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## Translating Anxiety in the Poetry of Maya Abu al-Hayyat

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Translating Anxiety in the Poetry of Maya Abu al-Hayyat

A Thesis Presented

By

JULIANNE C. ZALA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Translating Anxiety in the Poetry of Maya Abu al-Hayyat

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## ABSTRACT

TRANSLATING ANXIETY IN THE POETRY OF MAYA ABU AL-HAYYAT

SEPTEMBER 2020

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Maya Abu al-Hayyat (born 1980) is a Palestinian poet who thematizes motherhood, love, war/revolution, grief, and political hypocrisy in her poetry. In the context of Palestinian literature, she fits within a tradition of Resistance Literature, yet redefines it. Given that al-Hayyat has not been widely translated into English, this thesis presents 33 translations of her poems taken from her three poetry collections: *Mā qālathu fīhī* (*Thus Spake the Beloved*, 2007), *Tilka al-ibtisāma-- dhālika al-qalb* (*This Smile, That Heart*, 2012), and *Fasātīn baytīyya wa ḥurūb* (*House Dresses and Wars*, 2016). Throughout these three collections the poet shifts her use of vocalization and her poetic techniques. As argued throughout, translating al-Hayyat into English is important because it marks a shift from resistance as a uniform, collective experience to an individual and multifaceted one.

Additionally, in this thesis I argue that the speakers in al-Hayyat's poetry are anxious agents. I interpret the speakers' anxiety as manifested in the body and caused in part by living under occupation. The speakers are agents because they criticize patriotic motherhood and gender-based inequality. Finally, I explain how the translation concepts of renarration and the deformation zone inform each other because they force the translator confront their position in society and to the text. These terms are significant because they address the anxiety of translators potentially enacting orientalist violence and catering to American poetry values when translating Arabic women's poetry into English.

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## CHAPTER 1

### CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

To live under late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of ‘being in pain’: fortified structures, military posts, and roadblocks everywhere; buildings that bring back painful memories of humiliation, interrogations, and beatings; curfews that imprison hundreds of thousands in their cramped homes every night from dusk to daybreak; soldiers patrolling the unlit streets, frightened by their own shadows; children blinded by rubber bullets; parents shamed and beaten in front of their families; soldiers urinating on fences, shooting at the rooftop water tanks just for fun, chanting loud offensive slogans, pounding on fragile tin doors to frighten the children, confiscating papers, or dumping garbage in the middle of a residential neighborhood; border guards kicking over a vegetable stand or closing borders at whim; bones broken; shootings and fatalities—a certain kind of madness.

--Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”<sup>1</sup>

The words of another can shake us, being other, being not what we would say.

--Eléna Rivera, “Translation: A Movement”<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Achille Mbembe’s “Necropolitics” describes a “permanent condition of ‘being in pain.’” Mbembe asserts that the sovereign states’ role has shifted “[to] the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.”<sup>3</sup> Reading Mbembe’s inventory of humiliation and avenues to death is to experience empathy and distance. The reader feels empathetic for Palestinians yet is removed from the scenarios being described. Palestinian writer Maya Abu al-Hayyat tackles the themes of motherhood, love, war/revolution, grief, and political hypocrisy while describing the daily experiences of living under occupation. These daily experiences range

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<sup>1</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy C. Campbell and Adam Sitze, trans. Libby Meintjes (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 161.

<sup>2</sup> Eléna Rivera, “Translation: A Movement,” in *Kitchen Table Translation* (Pittsburgh: Blue Sketch Press, 2017), 101.

<sup>3</sup> Mbembe, “Biopolitics,” 161.

from the minutiae of managing the stresses of motherhood to the anxieties tied to living under Israeli occupation. This condition comprises the foundation of her speakers' anxiety. It further encompasses what the poet refers to as being "mentally occupied."<sup>4</sup> I argue that the speakers of al-Hayyat's poetry are anxious agents. In other words, they exert agency but do not have control over their life or death. They live under the purview of mental occupation.

While the emotions in al-Hayyat's poetry may transfer from the page to the reader and translator, this transfer leads to the articulation of a variety of distinct anxieties the translator experiences. Poet and translator Eléna Rivera implies this with her quotations from works by William Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson. The two pivotal translation theories to this project are Mona Baker's concept of renarration and Johannes Göransson's theory of deformation zone, both which are discussed in depth below. I felt anxious about reifying stereotypes of "oriental" women and unintentionally appealing to American poetry sensibilities, such as making the poems too accessible. These two practices inform each other because they force the translator to confront their position in society and the text.

### **Maya Abu al-Hayyat: Life and Work**

Maya Abu al-Hayyat was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1980 in the Palestinian Diaspora and amid the Lebanese Civil War. She moved to Jordan at a young age. There, she lived with her paternal aunt while her father, a high-ranking PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) official, fought in Beirut. Her childhood was a nomadic existence. She primarily grew up in Jordan but lived in Lebanon for a time. In 1993, al-Hayyat and her father, along with the PLO, moved from Tunisia to Jordan and then crossed into Palestine where they settled in Nablus in 1995 in

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<sup>4</sup> "'Breaking Bounds' - Kalimat - Palestinian Literature Festival - Nablus, 4 November 2018 - YouTube," accessed April 13, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgSQml6\\_HLs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgSQml6_HLs). 1:21:10-1:21:50.

adherence with the Oslo accords. In this way, her life was embedded in the Palestinian resistance movement. This will be further elaborated in the next section.

Before embarking upon her literary career, she earned a BSc (Bachelor of Science) in civil engineering in 2003. In addition to writing, she directs the Palestine Writing Workshop, which works with children to promote literacy through writing and storytelling and support emerging writers in developing their skills. Al-Hayyat now lives in East Jerusalem with her husband and children.<sup>5</sup> In addition to her volumes of poetry, she has published the following novels: *'Ataba thaqīlat al-rūḥ* (*Threshold of Heavy Spirit*, 2011), *Habbat al-sukr* (*Grains of Sugar*, 2004), *+AB* (*Bloodtype*, 2012), and numerous children's books. She has won the Young Creative Writer Award from the Palestinian Ministry of Culture (2005) and the Young Writer Award for Poetry from the A.M. Qattan Foundation (2006).<sup>6</sup> Her children's story *Barakat al-as'ila al-zarqā'* (*The Blue Pool of Questions*)<sup>7</sup> was translated into English by Hanan Awad and published in 2017 by Penny Candy Books.

Al- Hayyat's experiences growing up with her paternal aunt in Jordan inform her poetry. In an autobiographical essay she explains that she lived with her aunt, since her mother was absent. She tried to escape societal expectations but ended up marrying and having children. In the essay, she conveys that she could not escape the traditional norms of womanhood.<sup>8</sup> In addition,

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<sup>5</sup> Marcello Di Cintio, *Pay No Heed to the Rockets: Life in Contemporary Palestine*, 2018, 32–33, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1833782>.

<sup>6</sup> “All 4 Palestine | Model Role Details,” accessed April 2, 2020, <http://www.all4palestine.com/ModelDetails.aspx?gid=7&mid=1943&lang=en>.

<sup>7</sup> The translations of these titles are taken from the website Penny Candy Books website. All subsequent translations from Arabic are my own unless stated otherwise. “Meet Maya Abu-AlHayyat,” Penny Candy Books, last modified April 2, 2020, <https://www.pennycandybooks.com/blog-1/meet-maya-abu-alhayyat>.

<sup>8</sup> رواية الحياة... الحياة الروائية | شهادة في الرواية، فسحة ثقافية فلسطينية, <https://www.arab48.com/%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%AD%D8%A9/%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%82/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AF/2017/05/15/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-->

during a panel at a Palestinian literature festival she expressed that she did not have a sense of motherhood due to her absent mother. Instead, al-Hayyat explains that she had a socially constructed and romantic notion of what it meant to be a mother.<sup>9</sup> Following the birth of her twins she began to write again to escape feeling panicked. She says that motherhood left her feeling empty, a sentiment that haunts much of her poetry. In fact, al-Hayyat states that writing became about exposing the misgivings of motherhood and religion.<sup>10</sup> Her writing was influenced by portraying motherhood as a confusing experience rather than a familiar one.

Al-Hayyat's internal conflict with her Palestinian heritage impacts her writing. She writes of having to verify her nationality at the beginning of each school year for her teacher in Amman, Jordan. Al-Hayyat implies this was a confusing experience since she grew up there, dedicated her poetry to king and country, and wore traditional Jordanian dress for Independence Day celebrations. She eventually obtained Jordanian citizenship.<sup>11</sup> In the book *Pay No Heed to the Rockets*, al-Hayyat also expresses feeling separated from her Palestinian heritage; she says, "I only knew Palestine from what I saw on television... and what I read in poems of Mahmoud Darwish."<sup>12</sup> Once she returned to Nablus with her father, she became acquainted with her nationality yet discovered the limitations of being a part of the collective Palestinian society. Her poetry emphasizes the individual and multifaced experiences of resistance rather than a uniform, collective one. Al-Hayyat's childhood of growing up without a mother, unconventional views

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[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%7C-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9.](#)

<sup>9</sup> "Breaking Bounds" - Kalimat - Palestinian Literature Festival - Nablus, 4 November 2018 - YouTube." 58:57-1:00:20

<sup>10</sup> فسحة ثقافية فلسطينية, رواية الحياة... الحياة الرواية | سهادة في الرواية

<sup>11</sup> رواية الحياة... الحياة الرواية | سهادة في الرواية, فسحة ثقافية فلسطينية

<sup>12</sup> Di Cintio, *Pay No Heed to the Rockets*, 32.

surrounding motherhood, and being kept away from aspects of her Palestinian heritage have informed her writing.

### **A Brief History of the PLO**

Maya Abu al-Hayyat's biography unfolds within the history of the PLO. Some significant dates of the PLO are 1964, 1970, 1982, and 1995. The PLO is founded in 1964 during a summit in Cairo with the initial goal of uniting Arab groups and creating a liberated Palestine. Following the War of 1967, the PLO moved to Jordan where they fought Israeli forces alongside the Jordanian military. Eventually tensions rose between the two groups leading to the Jordanian military shelling Palestinian refugee camps with the support of the Syrian army. This event is referred to as Black September. Consequently, the PLO is driven out of Jordan and moves to Lebanon. In 1982, during the Lebanese Civil War, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon to fight the PLO. Under the watch of Israeli forces, the right-wing Lebanese militia, the Phalange, massacred Palestinians at the refugee camps Sabra and Shatila. It is estimated that 500-3500 were killed. As a result of Israeli military pressure, the PLO was expelled from Lebanon and moved into Tunisia. The PLO eventually settled into the West Bank in 1995 in accordance of the Oslo Accords.<sup>13</sup> The speakers in al-Hayyat's poetry live within the occupied territories and experience what Mbembe calls a “permanent condition of being in pain.”<sup>14</sup> Additionally, her writing resonates with scholars Ariella Azoulay’s and Adi Ophir’s argument that occupation is integral to the functioning apparatus of the Israeli state.<sup>15</sup> The daily experiences that al-Hayyat describes in her

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<sup>13</sup> “Palestine Liberation Organization,” Wikipedia, last modified July 27, 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine\\_Liberation\\_Organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine_Liberation_Organization)

<sup>14</sup> Mbembe, “Biopolitics,” 161.

<sup>15</sup> Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *The One-State Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine*, trans. Tal Haran, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 14.

poetry are characteristic of occupation, such as crossing through checkpoints, the destruction of property, displacement, and loss. These experiences partially explain the speakers' distrust and anxiety regarding the state of Israel.

### **Resistance as a Theme in Modern Arabic Poetry**

Resistance has been a theme in modern Arabic poetry since the 1930s. It is a theme that traverses neoclassical and free verse poetry. The purpose of this section is to place Maya Abu al-Hayyat's poetry within this tradition but argue that she redefines it. Additionally, I illuminate the key dates in the development of resistance poetry which are the 1930s, the 1950s, and 1967. The 1930s mark the beginning of Palestinian poets writing resistance poetry in defiance of British colonialism. In the 1950s Arab poets shift to writing committed literature that was embedded in Arab existentialism, an intellectual movement focused on the decolonization of Arab subjects. Resistance re-emerges as a theme in 1967 following the War of 1967 and Jean-Paul Sartre's public support of Israel. This section is followed by a general description of the three collections I translated from and the place of resistance therein.

Al-Hayyat's poetry falls in the tradition of resistance literature, even though she refines it. According to critic Atef al-Shaer's designation, al-Hayyat is not a resistance poet. Al-Shaer writes, "Palestinian literature from the 1990s onwards is rich in experimentation and expressionism. It is no longer a literature of direct resistance that uses resistance language, even though this continues to be found in the younger generation's writings. When literature documents, it does so through details; through minutiae, big subjects are examined."<sup>16</sup> In al-Hayyat's poetry, she tends to focus on the "details and minutiae." For example, in the poem

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<sup>16</sup> Atef al-Shaer, *A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba* (Saqi Books, 2019), xvii.

“Cafe” (pgs. 66-67, *House Dresses and Wars*) the speaker describes her trip to the café: “I walk on the remnants of burnt tires” and she subsequently injures her leg. This allows the reader into her daily life, which includes unbearable destruction and the suffering of bodies without using the “militant language” of other poets. The same technique is used in the poem “Painful Pictures” (pages 43-44, *House Dresses and Wars*). In this case the speaker reads the caption under a photograph “Syrians wait in the cold and rain for their turn to buy bread,” causing the speaker to contemplate their own passivity. These two examples suit al-Shaer's definition because they examine big topics without overtly using resistance language. Although, these two are not mutually exclusive, as shown in earlier resistance literature. Nevertheless, al-Hayyat does directly criticize aspects of her society. This is true of the poem “Insight” in which the speaker critiques martyrdom quite explicitly. Again, the speaker uses the image of the orphan not to glorify the cause of resistance but to criticize it. In addition, the homeland is not the beloved of the speaker but characterized as greedy and self-serving. Her poetry has aspects of resistance literature, but she redefines it by not using direct resistance language and problematizing concepts that are usually glorified. Al-Hayyat's Palestinian contemporaries include the following: Rajah Shehadeh, Suad Amiry, Nur Masalha, Nasab Hussein, Salim Tamari, Ala Hlehel, Fida Jiryis, and Asmaa Azaizeh.<sup>17</sup> Her work aligns most with Nasab Hussein and Asmaa Azaizeh who are both prose poets and write about the struggles of occupation from an individual perspective.<sup>18</sup>

The 1930s mark the beginning of resistance literature in the context of colonial suppression. In the Palestinian revolt of 1936-9, Palestinian peasants rose after the killing of ‘Iz al-Din al-

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<sup>17</sup> “Palestinian Literature Festival: Connecting Palestinians Readers with Writers,” accessed April 2, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/palestinian-literature-festival-connecting-palestinians-readers-with-writers-1.60517182>.

<sup>18</sup> “Kalimat Palestinian Literature Festival,” accessed June 7, 2020, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/blog/2019/kalimat/>.

Qassam, which caused a shift of Palestinian literature.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Ghassan Kanafani<sup>20</sup> documents a popular poetry from that era mirroring the impact of “the aggravating economic and political crisis on the literary movement.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, he acknowledged there were almost no writers that were not involved in the movement against colonialism. Some of these writers include Ibrahim Tuqan, Abu Salma (Abd al-Karmi) and Abdrahim Mahmoud.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Abdrahim Mahmoud died while reciting poetry in his village al-Shajara in 1948.<sup>23</sup> Writers of this generation used classical verse including “traditional, predictable patterns of rhyme, rhythm and metre.”<sup>24</sup> They were concerned with “sacrifice and devotion to the land” and used language “that [evoked] nostalgia, loss and resistance all in the same breath.”<sup>25</sup> Al-Hayyat’s poetry has some overt references to resistance but it differs from this early poetry because she does not write in meter and is not writing against British colonialism. This type of poetry gave way to committed (*iltizām*) poetry in the 1950s, but resistance continued to be a theme.

In the 1950s committed literature was embedded in Arab existentialism focused on the decolonization of Arab subjects. It is not the same as Sartrean existentialism but “a series of formulations and adaptations that collectively sought to create a new postcolonial Arab subject: confident, politically involved, independent, self-sufficient, and above all liberated.”<sup>26</sup> Abd al-Rahman Badawi, who coined this type of existentialism, announced that this movement would

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<sup>19</sup> Bashir Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present*, First paperback edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 16.

<sup>20</sup> A Palestinian writer (1961-1973) and leading member of the PLO. He and his niece were assassinated by Israeli intelligence, Mossad, in Beirut.

<sup>21</sup> Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> al-Shaer, *A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba*, xii.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Yoav Di-Capua, “Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 1061.



“liberate the Arab self from the constraints of colonial culture...”<sup>27</sup> Arab existentialism did grow into an “influential intellectual movement.”<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, critics of Badawi’s existentialism debated over its function and one of its aspects, committed literature.

Committed literature was articulated by Taha Husayn’s<sup>29</sup> reading of Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* The work

critically examined the relationship between the writer and society, making the argument that since writing is a consequential form of acting/being, intellectuals should assume political responsibility for their work and the circumstances that condition it. This call for responsibility-*cum*-professional action was conjoined in Sartre’s concept of commitment (*engagement*)<sup>30</sup> (emphasis original).

This definition of commitment would be contested in a debate until 1967, the end of committed literature. The two sides of this argument were: “the socialist-realist model of commitment on the one hand, as well as the pan-Arab model, founded on Sartre’s view, on the other hand.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, committed literature became a functional method for the younger generation to oppose colonial elites in their states and work towards decolonizing themselves. The themes of existentialist literature present in the poetry and prose in this time period included: “alienation, anticipation of death, absurdity, angst, estrangement, and revolt.”<sup>32</sup> Maya Abu al-Hayyat's poetry aligns with some themes of committed literature because she writes in free verse and her poetry includes themes of “alienation” and “anticipation of death.” Nevertheless, the purpose of her poetry is not to decolonize the Arab subject but to mark the shift of resistance as an individual experience rather than a collective one. Eventually committed literature was phased out once

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<sup>27</sup> Di-Capua, 1064.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Husayn (1889-1973) was an Egyptian writer.

<sup>30</sup> Di-Capua, 1070.

<sup>31</sup> Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel*, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Di-Capua, 1084.

Sartre, during a visit to Egypt days before the 1967 war, publicly supported Israel. It was perceived as a great betrayal by many of his supporters in the Arab world.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, existentialism left an important mark on Arab literature and still carried on the theme of resistance, specifically regarding a colonial past.

Resistance was a theme that was featured in Palestinian poetry, especially after the 1967 War, and especially in the works of Mahmoud Darwish<sup>34</sup> and Fadwa Tuqan.<sup>35</sup> Their writing was influenced by the political context of their time. They should be considered alongside al-Hayyat because they wrote in the same form but not to similar ends.

Al-Hayyat's subject matter in her poetry differs, though, from that of Mahmoud Darwish. Darwish is perhaps the most well-known Palestinian poet. Athamneh discusses how Mahmoud Darwish transitioned from a resistance to a humanist poet, especially with his publication of *Do Not Apologize for What You Did* (2003). This relates to Athamneh's characterization of Darwish's 2003 collection: "Darwish's treatment of the self and the other tells the story of a young poet who resists his enemy through his poetry for decades. However, this treatment witnesses a shift toward a humanist look at the conflict and the parties involved."<sup>36</sup> In contrast, al-Hayyat is not humanist but focused on the speakers' private lives. Al-Hayyat also diverges from Darwish's work because she rarely humanizes "the other" in her poetry. According to Edward Said, "Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and approved authority."<sup>37</sup> The speakers frequently

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<sup>33</sup> Di-Capua, 1088.

<sup>34</sup> 1941-2008

<sup>35</sup> 1917-2003

<sup>36</sup> Waed Athamneh, *Modern Arabic Poetry: Revolution and Conflict* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), xxix.

narrate experiences from their daily life, but they are not interested in examining the “human individuality” of Israelis. For example, in the poem “I Don’t Anything about Revolution” (pages 39-41, *This Smile, That Heart*), near the end of the poem the speaker reports that her hairdresser says, “...Israel is a bitch.” The speakers narrate experiences from their daily lives to demonstrate how the state of Israel impedes life and contributes to the speakers’ anxiety, which is a theme that underlines al-Hayyat's poetry. Her poetry is humanistic in the sense that it centers individual experiences, but it does not humanize the other, in this case Israeli. This is just one way al-Hayyat reconfigures the theme of resistance.

Fadwa Tuqan’s resistance poetry is slightly different from al-Hayyat's even though they use the same subject matter. Fadwa Tuqan is perhaps the most well-known female Palestinian poet. In her article “Political Engagement: The Palestinian Confessional Genre” Salam Mir analyzes Fadwa Tuqan’s autobiography and some of her poetry to trace Tuqan’s development as an engaged writer who was shaped by political events, specifically the 1967 war. She writes, “the poet becomes a political activist, a socialite, and a people’s poet. From then on, love of the homeland takes priority, for her desire now is to write poetry that ‘ferments and ages in the earthen wine jugs of people.’”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it qualifies as resistance poetry. Tuqan was trained as a classical poet by her brother, Ibrahim Tuqan, another famous Palestinian poet mentioned above. Tuqan’s confessional poetry shifted dramatically after the June war. According to Mir, Tuqan began to “[foreground] the martyrdom and sacrifice of young Palestinian fighters as the poet, now living under occupation, understands the full value of loss, exile, and resistance.”<sup>39</sup> Tuqan’s poetry tends to glorify the Palestinian resistance fighters, with lines such as, “they

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<sup>38</sup> Salam Mir, “Political Engagement: The Palestinian Confessional Genre,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2013): 368.

<sup>39</sup> Mir, “Political Engagement,” 370.

became a legend/ They grew, and became the bridge they grew, grew and became/ larger than all poetry.”<sup>40</sup> In contrast, al-Hayyat's poetry critiques the concept of martyrdom. For example, in the poem “Insight” the speaker writes, “I have seen children/Who gave their parents to the homeland/ But I have never seen a homeland/ That gave an orphan a father.”<sup>41</sup> Here, al-Hayyat instead uses the image of the orphan to demonstrate how the homeland does not reward its people for their sacrifices. Instead, she problematizes the concepts of martyrdom and homeland, so they do not connote glory and revolution. In this example, al-Hayyat utilizes the same subject matter as Fadwa Tuqan’s poetry but primarily and express the grief of those left behind.

The three poetry collections I translated from differ in style and subject matter, yet they all thematize love and resistance. *Thus Spake the Beloved* is concerned with myths, history, and gender roles. This entire collection is fully vocalized with short vowels unlike the other two volumes. On the other hand, *This Smile, That Heart* seems more concerned with relationships and the consequences of war and revolution and has a more sarcastic tone. The tone of the collection *House Dresses and Wars* is also sarcastic but, in this volume, al-Hayyat is more concerned with motherhood and questioning political hypocrisy.

### **Manifestations of Anxiety in the Body and in Translation**

The concept of anxiety in this thesis stands for myriad anxieties including the speakers’ and my own as a translator. I argue that anxiety is manifested in the speakers’ bodies in al-Hayyat's poetry. In part, their anxiety lies with a lack of control over life and death, since they live under occupation. Additionally, the speakers, who are mothers, feel stressed managing their daily life. On top of the speakers experiencing anxiety, I experienced anxiety as a translator but differently

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Foyle, *A blade of grass: new Palestinian poetry*, 45. Translation by al-Hayyat and Naomi Foyle.

than the speaker. I felt anxious about the following: reifying stereotypes of Palestinian women, and unintentionally appealing to American poetry sensibilities. At the end of this section, I elaborate on the benefit of acknowledging these varied anxieties.

Aside from being understood as a mental illness, I recognize anxiety as an emotional response triggered by a stimulus typically lacking explicit definition. Oftentimes the individual experiences physical symptoms in which the body mobilizes in response to handle the perceived threat. Anxiety can also be exhibited psychologically, behaviorally, and existentially.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk acknowledges that anxiety manifests in the body; after interviewing Vietnam war veterans, he states, “We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present.”<sup>43</sup> These readings describe how anxiety manifests in the body and the mind. Kolk's work demonstrates that ongoing repeated trauma, as Mbembe describes<sup>44</sup>, can leave an impression and has lasting consequences for how an individual manages their everyday life. Although it is not my intention to diagnose the speakers in the poetry, in this case the aftereffects of trauma can be applied to Palestinians who have been historically oppressed. One example of this is the poem “Half- Dead, Half- Alive” (pages 60-62, *That Smile, This Heart*) where the speaker fixates on the image of a mirror, which signifies death to her, her body paralyzed in a moment of fear. Another example is in the poem “Children” (page 17, *That Smile, This Heart*) the speaker’s embodied response to seeing the hand of a dead child is to binge on food. In these

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<sup>42</sup> This definition is influenced by: Allan Horwitz, *Anxiety: A Short History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that Mbembe is not describing anxiety in his essay “Necropolitics.”

two examples, the speakers in al-Hayyat's poetry are overcome with anxiety or exhibit embodied compulsions in order to cope.

The speakers, especially those who are mothers, also experience anxiety over managing their daily lives. Scholar Carol Singley explains how female writers identify their anxiety in relation to their bodies. According to her, “the body—its functions and roles—is a crucial starting point for understanding female reading and writing, not only because woman is traditionally defined in terms of her body but because the body serves as the literal and figurative site of female pain, pleasure, and production.”<sup>45</sup> The scholar qualifies the body as “an ambivalent source of identification for women and may be seen positively or negatively.”<sup>46</sup> This is the case with the speakers in al-Hayyat's poetry.<sup>47</sup> Arguably, the speakers are ambivalent about their roles as wife and mother. One example is the poem, “Mourning the Desire of Mothers” (pages 11-13, *That Smile, This Heart*) in a striking line the speaker says, “when a child touches me by mistake in places that are dormant.” The speaker is implying that her sexuality has been “dormant” in the wake of her duties as a mother. The mother finds comfort in remembering mothers from her past who also had “dead desires.” There is no explicit coping mechanism the speaker takes in contrast to the speaker in the poem “Children.”

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<sup>45</sup> Carol J. Singley, “Female Language, Body, and Self,” in *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*, ed. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, SUNY Series in Feminist Criticism and Theory (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Singley, “Female Language, Body, and Self,” 6.

<sup>47</sup> Singley pinpointing ambivalence in the body as an exhibition of anxiety shows our understanding has evolved since Freud coined his term “anxiety hysteria” which described that repressed libido is “not converted [...] but is set free in the shape of anxiety.” Taken from: Laplanche, Jean and Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1988), 38.

Again, I experienced anxiety as a translator due to the fears of reifying stereotypes of Palestinian women and unintentionally appealing to American poetry sensibilities. Translation scholars Carol Maier and Lina Mounzer elaborate on these concerns.

Mounzer, a Syrian translator, argues that there is an inherent violence involved in translating. She writes “there is a violence in undoing someone’s words and reconstituting them in a vocabulary of your own choosing...”<sup>48</sup> This is where my anxiety lies: unintentionally enacting a kind of Orientalist violence by portraying the speaker as oppressed, weak, etc. According to Benmessaoud, citing Abu-Lughod, the western translator “‘risk[s] playing into the hands of Orientalist discourse’ even when they are of ‘the combatting-stereotype sort.’”<sup>49</sup> For example, in the poem “Sex” (page 57, *House Dresses and Wars*) I chose to highlight the speaker's sexual agency at the risk of implying that Eastern, “women [in Orientalist discourse are] usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.”<sup>50</sup> Arguably I could be playing up stereotypes of the speaker as sexually available at the expense of retaining her agency.

In addition, I felt anxiety that I appealed too much to American poetry sensibilities. Translation scholar, Carol Maier addresses the anxiety translators face in the process, specifically when working with texts that do not fit within the target culture. Maier writes, “after all, many translators do find themselves irreversibly altered in ways both comfortable and uncomfortable as they work to express texts and contexts in languages in which a context for those texts is not

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<sup>48</sup> Lina Mounzer, “War in Translation,” in *Kitchen Table Translation*, ed. Madhu H. Kaza (Pittsburgh: Blue Sketch Press, 2017), 137-8.

<sup>49</sup> Sanaa Benmessaoud, “The Challenges of Translating Third World Women in a Transnational Context: The Case of Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass*,” *The Translator* 19, no. 2 (2013): 200.

<sup>50</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 207

easy to establish.”<sup>51</sup> Perhaps this may be difficult for English-language translators working from “third world” languages. This certainly contributed to my anxiety. According to Johannes Göransson us literary culture “has been too hygienic and clean” and in his estimation quick to reject translation because it “amplifies issues of power and conflict.”<sup>52</sup> My anxiety lies with aligning with these literary culture values instead of challenging them. I struggled to balance my agency as a translator and the expectations of my target audience. I tended to make the poems a little more accessible for my audience. I believe this is most apparent from my use of paratextual elements like footnotes and a glossary, which I talk about in the translation section. Specifically, in the poem “Daydreams” (page 29, *That Smile, This Heart*) the speaker mentions different cities and refugee camps in the West Bank. In order to avoid confusion for my reader yet simultaneously refrain from exoticizing, I elaborated on each in my glossary, rather than in footnotes or within the body of the poem itself.

In conclusion, these intertwined anxieties provide an ethics of translation where I exercise my agency as a translator by acknowledging my anxiety, which is one of privilege, and different from the speakers’ anxieties. This is elaborated on in a later section.

### **Gendering Resistance**

Overall, I argue al-Hayyat is a resistance poet since she criticizes Israeli occupation and patriotic motherhood, and destabilizes gender-based inequality. She critiques the practice of martyrdom through anxious speakers and overtly condemns it. Additionally, al-Hayyat exhibits resistance against gender-based inequality by focusing on her speakers’ sexuality and using the

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<sup>51</sup> Carol Maier, “The Translator as Theoros: Thoughts on Cogitation, Figuration and Current Creative Writing,” in *Translating Others*, ed. Theo Hermans (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), 166.

<sup>52</sup> Johannes Goransson, *Transgressive Circulation* (Blacksburg, Virginia: Noemi Press, Inc., 2018), 13.



quip. Her writing aligns with writers Assia Djébar, Sahar Khalifa, and Aliya Talib<sup>53</sup> who also portray their speakers/ narrators as active agents, or resistant in the face of war.

In her poetry, al-Hayyat does not directly criticize gender-based inequality; instead she destabilizes it through anxious female speakers. For instance, in the poem “Freedom” (pages 101-103, *House Dresses and Wars*) the speaker says, “Because I don’t want to say it publicly/ that I really miss/ living in a prison, with you its windows, doors, and walls.” In this quote the speaker explains her fraught conflict with her relationship. She feels shame that she longs for her partner and their relationship but also describes it as a prison. In other words, she exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards the gender- based expectations of her partnership and is resistant against it without fully criticizing it.

Al-Hayyat continues to complicate gender-based inequality through highlighting the speakers’ sexuality and using the quip. The poem “Sex” (page 57, *House Dresses and Wars*) opens with the speaker having sexual fantasies about her enemies. By the end of the poem, it is implied that she feels shame for her behavior. She says, “I notice that hostility/ which she has the luxury of forgetting/ is like pleasure, / it does not ever forget you.” The speaker is referring to herself in the third person, possibly to distance herself from her actions. It is my interpretation that the speaker calls attention to the double standard of men but not women being able to express their sexuality. Generally, it is not as shameful for men to express their sexual pleasure than it is for women. This portrayal of sexuality is the choice of the speaker and not for the benefit of another. By highlighting the sexuality of the speaker, al-Hayyat shatters expected gender roles. Additionally, she is fantasizing about her enemies which implies that she yearns for

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<sup>53</sup> Djébar (1936-2015) was Algerian. Khalifa (1941-) is Palestinian. Talib (1957-) is Iraqi.

a life that is different from her own. In the poem “All the Sex We Had” (page 24, *House Dresses and Wars*), the speaker employs the quip, or a clever remark at the end of the poem. She says, “because the salesman was skilled in that respect.” She implies this is the only reason that they bought their marriage bed, instead of the purpose for love and pleasure. The use of the quip serves not only as a witty phrase but perhaps as a coping mechanism for the role expected of her.

Like the other Arab female writers that Miriam Cooke studies, al-Hayyat critiques the notion of patriotic motherhood. This is the idea that mothers should sacrifice their children for war and reproduce to provide the state more soldiers.<sup>54</sup> Instead, Cooke explains that women use their position as mothers to their advantage:

This initiative and leadership by women *as women* in national struggle is one of the most visible aspects of the change in postcolonial warfare. In their struggle to control public space and attention, they refuse to play men’s roles. As never before, women are occupying what were defined as male-specific arenas, but they do so as women, and particularly as mothers (emphasis original).<sup>55</sup>

Cooke notices a shift of women occupying male-dominated spaces, especially as mothers, in “postcolonial warfare.” The speakers who are mothers in al-Hayyat’s poetry are not in the streets fighting against occupation. Instead they are mothers critiquing martyrdom. Al-Hayyat does this by emphasizing the speakers’ anxiety thereby overtly condemning it. For instance, in the poem, “The Martyrs” (page 49, *House Dresses and Wars*), the speaker focuses on the mourning and anxiety of the mother after losing a loved one, instead of celebrating patriotic motherhood. At the end of the poem the speaker says, “than you find their gazes everywhere.” The speaker is referring to the martyrs faces that she now finds haunting her. Similarly, scholars Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi align with Cooke when they discuss the varied roles Middle Eastern

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<sup>54</sup> Miriam Cooke, “Arab Women, Arab Wars,” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, ed. Shiva Balaghi and Fatma Müge Göçek (Columbia University Press, 1994), 160.

<sup>55</sup> Cooke, “Arab Women, Arab Wars,” 156.

female writers take during times of war. They are “the voice of the mother” who sends her sons to fight for the revolution, or “the voice of reason; they poke a determined finger at the inflated chest and ask why killing has become so easy” and they argue that women can also offer poems of “hope, comfort, and endurance.”<sup>56</sup> In this vein, I would argue that most often al-Hayyat takes on the “voice of reason” and the speaker explicitly examines why “killing has become so easy,” thereby rejecting the notion of patriotic motherhood. This theme is present in other poems besides “The Martyrs.” For example, in the poem “Children” (page 17, *This Smile, That Heart*), the opening image is a child’s hand under rubble. The hand is a symbol of terror and anxiety. It causes the speaker to compulsively check that her children are alive, and binge eat. The hand also represents the consequences of occupation where lives are dispensable.

The mothers in al-Hayyat’s poetry compare to mothers around the world who stand in defiance of security states. Cooke mentions just a few including mothers in South Africa, Yugoslavia, and the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo.<sup>57</sup> Some other examples include the mothers in Kashmir and of the Black Lives Matter movement. Al-Hayyat and other female Arab writers are drawing from a universal understanding of motherhood understood worldwide.

Al-Hayyat uses the quip to show resistance against Israeli occupation. In the poem, “I Am an Empty Woman” (pages 86-7, *House Dresses and Wars*) at the end of the poem the speaker says the following: “just a lot of sleepy soldiers.” This is an observation she makes while waiting at Qalandia checkpoint. This line can be interpreted as a coping mechanism the speaker takes to handle the anxiety of crossing through this checkpoint. Or a way to critique the occupation. As

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<sup>56</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., “Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East through Voice and Experience,” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Cooke, “Arab Women, Arab Wars,” 156.

symbols of occupation, the soldiers are portrayed as “sleepy” and extraneous. In turn this line questions the strength and perhaps efficacy of the occupation. As I have mentioned, al-Hayyat is considered a resistance poet since she criticizes patriotic motherhood and gender-based inequality. The speakers in her poetry are figured as women and mothers who use their role to show their defiance.

### **Renarration and Deformation Zone: An Ethics of Translation**

This section addresses the current state of Arabic literature in translation, the two significant translation theories to this project-- renarration and deformation zone, my use of paratextual elements, and finally specific translation choices I made in ten poems. I conclude that the concepts of “renarration” and the “deformation zone” inform each other because they force the translator to confront their position to the text and its context. As I mentioned before, acknowledging my anxiety as a translator provides an ethics of translation for this project. Near the end of this section, the poems are organized by the relevant translation theory utilized.

My translation falls into the context of a recent rise in literary translations from Arabic to English. The Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, Turjuman Prize, and International Prize for Arabic Fiction are given to literary translator(s) who publish full-length English translations of an Arabic work. Recent winners and shortlisted authors for the PEN Translation Prize and the Man Booker International Prize, awarded to an English translation from any language, also include Arabic-language authors Adonis, Jokha al-Harti, Mahmoud Darwish, Rabee Jaber, and Ahmed Sadaawi.<sup>58</sup> This is promising, considering that there is usually a lack of

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<sup>58</sup> Adonis (1930-) is Syrian. al-Harti (1978-) is Omani. Jaber (1972-) is Lebanese. Sadaawi (1973-) is Iraqi.

“Third-World” languages and women in literary translation in English, yet there is more to be done. Edward Said poses reasons this might be the case in his essay “Embargoed Literature.”

It has been nearly 25 years since Said wrote his essay and was told by an American publishing executive that “Arabic is a controversial language.”<sup>59</sup> Since then, the state of English translation of Arabic literature has changed. Journalist, translator, literary critic, and creator of the blog *ArabLit*, Marcia Lynx Qualey comments on the current reception of Arabic literature in English translation: “Then came September of 2001. There was mass interest in ‘Arabs,’ after that. But it was an interest that usually wanted Arab and Arabic fiction to fit a particular narrative. Publishers brought out stuff largely to show ‘what’s going on’ with ‘those Arabs.’ I think we are starting to wriggle our way out of that.”<sup>60</sup> Her conclusion implies that she has high hopes for publishing houses to take a genuine interest in Arabic literature. The two examples that Qualey cites are Common’s 2016 spring issue of Arabic-literature and Hoopoe Fiction publishing Arabic literature in translation.<sup>61</sup> This corresponds with the rise in recognition of Arabic literature in translation.

Mona Baker’s translation theory of “renarration” relates to Qualey’s hope that Americans now wish to understand Arabic culture through literature. Baker’s term describes a narrative approach to translation. She asserts that narratives are our interface to the world; therefore, this specific approach to translation is the ability for translators to construct their own narratives out

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Said, “Embargoed Literature,” in *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, ed. Carol Maier and Anuradha Dingwaney (Pittsburgh & London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 97.

<sup>60</sup> “2016 Has Been and Will Be a Fantastic Year for Arabic Literature in Translation,” Hoopoe, June 22, 2016, <https://hoopoefiction.com/2016/06/22/2016-will-fantastic-year-arabic-literature-translation/>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

of the texts they work with.<sup>62</sup> This was one significant theory to my project because my translations were dictated by my interpretation or the narrative I understood. One of the many benefits of her theory is its defiance of translation as an act of “bridge-building.”<sup>63</sup> Baker criticizes this notion because “[it] only helps to intensify our blind spots and discourage us from confronting the complexity of our positioning in society.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, this practice involves a confrontation where the translator must consider their “[position] in society,” borrowing Baker’s words. Additionally, “renarration” is a useful term since it reinforces the translator’s agency during the task of translation. It counters the narrative that translators simply render “[w]hat an author says and how he [sic] says it...”<sup>65</sup> This translation practice allows the translator some agency to create their own text from the original.

While Baker considers how narratives construct our reality, Johannes Göransson uses the term “deformation zone” to describe how readers and translators become “infected” with or affected by the source text. He writes, “the counterfeit infects the original, the original ‘context,’ and the target culture, opening up a ‘deregulating’ space of poetic ‘encounters.’”<sup>66</sup> In other words, the counterfeit or translation “infects” the source text or “original” and consequently the “target culture.” This term also calls us to challenge the accuracy and agency of the original poet, the translator and the original and translated text. More significantly, “in the deformation zone, both translator and reader are possessed by the foreign text.”<sup>67</sup> The translator can be affected by the original text. This describes my relationship to al-Hayyat's poetry. According to scholar,

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<sup>62</sup> “Narrative Analysis: Translation as Renarration,” [methods@manchester](https://methods@manchester.ac.uk/themes/qualitative-methods/narrative-analysis/), The University of Manchester, last modified July 11, 2020, [methods@manchester.ac.uk/themes/qualitative-methods/narrative-analysis/](https://methods@manchester.ac.uk/themes/qualitative-methods/narrative-analysis/).

<sup>63</sup> Mona Baker and Andrew Chesterman, “Ethics of Renarration,” *CLUTUS*, n.d., 16.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, Rev. ed, New Accents (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991), 70.

<sup>66</sup> Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 26.

Madeline Hron asserts emotions can be interpreted. She writes, “pain matters—or gains significance—only insofar as the sufferer perceives it and acknowledges it. To others. Or post facto, pain can never be ‘known’ it can merely be ‘interpreted.’”<sup>68</sup> In this way, to interpret is not to know, but to imagine. There is distance between the translator and the narrator/ speaker. Borrowing from Hron, I was made to interpret or confront the emotions of the speaker; therefore, they are not the same emotions.

Renarration and deformation zone inform each other because they make the translator confront their position to the text and its political context. To reiterate, Baker’s concept forces translators to not only consider their position in society but also what narratives they privilege and challenge in their translations. Göransson’s theory describes how the source text is deformed through the process of translation and how reader/ translator is affected by the original. The translator is forced into engaging with the text but in an embodied way. Acknowledging the open-ended nature of this engaging contributed to my anxiety as a translator. As I stated in the anxiety section, I felt anxious because of the potential of reifying orientalist stereotypes and appealing too much to American poetry sensibilities instead of challenging them. Confronting my anxieties has provided me an ethics of translation, where I attempt to balance privileges as a translator as opposed to the speaker’s in al-Hayyat's poetry.

On a more technical note, I decided to include an accompanying glossary and map of Israel/ Palestine. The glossary is mostly comprised of towns and cities in the West Bank and some cultural references. Along with this, I included a map so the reader can see where these towns and cities are in the region. My decision to include a glossary was influenced by Samah Selim’s

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<sup>68</sup> Madelaine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009), 38, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uma/detail.action?docID=4672701>.

article “Politics and Paratexts: On Translating Arwa Salih’s al-Mubtasarun.” She writes, “the intention of the glossary then would be, first, to claim the centrality of decolonizing spaces of thinking and analysis, and, second, to amplify the meanings evoked in the text as a series of questions about language, history, aesthetics, political philosophy, or any field of knowledge...”<sup>69</sup>

I believe that my glossary achieves the second strategy. I want my readers to not only know where these places are but to understand the politics and history of these towns and cities, but without exoticizing them. Therefore, I mainly provide some general information on how residents are impacted by occupation. Finally, in my translations I use transliterations. I understand that this strategy could be interpreted as ‘cushioning’<sup>70</sup> or making the text too accessible, but I use this method to mainly translate place names and cultural references that have no equivalents in English. I use these techniques to make my translations accessible but also grounded in recent history and politics.

Now, I elaborate on one or two images in the following poems: “Children,” “I Don’t Know Anything about the Revolution,” “Half-dead, Half-alive,” “Cry,” “The Martyrs,” “Sex,” “Cafe,” “I am an Empty Woman,” “Nakba,” and “Freedom.” The poems are organized by the relevant translation theory utilized in each poem.

### **Renarration**

Baker’s concept of renarration was most relevant in the translation of “Children,” because I utilized existing narratives as a framework. In this poem, the speaker is expressing her anxiety as a mother living under occupation, which manifests in actions such as obsessively checking her

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<sup>69</sup> Samah Selim, “Politics and Paratexts: On Translating Arwa Salih’s al-Mubtasarun,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 38 (2018): 196.

<sup>70</sup> Benmessaoud, “The Challenges of Translating Third World Women in a Transnational Context: The Case of Mernissi’s Dreams of Trespass,” 195.



children and binge eating. There are two different published translations of this poem in three anthologies: *A Bird is Not a Stone: An Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Poetry* (2014), *A Blade of Grass: New Palestinian Poetry* (2018), and *A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba* (2019) by Liz Lochhead and Graham Fulton respectively. In my discussion I analyze my translations with the published versions.

The first line transliterated in the poem is the following: “kullamā kharajat yaddu ṭiflin min asafal ‘imāra.” The gloss translation is “whenever a child’s hand exits from under a building.” My translation is “whenever I see a child’s hand beneath rubble.” I chose to alter the subject of the sentence from the hand to the speaker, which instead highlights the speaker as a witness to this horrifying image. Fulton’s translation keeps the child’s hand the subject of the sentence: “Whenever a child’s hand comes out of a collapsed building.”<sup>71</sup> Lochhead’s translation is “Whenever I see an image of a child’s hand.”<sup>72</sup> The two translators treat the image of the child differently. In Fulton’s rendering it is unclear whether the child is alive or not. In contrast, Lochhead elides the detail of the location of the child’s hand underneath a building. They both disguise the implication that the child may be dead. Instead I interpret the child as dead because of the image of a limp and lifeless hand of a child, which was influenced by existing narratives and media of children killed in conflicts in the Arab world.

Later in the poem, the speaker is trying to control her anxiety by eating as a coping mechanism. The original line is “āklān ‘āṭifiyyān bimuluḥa zā’ida.” The literal translation is: “emotionally eating excessively salty foods.” In my final translation, I decided to settle on the line: “Binging on salty foods.” In the other translations this line is muted. For example, Graham

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<sup>71</sup> al-Shaer, *Map of Absence*, 198.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Bell and Sarah Irving, eds., *A Bird Is Not a Stone: An Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Poetry* (Freight Books, 2014).

Fulton translates the line as: “Comfort myself with salty treats.”<sup>73</sup> Liz Lochhead’s translation is the following: “I/ emotionally over-eat, craving excessive salt.”<sup>74</sup> The other two translations treat this line as a “craving” or a treat rather than a compulsion, or a result of deep anxiety. In translating this line, I imagined this act since I entered an intimate reading of the text. My rendering focuses on how the speaker cannot cope living under occupation, so she takes control by binge eating. It may be a compulsive act but, in this way, she is still enacting agency.

By the end of the poem, the speaker is haunted by an image of grief. The original final line is “yasudd ramaq al-uyūn allatī tabkī fī kull makān.” A gloss translation of this line is “[the salty foods] barely keeping alive eyes crying in all places.” My translation is: “Barely sustaining the eyes that weep everywhere.” The other two translators miss the figurative meaning of the idiom and instead render the line literally. Graham Fulton chose: “Block out the sparks of the eyes that cry everywhere.”<sup>75</sup> Liz Lochhead translated it as: “the salt spark of the tears everyone around me is crying.”<sup>76</sup> My translation attempts to render the idiomatic phrase and furthers the narrative of a mother feeling anxious everywhere she turns.

In the poem “Cry” the most relevant theory in my translation was renarration because I created an alternative image in my translation. The speaker describes the power behind uttering a cry. The most relevant line to this translation theory was: “lan takūn yatīma li-taḥṭawī kull hādhā al-faqd.” The gloss translation is “it will not be sufficiently unique to hold all this loss.” My translation is “it won’t be the cry of an orphan bearing all this loss.” In my rendering I added the phrase “the cry of an orphan.” The word “yatīma” means unique or orphan in Arabic. I utilized

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<sup>73</sup> al-Shaer, *Map of Absence*, 198.

<sup>74</sup> Bell and Irving, eds., *A Bird is Not a Stone*.

<sup>75</sup> al-Shaer, *Map of Absence*, 198.

<sup>76</sup> Bell and Irving, eds., *A Bird Is Not a Stone*.

the method of “renarration” to construct a metaphor, in which the speaker compares her anguish with an orphan’s. In doing so, I potentially draw upon an image that is relatable and accessible to my target audience.

The theory of renarration was essential in the translation of “Sex,” poem because I based my rendering on existing narratives of sexuality. In this poem the speaker is grappling with owning her sexual desire and pleasure. The poem opens with the speaker having “sexual fantasies” of her enemies. The hardest line to translate was the following: “aḍamm fakhadhayya al-muballalatayn fī sarīrī.” A gloss of the line is the following: “I join my two wet thighs together in my bed.” I translated the line as the following: “I draw my two wet thighs together in my bed.” The difficulty of this line was the rendering of the verb, “aḍamm.” I chose “draw” because I wanted to convey the sensuality of this moment, without reifying stereotypes about Arab women. I believe this choice is effective because it is subtle reference to masturbation. This line sets up to the end of the poem where she begins to feel shame.

The speaker says: “antabih annhā al-‘adāwa/ tamluk rifāhiyyat nisyānihā / lakinnhā mithl al-lidhdha/ la tansākī abdan.” The gloss translation of this is: “I notice that enmity/ you possess the luxury of forgetting it/ but that enmity is like pleasure/ that does not ever forget you.” My rendering is: “I notice that hostility/ which she has the luxury of forgetting/ is like pleasure, / it does not ever forget you.” The main changes between the gloss and my translation are word substitutions and that the speaker refers to herself in the third person. She is also fantasizing about the enemy implying that she wishes to forgo her present life. The speaker feels shame for her actions, which is why she refers to herself in the third person. I believe the speaker is addressing the double standard that men are rewarded for expressing their sexuality unlike women. Nevertheless, the speaker engages in the behavior for herself and not for the benefit of

another. As a translator I chose not to mute the speaker's sexuality. I make the changes to tap into this narrative of gendered double standards.

In the poem "Café," the theory of renarration was most important to my translation process because I created an alternative narrative based on my interpretation of the text. The speaker is describing her walk to a café that goes awry since she injures her leg by stepping on burnt tire remnants. In looking into her glass at a café the speaker says, "kull al-faqā'ātu." The gloss translation is, "all the bubbles." My translation is the following: "all the soda bubbles." I reimagined this line to create the image of the speaker staring into her glass in a café. I imagined two distinct spaces: the speaker walking and injuring her leg and her sitting in a café. I had space to interpret this line because it is not clear in the original what kind of bubbles the speaker is referring to. In doing so I open a variety of meanings that were unavailable in the original text. Additionally, I narrow the meaning of the bubbles from the source to the target text. In this way I unintentionally make the poem more accessible to my audience.

In the poem "Nakba," it was important to accurately render the speaker's complicated attitude towards 1948. The most significant theory in this translation was renarration because I based my interpretation on relevant contexts/ narratives in the text such as historical and political. In the beginning of the poem the speaker writes, "qalbī yurid nahsha al-ḥiā' al-'ām/ iḥdāth fathā fī baṭnihi/ wa-ikhraj kull qadharātithi 'ala al-arḍ." A gloss of these lines is: "My mind wants to snap general modesty/ creating an opening in its stomach/ directing all its filth on the floor." My translation is: "My mind wants to rip apart public morality/ tearing an opening in its stomach/ and releasing all its filth on the floor." The speaker is imagining public morality destroying itself. I do not stray away from the meaning of these lines instead I clarify the language. Renarration was pivotal to this specific rendering because identifying the image/

narrative the speaker is critiquing helps to render it accordingly. This poem aligns with al-Hayyat's goal of critiquing public hypocrisy. Importantly, this is how the speaker opens a poem about the Nakba. Instead of celebrating or reminiscing about 1948, the speaker focuses on the personal affects for Palestinians to remembering the Nakba. Translating this poem was like surrendering to the text because the speaker describes 1948 in such unusual terms.

The concept of renarration was pivotal in the translation process of “Freedom” because I drew from existing narratives and created my own interpretations based on my understanding of the poem. In the poem, the speaker considers if love is synonymous with freedom. The poem reaches its climax when the speaker says the following about her relationship: “li-askun sijnan anta nawāfidhuhu wa-abwābuhu wa-judrānuhu/ wa-anta khurūmuḥu allatī sa-aḥfiruhā bi-adhāfirī.” A gloss of this line is: “[I miss] to live a prison you its windows, doors and walls/ and you its holes that I will dig with my nails.” My rendering is the following: “[I miss] living in a prison, with you its windows, doors, and walls/ and you the gaps that I will dig into with my nails.” Utilizing the method of renarration, I create an image of the speaker attempting to escape a prison like existence, which she also admits to missing. It is a paradoxical image, but not entirely unrelatable. I chose to retain it, with only changing some words, to engage with a universal narrative of prescribed gender roles feeling restrictive yet comforting.

By the end of the poem, the speaker seems resigned to her opinion of love, “lakinnī sa-aṭbukh laka ba‘da kull ḥubb/ mulūkhīyya wa-musakhinān wa-ka‘kat shukūlāta.” A gloss translation is: “but I will cook for you after each love/ Levantine dishes and chocolate cake.” My rendering is: “but I will cook for you after each “I-love-you-darling”/ Mulukhia and masakhana, and chocolate cake.” I chose to render “ḥubb” as both a pet name and a feeling of love. I used the method of renarration to create my own interpretation and in doing so open a different meaning in both the

source and target texts. The other change I made was to transliterate the two dishes. This could be interpreted as ‘cushioning,’<sup>77</sup> but there are no equivalents to these cultural references in English. This is another instance where I am anxious of making the text seem too foreign.

### **Deformation Zone**

The most pivotal theory in translating the poem, “I Don’t Know Anything about the Revolution,” was the deformation zone because my rendering offers alternative meanings in the source and target text. From the beginning of the poem the speaker claims she does not know anything about the revolution but juxtaposes that claim with images of it. In the middle of the poem the speaker shifts to the objects that she associates with death and loss. One of these objects is a bloodstained shirt. The original lines are the following: “wa-ḥīna abḥath lahu ‘an qāmatin/ ajidd alf qāmatin tantazur an talbisahu ‘inda al-’sr.” The gloss translation is “and when I search for a figure [to wear the shirt]/ I find a thousand figures waiting to wear it in the afternoon.” My translation is: “and when I search for a figure for it/ I find a thousand bodies waiting to wear it in the afternoon.” The challenge lay with the word “qāma.” The word literally means “figure.” I did not want to retain the repetition of these two lines because I wanted to create the image of a mass of bodies waiting to wear the shirt. The shirt triggers the speaker’s anxiety because it symbolizes the martyrs, who are willing to die and have died. The concept of the deformation zone applies because my choice triggers a new image and thereby alternative meanings in the source and target texts.

The last part of the poem focuses on an interaction between the speaker and her hair stylist. The stylist is a resident of Jerusalem, has a permit, and goes through Qalandia checkpoint like

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<sup>77</sup> Benmessaoud, “The Challenges of Translating Third World Women in a Transnational Context: The Case of Mernissi’s Dreams of Trespass,” 195.

the speaker. The two people differ in opinion when he utters the following lines: “an isrā‘īl al-‘āhira/ la tasmaḥ bi-ḍarbi al-bināt/ li-ta’dībihinna.” A gloss of this line is “Israel is a slut/ that does not allow hitting girls/ to train them.” My translation is: “that Israel is a bitch/ that does not allow hitting girls/ to discipline them.” The most significant change between these lines is the word “bitch.” The word “‘āhira” has multiple connotations including whore, prostitute, bitch. I did not stray from the meaning, but my choice carries different implications. The stylist calling Israel a bitch creates the image that the state is cold, and unforgiving. The language is stark, but I create a broader image of the hairdresser’s attitude towards Israel, which corresponds to the entirety of al-Hayyat's poetry. Arguably, the choice offers alternative ways to interpret the line in the source and target texts.

The theory of deformation zone was most important to my rendering of “Half-Dead, Half-Alive” because my rendering displays how the translation “deforms” the original text and what context can be lost via translation. In this poem, the speaker is describing how she makes herself feel alive. The most challenging part to translate was near the end of the poem when the speaker references Arabic grammar to describe her lack of agency. The lines are: “wa-qad la akūnu/ siwa jumla ismiyya/ yabda’ fīha al-khabr al-kalām/ wa yunhīhā al-ḍamma ākhr al-ḥarf.” The gloss translation of these lines is: “and may not I be /only a nominal sentence/ where the predicate begins speaking/ and finished with a damma on the final letter.” My translation is the following: “and I may not be/ but a jumla ismiyya/ in which the khabr begins speaking first, / then adorned by a damma on the final letter.” These lines refer to Arabic grammar and highlight the speaker's inability to control her own agency. I could have easily elided these terms or made a similar metaphor in my translation. One possible option is: “and I may not be/ but a plastic bag/ found on the ground/ then discarded in the trash.” Instead, I chose not to do this since the grammar is

essential for the reader to understand this image; therefore to retain this and help the reader I put the following in a footnote: “A jumla ismiyya, or nominal sentence, begins with a noun, and is followed by the khabr, or predicate. The damma is a short vowel in Arabic and marks a nominal sentence in Arabic. The metaphor here suggests the parts of the sentence are speaking out of order.” I utilize the footnote despite my anxiety of making the text too foreign and supporting systemic inequalities, to make this moment more accessible to my audience. Arguably, my rendering creates different implications. The speaker is describing her lack of agency but demonstrates she has the knowledge of Arabic grammar which is a mark of intelligence and high social standing. This opens a “deregulating space of poetic encounters”<sup>78</sup> since this grammar and context cannot be easily rendered into English.

The most relevant theory as I translated “The Martyrs” was the deformation zone because my rendering offered new ways to understand the source and target texts. In this poem, the speaker of the poem is presumably a mother who lost a loved one to war or revolution. One line that related to the theory was: “satuwarraq şūratak al-mubtasima nahārī.” A gloss translation is: “your smiling picture will populate my day.” My translation is “your smiling picture will wallpaper my day.” The difficulty of this line lay with the verb “satuwarraq.” The root, *w-r-q*, constituted in a causative verb form, literally means to burst into leaf or to cover with paper.<sup>79</sup> I decided to adhere to the root of this verb to create the image of this picture covering the speaker's walls. In doing so I create different implications in both texts. For example, wallpaper can connote many things such as wealth or mental institutions. I leaned towards my rendering because it lends well to the end of the poem where the speaker imagines the martyrs’ gazes everywhere. My intention

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<sup>78</sup> Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Arabic is a language that functions by roots. The same root can be used to create different parts of speech. For example, the word “waraqā” means paper.



with this line was to demonstrate that the speaker is haunted by this picture. Instead of glorifying the resistance and cause of martyrdom, like Fadwa Tuqan's poetry, the speaker critiques it based upon her anxiety attached to the picture populating her space. This poem is in line with one of the themes of the collection *House Dresses and Wars*, in which al-Hayyat addresses political hypocrisy.

The theory of the deformation zone was most important in my rendering of "I Am an Empty Woman" because my rendering displays how the original is altered and potentially improved via translation. The speaker is describing her feelings of emptiness and boredom as she crosses through a checkpoint. This poem has been published in two anthologies, *A Blade of Grass: New Palestinian Poetry* (2018) and *A Map of Absence: An Anthology of Palestinian Writing on the Nakba* (2019), in a translation by the poet and Naomi Foyle.

Near the middle of the poem, the speaker says, "anā imra'a mu'dima / a'īsh fī qabr mundhu sinīn." This line literally means: "I am a woman lacking/ I have lived in a grave for years." My translation is the following: "I am an empty woman/ who has been living in a grave for two years now." The published translation is "I'm a solitary woman/ who's lived in a grave for years."<sup>80</sup> The word "mu'dima" appears in the title and is repeated several times throughout the poem. It has many meanings including: non-existent, nothing, lacking, poor. To me, "empty" is a better rendering because it has many different connotations to the readers of both texts. In other words, it is not as narrow as the published version. By engaging with the multiple connotations of this word the reader can more fully imagine the extent of the speaker's emptiness, which is not possible with the published version.

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<sup>80</sup> al-Shaer, *Map of Absence*, 199.

The last line of the poem is “lakinnī ra’aytu al-kathīr min al-junūd al-na’sīn.” The gloss translation is “but I saw a lot of sleepy soldiers.” My translation is “just a lot of sleepy soldiers.” The published translation is “but I definitely see a lot of bored soldiers.”<sup>81</sup> In my rendering I chose to retain this sense of a quip, that is present in the original, and show that this insertion is a coping mechanism utilized by the speaker. I believe the other two translators interpret this line similarly. The concept of the deformation zone is relevant because my rendering conveys the same meaning differently. Arguably, it connotes an image of the speaker as more nonchalant and accustomed to her surroundings. This poem also corresponds to the theme of occupation that is prevalent in the volume *House Dresses and Wars*. As al-Hayyat has explained publicly in a panel, people are worrying of crossing Qalandia one hour before they go.<sup>82</sup> I had to imagine the speaker’s experience crossing through this checkpoint, which causes her so much anxiety due to the open-ended nature of the dangers to be encountered therein.

### Conclusion

As argued in this thesis, the speakers in Maya Abu al-Hayyat's poetry are anxious agents. Their anxiety is manifested in the body and caused by living under occupation, where there is a lack of control over life and death. Additionally, I demonstrate how I experienced anxiety as a translator in potentially encouraging orientalist tropes of Arab women and catering to expectations set by U.S. literary values, instead of challenging them. The translation theories, renarration and the deformation zone offered ways to combat my anxieties as a translator. The contribution of this thesis is it offers an alternative way to study Israeli occupation in Palestinian literature, namely through the individual and idiosyncratic experiences of speakers. In contrast to

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<sup>81</sup> al-Shaer, *Map of Absence*, 199.

<sup>82</sup>“‘Breaking Bounds’ - Kalimat - Palestinian Literature Festival - Nablus, 4 November 2018 - YouTube.”

examining occupation through literature that focuses on the collective experiences of Palestinians. Al-Hayyat and other writers suggest the benefits of this shift.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding translation, I support the previous work of scholars mentioned in the thesis, specifically Maier and Mounzer, that consider translation as a more embodied practice. These and others represent a development in the field of translation studies that is interested in how the translation process affects translators, rather than equivalency.<sup>84</sup> The benefits of an embodied translation practice that focuses on anxiety is that I transfer this to my readers. I open my readers to what Göransson calls “transgressive circulation, pulling readers and writers into an unsettled and unsettling flux.”<sup>85</sup> My readers’ understanding of American poetry literary canon is thus disrupted.<sup>86</sup> Considering the work done in this thesis, more research could be done to consider the literary techniques Palestinian female writers who write about occupation from the individual experiences of their speakers/ narrators.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> YouTube, “Breaking Bounds,” 56:29-58:38.

<sup>84</sup> There are other scholars that are interested in the cognitive and neurological processes engaged in translation. One such academic is Maria Tymoczko who writes about this in her book, *Neuroscience and Translation*.

<sup>85</sup> Göransson, *Transgressive Circulation*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Lucas Klein writes about a “translation anxiety” of Chinese poetry in translation “penetrat[ing]” American poetry. Taken from: Lucas Klein, “Silences, Whispers, and the Figure of China: Translation Anxiety in Contemporary American Poetry,” *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 51, no. 3 (December 12, 2018): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00166928-7190519>.

<sup>87</sup> The writers I am referencing are those already mentioned in the section on Palestinian literature, namely Nasab Hussein and Asmaa Azaizeh.

## CHAPTER 2

### TRANSLATIONS

#### **The Palm**

Pages 15-16, *Thus Spake The Beloved*

The palm oasis wasn't fruitful  
when he turns around to face fate in its vicinity  
he recalls from its fronds another two fronds  
A childhood kiss  
Stalks of a riddle climbing as he descends into its long shadow

The palm oasis  
Falling on the zinc roofs of the refugee camp  
near the lowest part of Gaza  
Wasn't made of wood that sends out warmth  
The men who stood upright in it  
in the time of war  
Bore the weight of memories  
with their hopeless sickness  
and controlled the fire

### **Warrior III**

Page 30, *Thus Spake The Beloved*

He has carried the city to her since its beginning... so she would come

War is an ambush...to stumble into

and the beloved was no longer pregnant with his last kiss

The beloved doesn't come

## Nightmares

Pages 82-84, *Thus Spake The Beloved*

During nightmares

he sweats like a bottle of red wine

Sharp of taste

Sour of temper

A corkscrew pierces his head and releases the cork

it is poured into rounded cups with long stems

No one drinks to their health

During nightmares

Those stuck between worlds visit him

They tighten the grip on his hand

and spit in his face

He carries their messages only to tear them apart

He combs their hair sometimes

He pities their whiteness

He doesn't call them nor they him

.....

Alone, the owner of the broken whiteness

who owns his eyes, hands, and personal effects

Stares into his face

During nightmares

His thoughts are a newsreel on Al-Jazeera

- "If only she had been silent so he could fall asleep."
- "In the fifth grade he began to hope for the death of his father."
- "He, also, doesn't understand his big words either."

- “The gun is bigger than his hand.”
- “He wants a boy who won’t inherit his cowardice and a girl who knows when to be silent.”

During nightmares

a green jinni stops him, at the house door

“take off your shoes... do not take her small hand”

Her voice booms off static pictures

“I still want to be that step, burdened of spirit, at your door”

During nightmares there are no doors or windows

## Mourning the Desire of Mothers

Pages 11-13, *That Smile, This Heart*

I will remember as I make my bed  
and two other, children's beds  
as I wipe up vomit from one of them on the floor  
as I open a window to the street dust  
as I pluck off thorns from a potted plant, on which no roses bloom  
as I read a recipe for making authentic mansaf  
as I repair a white slip torn by little fingers  
as I prepare the winter budget  
as I inspect a quilt that smells of ammonia  
as I flip through six children's channels to find "Tom and Jerry"  
and order on demand  
as I search in my supermarket bag for a forgotten towel

I will remember  
as I wash a body the size of my palm  
as I wipe runny noses  
as I remove tangles from hair attacked by chocolate milk and a straw  
and apricot jam  
as I read stories about bustling ants and lazy lions  
and migrating seals  
as I remove chewing gum from the bottom of my shoes and heart  
as I search for the best way to remove a spot of oil  
as I bite off twenty nails after searching forever for the nail clippers

I will remember  
when a child touches me by mistake in places that are dormant  
when the faucet sprays me  
when Turkish soap operas show me one of their classic scenes



when two interlocking palms pinch me beneath the restaurant table  
when I dig into friends' stories about living desires  
I will remember them, all of them  
Mothers with yellow eyes  
all of them hurrying in front of me at once  
the white thighs revealed in the courtyard of the house  
The occasional anger at specific times of the month  
The excessive anxiety over a phone bill  
an insufferable stomachache from ongoing distention  
Interpretations of dreams about frivolous devils  
Coffee cups ready-made for reflecting  
Singing of a blue skirt above a flattened knee  
A lip bleeding from intense biting  
A large bra that holds a few dinars and coins  
Forgotten bibs above round bellies  
and ceaseless stories of the neighbors' bad girls  
Mothers with braids cut off  
Henna drips on eyebrows  
and dead desires.

## Children

Page 17, *That Smile, This Heart*

Whenever I see a child's hand beneath rubble  
I check the hands of my three children  
I count for all their fingers and toes  
I check their teeth and the hairs in each eyebrow

Whenever a child's voice goes silent in Camp al-Yarmouk  
I raise the volume of the T.V., radio, and songs  
I pinch the sides of my three children  
until they cry and shout

Whenever my heart is hungry  
at Qalandia checkpoint  
I open my mouth and start eating  
Binging on salty foods  
Barely sustaining the eyes that weep everywhere.

## Daydreams

Page 29, *That Smile, This Heart*

I will write about a happiness that invades Jenin from six directions  
about children running with balloons in Am‘ari refugee camp  
about contentment that quiets as infants are silenced throughout the night in ‘Askar  
about a sea we walk around slowly in Tulkarm  
about eyes that stare into people's faces in Balata  
about a woman who dances for those waiting at Qalandia  
about men’s side stitches from frivolous laughter in Azzun  
about you and me fulfilling our destiny, by coincidence and madness, to build a city.

## **I Don't Know Anything about Revolution**

Pages 39-41, *That Smile, This Heart*

The revolution is not taught in the curriculum  
Mothers don't nurse children upon it  
preachers at Friday service don't mention it  
Fathers in infants' ears don't call upon it,  
No one knows it besides the revolutionaries  
and the revolutionaries don't all nurse from one mother  
to know how to call upon their parents in their ears  
as the preachers calmly take them to paradise.

I don't know anything about the revolution  
but I hear the voices of the children crying in the night  
I hear them refuse to go to sleep without their parents' kisses  
and when the screams intensify  
I hear swearing from mothers  
who gave all that they should give  
of patience, love, and things only understood by  
Mothers—or so it is said—  
when a hand stretches out that doesn't know anything about the revolution  
feeling around for wet pillows  
as bloodshot eyes take me over  
angry with something or other  
and me who hated to sleep on those pillows.

I don't know anything about the revolution  
but I see a bloodstained shirt

I see it before I fall asleep  
and after I wake up  
below it is a body  
above it is a body  
and when I search for a figure for it  
I find a thousand bodies waiting to wear it in the afternoon

I don't know anything about the revolution  
but the hairdresser  
who does my hair  
the way he wants  
and who lives in Jerusalem like me  
by permit,  
and who passes through Qalandia checkpoint  
and curses it two times a day  
Completely, like me  
told me as he did my hair  
that Israel is a bitch  
that does not allow hitting girls  
to discipline them  
He told me:  
the revolution must be proclaimed.

I don't know anything about the revolution  
but I'm angry with my hairdresser.

## **Half-Dead, Half-Alive**

Pages 50-52, *That Smile, This Heart*

I see a group of them wearing their shrouds, crossing the streets  
They see what I see only by coincidence  
when our eyes meet in a mirror or a passing funeral procession

I am naked  
I carry my shroud on my shoulder  
I wear it at evening gatherings and special occasions  
I take it off  
when I write a poem  
about love, war, and cold pictures.

And we meet  
Death and I, in Irsal street  
it resembles me in terms of insolence and abruptness  
a little black under the eyes  
and red close to the heart  
and it doesn't breathe from its nose

who am I when you are,  
Who is your victim and who is my killer?

No heaven for it  
This death, except what I say  
only fate or a deadly coincidence has control

“In this way I discovered how the distance increases or decreases between two lifetimes”

We live lightly if we lived

or we die of shame

Our path is our shadow

I am the path, the act of walking, and the passing body

and I am what I say and what I claim

and I may not be

except a breath that crosses from you to you

carrying your unfamiliar, endemic viruses

and I may not be

but a jumla ismiyya

in which the khabr begins speaking first,

then adorned by a damma on the final letter<sup>88</sup>

and I may not be

The dead resembling the living

The living resembling the dead

And I live very little

Cosmic concerns as large as the heavens

Modernist discourse and political affiliations

A pink dress the color of cheeks

A beret tilted on the head

I put on eyeliner

and I perfume myself with “Nina Ricci”

To believe I am alive

half-dead

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<sup>88</sup> A jumla ismiyya, or nominal sentence, begins with a noun, and is followed by the khabr, or predicate. The damma is a short vowel in Arabic and marks a nominal sentence in Arabic. The metaphor here suggests the parts of the sentence are speaking out of order.

half-alive.



## Heart Ache

Page 57, *That Smile, This Heart*

The circularity of my steps  
reveals failed wisdom  
an ache that descends from the heart  
to the waist  
where you sit quietly and complete your sentence slowly  
“no one dies from love  
and you won’t from pain”  
My mind is a polygon  
of sharp corners  
that makes, those failing circular steps, troubled of spirit  
Slow down  
My mind, that watches you analyze my sentences  
Short of breath  
the wide lower African lip  
and it cries.

## Wall

Page 58, *That Smile, This Heart*

Passing by a tall wall

--love slogans fill the wall, slogans between two admirers  
who exchange messages in public--

I plant, longing

and intimate moments for you

“the wall looks gray, tall, angry, and naked

without the messages

so I write.”

## Cry

Page 61, *That Smile, This Heart*

One day I will scream

A cry that condenses a million repressed screams

that died inside

it won't be high enough for everybody to hear

it won't be the cry of an orphan bearing all this loss

but it will be one cry

no other like it

My cry, mine.

**Me**

Page 64, *That Smile, This Heart*

Specks of dust stuck  
in the disappointment of an abandoned window  
A sheet of paper crumpled by children  
awaiting the closest basket  
A bird feather stolen by a stray cat  
Trying to hunt  
An empty Macintosh box  
that will be soon filled with thread and needles  
A school uniform on summer vacation  
A lone cockroach on its back  
waiting for the broom.

## Wedding Day

Pages 20-21, *House Dresses and Wars*

You aren't a gift  
and love dies  
and contended conversation is funny  
and doesn't ignite a gas oven  
and I don't want an oven as a gift  
and I don't even want dinner  
I want to enjoy brushing my teeth  
for half an hour  
and massaging my hands and eyes  
with creams and oils for children  
and watching you stand up there  
behind the heavy pressure cooker  
for the longest time  
and because you are not a gift  
and I don't celebrate my birthday daily  
I beg you to be satisfied with the poetry of lovers and believers  
Full of mirthful trust  
in this pure night  
for I want to sleep

**All the Sex We Had**

Page 24, *House Dresses and Wars*

Is that embarrassing moment over  
from which we will receive our firstborn?

Once I promised to sleep between your arms throughout the night  
How difficult it was  
to pry open those deadly embraces

We bought our marriage bed  
because the salesman was skilled in that respect

**Afflicted with a Phobia Named Hope**

Pages 35-36, *House Dresses and Wars*

Whenever I heard this word  
I remembered all the disappointments carried out in its name  
Children who don't return  
Pain that doesn't heal  
Memory that doesn't age  
Hope crushed all of it under its wings  
like I crush a mosquito  
above my daughter's head

.....

The bereaved has nothing but metaphysical truths  
they are his only nourishment and inheritance  
no logic for pain  
All things intercede on behalf of the afflicted  
except your logical questions

.....

I only wish no one went  
I only wish no one returned  
Each going is an attack of superstition  
Each return is a puncture in the lung

**I Celebrate Daily Stray Bullets**

Page 37, *House Dresses and Wars*

...that passed close to me but didn't hit me

During the additional hours that I spent walking

before arriving at a checkpoint

with raucous laughter

before your death blocked my mouth

in my thirty years

which I wasted discovering the paths



## **I Don't Celebrate War**

Pages 39-40, *House Dresses and Wars*

I know it usually ends  
I see a hand that will rise  
victorious or defeated  
two hands will rise  
usually bleeding

I don't celebrate war  
I will gather the broken glass  
as if the war will end now  
I prepare black coffee and some dates  
and I wait for the war  
that usually ends  
in an empty seat  
and a safari green suit  
with an old story  
that no one will wear

I don't celebrate war  
it usually ends  
In order to return

## Painful Pictures

Pages 43-44, *House Dresses and Wars*

I will tell you about painful pictures  
in the cold:

1

Twenty men  
with dark leather coats  
and slippers and cheap tennis shoes  
Faces reveal beards, pain, and cold  
Mouths covered with hands, plates, and scarves  
Snow falls on everything  
and the caption underneath reads:  
“Syrians wait in the cold and rain for their turn to buy bread”  
with an invitation to view more photos,  
I don’t click to see  
I am not noble in any case  
I am just a bored person  
browsing painful pictures  
to cry a little and thank Allah  
for the blessing of a warm house  
and then put more scraps of cloth over the window  
to silence the whistling wind

2

“For more painful pictures click here”

## My Home City

Pages 45-46, *House Dresses and Wars*

Look from behind its cover

and try to count

three pigeons looking for wet bread in my courtyard

Children run from school to the falafel and cake vendor

A woman hangs her laundry and rushes to work

A worker kisses the heads of his daughters and then faces Allah

The haji who flips the money between his hands flashes a smile

and invites me to change dollars into shekels

A young man calls out with the confidence of an expert

“Cake, cake, Jerusalem cake, tastiest cake!”

The worshippers enter for their prayers barefoot

and a fight breaks out between Mansour Ibn al-Tāsi‘a

and a soldier named Chaim who carries a machine gun

Market stalls at Damascus Gate with candy, shoes, and dishdashas

Loud calls

Close by are two soldiers staring at all that is mentioned

and the two of them scream in a language I don’t understand

about everything

And I stare at the city, the faces, falafel, and the soldiers staring in my bag

My home city, I treat it with the lightness of a mother of three children

I allot love beneath an olive and sycamore tree

and I search for one face from my city to put in a picture frame on the table

a picture without soldiers  
and without a god

## End of the War

Page 48, *House Dresses and Wars*

Theorists drink some anise tea  
they changed the pillowcase  
and consulted some tourist offices  
about very quiet and peaceful places  
The General wearing his white dishdasha  
without underwear  
Mothers sewed new clothes to ward off evil  
as female spiders spin their webs among house rubble  
The group returns for grinding out small wars  
between the molars of time, heart, and song  
all of them did that  
except for the martyrs

## The Martyrs

Page 49, *House Dresses and Wars*

Everywhere I put my head  
Your smiling picture will wallpaper my day  
even when I gather the broken glass on the floor  
and curse loneliness  
the martyrs' gazes are clever  
neither reproachful nor grateful  
that look that says to you  
"you can turn the page now"  
and no sooner do you do it  
than you find their gazes everywhere

**I Don't Believe Pain from the Public**

Page 50, *House Dresses and Wars*

...or public displays of affection

I don't believe conversations about long-term justice

nor talk of satisfaction either

If you weren't somewhat evil

I would know you were very evil

some things

cannot be believed

## Sex

Page 57, *House Dresses and Wars*

I frequently dream of my enemies  
sexual fantasies  
I wake up as if just returning from a war  
I draw my two wet thighs together in my bed  
to enjoy awhile longer  
and when the dreams recur  
I spend the day analyzing the matter  
I follow their chatter  
I browse through photos of their wives  
of their new cars  
and their never-ending projects

But I see them  
in the decisive moment crossing the street  
They look towards me or turn their heads away and hurry off  
and when I search where to put my head to avoid them,  
behind my husband's jacket  
or my children's orange stroller,  
I notice that hostility  
which she has the luxury of forgetting  
is like pleasure,  
it does not ever forget you



## **I Burn Time**

Page 59, *House Dresses and Wars*

...like carts of used tires at a checkpoint  
alone I suffocate  
and alone I pollute the atmosphere

The nightmares continue blooming  
tied with nets  
and I think of my pressing need  
to empty my bladder

## Café

Pages 66-67, *House Dresses and Wars*

I walk on the remnants of burnt tires  
to the café  
I wanted to speak; indeed, I was forced into talking  
all the soda bubbles  
explode in my face without my noticing  
My leg alone  
shakes in the void  
like a broken pendulum

In reality I am happy  
and all of these complaints are  
the luxury of teenagers  
but I am a woman  
that is a proven truth in official documents  
and in the eyes of women passing before me  
very miserable eyes  
that resemble my eyes

## **Blindness**

Page 82, *House Dresses and Wars*

I also wanted to be lifted up  
to be something

Only the martyrs are visible here  
O, blind homeland!

**Since They Informed Me My Habibi Wouldn't Return from the War**

Pages 83-84, *House Dresses and Wars*

I tried everything  
For example, Allah  
I leaned on his chest and prayed  
and on a prayer rug time after time  
I knew my habibi wouldn't return  
If he were to return  
He wouldn't know me

I tried politics  
I memorized nationalist songs  
Befriended politicians,  
Glorified warriors,  
They were temperamental and moody  
They changed their faces just like their speeches  
Time after time  
I knew my habibi wouldn't return  
And if he were to return, he wouldn't know me

Since they informed me my habibi wouldn't return from the war  
I write down the names of our children  
in the poems and the clouds  
I register their birth dates  
Their shoe sizes and the poems that they memorize  
Time after time

I knew none of them would return from the war  
and I know that I, too, won't return

## **I Am an Empty Woman**

Pages 86-87, *House Dresses and Wars*

I live at a checkpoint  
I rejoice over trivial things  
like my day passes without seeing one soldier  
who feels bored  
I write my new novel there  
about a butcher who wanted to become a violinist,  
bad and monstrous,  
but his hand betrayed him  
for a sharp and shiny knife  
You know how depressing it is  
to be empty and live at a checkpoint  
and rejoice over simple things  
like overtaking chattering people in line  
and tired workers carrying bags  
of banana, guava, and Tnuva milk  
I am an empty woman  
who has been living in a grave for two years now  
I haven't seen any devils or angels,  
Just a lot of sleepy soldiers

## **I Imagine Them All Day**

Pages 88-89, *House Dresses and Wars*

...those who die in wars that do not concern them

Treading ancillary paths

or smoking their cigarettes on the roof

They watch sentimental films

or educational cooking programs

They traverse the path of mistaken war

to become numbers and martyrs

I imagine their sorrow as I cross the checkpoint

as I wait for my children to return from school

as I peel garlic and smell my fingers

as I peer out from the window to the farthest bathroom

as I slip into my bed at night

and I dream again

Of a war free from war

## Silence

Page 90, *House Dresses and Wars*

I didn't know of anything that was weaker than knowledge

We really

End when we arrive and start speaking

Death taught me gossip

Nothing changed that

I am still dying



## **Nakba**

Page 91, *House Dresses and Wars*

My mind wants to rip apart public morality  
Tear an opening in its stomach  
and release all its filth onto the floor.

She is 29 years old  
has five children  
and wants to die,  
this is the Nakba that I know.

Among my wishes  
is burning the national school textbook  
and the smile of the director general  
and passing my hand above this great void, my heart  
without finding it.

## Gossip between Two Windows

Page 100, *House Dresses and Wars*

I'm not the one who writes the poems

I don't know the systems

My language

and heart are broken!

I only translate

Dialogue between two places

and gossip on balconies,

I convey breaths, dreams, and insults

between the pillow and eyes that do not sleep.

Look carefully

You write a line

but only I die!

## “Freedom”

Pages 101-103, *House Dresses and Wars*

Whenever a woman said:

“love is freedom”

We would smile in secret

She and I,

We won't say it publicly

She and I know

that love and freedom are actually linked spirits

that collide

and the light may escape.

Love does not set us free

yet we smile and are silent

for it appears so beautiful to be free,

Freedom appears to be

A single comprehensive position

like neutrality

a swing of anxiety

that appears again

like a good find on a shopping trip

and an increase in price

and an explosion of laughter,

in the street, home, and on the phone

Because I don't want to say it publicly

that I really miss

living in a prison, with you its windows, doors, and walls  
and you the gaps that I will dig into with my nails  
Time after time  
and free myself.

Yes, freedom appears to be  
Really civilized, aligned with all human rights  
but I will cook for you after each "I-love-you-darling"  
Mulukhia, masakhana, and chocolate cake  
and I rub your back, and legs, and head  
with all the creams in my purse  
and I go back to shopping.

## CHAPTER 3

### GLOSSARY

**Am‘ari refugee camp:** one of the smallest camps located in the West Bank; due to its growing population there is an issue of overcrowding and poor living conditions.

**‘Askar:** a refugee camp located near the city of Nablus in the West Bank. The IDF are still present in this camp, primarily looking to arrest and interrogate civilians.

**Azzun:** a Palestinian town located in the northern West Bank, since the 1967 War the town has been under Israeli occupation.

**Balata:** a refugee camp in Nablus located in the West Bank. It is the largest camp in the area. Twenty-seven thousand people now live there. The Israeli Security Forces (ISF) conduct weekly search and arrest operations, often at night. The ISF also use the camp for training.

**Dinar:** the main currency in some countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

**Dishdasha:** refers to a long white robe that is usually worn by men in the Middle East.

**Haji:** used to refer to a Muslim person who has completed the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca.

**Jenin:** refers to a city in the northern West Bank. It is under control by the Palestinian Authority.

**Jerusalem Cake:** ka‘ak in Arabic. Refers to a biscuit but can also be used to refer to a variety of baked goods in the Arab World.

**Mansaf:** a traditional Arab dish which includes lamb cooked in a fermented dried yogurt and served with rice or bulgur. It is eaten throughout the Arab world and popular in the Levant.

**Masakhana:** a Levantine dish that consists of chicken baked with onions, various spices, and fried pine nuts that is served over taboon bread.

**Mulukhiyya:** a green leaf that becomes gelatinous when chopped and cooked in a stew.

**Qalandia checkpoint:** refers to a Palestinian village located in the West Bank. Currently, it serves as the main checkpoint between the Northern West Bank and Jerusalem.

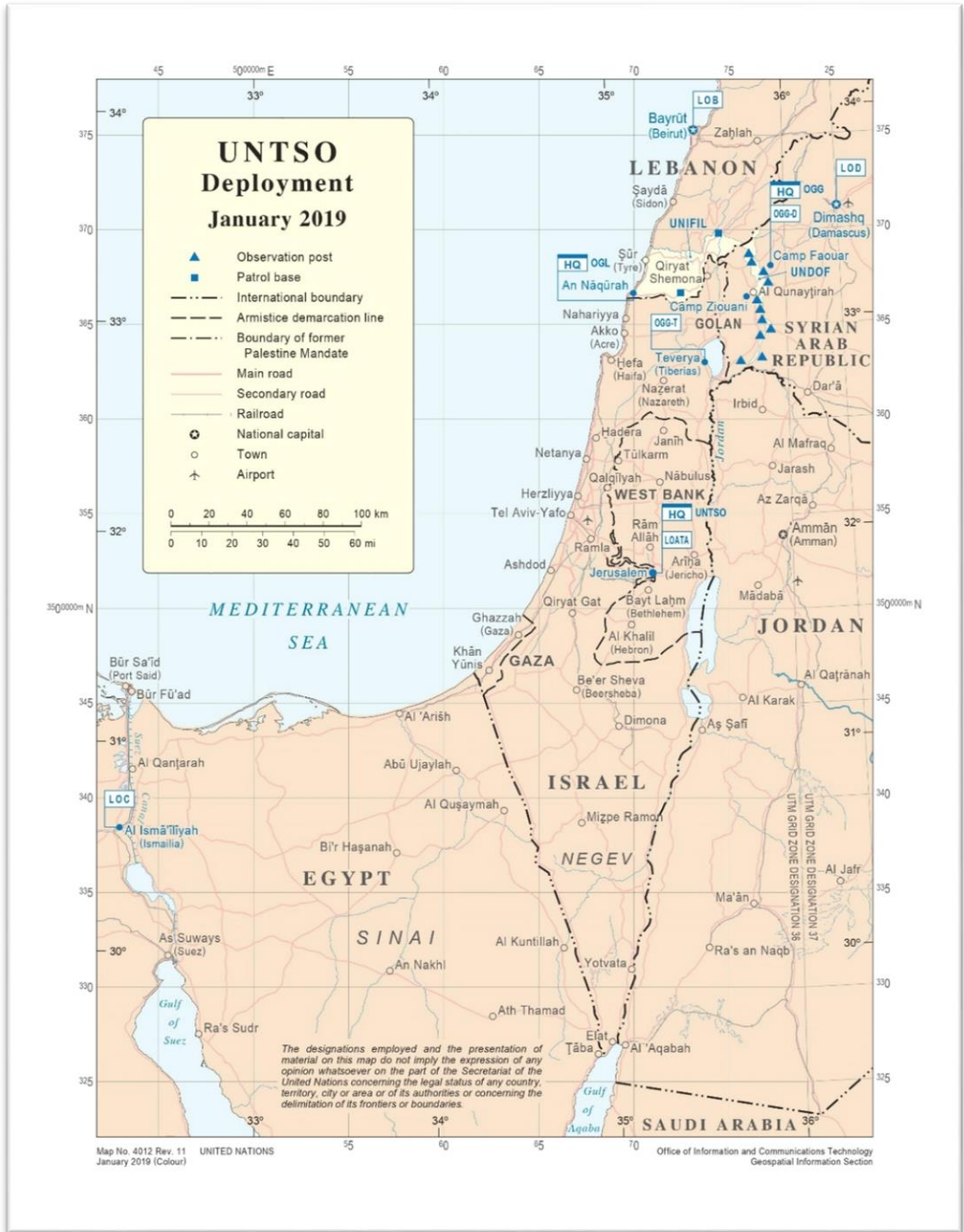
**Shekel:** officially known as the Israeli new shekel. It is the currency used in Israel, and the legal tender in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

**Tulkarm:** a city in the West Bank. It was previously under Israeli control following the 1967 War and briefly in 2005. It is now under control of the Palestinian National Authority.

**Yarmouk:** refers to an “unofficial camp” located in Syria that previously housed 160,000 Palestinian refugees located near Damascus. The camp has been mostly destroyed and is only home to a few dozen families who have stayed in the camp throughout the Syrian conflict.

CHAPTER 4

MAPS



89

Figure 1: Map of cities and towns in Israel/Palestine.

<sup>89</sup> "UNTSO deployment January 2019 [cartographic material]," United Nations Digital Library, last modified April 13, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3809828>.

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