yaffa”.¹³⁹ These are the words that Ibtisām ‘Āzim (b. 1974) uses to describe her choice to write about Haifa in her first novel *Sāriq al-Nawm: Gharīb Hifāwī* (The Sleep Thief). The novel appeared in 2011 in Germany where ‘Āzim used to live and work as a journalist, producer and correspondent for DW-TV-Arabic before she moved to New York in 2012, in order to work as a correspondent, co-editor and editor of the Arabic page at *Jadaliyya e-zine*. The narrative tells in non-linear fragments the story of Gharīb, a young Palestinian man from Haifa. The thirteen vignettes of the novels portray Gharīb’s life as a student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the 1990s. Gharīb, which means both strange and stranger, is born in Haifa, a city that according to a popular Palestinian belief welcomes strangers. His nickname, Hifāwī, is an association with his hometown. In each vignette, there is a snapshot on a distinct event in Gharīb’s life and different contemplations on the meaning of his existence as native-Palestinian in Israel. The narrative is situated in Haifa, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv in the period following the Oslo Accord. However, there are several flashbacks to major landmarks in Gharīb’s life: his childhood in Haifa as a son of a working class family, his coming of age during the First Intifada as a political activist and his subsequent imprisonment by the Israeli secret police, and his passionate love relationship with Hamsa, a young woman from Haifa whom he meets in Jerusalem.

¹³⁹ Skype interview with ‘Āzim in NY on August 2, 2012.

The intersection of personal and national histories characterizes Gharīb's narrative as he moves between Haifa, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv in constant alienation. Being aware of the etymological significance and the national connotations of his name, Gharīb Hifāwī metaphysically inhabits alienation. He is in a constant state of *ghurbah*, or exile. He is also estranged, because according to his mother, he came to the world in strange times during the Six Day War in 1967:

The Year of the *Naksa*” was the name his family called the year of his birth. Gharīb could have felt some resentment for having been born in those circumstances and in that particular year. But he used to console himself saying: “That is OK. If I had to set eyes on this world during a war, then what would follow must be better! But this excessive optimism was often followed by dark pessimism.” Our friend, his family and people, swung between these two extremes. As if the pessoptimism once used by that writer with the raspy voice and penetrating look to describe his people did not wish to part company with them until today. This should not be surprising because their circumstance have not changed. They are still swinging back and forth. They have not moved and are imprisoned in that spot going around in circles just as their prophet once said (9).¹⁴⁰

Gharīb's reflection on the story behind his name invokes both the history of *Naksa* (Setback) and Imīl Ḥabībī's canonical novel *al-waqāl al-gharībah fī ikhtifā saīd abī al-naḥs al-mutashāil* (The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist) (1974). Gharīb considers himself a living example of the ill-fated pessoptimist that Ḥabībī portrayed in his novel (9). Like Saeed, whose pessoptimism derives from his precarious identity as the

¹⁴⁰ This section of the novel was translated by Diyala Najjar. Courtesy of Ibtisām 'Āzim.

archetypical stranger in his homeland, Gharīb swings back and forth between liminality and belonging.

When in Jerusalem, Gharīb has several encounters that demonstrate his chronic alienation, which aggravates every time he steps into a Jewish-Israeli surrounding. Two of these dramatic encounters take place in West Jerusalem, which became to be known as such following *al-Naksa* in 1967. The first encounter occurs in Ben Yehuda market, where Gharīb meets Shaheen, a young boy from Hebron who sells pencils to make a living. The racist treatment that Shaheen endures as an unwelcome Palestinian from the West Bank in the predominantly Jewish market mirrors Gharīb's own alienation as a Palestinian in Israel. Gharīb does not feel welcome either in this part of the city. He also identifies with Shaheen's struggle as child worker. Seeing Shaheen humiliated while selling pencils in Jerusalem to help support his family evokes painful memories from Gharīb's own childhood in Haifa, where he used to tour the streets selling avocados:

Shaheen was selling pencils to Israelis, but I was selling avocados from my father's land to the Arabs. It is that the difference that troubles me?

When I saw Shaheen being kicked out of coffee shops where I sat, I felt knives cutting me apart. Shaheen was no longer the poor young man that store owners chased out, in order not to hurt the feelings of customers or to annoy them. But, I saw Shaheen, the poor Palestinian. The images mixed and left me confused.

Do they despise Shaheen, because he is an Arab, poor or both? Perhaps they just did not want him to disturb them while they were sipping coffee in a moment of serenity, and that is what all the deal is about without any

relation to color or nation. Then, things got mixed up and it seemed to me that I could not always distinguish between what I see from what I interpret in what I see (32-33).¹⁴¹

The Gharīb-Shaheen encounter in West Jerusalem reveals a common history of racism, alienation and poverty across the 1967 border. From Gharīb's perspective, being Palestinian on the Western side of the border (Israel) does not differ from being Palestinian on the Eastern side (Occupied Palestinian Territories). For Gharīb, this recognition becomes an assertion of belonging to a Palestinian national identity.

Gharīb's second episode of alienation occurs when he attends a party in an Arab house in West Jerusalem. One night Gharīb drives from Haifa to Jerusalem to attend a party organized by his Jewish friend, Danny. For Gharīb, the Arab atmosphere that surrounds him becomes surreal. The familiar *tabūlah*, songs of Umm Kulthum playing out loud, the lemon tree in the garden and other traces of those who used to live there haunt him with existential questions about the party and his participation in it. When seeing that Gharīb is in distress, Danny, who is portrayed as a liberal and progressive Jewish-Israeli man who memorized the lyrics of Umm Kulthum, goes into a monologue about the history of the house and the attempts of the new owners to preserve its Arab identity. Nevertheless, Gharīb remains indifferent to Danny's justifications and runs away:

I felt as if the place is 'Azrā'īl¹⁴² strangling my neck without letting go of me or taking me with him. I was on my way to the main door to leave when Danny saw me and stopped me as if he senses in what is going on in

¹⁴¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from this novel are mine.

¹⁴² 'Azrā'īl is the Arabic name for the archangel of death.

my mind. He said to alleviate my pain: “ this house was built on Arabic style as are all the houses in this place. The owner did not want to change or alter or affect or aesthetic sense of the city. He also cherishes Arabic civilization and appreciates it. Apart from this, he could not live here, so he left and sold the house to the current owner, who left the house in its Arabic style. This house is not like all the other houses in this area...it is a house whose people were not displaced...Gharīb, do you understand?” (66).

Danny’s assertion that the house does not belong to a displaced Palestinian family dramatizes Gharīb’s distress and deep concern for Danny’s involvement in cultural appropriation. This concern is further emphasized in the reaction of the other guests who explain his sudden rush from the party as “A Palestinian who drank a bit too much” (67).

It is noteworthy that in the previous vignette, “Hamsa”, where Gharīb reflects on his passionate love relationship with Hamsa during their time together as students in Jerusalem, the feeling of being constantly uprooted is portrayed as the reason for Gharīb’s sudden move to Tel-Aviv. When he witnesses the oak tree that had held him and Hamsa as they made love one rainy night being cut by Israeli authorities, Gharīb decides to leave the city, although he is disillusioned by the fakeness of Tel-Aviv:

They cut down the oak tree a week ago and I could not even bid her farewell. I went back home and I saw them cutting it down and putting in machines that devoured it.

My desire to stay in Jerusalem was truncated, and I decided to move to Tel-Aviv, because I started to suffocate in Jerusalem. It seemed to me that

Jerusalem lost its sacredness, because everyone sanctifies it. I was getting tired of the sacredness of the place and its significance. I could not walk in the streets without hearing or seeing a group trying to prove its existence. I got tired and I didn't want to prove my existence, because simply I exist. I don't like Tel-Aviv much either, although I didn't give this city a chance to love it. It always appears to me artificial, ostentatious, and living on the ruins of Yaffa. In fact, it had swallowed Yaffa and left it dying (51).

Gharīb's movement across Haifa, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv is accompanied by chronic alienation. His attempts to belong in each city are met with experience of a hostile environment that denies his self-search, his memories, if not his mere existence. This condition continues until the very end of the novel, when Gharīb undergoes a complete existential crisis, as a result of the accumulated sense of estrangement and non-belonging. and renounces his name altogether. Similar to the first vignette, the last vignette "Hāja" (Need) narrates one of Gharīb's reoccurring dreams. Again, he is at an Israeli police station for further interrogation. This time, however, when the investigator asks him about his identity, Gharīb chooses the name Nada, a female name that means dew. The metaphorical lightness of dew embedded in this and the renunciation of his male identity foreshadows Gharīb's dramatic resolution: to give up his identification card.

When I asked 'Āzim to what extent this movement across these cities is an autobiographical reflection of her own journey as a young women from Al-Taybeh in the center who was a student in Jerusalem in the early 1990s, she responded: "There are some autobiographical elements in the novel, especially the political atmosphere of post-Oslo in Jerusalem. On the one hand, Ramallah was becoming the new Palestinian

metropolis. It was open and me my friends could cross the border and hang out there at night. However, I was still treated as someone from the other side of the border, a 1948 Arab. On the other hand, following Rabin's assassination in 1995 and the beginning of the end of Oslo, there was a lot of tension in Jerusalem and speaking Arabic in public got you more suspicious looks than the usual. It was very important for me to write about this reality and to explore the meaning of being Palestinian".¹⁴³

As the discussion above demonstrates, the city is an important locus in the works of Shiblī, Asadī and 'Āzim. Moreover, border crossing is an important dynamic that encompasses their work. While Ramallah is the cultural center for Shiblī's literary production, Haifa is the core site for the events in the narratives of Asadī and 'Āzim. Unlike its sister city of Yaffa, Haifa survived *al-Nakba*. In fact, since the early 2000s, Haifa has been witnessing a revival of Palestinian urban cultural life. As Haifa became the new center for many Palestinian NGOs, there was a rapid increase in Palestinian youth moving into the city, and a plethora of coffee shops, as well as an active scene of alternative music making and regular literary events.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, in the Palestinian cultural imaginary, Haifa has become the new sister city of Ramallah. Between both cities, there is a regular exchange of Palestinian young talents and skills in music, art, filmmaking and literature. The cities also collaborated in co-hosting cultural festivals.

In Shiblī's case, however, to write and publish in Ramallah is to transcend the border and remap the fragmented Palestinian geography. In the case of Asadī and 'Āzim, the characters dwell in Haifa as they negotiate personal crises as well as gender and

¹⁴³ Skype interview on August 2, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of the recent revival of Palestinian cultural life in Haifa, see Salman Natour and Avner Giladi, "“Eraser” and “Anti-Eraser” - Commemoration and Marginalization on the Main Street of the German Colony: The Haifa City Museum and Café Fattush," *Haifa Before & After 1948: Narratives of a Mixed City*, eds., Maḥmūd Yazbak and Yfaat Weiss (Dordrecht: RoL, 2011).

national identities. When writing about Haifa, both writers invoke Kanafānī and Habībī, who are long-standing icons associated with establishing the modern Palestinian literary tradition of the city. The revival of this tradition occurs when both writers adapt canonical narratives by Kanafānī and Habībī to address a contemporary reality in Haifa while exploring the consciousness of Palestinian subjects. Whereas in Asadī's narrative, the disgraceful son from Kanafānī's story is replaced with a dishonorable father, the pessoptimism of Saeed in Habībī's novel is resolved in 'Āzim's narrative when Ghārib gives up his identification card, thus aborting the alienation inherited in his unsettled identity as a Palestinian in Israel.

Furthermore, the presence and absence of Yaffa in the works of Asadī' and 'Āzim reflect a contradiction in narrative that both authors admit to in the interviews.

Asadī' asserts: "My shock about the ugly reality in Yaffa compelled me to write about the struggle of the people there. Their living conditions contradicted the national image of Yaffa as the glorious Palestinian city. It was important for me to document this to increase people's awareness about the reality of our struggle."¹⁴⁵ 'Āzim, however, relates that growing up with a grandmother who was constantly reminiscing about Yaffa made her aware of the contradiction of narratives. She says: "Whenever I went to Yaffa and saw the gentrification and the crime in a city that looked abandoned, I would challenge my grandmother on her nostalgia. But when I began researching the city, I discovered that my grandmother was correct. Yaffa was a great city with a glorious ancient past. The history books even confirmed my grandmother's narrative. Still, I could not write about it."¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, the striking absence of Ramallah or other Palestinian cities in

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the author in Haifa on September 11, 2012.

¹⁴⁶ Skype interview on August 2, 2012.

Shiblī's narratives and the focus on the inner world of Palestinian characters, who are decontextualized from a territorial location exemplify a rejection of both border narratives and geographical categorization of Palestine. In other words, Shiblī' writes against the map. As the writings and personal reflections of these writers make evident, taking a journey across the motherland and beyond entails a multilayered negotiation of narratives and counter-narratives about cities, borders, and configurations of gender and nation. Yet, the compass in this journey is the search for the motherland: Palestine.

II: FOMMA: Crossing Borders and Performance of Indigenous Feminism

Since its foundation as a feminist theater collective in 1994, FOMMA has expanded into a team of six women artists, including Colombian theater director Doris Difarnecio, who joined in 1999. By 2010, FOMMA had produced twenty-six plays and performed extensively in local communities, as well as in Mexico and abroad. However, at FOMMA's center, which was established with support from local government agencies and literacy programs, including a national award from the Mexican Institute of Research on the Family and Population (IMIFAP) in 1999, there are numerous activities besides theater. In addition to writing and performing plays in the Spanish and Mayan languages, and sometimes in both, FOMMA's activities include classes in cooking, sewing, accounting and drama writing. In 2008, FOMMA's repertoire took a transnational turn when the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics in the Americas, based at New York University, established its first regional research and cultural center in FOMMA's theater. The new joint project, Centro Hemisférico/FOMMA,¹⁴⁷ received

¹⁴⁷ One of the most recent products of this collaboration is FOMMA's hosting of a summer course on art and resistance in the Americas in 2011.

support from NYU and the Ford Foundation.

It must also be noted that, while FOMMA has gained local and international visibility, works by other Mayan women writers, especially poets, have also received increasing attention from Mexican and US critics. This attention led to making Mayan women's poetry more available in publications in Mayan languages, Spanish and English. Their work appeared in various alternative presses, including the tri-lingual anthology by Carlos Montemayor and Donald H. Frischmann's *Words of the True Peoples/ Palabras de los seres verdaderos* (University of Texas Press, 2004- 2007), several other bi-lingual publications by *Sna Itz'ibajom*, *Taller Leñateros* and *CELALI*, and most recently in the English edition of *Conjuros y ebriedades* (1998), which was published by Cinco Puntos Press in Texas in 2009, under the English title *Incantations: Songs, Spells and Images by Mayan Women*.

What distinguishes the work of FOMMA is not only the feminist agenda of the collective, but also the intersection between the personal histories of its founders, Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa, who crossed the borders of their communities and challenged the status of women in their own indigenous societies. In fact, several of FOMMA's plays are based on the life stories of Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa. These plays depict the plight of Mayan women who have suffered rape, domestic violence, and sexism at the hands of Mayan men in communities already enduring rampant alcoholism and exploitive Ladino landlords.

These autobiographical plays also portray the different forms of exploitation that Mayan women endure as they migrate to the city to work as servants in Ladino homes and as vendors in street markets. This trend is particularly evident in the early plays of

FOMMA, including *Una mujer desesperada* (A Desperate Woman) (1993), *Migración* (Migration) (1992), *Víctimas del engaño* (Victims of Deception) (1998), and *La vida de las Juanas* (The Lives of Women Called Juana) (1999). While these plays underlined the personal stories of Mayan women fighting sexism and striving for equal human rights within their own communities and the Ladino/a world, the more recent plays of FOMMA focus on addressing women's right of political participation, criticism of the Catholic and Evangelical churches for exploiting indigenous people, and the violation of the labor rights of indigenous women, men and children who work on Ladino-owned coffee plantations. The plays *La voz y la fuerza de la mujer* (The Voice and Strength of the Woman) (2001), *La bruja monja* (The Witch Nun) (2003), and *El dueño de las mariposas* (The Butterflies' Owner) (2006), respectively, exemplify this trend.

Moreover, like *Sna Jtz'ibajom* and other Mayan writing collectives, FOMMA operates outside the framework of the EZLN and the indigenous national movement in Chiapas. Although FOMMA emerged in the same year as the Zapatista Uprising, it has created a separate space to reflect on the experience of Mayan women as both women and as indigenous people. This space remains independent from the EZLN cultural politics and its quest for indigenous autonomy within the state. Juárez Espinosa emphasizes this distinction from the Zapatista movement. She says: "Many people believe that we're Zapatistas. Actually, we don't even know who is a Zapatista. We do our cultural work. We support women in the city, but we don't know what is happening within the Zapatista organization" (Uno and Burns 168).

It is important to note here that although Juárez Espinosa embraces the principles of EZLN women's declaration and its call for equal human rights for women, she

emphasizes that FOMMA is not only independent from the political auspices of the Zapatistas, but at its core also remains a feminist project. She states: “Of course, there are many theater performers and companies that have produced plays about the Zapatistas and their strife, but they have another vision. As a theater company composed of women, we have a different vision. We’re the ones that suffer. We’re the ones that live through the worst situations. Sometimes there are people or men who don’t understand us. For example, if there is a rape, you tell them about it, and they accept it. Naturally. But for women, it is traumatic to suffer incidents like this. And when we put them on stage, maybe our lesson is a little comic, but it also has a message. We show what is really happening everywhere in Mexico, not just in Chiapas” (Uno and Burns 165).¹⁴⁸

To gain deeper insight into the works of FOMMA, we must call attention to the particularity of its emergence in the historical context of indigenous feminism. As Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo (2002 & 2010) observes, there has been a resurgence of indigenous women’s movements in various Latin American countries in addition to Mexico, since the early 1990s. In these movements, women have searched for the development of a new consciousness and the organization of spaces. Hernández Castillo (2002) notes: “Many indigenous women [...] have started to raise their voices in the public sphere, not only to demand cultural and political rights for their communities, but to point out that the construction of a more just society must begin within the family itself” (39). Hernández Castillo further argues that, since its inception, these indigenous movements, which include different ethnic communities, have been relying on

¹⁴⁸ These statements by Juárez Espinosa appeared in an interview with Harely Erdman. For a review of FOMMA’s work and the complete interview with Juárez Espinoza and Cruz Cruz, see Harely Erdman’s “FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya/Strength of the Maya Woman)” in Roberta Uno and Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *The Color of Theater: Race, Culture, and Contemporary Performance* (London: Continuum, 2002) 157-69.

indigenous epistemologies, often emphasizing that equality is rooted in complementarity between genders, as well as between human beings and nature. Hernández Castillo (2010) elaborates:

[This notion of equality] considers what constitutes a dignified life through a different understanding of people's relationship to property and to nature than the one liberal individualism provides. This alternative perspective on women's rights, which reclaims indigenous cosmovisions, or indigenous epistemologies as spaces of resistance, is being transnationalized by a continental movement of indigenous women, most notably as part of an international network called *Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas* (Indigenous Women's Continental Alliance). In this sense, we can point to an emerging form of cosmopolitanism or transnationalism from below, which confronts not only ethnocentric universalism but also globalization from above (541).

While Hernández Castillo (2010) argues that the indigenous feminist movements are characterized by a hierarchy of power that involves fighting globalization from above, while organizing transnationally from below, she concludes that these movements "have made us recognize that the struggles against racism, sexism, and economic exploitation can and should be complementary and simultaneous struggles" (544). The emergence of FOMMA as an independent indigenous feminist theatre collective with transnational ties reflects this history of the indigenous feminist movement. Their plays also demonstrate the politics of this movement.

FOMMA's focus on the plight of Mayan women for equal human rights and social justice, within the domestic space in their own rural indigenous communities, as well as in the public sphere among both Indians and Ladinos/as in San Cristóbal, exemplifies the simultaneous struggles against racism, sexism, and economic exploitation. This trend is particularly evident in Cruz Cruz's earlier plays *Una mujer desesperada* (A Desperate Woman) (1991) *La tragedia de Juanita* (Juanita's Tragedy) (1996), and *Infierno y esperanza* (Hell and Hope) (1999), as well as in Juárez Espinoza's *Migración* (Migration) (1992), *El padre* (The Father) (1992), and *Las risas de Pascuala* (Pascuala's Laughter) (2005).

Women all over the world suffer from various forms of oppression and discrimination, but our suffering is different. As indigenous people we suffer from racism when we migrate from our *comunidades* to the city. They mistreat us, call us Indians and use many other vulgar words to discriminate against us. These words are as violent as physical offense. Therefore, many indigenous women (and men) give up their traditional clothes, stop speaking their languages and try to pass as *mestizas* (and *mestizos*). I want the women to be proud of being indigenous and to speak their languages, because, even if we put on different clothes, we cannot change our blood, or transform our physical appearance. We are indigenous in blood and at heart. (Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, Personal Interview, January 25, 2010)

Cruz Cruz's preoccupation with the particular suffering of Mayan women is a recurring theme in her plays. The reason for their suffering stems from the fact they are women,

indigenous and poor. *Una mujer desesperada* (A Desperate Woman)¹⁴⁹ is Cruz Cruz's first play. She wrote it while she was still practicing theater with the *Sna Itz'ibajom* Mayan cultural collective.

The play in two acts depicts the devastating effects of domestic violence and alcoholism on a Mayan family from Zinacantán. The first act portrays the daily terror that María, a Mayan mother, and her three daughters, Carmen, Teresa and Lupita, endure as a result of the verbal and physical abuse of the alcoholic husband and father, Juan. In the first act, two tragedies hit María's family: Juan's death at home, followed by Carmen's death in San Cristóbal. Juan dies during another episode of bullying María. When the neighbor, Rosa, intervenes to save María, she pushes Juan aside. He accidentally falls on the floor and dies from a fatal stroke. After Juan's death, Carmen moves to the city to work as a domestic servant, in order to support her mother and sisters. Shortly after her arrival in the city, Carmen is hit by a car while crossing a busy street. In the second act, tragedies continue to plague María. Her second husband, Antonio, whom she married hoping that he would be a good father for her daughters and a source of support in old age, turns out to be a dominant macho with desires for the middle daughter, Teresa. The play ends with another double tragedy at home during another family fight: Antonio slashes María with his machete in front of Teresa, who tries to escape his violent grabbing and confession of 'love.' After struggling to get free, she shoots him with a shotgun hanging on the wall.

¹⁴⁹ I'm reading here from Diana Taylor's English translation of the play. It appears in Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino, *Holy Terrors: Latin American Women Perform* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2003) 291-310. The play's script is also available at FOMMA's archive on the website of the Hemispheric Institute. See <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/component/k2/item/293-fomma-mujer-desesperada>

This play portrays María's tragedy and her entrapment in a cycle of domestic violence. The events unfold chronologically and the scenario does not involve deep characterization, apart from two major dramatic transformations. The first occurs in the opening act, when Juan asks for Maria's forgiveness before his death. In his last moments of anguish and suffering, Juan expresses repentance: "Aaay, woman. This must be my punishment for having treated you so badly. I am dying. Please forgive me for everything that I have done to you. Take care of my daughters. Now they will be happy. I was only a nuisance... Just give me a little water. I'm thirsty" (296). The second transformation occurs in the final scene, when María refuses to let her daughter Teresa become another victim of abuse. When Antonio tries to lock her in after confessing that he married her, in the first place, because he is in love with her Teresa, María becomes furious and tries to physically prevent him from pursuing his plans and harming Teresa. After throwing a log at him, she threatens "I will kill you first, you disgraceful man, even if I have to go to jail for the rest of my life." (306).

Despite the seemingly simple plot of the play, staging María's tragic struggle against a reality of alcoholism and domestic violence marked an important moment in the emergence of FOMMA as a feminist theatre. In a doubly daring act of breaking the silence and "airing dirty laundry," Cruz Cruz's play addresses patriarchal oppression of Mayan women. The play not only describes the gloomy reality of a battered Mayan woman, but also encourages Mayan women in general to take charge of their lives and to question the inevitability of such a reality. This message is evident in María's advice to Teresa. María says "Oh Lord, my daughter. Although you are so young to marry...I understand. I can't ask you to keep putting up with the mistreatment of your stepfather. I

just pray to heaven that you can be happy, and that you are not destined for as much unhappiness as me...(She cries)” (304).

Moreover, the performance of the play was one of the first occasions in which Mayan women talked publicly about taboos in their own communities, specifically violence against women. The play was the opening salvo at the Women’s Group of San Cristóbal on International Women’s Day in 1993. It received extreme reactions –both approving and disapproving. Mayan men, for example, disapproved of Antonio’s character and said the scenario of a stepfather who demands to sleep with Teresa as his rightful due, for supporting her and María, “would never occur in their villages” (Simonelli, Hernández Pérez and La Fomma 2007). Cruz Cruz, however, identifies how personal the play was for her. She recounts: “ It was my first work. I narrated my pains and my visions of people who suffered from machismo and alcoholism. I did it with much love. It opened the doors for me to proceed and to write more” (Personal Interview, January 25, 2010).

Cruz Cruz’s cathartic narration of pain continues in her autobiographical play *La tragedia de Juanita* (Juanita’s Tragedy). Originally written in Spanish in 1996 and published later bilingually in Spanish and Tzotzil in 2005, by Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas, a Chiapas state organization, this play in two acts depicts the tragic story of Juanita, a nine-year-old girl who is sold for marriage to Ceferino, an elderly Ladino landlord. Juanita dies shortly after she is dragged to Ceferino’s house, where he rapes her. Cruz Cruz attests to the autobiographical dimension of this play. She confirms “When I was sixteen I was kidnapped and raped. I had a child as a result. But I didn’t realize that I was pregnant, because I didn’t have any education about sexuality. I

didn't know what the prolonged lack of menstruation means or the meaning of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. My parents didn't talk about these matters. They dealt with sex as secret. There was no openness or information about these issues like today".¹⁵⁰

However, unlike the tragic fate of Juanita at the end of the play, Cruz Cruz survived the trauma of her rape. Channeling her healing process into a play, she retold her own story through Juanita. Yet, this retelling involved not only the revindication of Juanita as a victim of local Mayan customs, extreme poverty and rampant alcoholism, but also a reclamation of a critical voice that questioned Ladino male authority and its complicity in the crime. On the one hand, Juanita's parents are held responsible for selling her to Ceferino, under the pressure of blackmail and drunkenness. On the other hand, Ceferino is characterized as the evil and trickster Ladino landlord, who abuses his authority. He takes advantage of local social practices and power dynamics within the community, as well as of Juanita's parents and their vulnerable conditions. In fact, Ceferino benefits from and perpetuates the oppression and exploitation of Mayan women. This characterization is evident in the dramatic encounter between Mariano, Juanita's father, and Caralampio, the village's representative sent by Ceferino to ask for Juanita's hand. Instead of asking for Juanita's hand personally, Ceferino follows the Mayan customs and sends Caralampio, who represents the local authority, to speak on his behalf. As a messenger of Cerefino, Caralampio enters the stage carrying bottles of alcohol as a gift-bribe:

¹⁵⁰ Petrona Cruz de la Cruz ,Personal Interview, January 25, 2010.

Mariano: (Enojándose); No, don Caralampio! Pero cómo puede creer que dé mi autorización, ¡Si es apenas una niña! Ahora, si ya fuera mayor de edad, entonces sí...pero así...¡No sé ni qué decir!

Caralampio: ¡Sí, don Mariano, le entiendo, no sé ni qué hacer también! ¡Como él nos has ayudado mucho aquí en el pueblo...peor ahora que es el cacique! Hasta a usted le ha dado mucha ayuda para su siembra. Por eso mismo pienso que sería mejor que usted aceptaba, ¡para que el pueblo no se vaya a poner en su contra!

Mariano: (Muy alterado.): Si es por el dinero que me dio...¿por qué no me lo cobra de otra forma, y no con mi hija?, apenas es una niña. ¡Le puedo pagar con mi trabajo!

[Mariano (Becoming angry): No don Caralampio! But what makes you think that I would give my permission? She is only a child. If she were older, then yes, but as she is... I don't know what to say!

Caralampio: Yes, don Mariano. I understand. I don't know what to do, either. Since he has helped us a lot here in the village...it is even worse now that he is the chief! Even you he has helped a great deal with your planting. Therefore, I think that it is better that you accept. Why turn the people of the village against you?

Mariano: (Very disturbed): Yes, it is worse, because of the money that he has given me. Why can't he collect what I own him, in a different way, and not with my daughter? I can pay him back with my work.] (65-66).¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from FOMMA's plays are mine.

While Cerefino's attitude as described in this scene reveals the nature of Ladino economic exploitation of Mayans in their villages, Cruz Cruz continues to document this colonial social order as it takes place in San Cristóbal, where similar dynamics occur between Mayan and Ladina women. The intersection of the triple oppression of Mayan women and the emphasis on Ladino/a exploitation is also pronounced in Cruz Cruz's 1999 play *Infierno y esperanza* (Hell and Hope). The play appeared first in Tzotzil under the title *Ilbajinel xchi 'uk lekilal ta tz'akal*, which literally means "Suffering with Good in the End." The plot focuses on Andrea, a young Tzotzil woman who struggles against the different forms of oppression that she encounters daily. Andrea's sufferings begin early in her childhood, when she is left in the care of her godparents, Josefa and Juan, after her mother dies and her father, Marcos, leaves for the city. Years later, Andrea is forced to marry Lucas, who becomes an alcoholic, abusive husband. Despite her pleadings and resistance to this marriage, Andrea is 'sold' to Lucas against her will, in exchange for a parcel of land. As far as her godparents are concerned, this marriage deal is Andrea's repayment of debt, her material reward for all those years that she lived under their protection.

The feminist content in this play is pronounced in Andrea's assertion that education and economic independence are the ultimate sources of salvation from her misery. In the internal monologues, Andrea proclaims that education, and literacy, in particular, are a woman's weapon against social oppression. Protesting against her forced marriage, she cries: "If I only knew how to read a little! Maybe then I could find some work and not have to get married against my will" (173). She further emphasizes the significance of education for women, children and the advancement of her own

community. In another scene, which describes a violent episode with Lucas, Andrea grabs a stick to threaten him and says: “I have to struggle for them, so they keep on studying and don’t end up being dumb donkeys like you!” (178). While she stands up to violent Lucas to affirm her resistance, she dramatically invokes education for the future generation as a model for ending domestic violence in her community.

Documenting racism and oppression of Mayan women in the city is another prominent theme in the play. After Lucas is imprisoned for his violent, abusive behavior, Andrea is cast out from her own house, as well as the house of her godparents. Pregnant and accompanied by her youngest child, she moves to San Cristóbal to search for work. There, she falls victim to exploitation, physical violence, racism and deception by Ladinos/as. Andrea is verbally and physically abused by Antonia, the Ladina woman who hires her to wash clothes. When Andrea complains to Antonia that her son tried to rape her, she slaps her and unjustifiably accuses her of seducing the young man. She also calls her “shameless woman” (179) and “stinking Indian” (180) and holds Andrea hostage until she pays back the advance she received.

Later, when Andrea complains to her neighbor, Rosa, about this abuse, which she describes as “worse than [being an] animal” (180), the latter suggests the church as a shelter. At the church, Andrea works as a cook and learns a trade, though the priest encourages her to return to her village, because the city is dangerous for indigenous people. The play ends on a hopeful note, as Andrea takes control of her life as a single, independent mother. She employs the skills that she learned during her temporary stay at the church and starts her own business as a Mayan storeowner in the city. More importantly, she becomes a woman whom men listen to. When Lucía, a young Mayan

woman who works with her in the store, is worried that her parents will not allow her to continue working in the city, Andrea is quick to reassure her: “I’ll speak with your *papás* so you can stay a few more days”. (184) In other words, the play ends giving Andrea both voice and agency.

There is a conflict with the Mexican government and there is an internal conflict in the *comunidades*, between different indigenous and religious groups. There is also a rapid increase in political parties. People are misinformed. Some don’t know what a political party means, or what benefits they can gain from it, because they don’t know Spanish well, or those in charge don’t translate the message accurately. Our theater focuses on these social issues. We try to educate people about their political and human rights in their own communities as well as in the city, where indigenous migration is constantly on the rise. (Isabel Juárez Espinosa, Personal Interview, January 25, 2010)

Juárez Espinosa’s interest in social theatre as an educational tool is evident in her plays *Mach’ atik ya xlok’ik*, *Migración* (Migration) (1992) and *Te Tatil*, *El padre* (The Father) (1992). The plays appeared originally in Tzeltal, before they were published again in her first bi-lingual Tzeltal-Spanish collection, *Cuentos y teatro Tzeltales/A ‘yejetik sok Ta ‘jimal* (Stories and Theater in Tzeltal) in 2002. In the introduction, Juárez Espinosa emphasizes that staging social issues reflects her interest in documenting the contemporary reality of the modern Maya. She notes:

Antes había escrito cuentos, leyendas y tradiciones que oía contar a mis abuelos y ancianos de Aguacatenango. Pero al notar que muchos de mis compañeros escritores simplemente ponían por escrito y traducían al español lo que decían los ancianos, comprendí que era necesario poner en ellos algo de lo que sucede en nuestro tiempo, nuestras propias vivencias, nuestras necesidades. [I had previously written stories, legends and traditions that I heard from my grandparents and the elders in Aguacatenango. But when I noticed that many of my fellow writers simply transcribe these stories and translate into Spanish the words of the elders, I realized that it was necessary to add something of what is happening in our time, to write about our own existence and needs] (9).

The daily reality and struggles of Mayan families, and women and children, in particular, is a recurrent dramatic plot in Juárez Espinoza's plays. The destructive effects of labor migration on the Mayan social fabric, and the displacement of Mayan women and children from their rural communities to the city, are central themes in the plays mentioned above. However, these plays also examine the ways in which Mayan families negotiate a place for themselves in the city. Her more recent play *Las risas de Pascuala* (Pascuala's Laughter), which she wrote in Spanish together with FOMMA in 2005, is another exemplary work.

Mach' atik ya xlok'ik, Migración (Migration) (1992)¹⁵² is a play in three acts. It tells the story of Carlos and Catalina, who immigrate to the city to look for work after

¹⁵² I am using here the English translation of the play as it appears in Carlos Montemayor and Donald H. Frischmann, eds, *Words of the True Peoples: Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous-Language Writers*, Vol. 3 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 211-20.

their neighbor Mario, the middle-man, promises them well-paid jobs that do not require literacy or special skills. Mario also promises to help them resettle. The play is set between a Tzeltal hamlet near Aguacatenango and San Cristóbal. Carlos appears wandering in the streets, half-drunk. He goes around asking for jobs, but people turn him away, because he is drunk, has no qualifications, and is not part of any labor union. Catalina is at their small, rented room at Mario's house, taking care of the children and anxiously wondering about the future of her family. The play opens with a scene from the hamlet, where Mario tries to convince his godson, Fernando, to immigrate. Despite Mario's efforts, Fernando refuses to agree to do so, because of the rampant exploitation of and racism against indigenous people in the city:

Fernando: Well, as far I'm concerned, compadre, it would be best for me to stay put, working my little piece of land. It may not provide me with much money, but at least it feeds my family. On the other hand, if I go to work in the city, I'll be poorly paid and taken advantage of by the employers. I've already been there a few times (Montemayor & Frischmann 211).

In the second act, Mario's wife, Elena storms into Carlos and Catalina's room, and tells them to get out of the house, because they have not paid the rent, and Mario is concerned that they won't be able to, because Carlos has lost his last job. As conflict arises between the families, Carlos and Catalina feel that they were betrayed and misled by their own people:

Carlos: (Angry and still half drunk) That's all we needed! First you fire me, now you kick us out of your house. Just where's the help you offered

so I could quit farming? You asked me to get rid of all my belongings.

Well, now you'll just have to wait until I find a job; I've already been out searching for several days. (Montemayor & Frischmann 218)

The play ends with Elena forcefully moving Carlos and Catalina out. Carlos reassures Catalina that their future is secure, because his efforts finally paid off and he was able to find a job. He also promises her to consider returning to their ranch. One of the dramatic moments in this scene is the confrontation between Catalina and Elena, which demonstrates the difference between the virtue of indigenous people from the rural areas, versus those who have been corrupted by living in the city:

Catalina: But...but...what is going on here? You don't need to do this.

We're poor and humble; we don't take advantage of people as you do.

You think you're really important, because you have a job and a house in the city, living off your friend's wages. Didn't you make me sell off all of my belongings back in our town? (Montemayor & Frischmann 219)

When I asked Juárez Espinosa about this play and the theme of immigration in her work, she said that it was important for her to educate indigenous people in the *comunidades* about their human rights and to prepare them for the challenges of moving to live in the city. Therefore, she included a character like Marcos, who represents the *coyote* who takes advantage of immigrants. She recounts, "Immigration is a central theme for us. We examine, for example, the character of the *pollero*, or what we call here the *coyote*. He convinces people to immigrate. They pay him a lot of money, but he leaves them at the border, and they don't cross. Another *coyote* from the border shows up, but he abandons them too. When people finally arrive in the city, they don't speak the language and they

don't know where to look for work. And when they get to customs those who have the right to cross and have documents don't know how to answer basic questions about their job, education, housing, etc. Since we have traveled a lot, we have lived through these circumstances. We understand what crossing the border and going through customs means. We try to educate people about this process through the plays that deal with immigration. We try to show them how to maintain and protect their human dignity through this process.¹⁵³

It is interesting to point out here that by invoking the image of the coyote, Juárez Espinosa equates migration to the city with immigrating to El Norte. Both immigrations are portrayed as dangerous ventures into foreign lands, where immigrants are prone to become victims of discrimination and exploitation. This is particularly important, because it conveys how Juárez Espinosa alludes in her play, which is set in Chiapas, to a larger historical context of recent migration of indigenous people from southern Mexico, including Chiapas and Oaxaca, who travel all the way north to cross the border to the US.¹⁵⁴

In comparison with *Mach' atik ya xlok'ik*, *Migración* (Migration), which portrays the disintegration of Mayan communities and describes this as the price that Mayans have to pay when they move to the city, *Te Tatil*, *El padre* (The Father) (1992) emphasizes the significance of family in Mayan society, especially for women. The one-act play focuses on the struggle of Pascuala, a mother of three children who is victimized by the daily physical abuse of her husband, Pedro. When Pascuala finally decides to put an end to her

¹⁵³ (Isabel Juárez Espinosa, Personal Interview, January 25, 2010).

¹⁵⁴ For more details about this phenomenon of indigenous migration from Southern Mexico to the US, see Lynn Stephen, *Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

life of domestic violence, she asks for a divorce and moves in to live with her parents. She also receives blessings and support from her parents-in-law, who disapprove of their son's patriarchal tyranny. Pedro's work with the government is also depicted as a reason for his corruption and abusive behavior. The last scene captures these sentiments, as well as the inter-family dynamics concerning Pascuala's decision:

Petrona: ¡Muchas gracias, comadre! Pues yo solamente vine a comunicales que nuestros hijos decidieron separarse.

Alfonso: ¿Es cierto eso, hija?

Pascuala: Sí, papá.

Alfonso: Pero están seguros que van a separarse de una vez, no después, mañana o pasado, se vuelven a juntar como lo han hecho en otras ocasiones, como antes que tuvieran más escuincles.

Pascuala: Sí, papa, ya no quiero que vuelva.

Margarita: Yo había pensando que ibas a dejar que te matara a golpes. Me alegro por ti, y si es tu decisión y ya lo pensaste bien. Lo único que te voy a pedir es que no nos pongas en vergüenza y te rejuntes otra vez luego luego, porque eso no nos gusta.

Alfonso: Además, nosotros ya hemos visto cómo te trata y también hemos visto que no en razón, por más que se le dice y le llamamos la atención, no hace caso. Pero si así lo has pensado, muy bien, cuenta con nuestro apoyo.

Los niños pueden venir a ayudarme y yo les enseño a trabajar la tierra.

Margarita: Sí, hija, ¿que más te podemos decir? Si, hemos visto que no nos respeta, a pesar de que somos tus padres. Te vamos a ayudar en lo que podemos mientras Dios nos dé vida.

Petrona: Es lo que yo le dije también: aunque mi marido está muy enfermo le podemos dar nuestro apoyo, para que salga adelante.

Margarita: Gracias, comadre, por venir a avisarnos, pero la verdad es que Pedro es un desgraciado, en balde es enfermo y trabaja por parte del gobierno, nunca se va a corregir.

Petrona: Pues sí, comadre, a mí me da mucha tristeza que mi hijo sea así, ya tampoco a nosotros nos respeta. Por eso vinimos a avisarles para que estén enterados.

[Petrona: Thank you, godfather! Well, I just came to inform you that our children decided to separate.

Alfonos: Is that true, daughter?

Pascuala: Yes, Dad.

Alfonso: But are you sure that you want to be separated once and for all this time, and not get back together tomorrow or the day after, as you have done on other occasions, when you had other fights?

Pascuala: Yes, father. I don't want to go back.

Margarita: I was afraid that you were going to let him beat you to death. I'm happy for you, and that it is your decision and you have already thought it through. The only thing I ask is that you don't shame us and reconcile with him again. That we wouldn't like at all.

Alfonso: Besides, we have already seen how he treats you and that he does it for no reason. Even though we called him on it, he didn't respond. But if you've thought it through, well, you have our support. The children can come and help me and I will teach them how to work the land.

Margarita: Yes, daughter, what else can we say? We have already seen that he doesn't respect us, even though we're his parents. We'll help you however we can, as long as God gives us life.

Petrona: That's what I told him too. Although my husband is very sick, we will give him our support, so she can move on with his life.

Margarita: Thank you, Godmother, for coming to let us know, but the truth is Pedro is a disgrace. He is sick for no reason, and he works for the government. He will never change.

Petrona: Yes, Godmother. I am very sad that my son is like that. He doesn't respect us either. That's why we came to tell you, so you would be aware.] (202-203).

This scene highlights the safety net promised to Pascuala by both her parents and in-laws, who commit to providing moral and financial support. Of note here, is the fact that Pascuala does not seek help from the state or any social welfare system. The play also does not reveal if Pascuala's resort to her family is in line with customary practices within her *comunidad*, or a default. However, it is interesting to point out that the play was written before the foundation of FOMMA, which, in addition to producing theatre, it provided a shelter for abused Mayan women. Juárez Espinosa comments that, when

FOMMA was established, it was highly criticized by people from the *comunidades*, who accused her and Cruz Cruz in engaging in inappropriate behavior. She recounts:

When FOMMA was first established, we received the worst criticism.

Because we were all women, including some married women who came here to look for jobs or to participate in workshops, their husbands and men in their families were jealous. They said that FOMMA was a house for whores. Some women even told us: “People say that you are not women, but lesbians. What is a lesbian?” I didn’t know what lesbian means either.¹⁵⁵

Juárez Espinosa’s keen interest in the theme of immigration reappears in *Las risas de Pascuala* (Pascuala’s Laughter) (2005). The play describes the daily lives of Mayan women and children street vendors. The main characters are two young single mothers, Pascuala and Lorenza. Together with Lorenza’s kids, Ciro and Abel, they commute daily from their hamlets early in the morning to San Cristóbal to sell ceramics, embroidered clothes, and other *artesanias*. The play depicts the hardships of making a living from selling Mayan folk art in the street. It also portrays the resilience of Pascuala as an indigenous woman who can both negotiate with the Ladina and *mestiza* dealers and stand up for her rights against state police brutality and discrimination. In fact, the play ends by declaring Pascuala a heroine and victorious for her relentless efforts to receive a police permit that would allow her to remain in her vending spot, and to officially become part of the local urban economy.

¹⁵⁵ Isabel Juárez Espinosa, Personal Interview, January 25, 2010.

Unlike the aforementioned plays, *Las risas de Pascuala* was written in Spanish,¹⁵⁶ a decade after the foundation of FOMMA. The play begins with an editorial footnote that alerts the reader that the dialogues intentionally include several grammatical errors in gender and number. These errors are kept in the script as well as in the performance to convey a realistic representation of a Mayan in the city who speaks ‘broken Spanish’:

En el respeto al habla en castellano de los indígenas chiapanecas, la autora refleja en los parlamentos de los personajes muchas discordancias de género, número, etc. Obsérvese que en Chiapas se ha desarrollado una forma peculiar de uso del “castilla” que tiene mucho que ver con las lenguas autóctonas. El análisis específico del habla excede al cometido de este libro, no obstante los lectores pueden observarlo a lo largo de la obra y sacará sus propias conclusiones. [Editor’s note: In regard to the indigenous way of speaking Spanish in Chiapas, the author reflects, in the characters’ conversations, many disagreements in gender, number, etc. Note that, in Chiapas, a peculiar form of using “Castilian” has developed, which has a great deal to do with the native languages. A specific analysis of speech is outside the purview of this book. However, the readers can notice it throughout the work and draw their own conclusions]. (101)

The second scene opens with an internal monologue by Lorenza. It captures the hardship of making a living from selling Mayan *artesanía* in the street. The uncertainty of making a living from a marginal space in a street economy, the lack of appreciation of shoppers,

¹⁵⁶ Some of FOMMA’s earlier plays were originally written in Spanish, and then translated to Tzotzil. Several plays, however, were written first in Tzotzil and Tzeltal, before they appeared in Spanish. When I visited FOMMA’s center in January 2010, Victoria Patishtan Gómez showed me the first draft of one of her plays. It was written in Tzotzil. She said that she was going to translate it to Spanish with the help of the other artists from FOMMA.

implicitly Ladinos/as and tourists, for the true financial and emotional value of her hand-made ceramics, as well as their lack of understanding of her abject poverty, are the highlights of Lorenza's monologue. Exhausted and lamenting, she confesses from her vending corner:

Parece que hoy no es mi día, nadie quiere comprar mi mercancía, ya estoy cansada de estar ofreciendo de un lado para otro: en las tiendas, con las personas...y nada, todos quieren pagar barato, como ellos no sufren para conseguir la leña para cocer, ni el barro. Y todavía venir a ofrecer en sus casas, ni así quieren. Lo malo es que no voy a tener para comprar las tortillas y polvito de chicharrón para que coman un poco mis hijos. ¿Será que me dicen algo aquí si tiendo mi venta? (Mira por todos lados) No creo que me regañen, voy a tender las cosas más pequeñas, ojalá que compren alguna. [It seems that today is not my day. Nobody wants to buy my goods; I'm tired of offering them from one place to another: in stores, to people ... and nothing, everyone wants to pay less, since they don't suffer to get firewood for cooking or to get mud. And even when I go offering them house to house, they don't want to buy them either. The problem is that I won't have enough money to buy tortillas and pork rinds for my kids, so they can eat a little. Will they say something to me if I lay out my wares here? (She looks all around). I don't think that they will scold me.

I'll spread out my smallest things. I hope people will buy some.] (112)

One of the most dramatic moments in the play occurs when Pascuala confronts Germán, a policeman who wants to evict her from the street market, for selling without a city

permit. The confrontation with Germán reveals Pascuala's feminist resistance to a male representative of corrupt state power. It also unmaskes the double racist treatment she receives, because she is indigenous and poor. However, in a moment of 'talking back to' Germán, Pascuala demonstrates self-assertiveness and agency:

Mire señor, no nos hagamos tarugos. Aunque me ve vestida toda traposa, pero no soy tonta para no darme cuenta de cómo es que trabaja. Y si quiere conservar su trabajo, déjenos en paz con nuestra venta porque yo no le voy a darle mordidas en dinero para que me deje vender mi mercancía. [Look, Mister, let's not play the fool. Although you see me dressed in ragged clothes, I'm not so stupid that I don't realize how you work. And if you want to keep your job, leave us alone and let us sell, because I'm not going to bribe you with money, so you will let me sell my goods] (121).

What is particularly paramount in this play is its invocation of the hierarchical and structural oppression of Mayan women through its focus on indigenous migrant labor. It vividly illustrates how Lorenza and Pascuala struggle as women at the intersection of indigenous poverty, the exploitation of indigenous labor and the racism against indigenous communities. Both characters fight on several fronts. They exist outside the national economy, but still they have to negotiate for a space within the margins, while relying on an "imperfect" use of the national language. They also exist outside the legal framework of the federal and state-level governments, which require them to show proof for their economic presence in the city. Whereas neither character appears desperate, their attitude fluctuates between resilience and resistance to the oppressive hierarchies.

It is important to point out here that Pascuala's triumph in the end asserts both Mayan agency and Mayan presence in the city. This "happy end" of play is particularly important, because it epitomizes a critique of the marginalization of Mayans in the recent booming market of ethnic tourism in San Cristóbal. Indeed, since the beginning of the early 1980s, the city has witnessed a notable increase in the number of foreign tourists, mostly Europeans. This trend escalated after the Zapatista Uprising in 1994, as San Cristóbal gained more international visibility, attracting more solidarity activists and visitors from the US, Canada, and many other countries. Throughout these years, however, Mayans have become a must-see sight. Pierre van den Berghe (1994) argues: "Ethnic tourism is interested in the "Indianness," not in the "peasantness," of Indians. Indians are interesting precisely because they are not like the garden-variety, "acculturated" Mexican *campesino*" (123). He further adds that, although Mayans have been an important resource for ethnic tourism, it was the local Ladino bourgeoisie who "seize[d]" this new opportunity for small and medium scale entrepreneurship. They became the middlemen by developing the infrastructure necessary to make the ethnic tourist feel physically and psychologically comfortable" (124).

The foundational criticism of FOMMA, as evident in the work of Cynthia Steele (1994) and Tamara Underiner (2004), has been particularly important in revealing the tensions that characterize its legacy as the first indigenous feminist collective. Both critics have accurately pointed out the risks and challenges that the playwrights have faced when they came out as feminists, indigenous, writers and actresses. Steele observes that both Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa were among the pioneering Mayan women who put their personal life story on stage. They also staged these stories as single mothers who

had suffered abuse and exploitation in their own communities, before they left for the city. Therefore, a certain level of tension accompanied their work as Mayan women who criticized their own traditions and communities while being in San Cristóbal.

Steele further asserts that the personal risk that Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa endured in their communities, including accusations about their sexual virtue, reflects the dual struggle of Mayan feminist writers. On the one hand, they write plays about independent women who defy the Mayan tradition that demands women stay home, because “it is extremely dangerous for a woman to venture out by herself” (239). As this tradition goes, the danger to women’s safety arises from their own sexuality and supposedly inherent inability to protect themselves against strangers, including “Cimarrones” or spooks. Steele notes that this theme was already evident in one of the earliest plays that Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa took part in, while they were still members of *Sna Jtz’ibajom*. In co-writing the play *Herencia fatal, drama tzotzil* (Fatal Inheritance, A Tzotzil Drama) in 1999, both women questioned the traditional role and space for Mayan women in their own society. In her critique of the play, Steele explains:

The tales admonishes them to behave ‘as women’: to perform household work diligently, to not venture out alone, not to be too ‘independent to the point of masculinity’ [...]. In walking alone in the fields [a woman] is violating two aspects of the gender code: women who venture out alone are seen to be inviting harm, and those who insist on doing ‘men’s work’ like farming are considered ‘machistas’ or ‘dykes,’ unnatural women who deserve to be punished for acting like men (249).

When Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa participated in the collaborative writing project of *Sna Jtz'ibajom*, they worked side by side with Mayan and Ladino men. Despite shared interest in larger social and political struggles, the Mayan male writers defended the 'tradition' that accused both actresses of sexual excess. Steele concludes: "This situation highlights the contradictions that can arise when a defense of 'tradition,' even in the context of anticolonial struggles, ignores intersecting issues involving human rights and freedoms, including feminism" (253). Hence, the particularity of FOMMA as making feminist theater is embedded in the personal stories of its founders and their defiance of borders within their own communities. It also involves their resistance to patriarchal political discourse within Mayan cultural productions.

Underiner also calls attention to the challenges that inform the feminism of contemporary Mayan women writers. Examining the history of Mayan theater in Chiapas, she concludes that Mayan performers and writers are often at the intersection of several encounters: local, national and international. While internal gender and political dynamics within the Mayan theatrical groups dominate the first encounter, interacting with Ladinos/as and international peers requires the Mayan actors and actresses to negotiate their positions as Mayans who are in cross-cultural interactions with non-Mayan members of their theater groups and international peers. Underiner argues: "Each of these [indigenous] groups participates in and represents itself as part of a more general resurgence of ethnicity-based cultural activities in Mexico- they call what they do 'Mayan' and 'indigenous' theater (4).

In the case of FOMMA, these dynamics and negotiations become more complicated, because the group is composed of indigenous women. In other words, in

this cross-cultural context, Mayan women playwrights had to negotiate their position in terms of ethnicity and gender. Their position as ‘indigenous Mayan women’ brought up many questions about ‘Otherness’, representation and essentialist categories of both ‘indigenous’ and ‘woman’. Moreover, Underiner suggests that FOMMA’s theatrical repertoire, which includes numerous plays that critique traditional male authoritarian structures, is an example of how Mayan and indigenous are not fixed categories.

Interestingly enough, Underiner observes that the international visibility that indigenous women playwrights have received escalated their emergence as independent feminist artists. In particular, she mentions the history of FOMMA. Due to the increasing global awareness in indigenous cultures and the international interest in Chiapas, the work of *Sna Jtz’ibajom*, which is considered an important voice in an indigenous art movement that operates in a multicultural form, gained wider recognition, both in Mexico and abroad. When, in 1992, Cruz Cruz was given a state award on behalf of her work in *Sna*, she developed a “new speaking engagement and higher profile in Mexican society than is typically enjoyed by Mayan women or men outside of their own communities” (54). Underiner asserts that this development created a new sense of agency in Juárez Espinosa and Cruz Cruz and encouraged them to express “their own dissatisfaction with the gender roles that were prescribed to them as (passive) bearers of Mayan culture” (54). This type of feminist awareness eventually led to their rupture with *Sna* and the establishment of FOMMA.

III: Conclusion

The comparison of the narratives of Shiblī, Asadī, and ‘Āzim and the plays of

FOMMA has revealed the multifaceted notion of the border in the literature of women who belong to an indigenous minority. While, in both the Palestinian and the Mayan context, the actual physical crossing of the border has been a constitutive factor in the emergence of these women, as writers and playwrights, respectively, there are discrepancies in their notions of the border. As these women writers and playwrights crossed the border in their personal lives and in their literature, we witness, as readers and critics, the different tensions and intersections that encapsulate border crossing and indigenous minority literature.

First, on the local level, FOMMA's work is clearly focused on making theatre that addresses local themes and concerns. Therefore, the particularity of the struggles and problems within the Mayan communities in Chiapas, such as domestic violence, poverty and migration, are an integral element of the collective's artistic and political mission. However, FOMMA's focus on making local theatre that is inspired by and geared toward the needs of the Mayan community in Chiapas, does not necessarily mean that it is only a local phenomenon. When I asked Cruz Cruz if she sees the work of FOMMA as indigenous, Mayan or Mexican, she responded: "Although I appreciate Mexican national theater, it does not produce plays that concern our communities. Our work, however, is always in dialogue with the indigenous communities. Yet, to address issues of women in our communities, we don't limit ourselves to local themes only. These days, I am translating Federico García Lorca's play *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (The House of Bernarda Alba) into Tzotzil. This play deals with women too, and it fits with our feminist theater agenda."¹⁵⁷

In contrast, as individual writers with different styles and agendas, Shiblī, Asadī,

¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁷ Petrona Cruz de la Cruz, Personal Interview, January 25, 2010.

and ‘Āzim are more inclined to step away from over-emphasizing the locality of their narratives. Although their work addresses the particularity of Palestinians in Israel as an indigenous and national minority that suffers from institutionalized racism and state exclusion, they resort to the national by aspiring to affiliations with majority literature: Palestinian and Arabic literature. As previously mentioned, Shiblī’ and Asadī’s work was recognized by Palestinian cultural institutions in Ramallah and Bethlehem, on the other side of the border. ‘Āzim’s transnational experience as a journalist and her life abroad has allowed her to interact with writers and critics from the Arab Diaspora and the Arab world at large. The appearance of her novel by a Beirut-Baghdad based publication house exemplifies this trend.

Second, the assertion of indigenous feminism in the works of FOMMA was more pronounced than in the novels of Shiblī’, Asadī and ‘Āzim. In FOMMA’s plays, Mayan women are at the center of the economic and the political struggles for social justice and equal human rights. The collective focuses on women’s rights to empower Mayan women and to improve their livelihood. As an independent collective, FOMMA, they lead this indigenous feminist struggle on the theatrical front, outside the framework of the EZLN and the Zapatista national movement. In fact, FOMMA’s work reflects the emergence of the indigenous women as political subjects.

In the case of Palestinian women novelists, however, the concern with the indigenous woman as a national subject persists. For example, in Asadī’s narratives, Palestinian women appear trapped between political and national subjectivity. Hence, the discussion of equal women’s rights is conflated with the patriarchal representation of Palestinian nationalism. This is particularly evident in her feminist adaptation of

Kanafānī's novel *Return to Haifa*. In Shiblī's novels, however, the destiny of Palestinian women is determined by the endemic closure and the lack of horizons that darken the future of Palestine as an independent and free nation. The male protagonist in 'Āzim's novel, however, is further alienated from the nation when he comes face to face with the social code that affirms a gendered notion of honor and rights. Gharīb feels that he does not belong to the patriarchal order of his family, when he realizes that his sister, Salma, is not promised an equal share of his father's future inheritance. His alienation becomes more existential when he confronts his father, who does not approve of his marriage to Hamsa, because she went against his traditional values and had sexual relations with Gharīb.

Third, one of the key differences between the literature of Palestinian and Mayan women writers is evident in the representation of the migration from the village to the city. In the Palestinian narratives, crossing the border from the village into Tel-Aviv, Yaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem and Ramallah is embedded with an attempt to revive the Palestinian city from ruin. This attempt is related to the reclamation of a national space and the articulation of the power of Palestinian presence. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Himmat Zoabi (2013) observe that, while living among the destruction of Palestinian cities, and particularly Yaffa, Palestinian citizens in Israel have come to realize that they are not only an indigenous national minority, but also exiles in their own land. As strategies of psychosocial and political resistance to the ongoing dispossession, racism and exclusion, Yaffa has become the new center for Palestinians to challenge colonial history and to "put down their roots" (54) despite their internal exile. Therefore, to cross the border to mixed Arab-Jewish cities, such as Yaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem, is to resist

the erasure of the Palestinian landscape and space.

In comparison, the migration of Mayans from their *comunidades* to the Ladino dominant city of San Cristóbal reflects a different history of internal colonialism. For the last three decades, the search for economic mobility, the expulsion of Mayans from their villages, especially Chamula, as a result of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts, and the Zapatista Uprising have led to an increasing influx of an indigenous presence in San Cristóbal. The city has also been surrounded by a growing number of newly established indigenous neighborhoods. Gary Gossen (1999) and Gabriela Patricia Roledo Hernández (2009) identify this development as “*re-Indianization*”¹⁵⁸ of the Mexican colonial city, which historically excluded the Mayans from its space. FOMMA’s plays on immigration depict this historical process without neglecting to address the challenges of being an indigenous woman in San Cristóbal. Moreover, the very presence of FOMMA’s center in the city is another example of creating a cultural space for indigenous Mayans in San Cristóbal. This space is neither the market nor the museum. It is FOMMA’s theater house, which is an active center for contemporary Mayan cultural production.

In other words, while Palestinian women novelists are invested in reviving the ‘lost’ Palestinian city, and in articulating a narrative of “*re-Palestinization*” of space, FOMMA’s plays portray the reality that has resulted from the “*re-Indianization*” of the Mexican colonial city. In both cases, the writers attest to the marginalization and

¹⁵⁸ Although the term is borrowed from Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and is the counter definition of his notion of *de-Indianization* as articulated in his seminal book *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (1996), both Gossen and Robledo Hernández describe the transformations in religious and cultural identity of the Mayans who moved to the city. These transformations include collective modernization and secularization as well as changes in the role of women and their participation in the domestic and the public sphere. For a detailed account of these transformations and their different histories, see Gary Gossen, *Telling Maya Tales: Tzotzil Identities in Modern Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 196-207, and Gabriela Patricia Robledo Hernández, *Identidades femeninas en transformación: Religión y género entre la población indígena urbana en el altiplano chiapaneco* (México, D.F: CIESAS, 2009), 29-72.

alienation of the indigenous female subject.

Finally, these different manifestations of the meaning of the border in the literature of Palestinian and Mayan women novelists and playwrights demand acknowledging the inherent, yet unequal, tensions that characterize the historical experience of indigenous minorities. The border confines gender marginalization and oppression. Moreover, it demarcates a process of minoritization and geographical territorial separation. It also signifies a legacy of colonial exclusion and racism. Therefore, when Palestinian and Mayan women novelists and playwrights cross the border(s) of sexism, racism, minoritization of the indigenous and internal colonialism, they demonstrate that crossing borders is a daily act of resistance.

Conclusions

The Mayan-Palestinian conversation that took place in this dissertation revealed several commonalities, as well as differences, between contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas and Palestinian literature in Israel. One key common aspect of these literary traditions is their assertion that indigenous minority literature is not merely defined by the dialects of resistance. However, one of the major contrasts that differentiates these literatures is the persistence of two distinct trajectories: the modern in Mayan literature, versus the national in Palestinian literature. This contrast is not absolute, as there are overlaps between the modern and the national in both literatures. To conclude this first round of the Mayan-Palestinian conversation, I will first reflect on these trends, and then suggest themes and issues that deserve more attention in future conversations.

On Autonomy, Alterity, and Resistance

The study of minority literature, especially indigenous and immigrant minorities, has received a considerable amount of attention from US scholars who study literature in the Americas. When approaching minority literature in the US, critics have scrutinized the marginalization of minority narratives. For example, in the case of Chicano/a literature, Ramón Saldívar (1994), maintains that narratives by Chicano/a writers are essentially oppositional ideological forms that signify the historical marginalization of Chicano/as in the US across race, class and gender. In calling for a reconstruction of American literary history through an inclusion of Chicano/a narratives and other “ethnic literature,” Saldívar goes on to emphasize the potential of marginal texts, to serve “as the silenced voices of the opposition [to] highlight the ideological background of the

traditional canon” (17) and hence reveal the ‘political unconscious’¹⁵⁹ of mainstream US literature.

On the other hand, in her seminal work on the consumption of minority literature in the Americas, Doris Sommer (1999) argues that, contrary to general assumptions by non-minority readers, minority writings can be “particularist” texts that are directed to a specific “emic” (in-group) audience and are not meant for casual reader consumption. Although Sommer is invested in validating minority literature, while calling for respect for ethnic boundaries between the identities of the readers and the text, she asserts that minority writers create intentionally opaque texts to produce and reinforce difference. Therefore, she challenges the “readerly competence” (xiv) of universalist readers who seek sameness in ‘particularist’ texts written by minority writers.

Despite their different theoretical frameworks, both Saldívar and Sommer emphasize that minority literature is governed by the dialectics of opposition and difference, mainstream and marginal, as well as Self and Other. Although I do not disagree with their contentions, I would add that the emergence of Mayan and Palestinian literatures as alternative texts with their own autonomous history demonstrates that there are other factors, in addition to resistance, that inform minority literature.

Indeed, archaeological digging into the literary history of Mayan and Palestinian literatures discovered that these traditions maintain a historical continuity with their origins in majority literatures. Contemporary Mayan literature is built on the ‘survival’ of Mayan languages, mythologies and oral traditions. This continuity is evident in the

¹⁵⁹ Saldívar employs ‘political unconscious’ in direct reference to Fredric Jameson’s use of the term.

restoration of oral traditions in Mayan folktales and the appearance of Mayan motifs in contemporary dream narratives written in Mayan languages.

In Palestinian literature, however, this continuity is manifest in the fact that Palestinian literature in Israel is another ‘branch’ of Palestinian national literature and culture that blossomed after the uprooting of *al-Nakba* in 1948. For instance, continuity is reflected in the attempts of the first generation of Palestinian writers, such as Tawfīq Zayyād and Imīl Habībī, both Communists, to replant this branch by writing the national narrative of *al-Nakba*, while preserving oral poetry, folklore and myths, which they identified as indigenous to the landscape of historic Palestine.

It is important to note here that thinking about Palestinian literature in Israel in terms of branching—rather than minoritization—emphasizes the “root” process of indigenous belonging to land. Here, I agree with other critics of Palestinian national literature who adopted this framework, such as Ami Elad (1999) and Steven Salaita (2003). In his mapping of Palestinian literature after 1967, Elad delineates three main branches: literature written by Palestinians in Arab countries and in centers of Palestinian culture in Europe and the United States, literary activity in the Occupied West Bank, and Palestinian literature written in Israel. Each of these literatures is written in Arabic. On the nature of these different branches, Elad observes: “This tripartite division is analogous to a tree with three branches, each representing one division of modern Palestinian literature, all three originating in the trunk deeply rooted in the earth” (11).

Salaita adds another branch to this trunk: Anglophone literature, or Palestinian literature that overlaps with the US and Arab America. The literature of this branch, he argues, represents the expansion of Palestinian literature as a result of Palestinian

Diaspora. Although it is written in English and exhibits different aesthetic elements than Arabic Palestinian writing, Anglophone Palestinian literature is connected to the other branches, because “their themes are nevertheless bound by a single entity, the land of Palestine” (176). Palestinian literature in Israel is not only part of this entity, but is also physically located in the land of Palestine.

In the case of Mayan literature in Chiapas, on the other hand, we need to be aware of the different ways in which territory and landscape contribute to its distinctive qualities, not necessarily as minority literature, but rather as Pan-Mayan and regional Chiapanecan. Keeping in mind that the Mayan community in Chiapas is very diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion and language, the emergence of a cultural movement that transcends this diversity and that potentially embraces Guatemala and the rest of Mayan Mexico as well, exemplifies a Pan-Mayan trend. The feminist collective of La FOMMA, for instance, includes women playwrights who speak different Mayan languages. Petrona de la Cruz Cruz is a native-speaker of Tzotzil, whereas Isabel Espinosa Juárez speaks Tzeltal. Moreover, the collective performs in rural indigenous communities where other languages are spoken.

It is important to add here that the pan-Mayan trend is a result of recent waves of massive migration of Mayans within the state of Chiapas and beyond. Indeed, in recent years, there has been massive migration of Tzotzil- and Tzeltal-speaking migrants into the Lacandón rainforest and into San Cristóbal, Mexico City and other cities in Mexico and the US. Also there has been heavy migration of the Lacandonese out of the rainforest into the cities of Ocosingo and San Cristóbal, as well as the US. Apart from economic reasons, migration of Mayans in Chiapas and beyond has been the result of expulsion

from their communities, because of their religious affiliation, mostly with Protestant Christianity, land struggle, refusal to join military groups, as well as health and personal family problems. In cities in Southern Chiapas, such as Comitán and Las Margaritas, the wave of immigrants who began arriving at these cities in the 1970s, has included Lacandones from the rainforest and Guatemalan refugees who crossed the border to Chiapas, in order to escape the civil war in their country. The Mayan migration to these Southern border cities, and to other cities nearby, such as Teopisca and Ocosingo, as well as to San Cristóbal in the Highlands, has led to the “reindianization” of urban space. It has also led to transformations in Mayan identity in their diaspora, especially because immigrants have tried to reconfigure establishment of indigenous communities while negotiating their ethnic, religious and linguistic identities outside their own territory (Cruz Burguete 149).

Before this recent development of pan-Mayan identity and Mayan diaspora, however, Mayan identities were very local and regional. Indeed, the state of Chiapas has a complex geography of seven different regions. Each region has its own cultural and Mayan history. For example, the majority of Tzotzil-speaking Mayans are in Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula, in the Central Highlands. Lacandones, on the other hand, live in the lowland Lacandon Rain Forest in eastern Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala. These diverse Mayan communities have produced distinctive types of literature and share different oral traditions.

Chamulans, for instance, believe that their location in the Highlands of Chiapas is sacred. Not only are they situated closely to the deity of the sun, but they also inhabit “*el ombligo de la tierra*” (the navel of the earth) (Morales López 125). Their belief is based

on a Mayan worldview that conceives of the earth as flat and four-cornered. Therefore, they consider San Juan Chamula sacred, because it is “*el centro de la isla-tierra cuadrada*” (the center of the four corners of the island-earth) (125). The attachment of Chamulans to their landscape is alluded to in the narrative of *Juan Pérez Jolote*, when Pérez Jolote describes the separation of his community from the rest in Chiapas. Another example of Pan-Mayan collaboration is the publication of *Sakubel k’irtill jachwinik / La aurora lacandona* (The Lacandon Dawn [2005]), a collection of short stories in Tzeltal and Spanish, based on Lacandon folklore. The collection is the result of collaborative works between several members of a new generation of Lacandones and Josías López Gómez, a Tzeltal-speaking bilingual teacher who is living in Ocosingo, on the outskirts of the rainforest (Steele 15).¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, the emergence of Mayan and Palestinian literatures from the contact zones as alternative texts, in a Lienardian sense, indicates that, in addition to the colonial encounter, there were other factors that influenced the historical formation of these traditions. The involvement of Mexican and US-anthropologists since the 1950s, and the promotion of indigenous cultural nationalism under the auspices of the EZLN since 1994, are two major trends that have contributed to the development of contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas. Similarly, the Palestinian Communists have played a vital role in sustaining a Palestinian literary culture during the military rule period in the 1950s and mid 1960s and afterwards. Although I did not address this issue in this study, it would be important to investigate in future research the similarities between the involvement of Mayan and Palestinian political parties and movements, such as the Communists and the

¹⁶⁰ Cynthia Steele has generously shared her manuscript of “Pan-Mayan Literature from the Lacandón Rainforest of Chiapas” with me.

Zapatistas, in furthering indigenous literature. It would be particularly relevant to examine how the Zapatistas have incorporated Mayan languages as part of their twofold political strategy: to promote indigenous cultural nationalism, while simultaneously asserting the recuperation of traditional knowledge and the re-creation of indigenous culture. The Palestinian Communists exhibit a similar process, as they have been deeply invested in the recuperation of Palestinian folk culture, while they insist on using *fushā*, to assert the connection to the *turāth* (heritage) of the Arabs.

In my opinion, the contact between anthropology and Mayan literature is an encounter that has involved questions of representation, whereas the contact between Communism and Palestinian literature is an encounter that has reflected an attempt to preserve Palestinian national identity. As our discussion in Chapter Two illustrates, these encounters were not tension-free. In Chiapas during the 1950s, these questions highlighted the tension between indigenous representation in ethnographic texts and *mestizo* nationalism in Mexico. However, this tension is less evident in pan-Mayan literature, specifically in the work of FOMMA and *Sna Jtz'ibajom*, as well as in local ethnographic fiction, especially by Jesus Morales Bermúdez. In these works, Mayan voices are given agency, and the Mayans are not represented in binary opposition to the Ladino world.

Conversely, the efforts made by a Palestinian Marxist writer and poet to preserve the cultural memory of his folk emphasized the tension between different ideological formations of Palestinian nationhood. I must add here that, as discussed in the first chapter, the role that Iraqi-Jewish writers played in furthering Palestinian literature in the 1950s—although a limited role—is yet another encounter. This encounter juxtaposes the

emergence of Palestinian literature in Israel, in relation to discourses of Pan-Arabism and Jewish ethnicity.

On the Modern versus the National

One of the major contrasts between Mayan and Palestinian literatures is the persistence of two different trajectories. While the emergence of contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas has been positioned within the framework of indigenous modernity, Palestinian literature in Israel remains preoccupied with becoming national. These two different trajectories are reflected and contested in the different narratives examined in this dissertation. Basically, this contrast can be framed in the following binaries: indigenous minority against a colonial nationalism, versus an indigenous minority against a colonial modernity.

In “Reading Tzotzil Ethnography: Recent Scholarship from Chiapas, Mexico” (2004), Jan Rus argues that, for many, the Zapatista Uprising in 1994 came as a surprise, because it defied the hegemonic anthropological representation of indigenous communities. He elaborates: “According to their popular image—largely derived from ethnographies written before the early 1970s, but still taught in the world’s universities and embodied in Mexican indigenous policy in the mid-1990s—Chiapas’s Maya lived in ‘closed corporate communities,’ turned in on themselves and isolated from the buffering of the modern world” (199). Rus goes on to argue that the revisionist ethnographic studies in Chiapas that began in the 1970s have broken away from the study of indigenous communities in terms of acculturation and “essentialist” notions of indigenous

culture. He also notes that these studies have paid attention to dynamics within the indigenous communities and the increasing presence of indigenous life outside of them.

According to Rus, these studies have generated human rights reports (216) that document several phenomena that involve human right abuses within the indigenous communities, such as domestic violence, interethnic clashes and religious expulsion from “traditional” communities, private armies, and indigenous paramilitary forces. Rus concludes that attention to indigenous life, outside what was perceived as “cohesive cultural communities,” (224) was the result of both better theories and material conditions. He cites as an example the decline of Mexican agriculture in the early 1970s, which resulted in increased unemployment in Chiapas and indigenous labor migration.

Rus’ delineation of the development of Tzotzil ethnography in Chiapas is useful, because it helps us understand how Mayan narratives engaged with the anthropological representation of the indigenous. Indeed, while *Juan Pérez Jolote* reflects the earlier period of ethnography in Chiapas and the representation of indigenous communities as secluded and isolated, the plays of FOMMA write against this ethnographic representation. The narrative of *Juan Pérez Jolote* describes the journey of a Chamula who must go through an acculturation process, in order to enter Mexican modernity and be accepted as an equal member of the nation. The text focuses on creating an accurate representation of Pérez Jolote’s life to a non-Mayan audience, and thus it includes many explanations about the protagonist’s cultural and spiritual beliefs. The plays of FOMMA, however, depict the ongoing struggles of Mayan women, children and families inside and outside their communities. These plays focus on making theater for these communities, while addressing internal issues, such as domestic violence and gender inequality, as well

as racism against and exploitation of Mayans outside these communities. Therefore, the plays do not include a portrayal, or an examination of ethnographic aspects of Mayan culture.

In contrast, the persistence of the national in Palestinian literature is evident in writing against the erasure of Palestinian collective memory and against the border of the so-called Green Line that separates Palestinians in Israel from their fellow Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza. The national is manifest in Saraya's return to the shores of Al-Zeeb in Imīl Habībī's fairytale. The supernatural trope in this narrative revives the ruins of a Palestinian demolished village. The ruins of al-Zeeb and the displacement of its people are restored with the memory of *al-Nakba*, as recounted by an indigenous Palestinian who remained on the land. While this fairly tale invokes the image of a Palestinian refugee in exile and her return to the homeland, or *'awdah*, it reveals the internal-exile of those Palestinians who remained in the homeland. Here, we see a convergence of two Palestinian historical experiences and national sentiments: *manfa* ('exile') and *ghurba* ('estrangement').

Moreover, the national is present in the narratives of Palestinian women novelists who crossed the so-called Green Line, and who returned to Yaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem. Both the novels of Shiblī and 'Āzim and the short stories of Asadī invoke the Palestinian national narrative while they grapple, from a feminist perspective, with issues of gender inequality and patriarchy, and with colonial racism in these spaces.

Nonetheless, this contrast is not total, and it does not necessarily mean that there is no preoccupation with the national in Mayan literature, or that Palestinian literature is not concerned with modernity. On the contrary, contemporary Mayan literature is

situated in a larger political context of emerging movements for indigenous autonomy in Mexico and Latin America. Following the Zapatista Uprising in 1994, indigenous autonomy in Chiapas has been an integral part of the political discourse and cultural activism. While Zapatista literature, particularly Marcos' folktales, emphasizes that the indigenous narrative is part of the revival of indigenous national consciousness across all indigenous groups in Mexico, the insistence of Mayan writers in *Sna Jtz'ibajom*, CELALI and FOMMA, to write and perform in Mayan languages, and to translate their texts from Spanish to Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and other indigenous languages, reflects their assertion of Mayan nationalism.

Indigenous nationalism has also influenced social movements. The indigenous women's movement in Chiapas, for example, has used the momentum created by the Zapatista uprising to form a national movement. In 1997, they established the first national indigenous women's social movement network, the *Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de México*, CONAMI (National Council of Indigenous Women, Mexico). The activities of this movement has relied on forums, workshops, and national meetings held throughout Mexico (Blackwell 117). Women from indigenous, peasant, community, or regional organizations have joined this movement.

In the Palestinian case, however, recent scholarship on Palestinian novels that appeared in Israel between 1967 and 1987 reveals that modernity in these narratives was juxtaposed against a Zionist modernist utopia, according to which "both modernization and integration of Palestinians in Israel go hand in hand" (Makhoul 153). This trend is particularly evident in counteraction novels that portray Palestinian characters who move into Jewish Israeli cities, only to fail at assimilating into the dominant culture, although

they give up their tradition, religious practices, or other elements of their Palestinian identity that supposedly differentiates them from modernism and Zionism.

To return to the contrast, I would like to reflect here on the reasons that may explain the persistence of the national in Palestinian literature, versus the centrality of the modern in Mayan literature. Here a brief review of the recent historical and political context of the intensification of Palestinian nationalism in Israel is necessary. In 2011, the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) passed the “*Nakba* Law”. Officially titled “Budget Principles Law (Amendment 39) - Reducing Budgetary Support for Activities Contrary to the Principles of the State,” the law enables a committee of bureaucrats from the Ministry of Finance to fine municipalities, public institutions, or publicly supported organizations- if they believe that these bodies oppose the interpretation of the term “Jewish and democratic State,” express feelings of mourning related to the Israel Independence Day or *al- Nakba*, or violate the symbols of the State.¹⁶¹ In other words, the law outlaws the Palestinian right for collective memory by criminalizing the commemoration of *al- Nakba*.

Moreover, in 2006 and 2007, Palestinians in Israel, represented by civil society and different organizations, drafted four documents: “Future Visions of the Palestinian Arab Citizens in Israel,” “The Haifa Declaration,” “The Democratic Constitution,” and “An Equal Constitution for All?,” and “On the Constitution and the Collective Rights of Arabs Citizens in Israel.” Collectively known as the Vision Documents, these texts outline the Palestinians’ demands from the state, including the historical recognition of their status as an indigenous national minority. This trend, which Oded Haklai (2011)

¹⁶¹ For a review of the law and its consequences on the Palestinian minority, see the following press release by Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel: “Adalah: Nakba Law Violates Rights of Arab Minority to Preserve its History and Culture,” *Adalah* 27 March 2011. Web. 5 May 2013.

describes as a manifestation of the ethnonational turn in Palestinian identity in Israel, is significant, because it addresses the status of minority by questioning the civic definition of the state. Hakali elaborates: “The documents identify the Jewish identity of the state as the root cause of the [Palestinian] plight and make demands for major institutional changes that will address the distinct ethnonational identity of the Palestinians in Israel” (114).

This context of a collective assertion of a Palestinian national identity explains the persistence of the national in Palestinian literature. I must add here that, in light of this political context, it would be interesting to read Imīl Habībī’s fairytale not only as a national narrative, but also as a text of resistance that counters the “Nakba Law”.

The persistence of the question of modernity in Mayan literature, on the other hand, is better understood in the context of the quest for autonomy. Despite their demands for autonomy in Chiapas, Zapatista Mayans seek inclusion in modern Mexico as equal citizens. Yet, the quest for autonomy, which gained urgency and became a national debate in Mexico following the emergence of the EZLN, expresses an outwardly negative attitude towards the interference of the state in decisions that define the way of life within indigenous communities. In a nutshell, autonomy calls for the recognition of four types of indigenous rights: Political, social, economic and legal (Valesco Sánchez 2). The Zapatista initiative for autonomy asserts that indigenous communities have the right to elect their own authorities in accordance with their own conception of “democracy”. They also demand respect and recognition of indigenous institutions and cultures on terms that are equal to *mestizos* and Creoles. Moreover, they ask for economic autonomy that is based on the transfer of resources and, above all, community participation in

development projects. In Chiapas and elsewhere in Mexico, the recognition of ‘customary law’ or “*usos y costumbres*,” by the general order is a key tenant of autonomy (2).

It is important to point out here that there is no consensus within the indigenous peoples, or the rest of society about this notion of autonomy (Rus, Hernández Castillo and Mattiace 253). However, since the quest for autonomy has been championed, reformulated and reiterated by Zapatista Mayans, although they are not representative of all Mayans in Chiapas, it is relevant to address their notion of modernity. Zapatista Mayans also do not believe that their ‘traditional’ life style as indigenous people, or their cultural distinctiveness, are barriers to their inclusion in the nation as modern Mexican citizens. The Zapatista declaration “On Autonomy” is the perfect example to illustrate this point. This declaration, which was delivered in the “Preamble to the Resolutions of Roundtable One” at the Zapatista-sponsored National Indigenous Forum, held in San Cristóbal on January 3-8, 1996, reconciles indigenous tradition with Mexican nationalism and citizenship. The following selection from Gary Gossen’s translation of the declaration (2004) illustrates this trend, by referring explicitly to the hegemonic notion of modernity and prejudice against the Mayas in Mexico as the major reason for the exclusion and repression of the indigenous:

In a profound sense, we consider ourselves to be Mexicans. This is so even though the founders of the Mexican state and all governments that have followed in their footsteps have ignored our existence. This is so even though many Mexican men and women regard us with condescension and ignorance, virtually denying our existence. Because of

this, as we reaffirm once again on this occasion our existence as a people, we wish to make it known that our current struggle for acknowledgment of our separate identities does not seek to launch a fight with our fellow Mexicans, nor much less to secede as our separate identity as Indians. Through our act of demanding recognition of our Indian identity, we wish to contribute to the formation of a more fundamental unity of all Mexican men and women, a unity that recognizes the true diversity of the ethnic communities that make up modern Mexico. This is a fundamental condition for harmony among all Mexican men and women. Our quest for recovery of our own identity does not, in any way, constitute a challenge to national sovereignty. (141)

It is important to point out here that, on February 16, 1996, the Mexican federal government and the ELZN signed the San Andrés Accords, which recognizes indigenous autonomy. But, the Mexican government has subsequently failed to honor it. However, the Zapatista insistence on autonomy resurfaced dramatically again on December 21, 2012, when tens of thousands of indigenous Zapatistas marched peacefully and silently in the cities of Palenque, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, and San Cristóbal, in the largest mobilization since the uprising in 1994. In the communiqué that was issued after the marches, the Zapatista reiterated their quest for autonomy, while emphasizing more indigenous independence from national politics in Mexico. The following four declarations from the communiqué convey this quest for indigenous autonomy and the increasing tension with the state of Mexico:

Now with our word, we announce that: First – We will reaffirm and

consolidate our participation in the National Indigenous Congress, the space of encounter with the original peoples of our country. Second – We will reinitiate contact with our *compañeros* and *compañeras* adherents of the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle in Mexico and the world. Third – We will try to construct the necessary bridges toward the social movements that have arisen and will arise, not to direct or supplant them, but to learn from them, from their history, from their paths and destinies. Fourth – We will continue to maintain our critical distance with respect to the entirety of the Mexican political class, which has thrived at the expense of the needs and desires of humble and simple people.

On Limits and Potential:

Because of the comparative orientation and scope of this dissertation, there are some topics that were not addressed, such as the role of bilingualism in Mayan literature and the genre of Palestinian literature in Hebrew. Needless to say, writing in the indigenous vernacular language, versus the language of the majority, has political implications for the very definition of indigenous minority. The examination of these linguistic dynamics in Mayan and Palestinian literatures requires a theoretical model that scrutinizes the notion of the minor in indigenous minority literature.

A close reading of the literary culture in both Mayan and Palestinian literatures is another aspect that did not receive adequate attention in this study. Here, I think of the role of local readership, circulation and translation, genres, trends in criticism, and comparisons between Mexican and Palestinian literatures, respectively. To examine these

issues would provide a more comprehensive, as well as a more nuanced, understanding of both literary traditions.

For example, for future research on Mayan literature, I would suggest looking at the emergence of new narrative and prose, including novels in Mayan languages, and the way in which these texts move away from the ethnographic and oral literature paradigm. I would also suggest examining Mayan literature in comparison with the other flourishing literatures in indigenous languages and regions in Mexico, such as Zapotec from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and Purépecha in Michoacán. Such a comparison across indigenous languages and regions will provide a more contextualized reading of Mayan literature in relation to other indigenous minority literature in Mexico, as well as Mexican national literature.

I also believe that it would be important to consider the role of the internet, and social media, in particular, in promoting dialogue between Mayan writers and scholars throughout Latin America and the world. FOMMA, for example, launched their Facebook page in 2012, and the collective has an online archive, relying on extensive use of the technological infrastructure of the Centro Hemisférico at NYU.

With respect to Palestinian literature, on the other hand, I would suggest examining the recent boom of young writers, both men and women, who have published numerous short stories, novels and blogs, while maintaining close cultural ties with the literary scene in Ramallah, Cairo, Beirut and the Arab technosphere. How these writers situate themselves as part of the global Arab youth cultural and literary movement can help us understand the limits of such categories as Palestinian national literature and minority literature.

Finally, to return to the original question of this dissertation, how are Mayan literature and Palestine literature situated closely, vis-à-vis New Comparative Literature/World Literature? Here, I would argue that the web of new critical and theoretical questions that has resulted from the Mayan-Palestinian conversation transcends Damrosch's notion of the 'alternative' canon, as they require critics and readers of World Literature to do more than pay attention to texts across traditions. For example, one of the most interesting theoretical paradigms that resulted from the Mayan-Palestinian conversation is the trope of the supernatural as a political text. In the Mayan dream narratives and the Palestinian fairytale that were analyzed, the supernatural appears as the language of social and political critique. While visions and spirits emerge in Mayan literature to reveal stories about internal colonialism, they surface in Palestinian literature in the middle of the night by the Mediterranean, to tell stories about Palestinian displacement and internal exile. In both cases, the supernatural trope is anchored in narratives about land struggle.

Intriguingly, this political dimension of the supernatural goes beyond the hegemonic discourses of Otherness and exoticism that resulted from the paradigms of Magical Realism and Orientalism, which historically have been the 'entry point' of Latin American and Arabic literatures into World Literature. As the Mayan-Palestinian conversation destabilizes these paradigms, it centralizes indigenous minority literature. In fact, despite their subaltern positions, contemporary Mayan literature in Chiapas and Palestinian literature in Israel contribute to new ways of thinking not only about *re-writing* New Comparative Literature, but also about *re-canonizing* Latin American and Arabic Literature in World Literature.

Clearly, in order to gain a deeper insight into how Mayan and Palestinian literatures reconfigure New Comparative Literature/World Literature, the Mayan-Palestinian conversation must continue!

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