Artistic Resistance in the Holy Land: ‘48 Palestinian Fiction and Hip-Hop

DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

Miriam Rudavsky Bourgeois

Graduate Program in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

The Ohio State University

2019

Dissertation Committee:

Naomi Brenner, Advisor
Alexander Kaye
Johanna Sellman
Ryan Skinner
This dissertation examines two literary works and two rap songs by Palestinian citizens of Israel (‘48 Palestinians) that challenge the Jewish state: Emile Habibi’s satirical novel *Saeed The Pessoptimist* (1974); DAM’s rap song “Innocent Criminals” (2000); MWR’s rap song “Ashanak Arabi” (2001); and Sayed Kashua’s semi-autobiographical novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002). Habibi and Kashua participated in Israel’s mainstream literary scene: their two novels were read by contemporary Israeli readers and published by Israeli presses. The rappers of MWR and DAM participated in an underground ‘48 Palestinian rap scene in Israel: aside from MWR’s short-lived radio popularity, the selected rap songs were not consumed by mainstream Israeli listeners, played on Israeli radio, or produced by Israeli record labels.

How can we account for these discrepancies? I suggest they are more reflective of attitudes within Israeli society than differences between the works themselves. As a result, factors such as genre (rap or literary text); candor (explicit or implicit critique); and language (Hebrew or Arabic) allow the artists to accomplish different things through their art. With a horizontal form of analysis that replaces more traditional hierarchical genre analysis with an emphasis upon the similar rhetorical force of both oral and written communications, I maintain that the “low” art of rap contains as much depth, substance, and nuance as the “high” art of written fiction.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to Brandon
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great debts are owed to many who have guided me on this academic journey: to the professors at OSU and UChicago who taught me many things, especially to my advisor Naomi Brenner; and also to Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad, who generously helped me translate Palestinian rap into English.

I could not have completed this journey without the love and support of my family, and in return I offer my love and undying gratitude: to my Rudavsky-Brody family, especially to Grandma Sarah and Grandpa Joe; Savi and Savta; Mom and Dad (I am forever grateful, and for the fresh bread, veggies, and perfectly grilled salmon); and Nathaniel and Sara; to my Bourgeois family, especially to my Mother and Father-in-Love and my two new brothers; as well as to my extended Rudavsky-Brody and Baptiste-Jacquot families for their collective pride, beauty, and encouragement.

To the friends near and far who have supported me, encouraged me, and rooted for me throughout this process: to Charlotte; Lara; Anna, and Natalie; and to those at OSU who have had my back: Maya A., Shahreena S., and Genie G.

Last and certainly not least, to Horace and Sappho who are always on patrol; and to my husband Brandon Bourgeois– for whom my greatest debt and gratitude is reserved, and to whom the entire project is dedicated– for his loving sacrifices, his support, his wisdom, and his cat songs. Brandon– my debts to you and my love cannot be expressed in words.
VITA

June 2005................................................................. Columbus School for Girls

June 2009............................................................... B.A., The University of Chicago

June 2013............................................................... M.A., The Ohio State University

2013 to present.............................................. G.A.A., Center for the Study & Teaching of

Writing, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

“Instituting and Assessing Asynchronous Online Writing Groups: Supporting Writer

Success Through a Self-Directed Model”, with Genie Giaimo, ROLE, 

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Near Eastern Languages and Cultures
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................. ii

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................ iv

VITA .............................................................................................................................. v

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER ONE. Introduction ....................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO. Political Pawn to Political Prisoner: Emile Habibi’s Saeed the Pessoptimist ....................................................................................................................... 30

CHAPTER THREE. “Stop being silent, Arabs!”: MWR’s “Ashanak Arabi” ................. 60

CHAPTER FOUR. DAM’s “Innocent Criminals” and Kashua’s Dancing Arabs .......... 95

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion ......................................................................................... 131

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................ 140
CHAPTER ONE. Introduction

Each of the following three chapters focuses on artistic works of resistance by Palestinian citizens of Israel (‘48 Palestinians’)—two literary writers and two rap groups—who, in their prominent and public engagements with Israeli society, challenge the state of Israel: satirical novel *Saeed The Pessoptimist* by writer, left-wing politician, and journalist Emile Habibi (1921-1996), published in Arabic in 1974 and translated into Hebrew in 1984; rap song “Innocent Criminals” (2000) by rap group DAM (est. 1999), released in Hebrew in 2000; rap song “Ashanak Arabi” by rap group MWR (est. 1999), released in Arabic in 2001; and semi-autobiographical novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002), by writer, journalist, and director Sayed Kashua (b.1975), published in Hebrew in 2002. Palestinians who became citizens of Israel in 1948 are a small but integral segment of Israel’s population.¹


². As ‘48 Palestinian rap participates in an underground art scene, much of the secondary source material that I use comes from interviews with the rap artists quoted in articles and several books. I additionally draw on footage of the artists, including candid interviews, from three documentary films: Anat Halachmi’s (2003), *’Arutzim Shel Za’am (Channels of Rage)*; Jacqueline Salloum’s (2008), *Slingshot Hip-Hop*; and Noisey (2015), *Hip Hop in the Holy Land*. Lastly, as the rap scene changes so quickly, and many of these manifestations are as yet undocumented in scholarship, I often turn to the artists’ official social media accounts as primary source material.

³. According to a recent statement that Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) issued prior to the release of the upcoming 2018 census, ‘48 Palestinians currently make up around 20% of Israel’s population (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017).
However many ‘48 Palestinians deal with perceived discrimination in Israeli society: ‘48 Palestinian communities are often isolated, and many ‘48 Palestinian voices are underrepresented within academic and popular discourse. The four works express resistance by challenging the state’s dominant ideology. Resistance (challenge to the state) can take various forms, such as armed struggle, picketing, rioting, political negotiation, or subversive art (the focus of this dissertation).

I closely analyze the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of the selected works of written text and spoken word over an approximately thirty-year period from 1974 to the aftermath of the Al-Aqsa (Second) Intifada (2000-2005),4 in order to analyze their different styles of resistance against the Jewish state. I selected these specific works of rap and written text first and foremost because they depict the artists’ similarly ambiguous identities, across different genres and over almost three decades. As perceived second-class citizens often living at the margins of Israeli society, these artists critique the state. Yet notably, they also showcase willingness to participate in the state and strive to improve their status in Israeli society. Their critical and often ambiguous engagements with the state of Israel raise important questions about the roles of ‘48 Palestinians and Israeli Jews in Israeli society, especially their engagements with rap music and literary works.

**Theoretical Framework**

Turning now to the theoretical framework, I begin with an examination of why many ‘48

---

Palestinians consider themselves to be second-class citizens of Israel. ‘48 Palestinians were granted citizenship in Israel’s Proclamation of Independence (May 14, 1948). As non-Jews, they could even be elected to public office. However, a dominant perspective among ‘48 Palestinians is that citizenship for Israel’s Palestinians is not equivalent to that for its Jews. As a small Arab non-Jewish ethnic group of 1.2 million, many ‘48 Palestinians claim that they face systemic discrimination in Israeli society. For one, schools teach Zionist historical accounts. According to these accounts, Jews have a biblical link to the land of Palestine. The creation of the state in 1948 is characterized as a celebration of independence and Jewish victory, whereas Palestinian historical accounts are not recognized. The Palestinian version of these same events does not recognize the Jewish people’s biblical claim to the land, and casts the 1948 War as the Naqba, or devastation. For another, Israel established a Law of Return (1950) aimed exclusively at Jews. The Law of Return provided that any Jewish exile who returned to Israel would be granted citizenship. The Law of Return did not, however, extend to Palestinian exiles. The Law of Absentee Property, passed in the same year, in fact denied ‘48 Palestinians the right to reclaim their ancestral land.

Palestinian scholar Nadim Rouhana additionally points to several amendments made to Israel’s Basic Laws to highlight what he sees as Israel’s discriminatory nature and privileging of its Jewish citizens. These amendments dictate that Israeli citizens can

only run for elected office in Israel’s Parliament (the Knesset) if they accept Israel’s nature as a Jewish state. Thus, one must recognize and accept Israel as state for the Jewish people, as well as its perceived practice of privileging its Jewish citizens, in order to enjoy individual rights. What Israel’s law dictates, notes Nadim Rouhana, is thus tantamount to asking ‘48 Palestinians to uphold the idea that the state they live in belongs to someone else: “they either accept or refrain from challenging the state ideology, which is the ideology that excludes them, or their democratic right to be represented is withheld.”

The legal status of ‘48 Palestinians is often reflected in their living conditions as well. Although some ‘48 Palestinians have integrated into middle-class neighborhoods, there are many who still live in isolated communities in Israeli society. Some of these communities, which Palestinian scholar of Arabic and Comparative Studies Amal Eqeiq calls “urban slums,” suffer from poverty, crime, drug abuse, and neglect, stemming from systemic discrimination. Mizrahi (‘Arab’) Jews also suffer from these structural forms of discrimination in Israeli society.

In order to establish a convenient vocabulary to begin identifying the ideological elements that either uphold or subvert the power dynamics in Israeli society, I now turn to the analytical framing of cultural hegemony famously set forth by Marxist philosopher

8. Section 7A, Israel’s Basic Law (2015). The amendments also required candidates to preemptively pledge support for Israel in the case of any future struggle. Candidates could additionally be disqualified if they had supported or lived in a “hostile state” in the past seven years (Rouhana, 1997, 47).


Antonio Gramsci (1892-1937). Reflecting Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony, the relationship between Israeli Jews and ‘48 Palestinians in Israeli society can be described as a dominant-subordinate relationship, wherein members of the subordinate group (‘48 Palestinians) perceive themselves to be structurally oppressed by the dominant group (Israeli Jews). Hegemony is the imposition of dominant ideology (i.e., the big, shared ideas of a society that are reinforced throughout its institutions and thus are difficult to avoid believing) onto everyone in society. In his *Letters from Prison* (written in a Fascist prison between 1927-1935), Gramsci discusses hegemony in terms of the interactions between social classes in order to describe the ongoing process by which dominant classes use cultural institutions to maintain social, cultural, economic, and ideological power. Dominant classes manipulate the culture of society, and impose their ideological worldview upon subordinate classes. These ideological assertions become self-evident assumptions, resulting in society’s acceptance of them as normal reality or common sense. Members of a society often intuit the dominant ideology of a state without realizing it. Paradoxically, then, ideology can be both deeply ingrained and unconsidered.

Cultural hegemony in Israeli society can thus be said to derive from its

13. As T.J. Jackson Lears notes in 1985 “twenty years ago [1965], ...Antonio Gramsci was rarely discussed outside his native land; now he has become an intellectual cause celebre and in some quarters a cult hero. Scholars continue to pore over his political journalism and his prison notebooks, reassembling the fragments in hopes of theoretical illumination” (Lears, 1985, ‘The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities’, 567). Lears (1985), 572; Lull (1995), 35; *Prison Notebooks* (2007), 138-142; 168; 445; 495.

14. Hegemony and ideology are used in the context of social justice critique. These definitions, as well as the definitions of subsequent terms that I will use and define in this section, come from Özlem Sensoy & Robin DiAngelo, Eds. (2017), *Is Everyone really Equal?*, 221-29.

foundational Zionist ideology. The state of Israel has been said to function as an ethnic democracy, i.e. a political system that combines democratic institutions with the dominance of one ethnic group. However, scholars such as Yoav Peled, Sammy Smooha, and Nadim Rouhana claim that by its very nature as a Jewish state, Israel automatically gives preference to its Jewish citizens.\footnote{Peled (1992); Rouhana (1997), 46, 47, 228, 231; Smooha (1997).}

Cultural hegemony functions as a theoretical lens through which to explore how subordinate groups may subvert dominant ideologies. Cultural hegemony comprises more than just manipulation or indoctrination. It involves what Raymond Williams (one of Gramsci’s most thoughtful critics) calls the “whole of living,” i.e., a “lived system of meanings and values […] which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.”\footnote{Raymond Williams (1977), \textit{Marxism and literature}, 110.} As a constantly evolving lived process (“a process of continuous creation”\footnote{Williams, Raymond (1973), ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxian Cultural Theory.’ Quoted in Lears (1985), 568.}), a cultural hegemonic system must be continually renewed, recreated, and defended. The creation of counter-hegemonies is always an option, thus any hegemony must be alert to the “alternatives and opposition which question or threaten its dominance.”\footnote{Williams (1977), 113.}

'48 Palestinian artists participate in what Gramsci calls a War of Position. Gramsci identifies two different phases in class struggles to challenge hegemonies: Wars of Maneuver and Wars of Position. A War of Maneuver refers to an \textit{armed} struggle, where revolutionaries attack their oppressors, resisting with weapons. A War of Position
refers to an *intellectual* struggle, where thinkers resist domination using literary and cultural tools. A *War of Position* can be started when revolutionary thinkers clarify discrepancies in the dominant ideology for members of both the subordinate and dominant group. The job of these intellectuals is ultimately not only to clarify the dominant ideology, but also to create a new value system to replace it.

As noted above, I selected four specific works of rap and written text in part because they depict the artists’ similarly ambiguous identities, across different genres and over almost three decades. All four artists critique the state of Israel, but they do so in different ways. In other words, these selected ‘48 Palestinian artists express resistance in a *War of Position* by drawing attention to perceived discrimination in Israeli society. Although ‘48 Palestinian and Jewish Israelis are undoubtedly aware of their own living situations, they might not be aware of the specific laws and ideologies that purportedly privilege Jewish citizens and discriminate against non-Jewish citizens. Additionally, they might not have considered alternative ways to live, whereupon everyone in Israel is treated equally. In drawing attention to perceived discrimination, ‘48 Palestinian resistance artists clarify Israel’s dominant ideology as well as highlight its discriminatory aspects. Sometimes they even encourage Israeli Jews and ‘48 Palestinians to actively reject Zionist ideology as well.

In 1968, ‘48 Palestinian writer and political activist Ghassān Kanafānī (1936-1972) coined the term *resistance literature* (*adab al-muqāwama*) to describe literature written by Palestinians that expressed a message of political resistance against

---

the very existence of the state of Israel.\textsuperscript{21} Almost twenty years later, literary theorist Barbara Harlow (1948-2017) wrote that resistance art is necessary in a subordinate group’s struggle for political and social equality because although governmental and political change can be achieved through armed resistance (a War of Maneuver), total social and intellectual liberation from the dominant hegemonic ideology can only be achieved by re-writing and reclaiming the historical and political record through art.\textsuperscript{22}

Both fiction and rap can function as sites of resistance for ‘48 Palestinians. But before turning to the works themselves, we must address the roles of rap and literature in the context of resistance. Is it even appropriate to compare rap songs, which are often performed orally, with written works of fiction? Scholars discuss the two novels within the context of literature,\textsuperscript{23} and the rap songs within the context of hip-hop and music.\textsuperscript{24}

Yet in contradistinction, I have chosen to discuss the selected novels and rap songs together. Expressing similar emotions of anger, indignation, resentment, and uncertainty, these writers and rappers mutually reinforce each others’ voices when they impart vivid, nuanced, multi-faceted, complex, and often multi-lingual stories of their collective suffering.

What, then, can be gained from comparing rap songs and literary texts, which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Kanafānī (1968), \textit{Literature of Resistance in occupied Palestine: 1948-1966} [Arabic].
\item \textsuperscript{22} Harlow (1987), 8.
\end{itemize}
criticize the state in Arabic and Hebrew over a thirty year timespan, and which engage so
differently with Israeli society? Although the selected works display different modes of
resistance, I will argue that the presence of resistance in ‘48 Palestinian rap and fiction
indicates that they both belong to a larger canopy of Palestinian resistance art. Palestinian
art can be traced back to before the creation of Israel in 1948, when native Arabs were the
most populous group living in Palestine.25 Until 1948, Palestinian Arab artists participated
in their own vibrant art scene in Palestine, exploring crafts such as architecture,
photography, and painting. Even after most Palestinians had left the region when Israel
became a state in 1948, the minority group that stayed behind—artists who identified, at
least on some level, as Palestinian—continued to foster a unique Palestinian art scene
distinct from Israel’s Jewish art scene. As noted by historian of art Gannit Ankori, the
fabric of Palestinian identity has found expression in many art forms, including literature,
film, dance and the visual arts.26 Experiencing dissatisfaction at their changed status in
Israeli society, many post-1948 Palestinian artists would express their discontent through
art as resistance art. Each work discussed in this dissertation engages with Israeli society
by expressing resistance in its own particular way.

In the following chapters, I conduct literary analyses of the selected rap songs and
literary works to examine the different types of artistic resistance they express. Reading
and listening to these novels and rap songs side by side illuminates important
complexities that transcend genre: language (the artists’ use of Arabic or Hebrew), candor

(explicit critiques stated outright or implicit critiques alluded to or obscured in the works); rhetoric (prescriptive critiques guide readers and listeners by telling them how to resist, and descriptive critiques illustrate perceived discrimination); and degree of engagement with Israeli society (only some of the works enter into public discourse).

This horizontal form of analysis, in which both rap and fiction are approached as equal forms of expression, reflects Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument that any concrete utterance is a link in a chain of speech communications in a particular sphere: “The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects. Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another.”

What this means is that verbal utterances such as rap music, and the contexts in which they are uttered, should be attended to as carefully as works of fiction (i.e., written utterances). For Bakhtin, notes critic Leslie Baxter, meaning can be found in the “the interplay of […] voices” just as readily as it can be found on the page.

Whereas Bakhtin's focus is on the multi-vocalism (or simply multiple voices) within fiction, I contend that there is also an important interplay between verbal and written forms of communication. I will be addressing both rap and fiction as equal partners in the expression of resistance art. The substantive and ultimately unique expressions of artistic resistance that appear in each of the four works of fiction and rap reflect the compatibility of verbal and written art forms. Moreover, similarities in the

---

expressions of resistance in each work more than hints at the ability of verbal art not only to hold its own against written art, but to complexly express resistance with as much nuance as its written counterpart.

Let us turn now to our second question, which is how these literary writers and rappers express resistance through their art. In other words, how does the art of resistance function? The four works discussed in this dissertation challenge the state of Israel by clarifying its dominant ideology and sometimes even providing counter values to replace it. Yet how precisely do these literary writers and rappers express resistance through their art? One way is through hidden transcripts. In 1990, sociologist James C. Scott (b. 1936) coined the terms public and hidden transcripts to describe the interactions he observed between subordinate and dominant groups, first in Malay society and then in a broader context. Scott observes two dialogues that occur, one in a public transcript and one in a hidden transcript. Public (or mainstream) transcripts refer to the open, public interactions that take place between dominant and subordinate groups. Public discourse is circulated across all institutions, and all members of society are exposed to it. Hidden transcripts refer to interactions that occur in private, among members of separate groups. Private discourse is often conveyed in a code (such as a different language or hidden messages) that cannot be deciphered by the other group. Subordinate groups outwardly accept dominant ideology in public transcripts, but often secretly resist it “behind the back of the dominant”29 in hidden transcripts.

Following Scott, I use the terms “mainstream” and “public discourse”

29. Scott (1990), xii.
interchangeably in the dissertation. I use both to refer to the phenomenon that occurs when an individual or entity becomes so popular or widespread that they/it are considered normal. At its most basic, the mainstream is dictated by popularity. As Israeli Jews are by far the largest (and most influential) group in Israel, the most general definition of mainstream in Israel turns out to reflect the preferences of Israeli Jews. However, even when I use mainstream in its most general sense in these pages, it is important to also remember that multiple discourses exist in Israeli society. These discourses correspond to specific groups, such as Russian Jews or Arab Jews, as well as ‘48 Palestinians, etc. Not all these discourses are able to penetrate into the mainstream.

How does a private discourse enter the mainstream? It might do so in veiled form, wherein its true meaning is obscured by vehicles such as rumors, gossip, songs, gestures, and theatre, all of which enable a “critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.”

Or private discourse might enter into public discourse openly. When this happens, the critique is stated openly, and its true meaning can be understood by all.

In 1994, Africanist and ethnomusicologist Tricia Rose used Gramsci’s paradigm of power relations between subordinate and dominant groups, as well as Scott’s vocabulary of public and hidden transcripts, to examine how African American rappers in the U.S. use the hidden transcript of hip-hop to resist discrimination in public discourse. Developing new forms of language, dance, and music, these rappers constructed a hidden transcript in the 1970s (which Rose calls a rap transcript), where they could openly

30. Scott (1990), xiii.
oppose those in power using “disguised cultural codes.”\footnote{Rose (1994), 100.}
The rap transcript entered public discourse when hip-hop culture in the U.S. was absorbed into the mainstream in the 1980s and 1990s via MTV, the Internet, and social media. When this absorption occurred, rap transcripts ceased to be hidden by “the insulated social sites that have historically encouraged the refinement of resistive transcripts.”\footnote{Rose (1994), 100-101.} According to Rose, when members of these subordinate groups expressed criticism openly, that criticism could then become co-opted as the handmaiden (i.e., part and parcel) of cultural hegemony. This consequent lack of insulation encourages compliance with hegemonic interests.\footnote{Many thanks to Dr. Brandon Bourgeois for directing me toward the implications of this phenomenon.}

Rappers in the U.S. began to voice subversive messages in the public domain. Yet Rose argues that the culturally specific code of hip-hop maintained a hidden aspect to rap, even when it was performed in the public transcript and consumed by mainstream listeners. This was possible because the “language, style, form, and substance” in rap’s expressions of resistance were specific to the American Black experience.\footnote{Rose (1994), 124.} Thus, while the public resistance expressed in rap was “part of the dominant text,” the rappers were also “always on the margins of this text; relying and commenting on the text’s center and always aware of its proximity to the border.”\footnote{In the end, “rap’s resistant transcripts,” argues Rose, “are articulated and acted out in both hidden and public domains, making}
them highly visible, yet difficult to contain and confine.”

Rose’s analysis of African American rap in the U.S. provides us with a theoretical lens with which to frame several questions pertinent to ‘48 Palestinian resistance literature, including both fiction and rap. We first need to identify and distinguish the hidden and public transcripts. While the two literary works use hidden transcripts to veil their authors’ critiques, the two rap songs are explicitly critical of the state. Hidden transcripts made the literary works so palatable to readers that the texts were readily accepted into public discourse. The explicit critique of the rap songs, on the other hand, alienated so many listeners that the songs did not enter public discourse. In fact, while the literary works were being consumed by all sorts of mainstream readers, aside from MWR’s short-lived radio popularity, the two rap songs “Ashanak Arabi” and “Innocent Criminals” were neither being consumed by mainstream Israeli listeners, played on Israeli radio, nor produced by Israeli record labels. As will be seen, rap group DAM even tried, and failed, to get their music into Israel’s public domain. One of the fundamental questions I consider in the following pages and chapters is why– in contrast to African American Rap which has become mainstream in the U.S.– most ‘48 Palestinian rap will never become mainstream in Israel. We shall return to this question.

**Historical Context: 1974-2002**

Proceeding chronologically, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to situating the works and artists within their historical, intellectual, and artistic contexts. As noted, the

works I discuss span thirty years. During their lives, Habibi, Kashua, and the artists of DAM and MWR collectively witnessed two regime changes, the formation of the state of Israel, the creation of a ‘48 Palestinian identity, two violent uprisings, and several major wars. The earliest work—Habibi’s *The Pessoptimist* (1974)—is set in the aftermath of the war of 1948, and was written between the wars of 1967 and 1973; DAM’s “Innocent Criminals” (2000) was created in response to the events of Black October and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada; and the latest works—MWR’s “Ashanak Arabi” and Kashua’s *Dancing Arabs* (2002)—were created in the tense climate surrounding the first several years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. As shown, these events (which are discussed in the following pages) have a direct correlation both with the artists’ identities as ‘48 Palestinians and Israeli citizens, as well as with the selected works themselves. Yet although life within Israeli society underwent many changes for both Israeli Jews and ‘48 Palestinians in this time, the artists’ relationships with the state of Israel during these years are remarkably similar. Moreover, as will be examined in the upcoming chapters, the critical resistance they voice against the state in these works have more rhetorical similarities than differences. I highlight many of these similarities in chapters two, three, and four, and suggest possible implications.

Habibi’s satirical novel *The Pessoptimist* is the earliest work examined. I discuss *The Pessoptimist* because it is one of the first and foremost works by a ‘48 Palestinian to artistically challenge Israeli society. The novel reflects Habibi’s unclear relationship to Israel: Writing in Arabic, Habibi criticizes the state implicitly, often without calling out
perceived societal discrimination by name. The Pessoptimist establishes an early precedent of resistance art by a ‘48 Palestinian who witnessed the formation of the state firsthand, and is torn between Palestinian and Jewish societies in Israel.

Habibi was among only approximately 150,000 Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after the creation of the Jewish state in 1948. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs, including many members of the Palestinian Communist Party, were displaced, ending up scattered and isolated from each other.37 Those who remained were granted Israeli citizenship, but—ostensibly for security reasons—were placed under military rule for (almost) twenty years, which effectively banned them from traveling within the state, and restricted their rights to free speech and political activism.38 Moreover, they were excluded from all Jewish political parties except the Communist Party (MAKI). As outcasts at the margins of Israel, Palestine, and the Arab world, ‘48 Palestinians could either join Palestinian armed resistance movements, cultivate their own intellectual circles, or try to participate in Israeli politics and society. Habibi took the latter route, and was in fact instrumental in persuading members of the National Liberation League (the Palestinian Communist Party he helped found) to join MAKI. He was elected to Israel’s Parliament (the Knesset) three times on the Communist Party ticket, serving in the Knesset for over twenty years (1951-1972).39

In 1966, Habibi was one year into his third and final term in the Knesset when

---

38. See: Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 169-180; Morris (2008), 272-301; and Shapira (2012), 197.
Israel’s military rule was abolished, and with it the laws restricting ‘48 Palestinians from leaving their villages and participating in much of the political sphere. Habibi and other ‘48 Palestinians took advantage of the increased freedom to move around more freely, as well as to start participating even more in Israel’s government. In June of the following year, the 1967 war was fought between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.\textsuperscript{40} Israel won the war, acquiring the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt; the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan; and the Golan Heights from Syria. When Israel acquired this land, and the Palestinians living on it,\textsuperscript{41} the borders between Israel and the West Bank were opened,\textsuperscript{42} and Palestinians in Israel were able to renew contact with Palestinians outside Israel for the first time since 1948.\textsuperscript{43} Of the newly acquired territory, East Jerusalem was annexed to Israel, while everything else was placed under military administration.

Habibi served his last year in the Knesset in 1972, two years before the release of his second novel, \textit{The Pessoptimist} (1974). In October of 1973, war broke out again when Israel was attacked unawares by Egypt and Syria. During the following year’s residual political unrest, \textit{The Pessoptimist} was published in Arabic. The novel tells the melancholy story of fictional character Saeed the Pessoptimist. Owing to a combination of passivity and an instinct for self-preservation, ‘48 Palestinian Saeed is loyal to Israel for the

\textsuperscript{40} The 1967 War is alternatively called the June War or the Six-Day War.

\textsuperscript{41} 650,000 in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and 356,000 in the Gaza Strip (Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 433).

\textsuperscript{42} At the same time, the borders between the Occupied Territories and the rest of the Arab world were closed. For more on post-’67 conditions, see Shapira (2012), 309-324.

\textsuperscript{43} Physical contact between the groups was still limited, however, as border checkpoints restricted travel for Israeli Arabs between Israel and the Occupied Territories.
majority of his life (and the novel). His loyalty doesn’t waver, even when Saeed is forced to work against his own self-interests and those of the ‘48 Palestinian people in order to appease his Jewish bosses.

Sayed Kashua, born the following year in 1975, belongs to a new generation who, unlike the original ‘48 Palestinians of his parents and Habibi’s generation, were born as Israeli citizens. I discuss Dancing Arabs (in chapter four) because even though Kashua represents a new generation of ‘48 Palestinian writers, the semi-autobiographical novel, written in Hebrew almost three decades later, echoes Habibi’s same uncertain relationship with Israeli society.

With little to tie him to the resistance efforts of Palestinians in the Territories (or their supporters in Israel, the Arab world, and beyond), Kashua’s uncertain identity stems largely from the time he spent learning to navigate between the communities of ‘48 Palestinians and Israeli Jews. These communities, as mentioned, had little contact with each other. Kashua was attending a Jewish boarding school in Jerusalem when the violent uprisings of the First Intifada came to a close.44 These instances of armed resistance against Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip broke out in 1987 and lasted four years. As one of the few ‘48 Palestinians at his Hebrew-speaking high-school, Kashua, like many ‘48 Palestinians in those years, tried to remain neutral.

Kashua would sustain this neutrality throughout his young adult life. He continued to navigate between Jewish and ‘48 Palestinian intellectual and social circles in

---

44. “The Arabic word intifada translates literally as ‘shake’, ‘shaking’ or ‘shake off’. In the context of Arab-Israeli violence it refers to a concerted Palestinian attempt to shake off Israeli power and gain independence” (Williams, 2015). The First Intifada is discussed further in chapter four.
school, as he received a Jewish education—learning about Zionist history and reading Hebrew texts. Kashua then attended Hebrew University. Graduating with degrees in philosophy and sociology, Kashua became a scholar and writer of Hebrew with a degree from a prestigious Israeli University.

At the close of the century, Kashua was writing as a correspondent for the Jerusalem-based weekly newspaper *Kol ha’ir* and was working on his semi-autobiographical novel *Dancing Arabs*. At the time, Israeli-Palestinian tensions were again close to boiling point due to both sides’ failure to implement the peace that had been outlined in the Oslo Accords (1993).

Kashua wrote *Dancing Arabs*—as he did all of his works—in Hebrew. Never having attained a level of written fluency in Arabic, he chose not to write in his native language. In the book, Kashua tells a coming-of-age story about a young ‘48 Palestinian. The young narrator, modeled after Kashua himself, struggles to find his place within mainstream Israeli society. His attempts to fit in are both biting and humorous, such as the many times he tries to pass as a Jew by hiding signs of his Palestinian identity.

Tamer Nafar, the first Arabic rapper and founder of ‘48 Palestinian rap group DAM, burst onto Israel’s fledgling hip-hop scene in the late 1990s, during the years that Kashua was working on *Dancing Arabs* and tensions between Palestinians and Israelis

45. *Dancing Arabs* wasn’t published until 2002, by which point the Second (Al-Aqsa) Intifada was underway.
46. For a timeline of activities and events on both sides, see Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 442.
were heating up. But whereas Kashua had the credentials and desire to secure his spot in the Jewish world and workforce, Nafar was more interested in drawing attention to the discrepancies he saw in the Jewish state than in joining it.

Nafar’s voice represents another segment of ‘48 Palestinians who realized, after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, that neither Jews nor Palestinians were looking out for the best interests of ‘48 Palestinians. The Oslo Accords were signed in Washington D.C. by Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and laid promising foundations for Israeli-Palestinian peace. 48 However the status of ‘48 Palestinians in the future Palestinian and Jewish states was left out of the negotiations entirely. This perceived abandonment by Israel and Palestine deeply impacted ‘48 Palestinian psyche. After Oslo, Nafar and other ‘48 Palestinians chose to look out for their own people and focus on strengthening their communities, status, and identities as Palestinian citizens of Israel, rather than either integrating into Jewish society or joining Palestinian resistance movements.

One way some ‘48 Palestinian intellectuals sought to improve their status was by issuing the Future Vision Documents between December 2006 and May 2007. 49 These four documents, each composed by a different writer or group of writers, made a series of demands. The demands included: redefining the state of Israel from a Jewish democratic state to a bi-ethnic or bi-lingual multicultural state; recognizing Palestinians in Israel as an indigenous national minority; accepting and endorsing (i.e., teaching in schools) an

official Palestinian version of history that characterized 1948 as the *Naqba* and did not recognize the Jewish peoples’ biblical claim to the land; and enacting a Law of Return for displaced Palestinian refugees. As noted earlier, Israel’s Law of Return, issued in 1950, provided that any Jew who “returned” to Israel would automatically be granted citizenship. The proposed law would extend similar guarantees of citizenship to Palestinian refugees.

By making these demands, the authors of the Future Vision Documents sought to achieve equal status for ‘48 Palestinians in Israel, while retaining both Palestinian and Israeli parts of their identities. Recognizing the impossibility of achieving this under Israel’s current Zionist governing system, they pressed Israeli Jews to change the fundamental nature of the Jewish state in order to accommodate its non-Jewish citizens. But few Jewish intellectuals were willing to engage in even a theoretical conversation about the demands made in the Future Vision Documents, seeing only the inherent threat these demands posed to the Jewish nature of Israel.

Enthralled by the remonstrances against the U.S. conspicuously flaunted in the lyrics of African American resistance rap, Tamer Nafar pursued a different way to define his own encounters with perceived discrimination in the Jewish state. And so when Nafar formed the first ‘48 Palestinian rap group DAM in 1998 with his brother Suhel and their neighbor Mahmoud Jrere, he incorporated the poignancy, profanity, and flagrancy of American gangsta rap into his own Hebrew and Arabic lyrics.

Meanwhile, tensions between Israel and Palestinians in the Territories continued

---

to increase. Some historians believe the final straw was future Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s visit to the sacred Al-Aqsa Mosque, or Temple Mount, in late September 2000, which was seen by many Palestinians as a direct provocation.\textsuperscript{51} Whether or not Sharon’s visit was the direct catalyst for the events that followed, shortly afterward, a series of Palestinian uprisings broke out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, mostly directed against Israel’s ongoing construction of new settlements on Palestinian land in the Occupied Territories. These uprisings, which would continue for around the next five years, became known as the Al-Aqsa, or Second, Intifada.

‘48 Palestinians watched their televisions with horror as they saw Israel respond to civilian protestors. In one skirmish, TV reporters caught footage of an Israeli soldier accidentally killing a twelve-year-old Palestinian.\textsuperscript{52} In early October 2000, ‘48 Palestinians took to the streets, staging a War of Maneuver as they resisted Israel in what became known as the Black October riots. The rioters were met with police brutality and violence as over the next nine days, Israeli police killed thirteen ‘48 Palestinians. Over 200 people on both sides were injured. ‘48 Palestinians felt dismayed and betrayed by their own state when they saw how Israeli soldiers turned on them– citizens of Israel – with the same force usually reserved for non-citizens.\textsuperscript{53}

The rappers of DAM, meanwhile, contributed to the resistance efforts in a War of Position. Fueled by outrage, DAM wrote and recorded the song “Innocent Criminals” (“Posh’im ḥafim mi’pesha”) shortly after the Black October riots. In the song, \textsuperscript{51}Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 448-456; Shapira (2012), 447-449. \textsuperscript{52}McDonald (2013), 247-249. \textsuperscript{53}Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 448-456; Shapira (2012), 447-449
DAM addresses listeners in Hebrew, poignantly describing the hardships and perceived discrimination that they, as ‘48 Palestinian citizens, endured every day in Israel.

After the casualties of the Black October riots, a governmental committee—called the Orr Committee after its lead investigator—was formed in 2001 to investigate whether the force used by police in response to the ‘48 Palestinian civilian rioters had been excessive or justified. ‘48 Palestinians were hopeful that Israeli police officers and top government officials involved in the killings would be brought to justice.54

The investigation was thorough. Wanting more than just photographic evidence, the commission members visited sites where alleged brutality had occurred to better visualize the scenes of carnage. The investigation also made a point of being open and transparent. In response to a general call to the public, people came forward with information. Interviews were held in open-sessions at the Supreme Court building in Jerusalem. And if someone missed the live hearings, they could always catch them later on Hebrew, Arabic and foreign-language media sources, or on the Ministry of Justice’s web page, where they were published each day.

In the midst of this volatile atmosphere, four ‘48 Palestinian friends—rappers Mahmoud Shalabi, Waseem Akar, and Richard (Richi) Savo, and DJ Charlie Shaabi (DJ Chuck)—formed the rap group MWR in 1999.55 The same year the Orr Committee began its investigation, the rappers of MWR contributed to the ongoing War of Position being waged by DAM when they released the hit single “Ashanak Arabi” in 2001. In the song,

55. @Mwr.Palestine, Facebook.
the rappers called attention to the unequal treatment and lack of job prospects they encountered. Rapping in Arabic, they admonished their listeners for being asleep, and thus complacent in the perceived discriminations that burdened their daily lives.

While these artistic works appeared in relation to historical events that were unfolding, they were also part of broader artistic contexts. The literary authors Habibi and Kashua had many engagements with Israeli readers. For one, no significant language barriers separated their works from Hebrew-speaking audiences. As noted, The Pessoptimist was translated into Hebrew by Habibi’s friend and fellow ‘48 Palestinian writer Anton Shammas, and Dancing Arabs was originally written in Hebrew. Although Habibi and Kashua challenged Israeli society in the primary language of Israeli Jews, The Pessoptimist and Dancing Arabs were both read and discussed– in mainstream presses, newspapers, and academic and popular literary circles– by contemporary Israeli Jewish writers, readers, and critics.

This is perhaps not so surprising when we consider that the writing climates in which each author participated were hospitable to critical texts. In the decade surrounding the release of The Pessoptimist in Arabic (1974) and Hebrew (1984), Jewish writers such as Sami Micha’el, Eli Amir, and Amos Oz also published texts that questioned, and even criticized, the Jewish state. And in the decade surrounding the publication of Dancing Arabs (2002), writers like Orly Kastel-Bloom, David Grossman, and Ronit Matalon

---


The mainstream or commercial\footnote{58. Mainstream rap is produced and/or distributed by commercially dominant record labels and is promoted on major radio stations. See Tricia Rose (2008), *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop— And Why It Matters*, 241-242.} hip-hop scene in Israel, on the other hand, was not very accepting of criticism against the Jewish state in the early 2000s. As I discuss in more detail in the third chapter, commercially successful Jewish rappers in Israel in the early 2000s,\footnote{59. Including Subliminal, The Shadow, Kele 6, Hadag Nachash, and Mookie (Ben-Ari (2010), 54.)} influenced by American party rap, created either hegemonic pro-Zionist rap or non-political party rap. As Israel’s most popular radio station Galatz was (and still is) controlled by Israel’s military and operated from a military base, the rap songs most likely to be played on the radio were by Zionist rappers such as Subliminal who supported the Jewish state, party rappers such as Shabak Samech who avoided politics altogether, or left-wing rap groups such as HaDag Nachash who managed to slip subversive messages unnoticed into their songs.\footnote{60. The leftist Jewish hip-hop collective Hadag Nachash created some of the only music critical of the Jewish state that was played on Israeli radio. Hadag Nachash’s first big hit was “Shirat ha-sticker” (The sticker song- תירש רקטסה) in 2003. The lyrics, written in Hebrew by leftist Jewish novelist David Grossman, criticized Israel by pointing out hypocrisies through slogans from popular bumper stickers. In an interview, Grossman claimed that he wrote the song to “express the noise, the vulgarity, the evil that we have in our lives” (Ben Nun, 2004). But “Shirat ha-sticker” gained popularity accidentally, despite the criticisms the song conveyed. The song’s mainstream popularity, Yuval Orr (2011, 37) notes, was “predicated largely on Israelis’ ability to identify with certain bumper stickers.” And thus the song’s true accusation was “lost” on many Israelis. “Hadag Nachash is the only band that consistently criticizes the State that has managed to succeed,” DJ Harel Segev of Israeli radio station 90 FM told Yuval Orr. “They do it with such style,” he continued, “that you almost forget they’re being critical” (Segev, 2010). See Orr, 2011, 37; Ben-Ari (2010b), 50-58; Lovatt (2009), 27.} Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the members of DAM and MWR did not generate much engagement with Israeli Jewish audiences. The Arabic and Hebrew songs
discussed were for the most part ignored by Israeli Jewish rappers, rap fans, DJs, and radio stations. Language is undoubtedly a factor in this outcome. The Arabic “Ashanak Arabi” was pointedly not translated into Hebrew, rendering its content, if not its beat, inaccessible to Hebrew speakers. Moreover, DAM provides translations of almost all their Arabic lyrics into English on their official site, but noticeably not into Hebrew.\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, MWR released a partial translation of “Ashanak Arabi” in English, but conspicuously not into Hebrew.\textsuperscript{62}

However language is certainly not the only factor for DAM and MWR’s lack of popularity among mainstream Israeli listeners. DAM’s Hebrew rap song “Innocent Criminals” never gained mainstream recognition either. But it did garner an “underground”\textsuperscript{63} following among some Israeli listeners, snagging over 20,000 downloads.\textsuperscript{64} Even when popular Jewish singer Aviv Geffen was featured on the remix (to which we return in chapter four), “Innocent Criminals” never got airplay on mainstream radio stations, and never became a hit amongst mainstream listeners. It might seem surprising, then, that MWR’s rap song “Ashanak Arabi” (2001) was a short-time radio hit in Haifa,\textsuperscript{65} considering both the song’s explicit and assertive message of resistance, as well as the fact that it is in Arabic. But perhaps this is less surprising when we consider

\textsuperscript{61} damofficialband.com/lyrics.
\textsuperscript{62} @MWR- Palestine (facebook.com/Mwr.Palestine/posts/1418893461695339).
\textsuperscript{63} Underground music is produced and/or released through either independent record labels, or privately via internet streaming sits such as SoundCloud or Youtube, podcasts, blogs, social media, etc. See Rose (2008), 241-242.
\textsuperscript{64} Tamer Nafar to Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am).”
\textsuperscript{65} @Mwr.Palestine, Facebook; “The Freshly-Minted and Sweet MWR “Because I’m an Arab” (2013).
that Haifa is a mixed Arab Jewish city, and the song’s resistance would primarily have been understood by Arabic speakers. To most Israeli Jews, “Ashanak Arabi” would simply have been a catchy rap song.

**Conclusion**

I opened this chapter by introducing four works by ‘48 Palestinians: Emile Habibi’s satirical novel *Saeed The Pessoptimist* (1974); DAM’s rap song “Innocent Criminals” (2000); MWR’s rap song “Ashanak Arabi” (2001); and Sayed Kashua’s semi-autobiographical novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002). These artists were chosen in particular because all four critique the state in important and compelling ways. I suggested that all four works express resistance addressed to public audiences. But they do so in different ways, utilizing hidden transcripts when appropriate and reflecting their intended audiences. Accordingly, the subsequent analysis occasionally necessitates that distinctions be made between Palestinian-Israeli (‘48 Palestinian) audiences, Jewish-Israeli audiences, and Palestinian audiences in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Despite the differences intimated above among these works, it is important to note their underlying thematic commonalities, which reflect resistance and critique, both explicit and implicit. In fact, as we shall see, there are no hard and set rules dictating how an artist may express resistance using either art form. In addition to the ambiguous, implicit critique in *The Pessoptimist* and *Dancing Arabs*, the angry, explicit critique in the rap songs of MWR and DAM are integral to Israeli society as well. In fact, not

---

66. Haifa is considered to be the most integrated Arab-Jewish city in Israel (‘The Arab Population of Israel 2003’, *Israel Central Bureau of Statistics*; Diaa (2016)).
considering the rap songs as part of ‘48 Palestinian discourse, if not Israeli discourse, is tantamount to rejecting the rappers’ voices altogether. Moreover, I argue that if an oppressed group can only fully reclaim its identity by establishing a counter set of values to the dominant ideology (as Gramsci and Harlow have argued), the selected literary works and rap songs are in fact both necessary in a ‘48 Palestinian War of Position, as they both contribute to evolving artistic attempts to define the attenuated ‘48 Palestinian role in Israeli society.

In what follows, I argue that although genre divisions do obviously exist between fiction and rap, the existing hierarchy (which privileges fiction over rap; the written word over the oral song) turns out to be superficial. As noted above, the genres of literary text and oral rap have traditionally been dealt with separately in academic and popular discourse. Yet nonetheless, the lines separating oral and written text in popular culture— or as theorist Samuel R. Delany calls them literary and para-literary genres67— are becoming less clearly defined. Consider for example the 2017 awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature, traditionally bestowed upon literary authors, to singer/songwriter Bob Dylan in 2017.

The same can be said of the lines dividing rap and classical music: in 2018, the Pulitzer Prize for Music, which has traditionally been given to classical musicians, was awarded to rapper Kendrick Lamar for his album “DAMN” (2017). These sorts of examples reflect the blurring of traditional categories, and reinforce the importance of recognizing Palestinian rap as an authentic and complex form of resistance literature on a

par with more traditional fiction. For this reason, in the following chapters, I will present both ‘48 Palestinian rap and ‘48 Palestinian fiction as equivalent articulations of literature of resistance. Similar analytic tools will be applied to both forms in an attempt to uncover both public and hidden transcripts. This analysis will enable us to appreciate more keenly the sharp messages contained in all types of resistance literature.
CHAPTER TWO. Political Pawn to Political Prisoner: Emile Habibi’s *Saeed the Pessoptimist*

The second chapter focuses on a satirical novel, written in Arabic, by ‘48 Palestinian writer, left-wing politician, and journalist Emile Habibi (1922/21-1996): *Saeed The Pessoptimist* (1974). Habibi challenges Israel in the novel by poking fun at the dominant-subordinate relationship between ‘48 Palestinians and Israeli Jews in Israeli society. I consider the candor of Habibi’s critiques against the state: Does he implicitly allude to his message of criticism or explicitly call out perceived structural discrimination by name? Moreover, how precisely does Habibi call attention to perceived inequalities in Israeli society? Does he additionally provide a counter ideology that is based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians?

Written in Arabic and translated into Hebrew ten years later under the author’s supervision, by his friend and fellow ‘48 Palestinian writer Anton Shammas, *Saeed The Pessoptimist* tells the “heart-rending” story of ‘48 Palestinian Saeed Pessoptimist. Saeed, who narrates the novel, conveys his life story in a series of letters, asking the (unnamed) recipient to pass it on (“in his letter to me, the ill-fated Pessoptimist pleaded,

---


69. *(he-opsimist: ha-kronikah ha-mufla’ah shel he’almut Saeed Abu al-Nahs Mutasha’il– The Strange Occurrences Surrounding the Disappearance of Saeed the Il-IFated Pessoptimist).*

70. Jayyusi (2003), x; Mir (2015), i.
‘Please tell my story.’) Saeed is a native Palestinian who is torn, socially and politically, between conflicting groups in Israel—Israeli Jews, ‘48 Palestinians, and Palestinians outside Israel. After the war of 1948, Saeed is exiled from Israel, but sneaks back into the country. He spends much of his life separated from his family and loved ones. Saeed’s personality displays a combination of passivity and an instinct to survive, which causes his identity and loyalties to waver. As a result, Saeed first supports Israel, then Palestine, and then neither. Saeed’s only true “claim,” notes Palestinian poet, writer, and translator Salma Khadra Jayussi (who co-translated the novel into English) is his love for two women, Yu’ad and Baqiyaa. At the end of the novel, Saeed retreats completely from society. He finds himself balancing on a floating spike, from which he is rescued by an alien with a proclivity for saving people stuck at the utter extremities of passivity and desperation.

I now turn to three passages in the novel where Habibi criticizes the state by calling attention to the denigration of ‘48 Palestinians as second-class citizens in Israel. I primarily discuss the Arabic version of The Pessoptimist, with occasional references to Shammas’ Hebrew translation. In the first passage, Saeed writes a letter where he

71. Pessoptimist, English, p. 3. Unless otherwise noted, English quotes are from S.K. Jayyusi and T. LeGassick’s 2003 translation; Arabic is from Habibi’s original 1974 text; and Hebrew is from Shammas’ 1984 translation.


73. “When you can bear the misery of your reality no longer but will not pay the price necessary to change it, only then you come to me” (Pessoptimist, English, p. 159).

74. See Levy (2014), Chapter 3: “Exchanging Words: Arabic Writing in Israel and the Poetics of Misunderstanding” for a discussion of the further implications of Habibi’s work being translated into Hebrew. Levy reads The Pessoptimist as a “double text” that “has been read both as a major Palestinian novel written for a broader Arabic-reading audience and as a striking example of minority literature in the Israeli canon” (116). Levy further sees a dual text that arises from the “mistranslation” of the Arabic text into Hebrew, claiming that the mistranslation expresses subversive truths.
introduces himself as both a “Palestinian Everyman” (to use the words of Rachel Feldhay Brenner\textsuperscript{75}), and a self-serving pessoptimist. He admits that his highest priority is ensuring his own survival, even over the survival of members of his community or family. In the second passage, Saeed delivers a speech comparing his own experiences in Israel to those of fictional protagonist Candide from Voltaire’s eponymous 18th century satirical novel.\textsuperscript{76} And in the third passage, Saeed undergoes an awakening while in jail for treason, whereafter he becomes devoted to the Palestinian revolution.

“\textit{So which am I, a Pessimist or an Optimist?}”\textsuperscript{77}

I begin with an example where Saeed criticizes the state in a letter:

\textbf{Focus on the text.}

\textbf{Focus on the text.}

\textbf{Focus on the text.}

\textbf{Focus on the text.}

How very often you have seen my name in the leading newspapers. Didn’t you read of the hundreds imprisoned by Haifa police when that melon exploded in Hanatir Square, now Paris Square? Afterwards every Arab they found in Lower Haifa, pedestrian or on wheels, they put in jail. The papers published the names of everyone notable who was caught, but merely gave general reference to the rest.

The rest– yes, that’s me! The papers haven’t ignored me. How can you claim not to have heard of me? I truly am remarkable. For no paper with wide coverage, having sources, resources,

\textsuperscript{75} Brenner (1999), 94.

\textsuperscript{76} Voltaire (1759), \textit{Candide, ou l'Optimisme}.

\textsuperscript{77} Pessoptimist, Arabic, p. 19; English, p. 12.
advertisements, celebrity writers, and a reputation, can ignore me. Those like me are everywhere—towns, villages, bars, everywhere. I am “the rest.” I am remarkable indeed!\(^78\)

Saeed launches into the above anecdote to impart to his reader how very remarkable he (Saeed) is. He is in the midst of recounting how his father was shot and killed during the war of 1948, and how he too would have been shot if a stray donkey (translated into English as “ass” for comedic value) hadn’t wandered past. Luckily, the donkey stepped directly into the line of fire and blocked Saeed from the bullet.\(^79\) Noting that he owes his entire existence to the donkey’s sacrifice, Saeed pauses to reflect on the precarious, remarkable, and ultimately humorous, nature of his own existence (“my subsequent life in Israel, then, was really a gift from that unfortunate beast”\(^80\)). Although by his own admission Saeed is remarkable, the reader of his letter has never heard of him (“You said you never noticed me before. That’s because you lack sensitivity, my friend”\(^81\)).

Despite his apparent enthusiasm, what Saeed doesn’t say outright, is that his remarkableness depends on the un-naming of hundreds of ‘48 Palestinians. For instance, Saeed recounts an explosion and the ensuing imprisonment of innocent ‘48 Palestinians (“didn’t you read of the hundreds imprisoned by Haifa police when that melon exploded in Hanatir Square, now Paris Square?”). However he skips over the trauma and hurt caused by the explosion, such as the injuries, the deaths, and the imprisonment of hundreds of innocent bystanders. Saeed briefly mentions the “notables” but quickly

\(^{78}\) *Pessoptimist*, Arabic, p. 14; English, p. 7.

\(^{79}\) *Pessoptimist*, English, pp. 6-7.

\(^{80}\) *Pessoptimist*, English, p. 6.

\(^{81}\) قلت إنك لم تحس بي أبذا، ذلك إنك لا تيد الحسن يا محترم. (*Pessoptimist*, Arabic, p. 14; English, p. 7).
dismisses them. These are the Arab elite whose names are worth mentioning (“the papers published the names of everyone notable who was caught”). Just as the papers hurry past everyone else, Saeed hurries past the notables to arrive at his main focus, everyone else. Everyone else is grouped together, referred to anonymously as “the rest: (“ [the papers] merely gave general reference to the rest”).

Saeed displays seeming satisfaction at being grouped in with the rest (“I am ‘the rest.’ I am remarkable indeed!”). He introduces himself as a Palestinian Everyman in the letter, proudly boasting “The rest– yes, that’s me!”82 (انأ– هؤلاء أنا “اکثاری– هوالا’ ana). He claims that as a (non-elite) ‘48 Palestinian, it is quite remarkable to be unremarkable. “The papers haven’t ignored me” he boasts, “I truly am remarkable.”83

The irony is that although Saeed delights at being called the rest, it is meant as a term of denigration. For one, ‘48 Palestinian bystanders are degradingly imprisoned despite their innocence. For another, the papers do not even bother to find out their names. The papers thus deny these hundreds of innocent Israeli citizens individuality, dismissively referring to them as the collective rest. Unlike the notables whose names are worth mentioning, the rest are deemed as being totally unremarkable, and unworthy of mention. So when Saeed transforms ‘the rest’ into something remarkable, Habibi is really making fun of his obtuseness.

Second, Saeed explains his life outlook of pessoptimism:

82. Pessoptimist, Arabic, p. 14; English, p. 7.

83. The word (fadh) (Arabic, p. 14.)– translated in the English version as ‘remarkable’ (English, p. 7)– can also convey ‘uniqueness’ or ‘singularity.’ Shammas’ Hebrew translation captures more of the word’s nuance:

آنآ أني الوحيد الوحيد بميزة (literally: I am the unique, singular one of our kind) (Hebrew, p. 13).
This word [pessoptimism] combines two qualities, pessimism and optimism, that have been blended perfectly in the character of all members of our family since our first divorced mother, the Cypriot.

Take me, for example. I don’t differentiate between optimism and pessimism and am quite at a loss as to which of the two characterizes me. When I awake each morning I thank the Lord he did not take my soul during the night. If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was no worse. So which am I, a pessimist or an optimist?"

Picking up his life-narrative later in the same letter, Saeed tells of his exile from Israel in 1948. He sneaks back into the country, whereupon he rides a donkey to the military governor’s headquarters, seeking to ingratiate himself with Israeli officials. Saeed is in the midst of recounting the narrative of his return when he pauses to describe the pessoptimism that has run in his family for generations. He blames pessoptimism for what might be seen as his subservient actions.

Pessoptimism contains components of optimism and pessimism, ultimately taking

84. Transliterated in Shammas’ Hebrew text as ”לא-לאשאחשא“ and translated as ”Pessoptimist, Hebrew, p. 18.

85. Habibi blends the two words as أمشنام.

86. Pessoptimist, Arabic, p. 19; English, p. 12 (my additions and emphases).
the form of cautious optimism, or grateful pessimism. Saeed exhibits pessimism by expecting the worst every night (i.e., that the Lord will “take [his] soul during the night”). On the other hand, he is cautiously optimistic when he wakes up each morning, grateful to be alive (“when I awake each morning I thank the Lord he did not take my soul during the night”).

The satire is that Saeed displays gratitude each day to be alive, even if being alive comes at a great cost (“If harm befalls me during the day, I thank Him that it was no worse”). Saeed ends up using pessoptimism to justify or excuse his actions and inactions throughout the novel. For instance, Saeed receives special treatment in Israeli society for most of the novel. But sometimes he must take demeaning, cowardly actions in order to enjoy these perks, such as working with Israeli Jews to help subjugate his own people. Other times, he must choose inaction in order to ensure his own survival. For instance, Saeed stands by passively when Jewish guards violently arrest, and deport, his Palestinian lover. He does the same when Jewish guards assassinate his other lover along with their son, who is a Palestinian freedom fighter. Pessoptimists, by nature, do what they must to stay alive, even if their survival cause someone else pain.

Overall, Saeed unintentionally expresses criticism in these examples when he discusses his role as a Palestinian Everyman, as well as his self-serving life outlook of pessoptimism. He alludes to the perceived discrimination underlying Israel’s dominant ideology without explicitly calling to it by name. This perceived discrimination is

88. He is a fedā’i, or freedom-fighter.
responsible for the inherent contradiction between supporting Israel (a Jewish state), and supporting ‘48 Palestinians (non-Jewish second-class citizens). The rhetoric that develops as Saeed attempts to show support for Israel and ‘48 Palestinians creates an unresolved tension in the novel.89

Life and History

Like Saeed, Habibi was a native Arab of Palestine who devoted much of his post-1948 life and efforts to both showing support for ‘48 Palestinians, and participating politically and intellectually in the Jewish state. Habibi witnessed a regime change and contributed to the creation of an entire ethnic group during his lifetime: he was born in August of 192190 in Haifa, Palestine as an Arab under the British Mandate, and he was buried in 1996 in Haifa, Israel, as a ‘48 Palestinian in the Jewish state.91

Although Habibi was surrounded by political turmoil and societal unrest for most of his life, he never participated in armed combat. Almost all of Habibi’s childhood and early adult years were punctuated with vicious fighting between Arabs and Jews in Palestine.92 He graduated high-school, at the age of seventeen, the same year World War

---
90. Some sources placed Habibi’s birth date at 1921 and others at 1922 (Levy, 2014, 106).
91. Unless otherwise noted, the biographical information about Habibi presented in the following pages was gathered from the following sources: Campbell (2004); Hadi (2006); Khūrī (1981); and Mikhail (2008). Habibi sent a copy of his interview with Darwīsh and Khūrī to R.B. Campbell as a substitute for the requested autobiography (Campbell, 389).
92. For instance, when Habibi was seven, a week-long violent encounter broke out in August of 1929, and 133 Jews were killed (Shapira, 2012, 78-79). Put simply, the main issues were land ownership and safety. When both groups appealed to the British for help, British officers often fanned the flames, pitting the two groups against each other. In April of 1936, when Habibi was 15, another series of riots broke out. The riots, known as the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939), lasted for the three years Habibi spent in high-school. To read more about the instigating factors, complications, and implications of these riots, see Kimmerling
II broke out (1939). Rather than fight for any side in the war, Habibi spent the next several years drifting through a series of odd jobs. Like his father and brothers before him, he worked as a laborer to build the Haifa Oil Refinery, and additionally sought (but never completed) a degree in petroleum engineering by correspondence from London University between 1939 to 1942. In 1940 Habibi moved to Jerusalem, where he worked as a radio announcer for the Palestinian Broadcasting Service for several years. In 1943, he resigned from radio to become secretary of the Palestinian Communist Party in Haifa. The following year, Habibi helped found the National Liberation League, a Communist party specifically for Arabs in Palestine. In May of that year, he co-founded al-İttihat (the Union), a newspaper circulated by the Palestinian Communist Party, and also served as its chief editor.

Habibi was one of the few native Arabs of Palestine who was fortunate enough to evade exile and retain his right to remain on the land that fell under Zionist control in 1948. Habibi was south of Haifa when the escalating conflicts between Arabs and Jews in Palestine came to a head. In 1947-1948, a series of battles erupted across Palestine. Jewish forces defeated Arab forces on the ground. In November of 1947, the British despaired of ever reaching peace. The UN General Assembly voted to terminate the British Mandate. They began making plans to move out of the region by May 15th of the following year (1948). On this date, according to an arrangement called Resolution 181, & Migdal (2003), 426; Shapira (2012), 84-87.

93. Many Arab workers left their farming villages in the early years of Britain’s Mandate in Palestine to find work as laborers in urban cities (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, 30).

94. In 1944, the Communist Party of Mandate Palestine had split into Jewish and Arab factions.
Palestine would be partitioned into two states: a state for Jews (Israel) and a state for Arabs (Palestine).⁹⁵

Anticipating the chaos and violence that would follow Britain’s exit from Palestine, Habibi made plans to return to his hometown of Haifa before May 15, 1948. But he arrived to find the city already under Israeli control. His brothers had fled to Lebanon, and his parents had traveled east of Haifa to their hometown of Shafā‘ Amr. Habibi followed them to Shafā‘ Amr, only to learn his father had died there. He was, however, reunited with his mother, and brought her back with him to Haifa.

Habibi fictionally recounts his traumatic return to Haifa in The Pessoptimist. For instance Saeed narrates some of these devastating experiences in the letter examined above. “I tried to recall the experience of returning,” Habibi reminisces five years later in an interview with his friend, exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, “not the returning so much as the road itself. I tried to recall my grief-stricken meeting with Haifa after the disaster.”⁹⁶

As Habibi anticipated, the War of 1947-1948 had immense impact on his own life and the lives of almost every Arab in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, the British withdrew from the region as planned, marking the end of the British Mandate. The Jewish state of Israel was created on May 15, but civil war between Jewish and Palestinian armed forces immediately followed. The fighting came to an end in 1949, when armistice agreements

⁹⁵. Zionist leaders accepted the partition plan. But Arab leaders rejected it, insisting on a majority of the land. The Jewish state was meant to contain 500,000 Arabs (40% of the total population) and 600,000 Jews (60% of the total population) (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, p. 147, fn. 40). For a map of “The UNSCOP Partition Plan, 1947” see Shapira (2012), 93. To read more on the 1947 partition plans, see Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 146-156 and Shapira (2012), 92-94.

were signed between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries. The armistice agreements re-negotiated Israel’s borders, with everyone profiting except native Palestinian Arabs. The new borders (the Green Line) expanded the Jewish state, while the land that had been designated for a Palestinian state in Resolution 181 was now divided between Israel, Transjordan, and Egypt.

Habibi was among only approximately 150,000 Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948. Among this small number were journalist and writer Atallah Mansour (b. 1934), the family of writer and fellow Protestant Christian Anton Shammas (b. 1950), and beloved poet and public figure Mahmoud Darwish (b. 1942). Most Palestinian Arabs, however, were forcefully evacuated from Israel, ending


100. Mansour was born in northern Palestine, in the village of Al-Jish, Safad. After 1948, Mansour was one of the first ‘48 Palestinians to live on a Jewish Kibbutz, Kibbutz Sha’ar ha-amakim (1951-1952). He was also the first ‘48 Palestinian to become a regular contributor and member of the editorial board for Israel’s leading Hebrew newspaper Haaretz, as well as the first non-Jew to publish a novel in Hebrew (‘Atallah Mansour, Journalist and Author’, (atallahmansour.com); Uzi Benziman (2004), ‘The Case of Atallah Mansour,’ Haaretz).

101. Shammas was born in the village of Fassuta in the Upper Galilee. Shammas’ family moved to Haifa in 1962, when he was twelve, and he moved to Jerusalem six years later to attend Hebrew University, graduating with degrees in English literature, Arabic literature, and Art History. He remained in Jerusalem until 1987, when he left for the U.S. He is now a professor at the University of Michigan (Marzorati (1988), “An Arab Voice in Israel,” The New York Times).

102. Darwish his family fled Israel to Lebanon during the war of 1948, and his native village was destroyed by the newly-fledged Israeli army. They returned to the Galilee in 1949, but were too late to be included in the official Israeli census of Palestinian Arabs (“Mahmoud Darwish,” Poetry Foundation; Mahmoud Darwish (1995), Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982, xii; Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 170-180; Ameed Saabneh (2019), ‘Displaced and Segregated: The Socio-economic Status of the Second Generation of Internally Displaced Palestinians in Israel’; Segev (1986), 1949: The First Israelis, 80).
up scattered and isolated from each other. They regarded the defeat as *al-Naqba* (the devastation). Among the hundreds of thousands of exiles were novelist and poet Ghassan Kanāfānī (b. 1936) and novelist, activist, and professor Sahar Khalifah (b. 1941). These Palestinian writers, like Habibi, expressed artistic criticism against Israel, from inside and outside the state, in their written works.

### ‘48 Palestinian Writers

To show that Habibi’s message of criticism is unique even from that expressed by contemporary ‘48 Palestinian writers, I pause here to briefly consider the artistic messages of criticism expressed by Mahmoud Darwish and Anton Shammas, two of the most well-known and influential ‘48 Palestinian writers.

In his role as beloved and outspoken poet of the ‘48 Palestinian people, Mahmoud Darwish participated in what Gramsci terms a War of Position against Israeli society. He criticized the state of Israel by explicitly calling attention to perceived discrimination. For instance, in his famous poem “Bitaqat huwiyya” (“Identity Card” –1964), Darwish expresses resistance by depicting an encounter he has with a Jewish Israeli bureaucrat when renewing his ID card at the Ministry of Interior. The bureaucrat asks his nationality,

---

103. 100,000 Arabs fled to Lebanon; 75 to 90 thousand to Syria; 100,000 to Transjordan; and 7,000 to Egypt. Additionally, 300,000 were sent to the West Bank, and 160 to 190 thousand were sent to the Gaza Strip. (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, Map 4, p. 159; Khalidi, 177-181 and Rekhess, 4-8).


105. Kanafānī was from Akko, the same town on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine as the rappers of MWR. Whereas the rappers’ families managed to stay, Kanafānī and his family fled to a small village near the Southern Lebanese border in 1948, with hopes of returning once the fighting had simmered down (Zeidan, “Men in the Sun,” 285).

106. Khalifah was born and lived in Nablus, Palestine, under the British Mandate. In addition to artistically resisting Israel, she devoted much of her life to advocating on behalf of Palestinian women. See Al-Mallah (2009); Koy (2009); Khalifah (1980).
to which Darwish responds defiantly (in the poem): “Write it Down! I am an Arab- سجل! Ana ‘arabi.” The designation ‘Arab’ is meant to mark Darwish’s status as a non-Jewish citizen of Israel. Darwish established a set of counter values when he transformed his Arab identity from a point of control into a point of pride. Indeed, “Identity Card” would become a rallying cry for Palestinians both inside and outside Israel who discovered newfound pride in their Arab identities.

Anton Shammas also participated in a War of Position against Israeli society. Two years after translating The Pessoptimist into Hebrew, Shammas confronted Israeli readers in 1986 with his own Hebrew work of artistic critique, Arabesques. He was one of the first non-Jewish citizens of Israel to criticize Israeli society in Hebrew. Through interwoven stories set over a period of one hundred and fifty years in Palestine, Israel, Paris, and Iowa, Arabesques weaves the history of several generations of Shammas’ family. In the novel, Shammas explicitly criticized the Jewish nature of both the Hebrew language and the state of Israel. “What I’m trying to do–mulishly, it seems–” Shammas reflects in an interview “is to un-Jew the Hebrew language... to make it more Israeli and

107. Mahmoud Darwish (1964), Bitaqat Hawiyyah [Identity Card].

108. In fact, as a ‘Present Absentee,’ Darwish’s status in Israeli society is slightly different— and lower— than Habibi’s. Whereas Habibi returned to Haifa before the fighting even started, Darwish— who returned too late to be included in the official Israeli census of Palestinians in Israel— is among the fifteen percent (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, 171) of ‘48 Palestinians regarded as ‘Present Absentees’ or ‘Internally Displaced Palestinians’ (IDPs) (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, 170-180; Ameed Saabneh, 2019). Due to the 1948 Absentees Property Law, Darwish was granted Israeli citizenship, but never regained ownership of his family land, and was never included in official state census data. See: “Mahmoud Darwish,” Poetry Foundation; Mahmoud Darwish (1995), Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982, xii; Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003, 170-180; Ameed Saabneh (2019), ‘Displaced and Segregated: The Socio-economic Status of the Second Generation of Internally Displaced Palestinians in Israel’; Tom Segev (1986), 1949: The First Israelis, 80.


less Jewish, thus bringing it back to its semitic origins, to its place.” Additionally, Shammas established a counter-set of values, urging his people to claim Hebrew as their own cultural language. Hebrew is thus more than just the language Shammas used to criticize Israeli society. It was part of his resistance, as he took on Israeli society from within.

Due to their explicit and very public expressions of artistic resistance, Darwish and Shammas both faced a degree of controversy in Israeli society. For instance, Darwish was evidently perceived as enough of a threat in the 1960s that he was arrested for traveling between different ‘48 Palestinian villages without a permit, and for reciting his politically charged poem “Identity Card.” As both of these acts were in violation of military law, Darwish was placed under house arrest. Twenty years later, the explicit provocation Anton Shammas posed to the Jewish nature of Israel’s Hebrew literary scene by writing in Hebrew angered prominent Jewish writer, A.B Yehoshua. In a 1985 interview, Yehoshua even denied Shammas’ status as an Israeli citizen, inviting him to either leave Israel, or accept his marginal status as a second-class citizen.

As will be seen in the remainder of the chapter, Saeed’s rhetoric in The Pessoptimist, as well as his engagements with Israeli society, differ from the expressions of resistance in Darwish and Shammas’ writing. Although Habibi expresses critique in in

---

111. Anton Shammas, quoted in Levy (2014), 150.
112. Military rule is discussed in chapter one. See Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 169-180; Morris (2008), 272-301; and Shapira (2012), 197.
a work that (eventually) enters the public domain, he points out perceived structural flaws without mentioning them by name.

In 1972, almost ten years after Darwish’s incendiary poem “Identity Card,” Habibi released the first parts of what would become his most well-known work, The Pessoptimist, in serialized form in his newspaper al-Ittiḥād. The full text was published in Arabic two years later in 1974. In 1984, as noted, The Pessoptimist was translated into Hebrew as ha-opsimist, under Habibi’s close supervision, by his friend Anton Shammas, and was published by the left-wing press ha-kibuts ha-me’uḥad.115

When parts of The Pessoptimist were printed in al-İttiḥād in 1972, Habibi was criticized for copying the tone, style, and message of Voltaire’s Candide.116 He responded to his critics with mockery, insisting tongue-in-cheek that any similarities between the two novels were coincidental.117 In a final flippant dig at his critics, Habibi explicitly referenced Candide in the final version of The Pessoptimist by adding the Candide speech, parts of which are discussed in the following section.

Candide Speech

I now turn to two examples from the Candide speech where Saeed criticizes the state when he calls attention to inherent disparities in Israeli society. Outwardly, Saeed affirms pro-state discourse in the speech. Pro-state discourse supports Israel’s identity as a Jewish

state. Saeed demonstrates his support of Israeli society and governmental policies, and tacitly upholds Israel’s fundamental nature as a Jewish state. In the speech, Saeed compares his life experiences to those of Candide, who is reared on the optimistic outlook taught to him by his tutor Pangloss.\textsuperscript{118} Candide believes everything that happens is the best possible thing that can happen in the best of all possible worlds.\textsuperscript{119} Habibi uses the story of Saeed to challenge Israel in a similar way that Voltaire uses the story of Candide to criticize the French monarchy and the authority of the Catholic Church. I consider Saeed’s use of implicit language to express criticism in both upcoming examples.

First, we start near the beginning of the speech. Saeed criticizes the state by using pro-state discourse to call attention to inherent hypocrisies in Israeli society:

فيتمل هذه التعذبة تعزيًا لنا، بعد مثنا عام، وذلك في أيول من عام 1972 يوم أن قتل الرياضينا في ميونيخ. ألم ينتقم لنا طياراننا الحربي بقتل النساء والأطفال، المبتدين في رياضة الحياة في مخيمات اللاجئين في سوريا ولبنان، فتعزّيًا؟ وفي اليوم التاسع والعشرين من الشهر الذي جاء بعد أيول، في أكتوبر الخمسة، ولنا عادة طائراتنا من ضرب مخيمات اللاجئين في سوريا ضربًا موفقاً، ألم يجمع الوزير ينجلو بارامر الرياضيين المعذرين ويعزّي يسال طائرتنا أصابت الهدف إصابات ممّحوة وفعلًا غليظًا؟

We ourselves, after all, sought consolation in the same way two hundred years later. That was in September 1972, when our athletes were killed in Munich. Did our military aircraft not take revenge for us by murdering women and also children, just beginning to enjoy the sport of life, in refugee camps in Syria and

\textsuperscript{118} In Voltaire’s satirical novel, which is loosely based on real events— the seven-year war between the French and the Prussians (1756-63), and the deadly earthquake in Lisbon in 1755— key names and events are modified and altered. For instance, the French and the Prussians are called, respectively, the Bulgars and the Aabares.

\textsuperscript{119} Harb (2010), 93. Pangloss follows the teachings of (real) early 18th century German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz. Voltaire criticizes the idealistic teachings of Leibniz in \textit{Candide}. 

45
Lebanon? Didn’t this **console** us? In October of that same year, our planes having returned after bombing Syrian refugee camps, did not our very own Pangloss, the Minister of Education and Culture Yigael Allon, meet with the widows of our athletes who had fallen victim and console them by saying that our aircraft had hit all their targets and had done a magnificent job?\(^\text{121}\)

Saeed sets the scene with an illustration of Pangloss’s optimism. According to Saeed’s narration of events, Pangloss tells Candide that Bulgars raided his father’s castle, and raped and plundered his people, the Abares. Pangloss depicts the brutal situation optimistically, recalling that the Abares once did the same to a neighboring barony belonging to a Bulgarian lord (“Did not Pangloss express consolation for the Abarian women who had been raped, and who had seen bellies ripped open, heads cut off, and their castles demolished, with the comment: ‘But we’ve had our revenge, for the Abares have done the very same thing to a neighboring barony, which belonged to a Bulgarian lord?”\(^\text{122}\)). In the above passage, Saeed applies Pangloss’s same optimistic logic to an example from 1970s Israel.

Habibi’s message of criticism in this passage is obscured by Saeed’s use of, and seeming belief in, pro-state discourse. First, notice how Saeed identifies as Israeli by referring to “we” and “our” (in bold). He thereby labels himself as complicit in Israel’s actions.

Saeed uses pro-state discourse to outwardly express support for Israel’s retaliation against Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon. He does this by attempting to equate

---

120. The Arabic and Hebrew texts specify the date as the 29th day of the month after September (i.e., October 29) (פאנטאסיטיס, Hebrew, p. 75).
121. *Pessoptimist*, Arabic, pp. 102-103; English, p. 73. The bolded words in the passage are my emphasis.
122. *Pessoptimist*, Arabic, p. 102; English, p. 73.
the execution of grown Israeli athletes with the slaughter of Arab women and children. In *Candide*, the Abare barony retaliates against their Bulgarian attackers in like fashion, doling out tit for tat. In *The Pessoptimist*, on the other hand, Israel responds to provocations with an escalated retaliation. Saeed even attempts to justify the massacre of Arab women and children by describing the victims as beginning to enjoy the “sport of life” ("رياضلا الحياة"—*riyādat al-hiyat*), as if to say that because both groups participate in sports, they are somehow equivalent.

Saeed’s words “take revenge” and “console” (in bold) point to the inherent critique underlying his comparisons.123 Outwardly, Saeed upholds pro-state discourse by trying to justify the military’s murder of Arab women and children, proclaiming it is simply the state’s way of taking revenge. He further affirms pro-state discourse by asserting that Israelis should be consoled by the murders. However, his words end up calling attention to how unjustified these murders really are, as he illustrates the extent to which Israel’s retaliation goes above and beyond the initial attack. By comparing events in *Candide* to current events in Israel in these lines, Saeed implies, even if he never says, that the real-life circumstances of Palestinians in Israel are far worse than even the exaggerated circumstances in *Candide*.

We now move a few paragraphs later in the speech:

123. The English translation puts these words in quotations, but there are no quotations in either the Hebrew or Arabic versions (*Pessoptimist*, Hebrew, p. 75; Arabic, pp. 102-103; English, p. 73).

And even years before, in early June 1950, when our state was still learning to crawl and, gazing out at the world with all the innocence of babyhood, did not our much-famed author Jon Kimche express the same Pangloss-like wisdom when he wrote in the Jerusalem Post: ‘The Arabs waged a bloody war against the Jews. And they were defeated. So they have no right to complain when they are asked to pay the price for the defeat which they have suffered’!  

In this passage, Saeed attempts to use Pangloss’s optimistic worldview to justify Israel’s actions against its Palestinian citizens. Outwardly, he still affirms Israel’s actions through his use of pro-state discourse. 

One way Saeed upholds the state’s actions in this example is by siding with Israel and distancing himself from ‘48 Palestinians. Notice how he refers to “our state” and “our much-famed author” (in bold). On the other hand, Saeed refers to ‘48 Palestinians (his own people), as “they”: “they have no right to complain,” “they are asked to pay,” and “they have suffered” (also in bold). 

Another way Saeed uses pro- state discourse to uphold the state’s actions in this example is by agreeing with the perceived discrimination expressed by Jon Kimche.

Kimche was a British Jewish historian and journalist who participated in Zionist efforts to form a Jewish state. In an article for the Jerusalem Post in 1950 entitled “The Arabs in Israel,” Kimche condescendingly described ‘48 Palestinians as a “suspect minority.”

Kimche blamed ‘48 Palestinians for ongoing Arab-Israeli tensions. Saeed supports

---

125. Pessoptimist, Arabic, p.103; English, p.73. The bolded words in the passage are my emphasis.
Kimche by describing him as “much-famed,” and likening his comments to “Pangloss-like wisdom.”

Although outwardly Saeed uses pro-state discourse in this example to support Israel and distance himself from ‘48 Palestinians, the message of critique exists in what Saeed doesn’t say. By agreeing with Kimche’s overly simplified and deeply biased assessment that Palestinians deserve to pay the price of defeat for what he calls the Arab’s “bloody war against the Jews,” Saeed calls attention to the fact that the price of defeat is anything but fair. First, to simply say that Arabs waged a bloody war and deserve to pay the price is to ignore the many factors leading up to the war (such as the loss of land, the forced exiles, and the violence against Palestinians already living in Mandatory Palestine). Second, neither Kimche nor Saeed mentions that the price of defeat is ongoing. ‘48 Palestinians are still paying, in fact. As non-Jews, they face daily discrimination in the Jewish state as second-class citizens. Third, Saeed, by his own admission, suffered greatly at the hands of Israel. Not only was his father shot and killed in the 1948 war, but Saeed himself was almost shot and killed (saved from the bullet by a stray donkey), not to mention exiled and separated from his family and community, before sneaking back into the country. Saeed’s critique in these lines is that the real injustices faced by Palestinians are thus worse than the semi-fictional injustices in *Candide*.

Overall, the critique in these two examples occurs in the instances that Saeed’s

---

use of pro-state discourse (i.e., supporting Israel’s actions and identifying as Israeli) calls attention to disparities in Israeli society. Yet Saeed’s actual criticism is obscured by his use of pro-state discourse and implicit language. Saeed calls attention to the dominant ideology in both examples. He descriptively alludes to disparities between how Jews and Palestinians are treated in Israeli society, which he does not name outright. The satire lies in the fact that for Saeed to believe the pro-state discourse he speaks, he must necessarily also believe in his own inferiority. Thus Saeed’s character, in spouting pro-state discourse and positioning himself within society based on this same discourse, ends up pointing to inherent contradictions, hypocrisies, and inequalities in Israel’s social system. As Lital Levy writes, “through such faulty and overly literal interpretations, Saeed inverts the official state discourse so that it ends up meaning the opposite of what its spokespersons intend.”

Prison

Lastly, I turn to an example from prison, where Saeed criticizes the state by intentionally calling attention to inherent inequalities between Israeli Jews and ‘48 Palestinians. After being arrested, treated roughly, ridiculed by Israeli guards, and harshly beaten, Saeed undergoes an awakening in prison. He becomes devoted to the Palestinian revolution, and, for the first time, becomes fully cognizant of the criticism he expresses. Yet even though Saeed’s critique in these examples is no longer obscured by his affirmation of pro-state discourse, I show that he still refrains from expressing criticism outright.

129. Levy (2014), 118.
Saeed’s critical message transitions to his consciousness, leading to his intentional vocalization of support for Palestine over Israel. I consider Saeed’s rhetoric of criticism to see if it changes after his awakening. Saeed is jailed for being a traitor to the state, and is tasked with informing on other ‘48 Palestinian inmates. When explained the parameters of his new role in prison as a liaison between other inmates (his “inferiors”) and Jewish Israeli jailers (his “superiors”), Saeed realizes that life in prison is exactly the same as life outside prison. He realizes, furthermore, that as a ‘48 Palestinian, he has in fact been a prisoner in Israel his whole life, even before being locked up in a physical jail.\(^{131}\)

Saeed’s immediate reaction, upon realizing this, is one of joy (“I thus cried out, at this immense realization,”– As God wills!”\(^{132}\)). He thinks, at first, that he will be able to ‘game the system’ if he simply acts in prison exactly as he acted outside prison. In other words, Saeed thinks that if he continues to act subserviently, he will continue to receive special treatment. But Saeed comes to a rude awakening when he receives his first beating.

It is in the aftermath of this beating that Saeed’s awakening begins. While recovering, Saeed befriends a young Palestinian revolutionary (“fedā’i wa-lāji– a freedom-fighter and a refugee”), whose name is also Saeed. The freedom-fighter (hereafter fedā’i-Saeed) also happens to be the son of Saeed’s lover. Saeed is literally ‘woken up’ by fedā’i-Saeed: (“a hand shaking my own woke me up”– أَفَقْطَ تَنْتَظَقِيَّأ يَدُ يَدِي وَأَحْفَّصُ يَدِي– 133).

\(^{130}\) *Pessoptimist*, English, p. 124.

\(^{131}\) Or “inner” and “outer” jails, as Saeed calls them upon his release (*Pessoptimist*, English, p.136).

\(^{132}\) *Pessoptimist*, Arabic, p. 182; English, my translation. (حَتَى صَحَّتْ مِن شَذَةِ الْعَسْتَحْمَانِ: مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ).

\(^{133}\) *Pessoptimist*, English, p. 131.
ayqażatni yad tašāfah yadī۳۴). We will again encounter the imagery of waking up to denote awareness of social or political injustices in chapter three in the rap lyrics of MWR. Saeed and fedāʾi-Saeed become friends, as fedāʾi-Saeed offers Saeed sympathy and compassion (“he healed my wounds by talking about his own”۳۵). Although Saeed depicts his awakening, there is no immediate change in his rhetoric, and he still refrains from expressing criticism outright.

Saeed criticizes Israel by intentionally refuting pro-state discourse in implicit language:

دوسي، أيتها الأحذية الضخمة، علي صدري! أخنقني أنفساني! أيتها الغرفة السوداء أطفي على جسدي العاجز! فلو أراك ما اجتمعنا من جديد. الحرس الغلاط، لو كنا معلمين، هم حرس الشرفي بلاط هذا الملك. والغرفة السوداء الضيقة هي البيهو المفضي إلى قاعة العرش!

أصبحت أختاه. أصبحت والده. فأعيدوا ابتساماتكم إلى قواليها أيها العسكر!

Trample all you like, you huge boots, on my chest! Suffocate me! And you, black room, crumple over my helpless body! Were it not for all of you, we would not have been reunited! Those brutish guards, if only they knew, were merely guards of honor at the court of this king. That dark and narrow room was the outer hall that led to this, the throne room!

I have become his brother! I have become his father! Laugh at that, if you can, my jailers!۳۶

Ecstatic about meeting someone who understands his pain, Saeed intentionally withdraws his support from the Jewish state for the first time.۳۷ He recants his earlier words of praise for his jailers, replacing them with cries of outrage, as he describes how his jailers

۱۳۴. Pessoptimist, English, p. 131; Arabic, p. 185.
۱۳۵. Pessoptimist, English, p. 133.
۱۳۶. Pessoptimist, English, p. 132; Arabic, p. 185.
۱۳۷. Also see Rachel Feldhay Brenner (1999), 94; LeGassick (1980), 218; and Mir (2015), 145-151 for an analysis of this passage.
‘trampled’ him, ‘suffocated’ him, ‘crumpled’ his ‘helpless body’ and locked him in a “dark and narrow room.” Saeed even claims that by beating him, his jailers are in fact responsible for his awakening and intentional support of Palestine over Israel (“were it not for all of you, we would not have been reunited”).

At first glance, Saeed might appear to be calling out Israel’s treatment of ‘48 Palestinians by name. But notice that although Saeed no longer uses pro-state discourse, he still uses implicit language to keep from uttering outright words of critique. For instance, instead of indicting Israel by name, Saeed refers to the “huge boots” of the jailers, the “black room” he’s locked up in, and the “brutish guards” who hold him prisoner. Even when addressing his jailers, Saeed implicitly refers to them as “all of you” or “my jailers.” He makes no explicit mention of Israel or Israeli Jews.

Overall, Saeed’s implicit language allows him to continue criticizing Israel after his awakening without ever stating words of critique outright. Salam Mir describes Saeed’s conscious decision to support Palestine as a “partial metamorphosis,”\textsuperscript{138} noting that Saeed’s implicit language calls into question the sincerity of his allegiance shift. Saeed’s implicit language when expressing criticism in prison, even after his awakening, reflects his relationship to Israeli society.

\textbf{“Remained in Haifa”}\textsuperscript{139}

Saeed’s uncertain identity as a ‘48 Palestinian who supports Israel is also reflected in the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{139} Printed on Habibi’s tombstone, by his own request (Mahdi Abdul Hadi (2006), \textit{Palestinian Personalities: A Biographic Dictionary}, 76.)
\end{flushright}
contentious praise *The Pessoptimist* received in Israeli society. *The Pessoptimist* generated much acclaim both inside and outside Israel. The Arabic version of the novel was widely read by Arabic-speaking audiences. It went through three cycles of printing in the first three years after its release: It was first released in 1974 in Haifa, then later that same year in Beirut, and a couple years later in 1977 in Jerusalem. But the novel was not widely read in Israel until the Hebrew translation came out in 1984. Later this same year, ’48 Palestinian actor Muhammad Bakri composed a play based on the novel. He staged the play as a one-man performance in both Arabic and Hebrew for Palestinian and Jewish audiences throughout Israel. The play was a success, and continued to be performed in both Hebrew and Arabic for the next ten years in theaters, schools (Jewish and Arab), community centers, and outdoor venues.

As seen in the examples from *The Pessoptimist* analyzed in this chapter, Habibi’s message of criticism is often so vague that some readers run the chance of misreading it. For instance, after the novel’s Hebrew release, some Jewish critics read its critical message as being “humanist” and “universalist” rather than directed at a specific target. They saw Habibi as a “tolerant observer of humanity.” Many of these critics became aware of their mis-reading after seeing Bakri’s play. Novelist Aharon Megged, for

144. Brenner (1999), 94.
145. The play, notes Hanan Hever, “literally turns the hidden transcript of the novel into a public transcript” (Hever, 2002, 213). There were some, critics, however, who still missed the subversive message even after watching the play (Brenner, 1999, 95-96).
instance, was forced to confront the fact that “the satire he had found amusing and instructive assumed the foreboding traits of subversive propaganda directed at the state.”

The controversy surrounding Habibi’s later accolades further reflect his ongoing precarious and ambiguous perch between the artistic and social worlds of Jews and Palestinians in Israel. Habibi wrote five literary works between 1969 and 1991. In 1990, he was awarded the State of Palestine Certificate of Merit, and the Medal of Jerusalem for Culture, Literature, and Art by Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Cairo. In May of 1992, Habibi received Israel’s Prize for Literature, making him the first Palestinian to win this prestigious prize. Habibi’s acclaim, however, was highly contentious. He accepted Israel’s Prize for Literature, but his acceptance was controversial. He was praised here and there, but mostly received criticism. Jewish Israeli scientist and conservative politician Yuval Ne’man, for instance, caused a scene at the actual award ceremony by giving back the prize he himself had won that night, and leaving the ceremony early. Moreover, Palestinian and Arab intellectuals outside Israel


148. Israeli Jewish scholar Hannan Hever, for instance, praised Habibi’s acceptance of the prize as signifying the Arab Israeli author’s “infiltration” into the Israeli literary canon (Hever (2002), 211). Other critics—such as Arab author and scholar Sasson Somekh, Middle East scholar Immanuel Sivan, and Jewish writer and essayist Shulamith Hareven—applauded Habibi’s win, believing he deserved it based on the literary merit of The Pessoptimist alone, notwithstanding the political implications (Brenner (1999), 93).

began to regard Habibi as a traitor. The London-based Lebanese daily paper *al-Hayat*, for instance, published complaints from twenty-five Arab intellectuals insisting that Habibi give the prize back.\(^{150}\) Even worse, many of Habibi’s closest friends rejected his friendship.\(^{151}\) The rebukes of his close friend Mahmoud Darwish hurt Habibi the most.\(^{152}\) He ended up donating the prize money to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society to treat Palestinians wounded in the First Intifada. He died a few years later in 1996.

Although Habibi died in Nazareth, Israel, he insisted that his body be transported and buried in nearby Haifa. This insistence sheds light on Habibi’s relationship to Israel. As one of the few ‘48 Palestinians to remain in Israel after 1948, he was regarded as a traitor by many Palestinians and Arabs outside Israel. His active participation in Israel’s Parliament, as well as his acclaim as a writer in Israeli society, only served to intensify these resentments. Yet Habibi was reluctant to fully commit to Israel. For instance, he wrote all of his novels in Arabic. Additionally, as co-editor of an Arabic-language paper, he sought out work by Arab writers. This is further complicated, of course, by Habibi’s acceptance of Israel’s Prize for Literature, as well as his forfeit of the prize money. Habibi’s final request to be buried in Israel does little to resolve his complicated relationship with Israel, aside, perhaps, from further illuminating the depths of its complexity. As quoted above, on his tombstone was written, per Habibi’s request, “Emile

---

\(^{150}\) Other people who renounced his acceptance of the prize included writer Muhammad Ali Taha and Samih al-Qasim. Brenner (1999), 92.

\(^{151}\) Habibi’s few remaining friends included Naguib Mahfouz (the Egyptian Nobel laureate), Hanan Ashrawi (the Palestinian spokesperson), and Fat’hi Ghanem (the Egyptian political writer) (Brenner (1999), 92).

\(^{152}\) Brenner (1999), 92.
Habibi—Remained in Haifa.”

We can surmise, in the end, that Habibi’s identity, as well as his relationship to Israel and Palestine, were even more ambiguous than Saeed’s.

**Conclusion**

“Many adopt literature because they lack power for anything more.”
- Emile Habibi, 1974

I conclude that *The Pessoptimist* criticizes the state in a hidden transcript in the public domain. The messages of resistance in *The Pessoptimist* are expressed in a hidden transcript because they are non-committal. Habibi maintains plausible deniability in the novel by alluding to perceived oppression in implicit language rather than calling it out by name. Additionally, while he descriptively clarifies Israel’s dominant cultural ideology, Habibi does not prescriptively offer a set of counter values to encourage ‘48 Palestinians to live according to an ideology based on their inclusion in the state.

Consider, for instance, the above quote from *The Pessoptimist*. Speaking about writers and intellectuals, Habibi writes that “many adopt literature because they lack power for anything more….” He downplays the effect of artistic expressions of critique in this line, implying that people only write because they are too weak to fight. Although this line might be read satirically, or as a rare moment of sincerity (breaking the fourth wall, perhaps?) it is compelling to read it as Habibi’s tacit acknowledgement of his own hesitancy to write an explicit and outright message of resistance against Israel in the public domain, and his admission that his recourse is to obscure his criticism in a hidden

transcript.

Yielding a pen instead of a sword, I have shown in this chapter that Habibi criticizes the state in the moments that Saeed both upholds and refutes “pro-state discourse.” He demonstrates his support for Israel and its Jewish nature when he praises Israel’s society and governmental policies. Saeed then rebukes pro-state discourse when, after experiencing an awakening in prison, he speaks harshly against the state, withdrawing his support from Israel and tacitly condemning its Jewish nature.

I argue that Habibi’s expression of criticism against Israel is consistent throughout the novel, even as Saeed transitions from upholding to refuting pro-state discourse. When Saeed (the narrator) tacitly affirms Israel’s designation as the exclusive land of the Jewish people, Habibi (the author) challenges the dominant ideology imposed by the state on its citizens. He points to what he sees as Israel’s underlying flaw: the perceived marginalization of non-Jewish citizens. In the first and second passages I examine—where Saeed parrots pro-state discourse—Saeed is unaware of his word’s subversive implications. Only the author (Habibi) is aware of the critique conveyed in these scenes. In the third passage—where Saeed rebukes pro-state discourse—the critique transitions to Saeed’s consciousness. As a result, by the end of the novel, Habibi and Saeed are now both aware of the subversive implications of Saeed’s words, and Saeed intentionally expresses criticism.

In the following chapter I consider the rap song “Ashanak Arabi” (2001) by rap group MWR, created almost thirty years later in Arabic. Unlike The Pessoptimist,
“Ashanak Arabi” is never translated into Hebrew, and it explicitly criticizes the state.

Like *The Pessoptimist*, the song is acclaimed in Israeli society, but only for a short time.

In the following chapter, I consider how we can account for the different engagements *The Pessoptimist* and “Ashanak Arabi” have with Israeli society. How does “Ashanak Arabi” express resistance against the state? Are there even points for comparison between the two works, considering that one is a novel and one is a rap song? Moreover, are Habibi and MWR restricted by their chosen genre (literature or rap)? That is to say, must all writers, like Habibi, express implicit critique and must all rappers, like MWR, express explicit critique?
CHAPTER THREE. “Stop being silent, Arabs!”\textsuperscript{156}: MWR’s “Ashanak Arabi”

In chapter two, I looked at several examples of artistic criticism from Emile Habibi’s satirical novel \textit{The Pessoptimist} (1974), which was acclaimed in mainstream Israeli society. I now turn in this chapter to a rap song written near the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005)\textsuperscript{157}, two-week hit “Ashanak Arabi” (2001) by rap group MWR (est. 1999). “Ashanak Arabi,” which was originally written in Arabic and never translated into Hebrew, had short-lived acclaim in Israeli society. As both works are critical of the state in Arabic, why did \textit{The Pessoptimist} enter into Israeli cultural and literary discourse, while “Ashanak Arabi” entered the public domain only briefly and was not circulated in the same discursive or cultural spheres? Is it simply a matter of language (as \textit{The Pessoptimist} was translated into Hebrew and “Ashanak Arabi” was not), or are other factors at play, such as the explicitness of the rap song and societal attitudes towards fiction and rap?

Although they are citizens of Israel, ‘48 Palestinian rappers, along with their music, are all too often ignored in Israeli popular and academic discourse. Israeli Jewish rapper Subliminal, for instance, excludes ‘48 Palestinians from Israeli society, claiming

\textsuperscript{156} MWR, “Ashanak Arabi.” Arabic lyrics obtained from exchange with MWR @Mwr.Palestine. Translated into English by Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad (2018) and modified by myself, with a few lines taken from the abridged English translation posted on MWR’s Facebook page @Mwr.Palestine.

\textsuperscript{157} Also called the Second Intifada. See Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 448-456 and Shapira (2012), 447-449.
that because ‘48 Palestinian neighborhoods and cities “are actually [on] the border with the countries out[side] of Israel,” they are not technically part of Israel.\(^{158}\) Israeli Jewish political scientist and journalist Nirit Ben-Ari also excludes ‘48 Palestinian rap music, if not ‘48 Palestinian rappers themselves, from Israeli society. Ben-Ari’s musical expertise derives, in part, from her firsthand experience as a music editor for the Israeli military radio station, Galei Tsahal, while serving in the Israeli army from 1993 to 1995.\(^{159}\) Ben-Ari claims, in her earlier works, that ‘48 Palestinian rappers make Palestinian music, not Israeli music.\(^{160}\)

I suggest, on the other hand, that as citizens of the Jewish state, the ‘48 Palestinian rappers in MWR create Israeli music, even though they express subversive messages against the state using the explicit language of rap.\(^{161}\) The voices of these rappers are in fact integral to Israel society, for MWR speaks for a group of Israeli citizens whose voices may not otherwise be heard.

The rappers’ use of a regionally specific dialect of ‘48 Palestinian Arabic points not only to the entanglement of ‘48 Palestinians with Israel, but also to their isolation from Arabic speakers outside Israel. In contrast to Habibi’s use of Modern Standard Arabic.


\(^{159}\) Ben-Ari talks about these experiences in her doctoral dissertation while at NYU, *From the South Bronx to Israel: Rap Music and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (2010b, 34-35). See Kaplan (2009), 313-345 on Israeli radio.

\(^{160}\) In her later writings, Ben-Ari does, however, consider ‘48 Palestinian rap to be Israeli. For her earlier writing see ‘Asur l’Intifada Hashinah: Muzika Harap Hayisraelit Lo Hivkhinah B’Mah Sheh Koreh [Hebrew],’ (2010), and *From the South Bronx to Israel* (2010b), 168. For her later writing see ‘Love of Black Music Unites Diverse and Divided Israel’ (2016). Also see Regev & Seroussi (2004), 24.

\(^{161}\) Or Israeli Arab, Israeli Palestinian, ‘48 Palestinian, etc.
Arabic,}\textsuperscript{162} the rappers of MWR follow in the oral tradition of Palestinian folktales.\textsuperscript{163} They rap in a (colloquial) Arabic dialect.\textsuperscript{164} Dialectical Arabic is the spoken and written\textsuperscript{165} form of Arabic generally used for informal day to day communications. Dialects vary by region, lifestyle, religion, social class, education, and gender, and they can also be impacted by contact with other languages as well as by sub-dialects that develop within each dialect.\textsuperscript{166} Note that the informality of dialectical Arabic does not reflect a lack of importance or impact, as the dialectical form of the language can spread “socially powered commentary on different domains and topics, from personal narratives to traditional folk literature (stories, songs, etc.)”\textsuperscript{167}

Impacted by its contact with Modern Hebrew, the dialect of Arabic spoken by ’48 Palestinian communities in Israel is distinct, even from regional dialects spoken by Palestinian communities outside Israel, both in terms of idiom (regional slang) and pronunciation. Cotter and Horesh observe a slew of dialectical patterns that are seen

\textsuperscript{162} Modern Standard Arabic, based on the Classical Arabic of the Qur’ān, is the standardized form used in most written texts and formal spoken communications. Formal communications include news, media (such as BBC broadcasts), education, and literature (Jarrar et al., ‘Curras: an Annotated Corpus for the Palestinian Dialect,’ 746). Also see Holes (2004), Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties.

\textsuperscript{163} Amal Eqeiq (2010), ‘Louder than the Blue ID: Palestinian Hip-Hop in Israel,’ 56.

\textsuperscript{164} There are both similarities and differences between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Dialectical Arabic (DA). The latter can be seen in terms of “morphology, phonology, and lexicon” (Jarrar et al., 2016, 746). Jarrar et al. (2016, 754-755) compiled the first ever corpus on the dialect of Palestinian Arabic, based on written and spoken examples collected from Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Forums, written stories (from various sources), Palestinian terms (from websites), and TV shows (from teleplays of forty one episodes of a Palestinian show.

\textsuperscript{165} In the age of social media, written forms of dialectical Arabic have developed in addition to oral forms (Jarrar et al., 2016, 747).

\textsuperscript{166} William M. Cotter & Uri Horesh (2015), ‘Social Integration and Dialect Divergence in Coastal Palestine,’ Journal of Sociolinguistics, 461; Jarrar et al. (2016), 746. Sub-dialects in Palestinian Arabic commonly include Bedouin, Druze, rural, and urban (which itself varies from city to city) (Jarrar et al., 2016, 748).

\textsuperscript{167} Jarrar et al. (2016), 753.
primarily among ‘48 Palestinians in Israel. They observe that many of these linguistic distinctions derive from engagements with Hebrew. For instance, there is a tendency among ‘48 Palestinians to pronounce the consonant ‘ayn (א) as a full glottal stop. This tendency directly correlates to the contact ‘48 Palestinian speakers of Arabic have with Modern Hebrew, as Modern Hebrew does not have the phoneme (specific sound) of ‘ayn (which linguists refer to as a “voiced pharyngeal fricative”). This consonant alteration (lenition) is not seen in speech patterns of Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank, thus distinguishing it as a unique feature of ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic.\textsuperscript{168} Unlike speakers of Arabic outside Israel, ‘48 Palestinians additionally incorporate Hebrew slang into their idiom.

The very existence of a regionally specific ‘48 Palestinian dialect of Arabic reflects not only the deep fractures in the Palestinian community (“what was once simply \textit{Palestinian} can now be divided and compartmentalized into \textit{refugee, Gazan, West Banker, ['48 Palestinian]}”\textsuperscript{169}), but also MWR’s entanglement with Israeli society. The divergent dialects of Arabic across Palestinian communities inside and outside Israel, as well as within the same communities, have turned dialectical Arabic into “a marker of identity that locates speakers as members of communities both locally and across geographic, political, and social borders.”\textsuperscript{170}

I point to usages of ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic in the following analysis of rhetorical styles in “Ashanak Arabi,” in order to indicate the extent that the lives of the

\textsuperscript{168} Cotter & Horesh (2015), 465-468, 
\textsuperscript{169} Cotter & Horesh (2015), 479. 
\textsuperscript{170} Cotter & Horesh (2015), 479.
rappers of MWR are immanently intertwined with Israel, as well as isolated from Arabic speakers in the West Bank, Gaza, and other Arab countries.

“Ashanak Arabi” (2001)\(^{171}\)

Stay silent, show me where you end up.
-MWR, “Ashanak Arabi”

I look at three examples from “Ashanak Arabi”\(^{172}\) where different members of MWR express artistic criticism. The rappers nonverbally play with different eastern and western musical styles; prescriptively urge ‘48 Palestinians to wake up and recognize perceived discrimination, stand up for their rights, and demand change; and descriptively call attention to perceived difficulties ‘48 Palestinians face in their daily lives.

I now turn to the first example from “Ashanak Arabi.” By blending Arab and western musical styles in the song’s opening bars, DJ Chuck calls attention to perceived structural discrimination in Israeli society, which often upholds derogatory associations linking Israeli Jews to Europe and the perceived superiority of the west, and ‘48 Palestinians to the Levant and the perceived inferiority of the east. In his ground-breaking yet contentious work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said argues that western conceptions

---

171. *Ashanak Arabi* (عشقك عربي) actually translates to “Because You’re an Arab.” However, in the English translation of the song on MWR’s official Facebook page (@Mwr.Palestine), as well as on the YouTube video of the song that MWR posted (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8BRMIKoYoY), the song is titled “Because I’m an Arab.” To avoid confusion, I’ll be referring to the song by a transliteration of its Arabic title, “Ashanak Arabi”.

172. I refer, in the upcoming discussion, to a recording of the song on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8BRMIKoYoY), as well as to a version of the printed Arabic lyrics given to me by MWR. An abbreviated, and slightly altered, English translation is posted on MWR’s Facebook page. As the Arabic lyrics are not readily available, I reached out to MWR directly (via Facebook), and they sent me a copy of the lyrics typed out in a written form of ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic. I used the original spellings when typing out the Arabic, so as to retain the language of the original text given to me by MWR as closely as possible. The English translation is by Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad, with some modifications by myself.
of the levantine east (the Orient) come from a “sovereign western consciousness”\textsuperscript{173} that primarily serves to reinforce presumptions of western superiority. Scholars have observed this euro-centric ideology playing out in Israeli society in some Israelis’ perceptions of both eastern Arab (Mizrahi) Jews and Arab Palestinian citizens as culturally and intellectually inferior. In 1959, Mizrahi Jewish writer Jacqueline Kahanoff famously subverted the derogatory connotations of the term “levantinism” in a series of essays.\textsuperscript{174} Recalling Kahanoff, I hereafter refer to eastern or “Oriental” styles objectively as either Arab or levantine.

Musically, the opening segment of “Ashanak Arabi” follows the traditional melodic progression of a taqsîm, an improvised stylistic device that is one of the most unique and distinguishing features of both traditional and popular Arab and Mizrahi music (\textit{muzika mizrakhit}), which became prominent in Israel’s mainstream music scene in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{175} Adhering to the structural form of a taqsîm, “Ashanak Arabi” opens with an instrumental segment, which introduces the melodic mode (maqâm\textsuperscript{176}) of the piece.\textsuperscript{177} The melody in Ashanak Arabi’s instrumental opening has a perceptible levantine tone, as it is


\textsuperscript{175}Muallem (2010), 95-96. Both Mizrahi and Palestinian music in Israel are descended from Arab musical traditions. For a discussion of muzika mizrakhit, and how it entered the Israeli mainstream by confronting stereotypes about Mizrahi Jews, see Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, Pamela Squires-Kidron (1989), ‘Musica mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel,’ 133; Regev & Seroussi (2004), 18, 57, 7.

\textsuperscript{176}A mode in Arab music, called a “maqâm”, may comprise many types of intervals– based on “augmented” or “diminished” quarter-tones– each representing a different melody. Western music, on the other hand, has only two “modes” of scales (major and minor) (Muallem, 2010, 18-38, 95-96; Touma, 2003, xvii).

\textsuperscript{177}MWR- Palestinian Hip Hop, ‘MWR - Because I’m an Arab’, \textit{Youtube}, 0-0:25 seconds.
based around a double harmonic, or Arabic scale. Scales in levantine music (based on a modal\textsuperscript{178} tone system) have distinctly different tones than scales in western music (which are based on a diatonic\textsuperscript{179} tone system).\textsuperscript{180} Instead of using traditional Arab instruments such as the flute-like nay, or the stringed oud, kanoun, or buzuq\textsuperscript{181} to convey different tones in “Ashanak Arabi,” DJ Chuck uses pitch bends (a control used to fluctuate pitch on an electronic synthesizer) on guitars and electric keyboards to create these levantine tonal shifts with western instrumentation.

After introducing the melody of the maqâm, the opening instrumentals of the taqşîm are joined by rhythmic accompaniment (wazn or meter) and melodic accompaniment.\textsuperscript{182} The wazn in traditional Arab music comprises recurring sequences of time segments of varying lengths, ranging from very simple to very complex rhythmic patterns. The first beat of a wazn is usually accented. Melodic accompaniment in a taqşîm can be instrumental, vocal, or both. It is traditionally performed either by a single

\textsuperscript{178} Scales in Arab music are based on the interval between each note (Muallem, 18). In Arab music– which is modal– the octave contains twenty-four notes in intervals of quartertones. This division is the basis for all Arab scales, with many modulations resulting from these intervals (Muallem, 29). A mode (maqâm) in Arab music is not subject to any fixed rhythmic structure (Touma, 38), and there are often “significant changes in the pitches of notes in different octaves” as well (Muallem, 20). See Muallem (2010), 18-38; Touma (2003), xvii.

\textsuperscript{179} Scales in Western music can be described either in terms of the interval between each note, or the interval between each note and the tonic (the first and last note in a scale) (Muallem, 18). In Western music, scales comprise twelve notes per cycle (as represented by both the black and white keys on a piano). Following a “diatonic” system, Western music distinguishes both major seconds (which consist of a whole tone) and minor seconds (which consist of a semitone) (Muallem, 19). In Western music, rhythm takes precedent over the modal component (think of a waltz, or a march) (Touma, 38). Scales in Western music are not dependent upon the register (or octave) in which they are played, and changing the register of a melody does not change the scale (Muallem, 20). See Muallem (2010), 18-38; Touma (2003), xvii.

\textsuperscript{180} On Levantine vs. Western styles of music, see Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron (1989); Horowitz (2010); Joseph Massad (2005),179.

\textsuperscript{181} Muallem (2010), 95-96.

\textsuperscript{182} Muallem (2010), 25; 31, 95-96; Touma (2003), 47.
instrument or singer, or by a primary instrument or singer supported by a secondary instrument in the background playing a note or chord that is sounded continuously throughout most or all of a piece (a drone). The eastern-style maqâm in “Ashanak Arabi” is joined by a western-style wazn.

DJ Chuck again blends levantine and western musical styles when, after the first few bars of “Ashanak Arabi,” he adds a rhythmic electronic beat – the wazn – to accompany the melodic opening strains introduced by the taqsîm. The wazn DJ Chuck plays in “Ashanak Arabi” is a western-style hip-hop beat that has an accented downbeat on every second and fourth beat of the measure, as opposed to the usual accent on the first beat in Arabic wazn. Additionally, unlike traditional levantine taqsîm, where the maqâm is sustained throughout the entire song, the maqâm in “Ashanak Arabi” is almost immediately overwhelmed by the accompanying electronic hip-hop beat, and drops out entirely. The rappers of MWR provide the melodic accompaniment, rapping over the drone of the hip-hop backbeat.

By following traditional Arab musical structures in the song, DJ Chuck seems to be situating ‘48 Palestinian rap firmly within an Arab musical tradition, while at the same time incorporating western elements. This interpretation is in line with observations of scholars such as Sunaina Maira, Magid Shihade, and Joseph Massad, who argue that rather than viewing ‘48 Palestinian resistance rap as a unique art form of artistic

183. MWR- Palestinian Hip Hop, ‘MWR - Because I’m an Arab’, Youtube, 0:25.
184. Western music uses predominantly two types of beats (accented and unaccented), and two types of meter (duple and triple) (Muallem, 2010, 95-96).
185. The beat switches from E to F# minor every other measure, finally holding F# minor as a drone for the remainder of the song (Many thanks to Dr. Ryan Skinner for this observation).
resistance, we should situate ‘48 Palestinian rappers “within a genealogy of artistic and protest movements by Palestinians in Israel.” Massad traces the role of music in the lives of ‘48 Palestinians in Israel, establishing a link between the performance styles of rap in the early 2000s and songs supporting Palestinian liberation in the 1950s. Musically, the turn to hip-hop marks a departure from traditional Palestinian ballads and folk music (*dabka*). When Israel’s military rule (1948-1966) outlawed and suppressed expressions of nationalism as well as political organizing and protesting, one of the only ways ‘48 Palestinians could express resistance was through art. Songs protesting the *Naqba* were performed by famous Arab singers, such as Najah Salam from Lebanon, Farid al-Atrash from Syria, and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab from Egypt. Thus through hip-hop, ‘48 Palestinians continue the tradition of “vibrant artistic protest established by the community since the early years after the Palestinian *Naqba.*”

By inserting levantine musical styles and tones into a western-style rap song which is devoted, moreover, to pointing out perceived structural inequalities in Israeli society, DJ Chuck points to both the “exoticism” of Arab music in a western musical scene, and the “otherness” of ‘48 Palestinians, who balance precariously between the western world of Israeli Jews, and the levantine world of Arabs (both inside and outside Israel). Although hip-hop is musically linked to the African diaspora, as will be explored

---

189. Maira & Shihade (2012), 7; Massad (2005), 176.
later in this chapter, it is culturally rooted in the experiences of African Americans in American ghettos who used hip-hop and rap music in the 1980s and 1990s to resist poverty and oppression. Thus the perceived exoticism of levantine music reinforces the essential Arabness of these ‘48 Palestinian rappers, serving as a perpetual reminder that people cannot escape their ethnic identities. DJ Chuck thus adds another meaning to the song’s overall claim “because you are an Arab.” Not only do ‘48 Palestinians face inherent discrimination in Israeli society simply by virtue of being Arab (i.e., not Jewish), but no matter how far they climb socially or economically, ‘48 Palestinians will forever be treated as second-class citizens in Israeli society. Thus the claim “because you are an Arab” is reinforced by the interplay between eastern and western musical styles, and the clear strains of Arab maqâm, taqsîm, and wazn.

For the second example, I now turn to the opening verse of “Ashanak Arabi”:

 حاج سكوت يا عربي
أقموا اقطوا وطالبوا الحقوقكو

Stop being silent, Arabs!
Get up, stand up, and demand your rights!191

By prescriptively calling upon ‘48 Palestinians to take action in these lines, the rappers challenge the dominant ideology in Israel. Acting as truth tellers who urge ‘48 Palestinians to demand change, they also contribute to the creation of a counter ideology. The new set of values they propose is based on equal rights for ‘48 Palestinians.

As the rappers’ language is explicit, MWR’s opening words of exhortation are

191. Literally: “Stop being quiet Arabs, Get up, stand up, and ask for your rights.” @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English). As noted, I retained all spellings from the original text given to me by MWR when typing out the Arabic.
immediately apparent to speakers of ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic. “Stay silent” (كَلِكَتْكَ سَكِّتْنَ, the phrase “get up, stand up, and demand your rights” recalls Bob Marley’s well-known song of resistance “Get Up, Stand Up” (1975). In the song, Marley urges:

- Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights
- Get up, stand up, don’t give up the fight

The rappers imply that conditions will only worsen for ‘48 Palestinians if they don’t advocate for better treatment in Israeli society. These words are followed first by an accusation admonishing ‘48 Palestinians for being complacent (“You’re asleep - أنتو نائمين ـ antū nāyimīn”), and then by the entreaty quoted above.

The exhortation in these lines is blatant, outright, and assertive, as the rappers invoke their brothers and sisters to demand change. Notice the rappers’ use of ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic: For instance, ‘حَجّ’ (حَجّ) is used to negate the verb ‘سُكِّت’ (سُكِّت) instead of the standard ‘لَا’ (لَا). This character transformation is not mentioned in the corpus of Palestinian Arabic, suggesting this dialectical feature is likely specific to ‘48 Palestinian Arabic.

192. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
194. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
195. Jarrar’s corpus is a searchable online database that, to my knowledge, is the only one of its kind. Its creators make no claims that the corpus is an exhaustive database of ‘48 Palestinian dialect. It contains “about 56K words/tokens.” Further, as spoken dialect changes quickly, especially in the digital age of social media, it is quite possible that new dialectical forms of Palestinian and ‘48 Palestinian Arabic have already arisen since the corpus was created almost three years ago. I thus cannot make a positive argument that this character transformation is a known feature of ‘48 Palestinian Arabic, simply due to its absence from the corpus. I can only posit that its absence from the corpus signifies its specific usage by ‘48 Palestinian speakers of Arabic. Mustafa Jarrar, Curras: Corpus for Palestinian Arabic, (http://portal.sina.birzeit.edu/curras/curras.html).
used in ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic, is used to denote possession, instead of the standard Arabic ‘kum’ (کم), in the word ‘ḥuqūkū’ (‘your rights’ - خفوفك). This sound substitution is, on the other hand, mentioned in the corpus of Palestinian Arabic, suggesting it is used in other Palestinian dialects, and therefore is likely not specific to ‘48 Palestinian Arabic.196

The rappers continue to urge ‘48 Palestinians, in the next line, to “arise, awaken to the world” and clamor for their rights, which are ‘šhwāy shwāy ‘amr baṭīr’ (‘slowly fading’ - تşıابا شوياي عمر بطيير).197 MWR’s imagery of being awake to signify awareness of injustice and racial inequalities recalls Habibi’s use of this same imagery in *The Pessoptimist*.198 This imagery of waking up from complacency is also a common trope in hip-hop in the U.S. 199

“This government doesn’t pay attention to us,” the rappers from MWR conclude–rapping faster and faster– “unless they see us with eyes wide open.”200 That is to say, the rights of ‘48 Palestinians are normally overlooked, and Israel’s government only actually notices its Palestinian citizens when paying very close attention. The word ‘look’- from the root ‘tal’ (طل) is negated with the suffix ‘‘aysh’ (عش), another character substitution

197. Literally: “slowly, slowly, flying away”. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
198. Habibi uses the word بنت (yaqaz) (Pessoptimist, Arabic, 185), and MWR uses uses صح (sahaw). Both words denote waking up.
199. The Twitter hashtag #StayWoke was picked up by the Black Lives Matter movement around 2016 to denote awareness of social injustice.
200. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
for the standard ‘la’ (لا) in ‘48 Palestinian Arabic. This change does not appear in the Palestinian Arabic lexicon, suggesting that its usage is also specific to ‘48 Palestinian Arabic.

Beginning with a threat, continuing with an accusation, and concluding with an entreaty, the rappers of MWR thus blame a neglectful Israeli government for perceived inequalities between Israel’s Jewish and Palestinian citizens in these lines. Although the rappers accelerate in places, the entire first verse is delivered, for the most part, in a rapid monotony, as MWR addresses fellow ‘48 Palestinians in explicit language, urging them to wake up and resist societal oppression. The rappers challenge Israel’s dominant ideology in these lines. Moreover, by prescriptively urging ‘48 Palestinians to stand up to discrimination and demand better treatment, they lay down the foundations for a counter ideology based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians.

In the third example, a few verses later, the rappers criticize the state in explicit language:

When you’re looking for a job so you can live,
They laugh at you, turn you down, say you're unqualified.
And why?

201. The result is “- not looking- bitatal’aysh (Many thanks to Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad for explaining this dialectical slang of Palestinian Arabic to me). Also see: Cotter & Horesh and Jarrar et al.

202. From قال (“to tell”).
‘Cause you’re an Arab!

Opening with gritty exclamations of “ya! ya!” the rappers descriptively challenge Israel’s dominant ideology in these lines by illustrating, in blatant imagery and gravely voices, the everyday bias ‘48 Palestinians encounter in Israeli society. They describe outright the perceived discrimination many ‘48 Palestinians face from potential employers (“they laugh at you, turn you down, say you're unqualified”), due to inherent biases against ‘48 Palestinians in Israeli society (“why? ’cause you’re an Arab!”). The rappers criticize the state in these lines, calling attention to the difficulties ‘48 Palestinians face when they are either fired or rejected from jobs because of their Arab ethnicity. Although the phrase ‘Ashanak Arabi’ (عَشْنَك عَرْبِيّ - ‘because you’re an Arab’) is here used disparagingly, the rappers reclaim the phrase later in the song. They turn disparagement into pride when they claim, defiantly, that because they are Arab, they must not submit to Israeli Jews (“because we’re Arabs, we gotta show these sons of b*** we’re better”).

The hip-hop backbeat, still holding a steady F# minor drone, dramatically punctuates the rappers’ voices in this verse. The lyrics are alliterative— the sound ‘sh’ (ش) stands out in the words ‘shaghal ‘ashān ta’īsh’ (‘a job so you can live’); and the prefix ‘b’ (ب) in the three verbs that follow: ‘bihāḥūk, birafadāk, wabi‘lū lāk’ (بِحَاحُكَ، بِرَفَادُكَ، وَبِلُوَ لَكَ) - literally: ‘they knock you down, they refuse you, and they tell you’). Notice the dialectical use of the word ayeesh (أيَيْش) for ‘why,’

203. Literally: “And when you go looking for a job so that you can live, they laugh at you, they refuse you, and they tell you you are not eligible. All of this because what?? ‘Because you are an Arab’” (@Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English)).

204. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English). The rappers say the word ‘al-sharmūṭa’ (الأَلْشَرْمُوَطة - whore) that’s abbreviated above as “b***” and in the written Arabic text as ‘al-sh...’ (الش...).

205. From قال ("to tell").
instead of the standard ‘laysh’ (لیش) or ‘limādhā’ (لماذا). Notice also the substitution of the vowel sound ‘i’ (ئ) for the consonant sound ‘q’ (ق) in the verb ‘bi’lū lak’ ( بنتلو لك ‘they tell you’). Both of these character transformations are mentioned in the Corpus of Palestinian Arabic, suggesting that the two dialectical features are shared by Palestinian dialects outside Israel.206

The rappers continue to criticize the state in the next line by drawing attention, in explicit language, to the ID card ‘48 Palestinians are constantly required to show (“every time you go somewhere, anywhere, they ask for ID”207). The ID card represents the perceived discrimination experienced by ‘48 Palestinians in Israeli society. As Amal Eqeiq notes, identification cards are used to distinguish ‘48 Palestinians both from Israeli Jews and Palestinian non-citizens in Israeli society.208 When asked to present identification, ‘48 Palestinians are required to prove their citizenship. “Why can’t we be equal?” the rappers ask, “they don’t treat us like people!”209

This verse explicitly addresses perceived discrimination in Israeli society. MWR’s reference to the ID card recalls ‘48 Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “Identity Card”–discussed in chapter two– in which Darwish transforms his Arab identity from a point of denigration into a point of pride by asserting defiantly “Write it Down! I am an Arab- سجل! أنا عربي - Sajal! Ana ‘arabi.’210

207. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
208. Eqeiq (2010), 56.
209. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
210. Mahmoud Darwish (1964), Bitaqat Hawiyyah [Identity Card].
The rappers of MWR also reflect Darwish’s resilient defiance in the face of perceived structural oppression when, at the end of the song, they entreat listeners to look towards the future instead of dwelling on the fraught past (“Forget everything that happened/ Think about the future that isn’t dead”). The song ends on a hopeful note, as the rappers compel ‘48 Palestinians to examine their lives and actions from every angle (“look to the left, to the right, to the back, and to the front”), and determine how they can improve their resistance and peace efforts in the future.

In the end, the rappers express resistance nonverbally, prescriptively, and descriptively in the song. Together, they challenge Israel’s dominant ideology by clarifying the ideology of the Jewish state as well as creating a counter set of societal values. The rappers stress in the song that ‘48 Palestinians have long suffered in silence (“we suffer injustices, and are silent”211), and that the time for silence is over (“we’ve had enough! Enough torture”). They contribute to what Gramsci calls a War of Position by taking it upon themselves to speak out against unfair treatment (“we’ll remain here and continue to challenge the universe”), and urging their listeners to do the same (“stop being silent, Arabs! Get up, stand up, and demand your rights!”). The rappers of MWR do not encourage ‘48 Palestinians to take up arms and partake in violent action in “Ashanak Arabi,” nor do they encourage their listeners to forsake Israel. As will be seen in chapter four, the rappers of DAM do not forsake Israel either, even when artistically resisting Israeli society in explicit language in “Innocent Criminals” (2000).

“Ashanak Arabi” topped the billboard charts on a mainstream radio station in the

211. @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
mixed Arab-Jewish city of Haifa for two weeks in 2001, causing MWR to be named band of the year.\textsuperscript{212} Given the acclaim Habibi received in Israeli society for \textit{The Pessoptimist} (discussed in chapter two) the song’s success may not seem surprising. But when we look at “Ashanak Arabi” within the context of Israel’s rap scene, the song’s popularity, even in an integrated Jewish-Arab city with a large percentage of Arabic-speaking listeners such as Haifa,\textsuperscript{213} is in fact a little surprising. As demonstrated in the following section, it was rare in the early 2000s for Arabic rap—especially songs with politically subversive messages—to be played on Israeli radio stations.\textsuperscript{214}

\textbf{Israel’s ‘48 Palestinian Rap Scene}

Largely ignored in the early 2000s in Israel’s “mainstream” or “commercial” hip-hop scene—the nuances of which will be discussed in the following section—‘48 Palestinian rappers ended up forming an “underground” rap scene in Israel. Mainstream rap in Israel is produced and/or distributed by commercially dominant record labels,\textsuperscript{215} and is promoted on major radio stations.\textsuperscript{216} Meanwhile underground rap—which “tends to operate in local DIY (do it yourself) networks”\textsuperscript{217}—is produced and/or released through

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{212} @Mwr.Palestine; hotarabic (2013).
  \item \textsuperscript{213} Haifa is considered to be the most integrated Arab-Jewish city in Israel (‘The Arab Population of Israel 2003’, \textit{Israel Central Bureau of Statistics}; Hadid, Diaa (2016), ‘In Israeli City of Haifa, a Liberal Palestinian Culture Blossoms’, \textit{The New York Times}).
  \item \textsuperscript{214} Ben-Ari (2010b), 108-124; Kaplan (2009), 313-345; Regev & Seroussi (2004), 442.
  \item \textsuperscript{215} Such as such as Tact Records (run by well-known Jewish rapper Subliminal), and Mad Man Studios (run by Israeli hip-hop mogul Chulu) (‘Tact Records’, \textit{Facebook} (Tel Aviv, Israel). ‘Mad, Man’ \textit{Facebook} (@MadManWear).
  \item \textsuperscript{216} Such as Galgalatz, which will be discussed later.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} Rose (2008), 242.
\end{itemize}
independent record labels,\(^{218}\) or is released privately via internet streaming sites such as SoundCloud or Youtube, podcasts, blogs, social media, etc.\(^{219}\)

‘48 Palestinian rappers’ scant commercial success in the early 2000s isn’t due to lack of trying. For one, Jewish radio DJs refused to play most Arabic rap on Israeli radio.\(^{220}\) There was no official restriction against doing so, but, as Regev and Seroussi note, Jewish DJs were afraid that playing Arabic music would scare listeners away.\(^{221}\)

Another setback ‘48 Palestinian rappers encountered was lack of access to recording equipment.\(^{222}\) It is costly to rent studio time at state-of-the-art recording studios in Israel, and high-quality recording equipment is expensive to buy. Some ‘48 Palestinian rappers, such as rap group We7 (\textit{walād al-ḥārah}, or ‘Boys from the Hood’),\(^{223}\) were able to bypass studio fees by building their own studios. Other rappers teamed up with ‘48 Palestinian DJs, such as DJ Chuck of MWR, who were willing to co-produce their songs.\(^{224}\)

Another obstacle ‘48 Palestinian rappers faced was finding labels willing to sign them, as they were too ‘Arab’ for most Jewish Israeli record labels, and too ‘Israeli’ for most Arab record labels outside Israel.\(^{225}\) As a result, most ‘48 Palestinian rappers are

\(^{218}\) Such as the labels owned, respectively, by DJ Chuck and Waseem Akar (discussed later).
\(^{219}\) See Tricia Rose (2008), \textit{The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop— And Why It Matters}, 241-242.
\(^{220}\) Regev & Seroussi (2004), 442. Also see Ben-Ari (2010b), 108-124.
\(^{221}\) Regev & Seroussi (2004), 442.
\(^{222}\) Lovatt (2009), 27; Maira (2013), 75; 97.
\(^{223}\) WE7 is an acronym of Wlad el 7ara, which is written slang for \textit{walād al-ḥārah} (Andersen, 2013, 83).
\(^{224}\) Lovatt (2009), 27; Maira (2013), 75; 97.
\(^{225}\) Lovatt (2009), 27; Maira (2013), 75; 97.
signed to labels outside the Middle East. MWR, for instance, released songs on a Dutch label (Wave Records), as well as on DJ Chuck’s label, and Waseem Akar’s label (Blacknoise Studios). DAM, meanwhile, is signed to Cooking Vinyl Records, an independent record label in the UK.

Without radio play, access to state-of-the-art recording equipment, or record deals, ‘48 Palestinian rappers in the early 2000s had to distribute and promote their music themselves. They did so by going through underground channels, such as mixtapes, live shows, and the internet. Many ‘48 Palestinian rappers published their songs on streaming platforms such as Youtube and SoundCloud, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. But this route too had its obstacles. MySpace, for instance, did not list Palestine as a country of residence, only Israel. ‘48 Palestinian rappers circumvented this by inserting words such as “not” or “Palestine ‘48” before their country of residence (Israel). ‘48 Palestinian rappers also posted their music on Arabic rap websites, such as mmdrap.com and palrap.net, while fans turned to online forums—like arabrappers.net—to discuss, analyze, and critically engage with other local and international fans.

Aside from anomalies such as the success of “Ashanak Arabi,” ‘48 Palestinian rap

226. @Mwr.Palestine.
227. @dampalestine (2014).
228. Maira (2008), 22. In today’s age of digital music and streaming, notes Maira, these once “underground” methods of distribution are actually becoming mainstream (Maira, 2008, 3; 6).
229. Lovatt (2009), 28. This is no longer the case, as Palestine is now listed as a country of residence on Soundcloud.
230. More extreme examples include Gaza-based group RG Band, who inserted “There is No Palestine So Fuck” before Israel (Lovatt, 2009, 28).
in the early 2000s primarily remained in underground channels. Rappers openly resisted the state in ‘48 Palestinian dialectical Arabic from the underground in what Tricia Rose calls the “rap transcript.” Unlike the American rap transcript, the ‘48 Palestinian rap transcript never became public. The question remains, why were ‘48 Palestinian resistance rappers in the early 2000s not able to enter Israel’s mainstream rap scene? This question is even more perplexing when we consider the ease with which Habibi entered Israel’s mainstream literary scene in the 1980s with The Pessoptimist, not to mention the commercial success of former-underground politically conscious rappers in the U.S.—such as N.W.A, Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., and Public Enemy— who turned into pop-culture superstars in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I address this question in the following section, with an examination of Israel’s mainstream hip-hop scene. Starting with the origins of hip-hop in the South Bronx—first as a dance-hall style of party music, and second as a subversive style of resistance art—I examine the advent of rap in Israeli living rooms in the early 1990s, focusing on the ways that Jewish Israeli rappers appropriated the language and attitudes of rap to advance pro-state messages. Turning to ‘48 Palestinian resistance rap, I show that it is a globalized transplant of U.S.-inspired ‘gangsta’ rap participating in an underground rap scene at the margins of Israel’s Jewish hip-hop scene (which is itself an outgrowth of American party rap).

Rap in Israel

Originating in the wake of American hip-hop’s global commercial success, hip-hop

---

culture in Israel is mapped onto the state’s political fault-lines, wherein voices of both dominant Jewish and subordinate ‘48 Palestinian ideologies find their expressions. Hip-hop evolved along divergent paths in Israel: Israeli Jews, influenced by American party rap, tended to create either pro-Zionist rap or non-political party rap; ‘48 Palestinians, in an identification with hip-hop’s particular modes of resistance against dominant hegemonies, tended to create resistance rap, which resisted perceived structural oppression in Israeli society.

**Origins of Resistance Rap**

The “oppositional subculture”\(^{233}\) of hip-hop developed in the 1970s in the South Bronx as a response among mostly Black and Puerto Rican youth to poverty and discrimination resulting, broadly, from deindustrialization and urban renewal schemes gone awry.\(^{234}\) The three pioneers of hip-hop were DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaata. Bambaata defines hip-hop as being comprised of five main “pillars”: DJs (Disk Jockeys), who provide the beat by mixing records; MCs (Masters of Ceremonies or Mic

\(^{233}\) Maira (2012), 9.

\(^{234}\) In 1929, the New York Regional Plan Association designed a plan to “transform Manhattan into a center of wealth, connected directly to the suburbs through an encircling network of highways carved through the heart of neighborhoods in the outer boroughs” (Chang, 2005, 11). To achieve this, urban builder Robert Moses constructed the Cross-Bronx Expressway, which would enable people to travel from New Jersey, through Manhattan, and to Queens. The whole drive would only take 15 minutes. The highway passed right over the Bronx, so drivers would not have to even pass through (Chang, 2005, 11). After the Expressway was built, the south Bronx neighborhoods it passed over took huge losses due to lack of foot traffic. Businesses and factories left, property decreased in value, and poverty increased. Most white families left for other suburbs. Additionally, many poor Black, Puerto Rican, and Jewish residents of Manhattan communities were uprooted when entire neighborhoods were condemned to make way for the highway. As a result, Black, Afro-Caribbean, and Latin-x families opted to relocate into formerly white and Jewish neighborhoods in east Brooklyn and the South Bronx, where “public housing was booming but jobs had already fled” (Chang, 2005, 11). Poverty and unemployment gave way to violence and theft (Chang, 2005, 14). See Ben-Ari (2010b), 5-7; Chang (2005), 11-14.
Controllers), who interact with the crowd, B-boys (breakdancers) who dance in accompaniment to the music, and Graffiti artists who write and draw on (“tag”) public structures, as well as what Bambaataa calls Knowledge, which refers to an overall attitude of political resistance and a focus on community. Hip-hop began as an underground dancehall/party style of music that borrowed from disco and funk. MCs, accompanied by B-Boys, entertained crowds by rapping over DJs’ beats.

Resistance rap in the U.S. transitioned over time from a hidden transcript on a private stage to a hidden transcript in the public domain, as it shifted from underground to mainstream music scenes. The transition started when concert-goers began secretly recording and distributing mix-tapes, which were passed by hand from one fan to another. The first-ever resistance rap song—“The Message,” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five—was released in 1982 by Sugar Hill Records. Other resistance rappers with subversive messages followed, such as Public Enemy, N.W.A., and Tupac. These so-called ‘gangsta’ rappers used the burgeoning hip-hop scene to spread subversive messages of resistance in the public domain.

235. Ben-Ari (2010b), 5-7; Chang (2005), 11-14, 90.
236. DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaata described the first underground hip-hop concerts in the South Bronx in an interview with writer, journalist, music critic, and film maker Nelson George (Nelson, 2004, 52). Also see Chang (2005); Lovatt (2009).
237. See chapter one for a discussion of James Scott and Tricia Rose’s use of the terms hidden and public transcripts to describe resistance art.
238. The first studio-recorded rap album had a dance-party vibe. The album—Rapper’s Delight (1979)—was by The Sugar Hill Gang. See: Ben-Ari (2010b), 5-7; Chang (2005), 132; 477.
239. Chang (2005), 307; 452-453; Gilroy (2004), 92.
Advent of Hebrew Rap

American rap arrived in Israeli living-rooms for the first time in the early 1990s when cable TV first entered Israel’s tele-communication market. Although Israel had a free press—i.e., independent papers—since its early days as a state, until the 1990s, mainstream media, including radio and television, was run by either the state-controlled National Broadcast Authority or, in the case of radio, by the army radio station Galatz. Rap was introduced to Israel—through music videos—by hosts Ed Lover and Fab 5 Freddy via the popular American show Yo! MTV Raps, which aired from 1988-1995. Shortly thereafter, Jewish Israeli artists began experimenting with rapping in Hebrew and producing their own beats.

The burgeoning Jewish Israeli rap scene began underground, primarily at hip-hop mogul Aryeh “Chulu” Avitan’s recording studio Mad Man Studios, located behind his hip-hop clothing store on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv. Hebrew rap transitioned above ground around 2000, when Israeli DJs DJ Ori Shohat and DJ Magic started Leyl HaChishguzim (ليل השישגוזים - Night of Mayhem), a live showcase for Israel’s DJs and MCs. After its launch, not only rap, but the entire hip-hop scene in Israel exploded.

240. Cable television was banned in Israel until the 1990s. See: Ben-Ari (2010b), 35-46; Dorchin (2015), 4; Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron (1989), 133; Regev & Seroussi (2004), 2, 18, 57, 71.


242. For more on freedom of the press, see Ben-Ari (2010b), 49; Shapira (2012), 201.

243. The first Hebrew rap songs, like the first English rap songs, had party vibes, not subversive vibes. Shabak Samech— a rock band formed by six teenagers from Yavne, who were influenced primarily by the Beastie Boys and Run-DMC—released, in 1995, what would become the first prominent Hebrew rap album. Shabak Samech’s album Ein Kavod (Without Honor) featured instrumental rap. Their songs were not political. Rather, they extolled partying, sex, and drugs. (Ben-Ari, 2010b, 51; 48-57).
Mainstream media outlets began to cover hip-hop events, music, and artists; people flocked to hip-hop shows and parties; graffiti art became a common sight; breakdancing classes were offered at urban and suburban dance studios; and rappers and DJs were signed to labels, and promoted on radio, television, and newspapers.\textsuperscript{244}

The first radio program to play rap exclusively was instructed by the military to play pro-state rap by Jewish rappers.\textsuperscript{245} This radio show, called \textit{Esek Shachor} (נהגי השותה - Black Business), aired on the radio station Galgalatz, which was owned by Israel’s military radio station Galatz.\textsuperscript{246} Operating from a military base in Jaffa, Galatz was founded in 1951. The station was DJ’d by 18-21 year old soldiers, who picked content that would appeal to their same demographic. \textit{Esek Shachor} was started in 1995 by DJs Eyal ‘Quami’ Freedman and Liron ‘Don Jachnoon’ Teeni. Most commercially successful Jewish rappers in Israel\textsuperscript{247} got their start on the show, which had a live broadcast every Thursday night. It was unscripted, laid back, and funny, and often featured rappers who visited the studio to record open mic sessions.\textsuperscript{248} But as a subsidiary of Galatz, \textit{Esek Shachor}’s content and message were still controlled by the military’s Education Unit, who instructed Quami and Liron to play pro-state rap.\textsuperscript{249}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{244} Ben-Ari, 2010b, 48-57.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Ben-Ari attests to this from her own experiences as a DJ for Galgalatz, as do numerous DJs in interviews with David McDonald (2013), Yuval Orr (2011), Nirit Ben-Ari (2010), and Sunaina Maira (2008); (2012); (2013).
\item \textsuperscript{246} Ben-Ari (2010b), 52-55.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Including Subliminal, The Shadow, Kele 6, Hadag Nachash, and Mookie from rap group Shabak Sameh (Ben-Ari, 2010b, 54).
\item \textsuperscript{248} Ben-Ari (2010b), 52-55.
\item \textsuperscript{249} By endorsing rap, notes Israeli hip-hop scholar Uri Dorchin (2012) the state also stripped it of any subversive aspect (p. 3). Also see: Ben-Ari (2010b), 52-55; Orr (2011); Or Tregger (DJ Alarm), interview with Yuval Orr (21 August 2010), Tel Aviv, Israel.
\end{itemize}
One of the pro-state rappers to get their start on *Esek Shachor* was Iraqi-born Israeli Jewish rapper Kobi “Subliminal” Shimoni, who was the most commercially successful rapper in Israel in the early 2000s.\(^{250}\) We see Subliminal’s pro-state discourse on his second album, *Ha’or ve-ha-tsel* (האור והצל - The Light and The Shadow), released in 2002, one year after MWRs “Ashanak Arabi.” In the song “Hefred u-mashol” (הפרד ומושל - Divide and Conquer), Subliminal raps: “My enemies are united and want to destroy me. We’re nurturing and arming the haters. Enough!”\(^{251}\) He continues defiantly: “I’m not giving up today. I’ll never give up. I’ll carry a Star of David until my dying day.”\(^{252}\) And on the song “Hatikvah” (התקווה - Hope) from the same album, Subliminal’s bandmate the Shadow raps menacingly: “The son of a bitch who can stop Israel has yet to be born.”\(^{253}\)

With most commercially successful Jewish rappers in Israel coming from affluent, middle-class suburbs, many Jewish rappers appropriated the culture, expressions, and

---

250. *Noisey*, 2015b. In 2007, for instance, Subliminal wrote a Holocaust commemoration song that he performed at *Yad Vashem* on Holocaust Remembrance Day. The song was not only backed by the Israeli Ministry of Education but was “promoted as any regular hit would be with a music video and a ring tone application” (Dorchin, 2015, 11). Subliminal also wrote the official song for Israel’s 60th birthday celebration in 2008, and performed it with Israel’s *Gevatron* choir (Dorchin, 2015, p. 14, n. 9).

251. "I’m not giving up today. I’ll never give up. I’ll carry a Star of David until my dying day.”

252. "The son of a bitch who can stop Israel has yet to be born.”


attitudes of American rappers to create Hebrew rap that supported the Jewish state.\textsuperscript{254} Although the Jewish people were a subordinate group for much of their history, by the time hip-hop was exported to Israel in the 1990s, Israeli Jews were the dominant group in a state they controlled. They inherently benefitted from Israeli society, enjoying perks and privileges that came with being Jewish.\textsuperscript{255} Thus, the rhetoric, sounds, spaces, and attitudes of hip-hop culture are not “rooted in the lived experience of Israelis,” notes Israeli-American writer, filmmaker, and translator Yuval Orr, who conducted extensive fieldwork in Israel while studying at the University of Pennsylvania, including in-person interviews with numerous DJs, rappers, critics, and scholars affiliated with Israel’s mainstream and underground rap scenes.\textsuperscript{256} “Israeli artists don’t have anger,”\textsuperscript{257} \textsuperscript{48} Palestinian rapper Adi Krayem from the afore-mentioned rap trio WE7 explains to Orr. “They can understand [hip-hop] intellectually,” he observes, “but they don’t feel it.”\textsuperscript{258}

\textit{Advent of Arabic Rap}

Look, I told you, until today I am waiting for the real one to arrive. The one whose father is in jail, and his mother is a whore, and I don’t know what. And he, all of a sudden, sings from the heart. And he didn’t arrive. And I am telling you from experience that it does not have to come from there.

–Aryeh “Chulu” Avitan\textsuperscript{259}

In the above quote, producer and hip-hop mogul Chulu remarks, in an interview with

\textsuperscript{254} These rappers include Shabak Samech, Quami de la Fox, Kele 6, MC Shiri, Sagol 59, and Subliminal & The Shadow (Ben-Ari, 2010b, 51).


\textsuperscript{256} Orr (2011), 59.

\textsuperscript{257} Adi Krayem to Yuval Orr (Orr, 2011, 28).

\textsuperscript{258} Adi Krayem to Yuval Orr (Orr, 2011, 28).

\textsuperscript{259} Aryeh “Chulu” Avitan to Nirit Ben-Ari (Ben-Ari, 2010b, 113-114).
Nirit Ben-Ari, on the absence of rappers from impoverished neighborhoods with experiences of suffering and hardship. Chulu must not have been looking in the right places, though, for the rappers he describes—these so-called “real ones”—are right under his nose in Israel’s ‘48 Palestinian communities. ‘48 Palestinian rappers, unlike Israeli Jewish rappers, identify with the experiences of Black Americans. Notwithstanding the unique histories that led to the present circumstances of Black Americans and ‘48 Palestinians, parallels can be drawn between life in Black American and Palestinian Israeli communities—such as poverty, crime, drug abuse, and neglect—that largely stem, in both cases, from perceived systemic discrimination.260

When the first ‘48 Palestinian rap groups DAM and MWR formed in the late 1990s, perceived systemic inequalities in Israeli society could be seen in the stark contrasts between Jewish neighborhoods and adjacent ‘48 Palestinian neighborhoods, which tended to be more impoverished and overcrowded than their Jewish counterparts.261 Palestinian cities, small towns, and villages across Israel are spaces which, like the urban communities that fostered the rise of hip-hop in the United States, “suffer from significant overcrowding as well as […] nonexistent public services[…] paved roads and operating sewage systems.”262 Because they do not receive government support, buildings and roads in Palestinian neighborhoods are in disrepair, there are few parks, and schools, along with health and welfare services, are substandard. Matters do

262. Eqeiq (2010), 55. Also see Suhel Nafar to Nirit Ben-Ari (2010b), 189.
not stand to improve, either: many ‘48 Palestinian neighborhoods are neither recognized by local municipalities, nor included on municipal master plans, so houses are regularly demolished. This poverty and governmental neglect is depicted in “Ashanak Arabi” when the rappers of MWR describe the lack of sports facilities, parks, and the deterioration of public schools:

Instead of courts, we play basketball at the lighthouse,
And soccer in the barn.
Our sports clubs, rich in strength,
Can afford just a few nets and locks. And our schools
(Ah, our schools)...
Where we sit in class during the winter cold,
Even tho the windows are broken.  

By talking about their struggles with poverty and oppression in their music, American rappers provided ‘48 Palestinians with a precedent to talk about their own lives. Tamer Nafar was the first ‘48 Palestinian rapper to use what Sunaina Mara calls the “idiom” of American resistance rap to describe his experiences as a ‘48 Palestinian in Israel. Nafar was also the pioneer of Arabic rap, the first rapper to rap in Arabic. Nafar first encountered a Tupac music video– in English– with his brother and fellow DAM member Suhel Nafar, while a teenager in Lyd. “When I heard Tupac sing ‘It’s a white man’s world' I decided to take hip-hop seriously,” says Tamer Nafar. Neither brother spoke English, but although they couldn’t understand Tupac’s words, they both

263. “Ashanak Arabi” (2001). @Mwr.Palestine (Arabic); Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself (English).
264. In an interview with Nirit Ben-Ari, rapper Adi Krayem from the Nazareth-based trio WE7 (Walād al-Hārah- Boys from the Hood), also notes the impact of American rap (especially Tupac) on his own music (Adi Krayem to Ben-Ari, 2010b, 191-192).
266. Maira (2008), 167.
immediately understood the song’s sentiment. “It looked like he [Tupac] filmed it in our hometown, Lyd,”
Suhel Nafar later observed to filmmaker Jacquie Salloum.268

The two Nafars were so enthralled with the music of Tupac, whose songs seemed to give voice to their own experiences, that they set out to learn English.269 They taught themselves English by translating Tupac songs into Arabic and watching Spike Lee movies. Without a precedent of Arabic rap to emulate (as Arabic rap did not yet exist), Tamer Nafar began to rap in English as a teenager. He explains to Jacquie Salloum that as he had never heard Arabic rap before, he thought English “was the only way to go.”270 Plus, “It was easier for us to rhyme in English,” he admits to David McDonald.271

The members of DAM and MWR were not only the first ‘48 Palestinian rappers, but the first rappers to rap in Arabic.272 In the years to come, more ‘48 Palestinian rappers

268. Uri Dorchin (2015, p. 4) talks about this as well.
271. McDonald (2013), 245.
272. DAM is still the most well-known ‘48 Palestinian rap group, as well as one of the most prominent Arabic-speaking rap groups outside Israel. Yet fans of DAM and MWR, as well as the rappers themselves, publicly disagree about which group started first (@dampalestine, 2014; @MWR- Palestine, 2014; Salloum (2008)). MWR has always insisted they were first (@MWR- Palestine, 2014). Yet in the documentary Slingshot Hip Hop, Suhel Nafar unhesitatingly calls DAM the first Palestinian rap group (Suhel Nafar to Jacquie Salloum). On their Facebook page, however, DAM equivocates, in Arabic, about who was first: “With respect to everyone asking who was first, MWR or Mahmoud, Suhel, and Tamer, How can we prove who was first, but we can prove that DAM is last” (@dampalestine, 2014 [My translation]). MWR counters DAM’s Facebook post (in Arabic) with a link to an interview on “Dardashat” on Israeli TV Channel 2 with host Zoher Bahlol, proving they were first. MWR states defiantly: “Nobody can take the glory from @MWR-Palestinian Hip Hop, it doesn’t matter if MWR broke up it matters who started it” (@MWR-Palestine, 2014).
and rap groups would spring up across Israel, followed by the emergence of the first Palestinian rap group in Gaza, PR (Palestinian Rapperz). Mahmoud Shalabi, Waseem Akar, Richard Savo, and Charlie Shaabi formed MWR around 1999 in the coastal Israeli city of Akka. The initials MWR stand for Mahmoud, Waseem, and Richi. MWR eventually split up, and the members embarked on solo and other joint ventures. The lead rapper of MWR, Mahmoud Shalabi, went on to become one of Israel’s “dopest MC’s,” according to Suhel Nafar. Also around 1999, brothers Tamer and Suhel Nafar formed DAM– ‘Da Arabic MCs’ – along with their neighbor Mahmoud Jrere, in the central Israeli city of Lyd. As of 2019, DAM is still active as a rap group that continues to

---

273. In her study on Palestinian hip-hop, Amal Eqeiq estimates, at the time of writing in 2010, an approximate number of sixty ‘48 Palestinian hip-hop artists in Israel (Eqeiq, 2010, 54). The small, but steadily growing, underground ‘48 Palestinian rap scene includes DAM in Lyd; MWR in Akka; We7 (Wlad al-Hara, Boys of the Hood) in Nazareth; female rapper– and cousin of DAM’s Mahmoud Jrere– Abeer al-Zinati (Sabreena Da Witch) in Lyd; Saz in Ramleh; female rap trio Arapayat in Akka; the Happiness Kids in Jaffa; Khalifa E. in Nazareth; Abna’a al-Ghadib (Anger Boys) in Qalansuwa’; Ta’am al-Alam (TOP) Taste of Pain in Tira (Sayed Kashua’s hometown); and Jaish al-Aswad (Black Army) in Sakhnin. See: Ben-Ari (2010b), 189; Dorchin (2015), 12; Eqeiq (2010), 54; Lovatt (2009), 13-18, 20-21; Maira (2013), 73.

274. PR is comprised of rappers Mohammad Al-Farra (aka the Dynamic Rapper ‘DR’), Moataz Al-Hewaihy (aka Mezo), and Kan’an. Al-Farra later immigrated to the US. He produced his first album ‘Ana Jeet’ (I Have Come) here, and collaborates with Palestinian American rappers (Lovatt, 2009, 23).

275. @Mwr.Palestine.

276. Eqeiq (2010), 64.


278. Or ‘The Arabian MCs,’ or ‘Da Arabic Mic’.

279. Mahmoud Jrere describes the group’s inception on their 2006 album Dedication (Ihda’):
participate in a War of Position in Israeli society.

DAM, MWR, and other ‘48 Palestinian rappers and rap groups—fueled by outrage over the slaying of thirteen ‘48 Palestinians during the Black October Riots, as well as the escalating developments of the Al-Aqsa Intifada–formed an underground subversive rap scene in the early 2000s. Only a few years after the advent of ‘48 Palestinian rap (and Arabic rap at all), ‘48 Palestinian rappers began to use their music to express resistance in the face of their mounting frustrations over Israel’s treatment of ‘48 Palestinians. “Just light up, we’ll explode,” Mahmoud Shalabi freestyles to Jacquie Salloum, “Arabic hip-hop will knock you out.”

Because life for ‘48 Palestinians in the early 2000s was so intrinsically politicized, ‘48 Palestinian rappers do not appear to have developed a trope of party rap akin to that which arose in Hebrew and American rap. Most ‘48 Palestinian rappers in these years were looking for a space to vent their political and social frustrations. In their song “Why Do They Say That About You, Rap?” Wlad El 7ara expresses their appreciation for the space and idiom that rap provides:

So we’re always going to be grateful to rap, cuz it gave us the voice
To be the advocates of freedom, to put an end to hatred,
And to represent the voices of the marginalized minority…

---

With Suhel, Tamer and I, DAM was born
At the start Suhel rejected me
With time we began to get along


280. Mahmoud Shalabi freestyles to film director Jacquie Salloum (2008), Slingshot Hip-Hop.

“Palestinian hip hop,” notes Maira, “provides a space to negotiate multiple axes of identity— including gender, sexuality, nationality, race, and class— and, like all forms of popular culture, to variously assert, challenge, or subvert social and political norms.”

Abeer al-Zinati (Sabreena Da Witch), a female rapper from Lyd and cousin of DAM’s Mahmoud Jrere, echoes the notion that rap provides a space to negotiate identity, in her song “Where No One’s There (2011):

If the music isn't enough
for you to understand what's inside me,
then I don't know
what to do

As ‘48 Palestinian rapper from Ramleh, Saz (Sameh Zakout) explains, ‘48 Palestinian rappers use the idiom of rap to contribute to a War of Position: “Hip hop Palestine— this is a way to protest the situation without using weapons, and this is the way to give people hope.” ‘48 Palestinian rappers, for instance, often promise rhetorical salvation in their songs. We see this in MWR and DAM’s collaborative song “Identify Yourself” (2001), when MWR’s Mahmoud Shalabi offers deliverance through words instead of weapons:

Take care ‘cause we’re a military army,
Whoever messes with us, rockets at them we launch.
We protect our people from our Zionist enemies,
We’ll scar, fight, and destroy all racism.

284. Saz is from the Old City of Ramle in central Israel (Saz ‘My Story’, alsaz.net [www.alsaz.net/about.php]).
286. Arabic lyrics from DAM’s website (damofficialband.com/lyrics); English translation by Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself.
Don’t forget we got your back.
MWR and DAM are coming to you.

The rockets Shalabi threatens to launch are the rappers’ words. Hiding nothing from his listeners, Shalabi even blatantly names his enemy as Israel’s Jewish citizens (\(\text{ةﯿۢنﻮﯿۢﮭﺼﻟا} /\text{ the Zionist enemy}\)). Over a decade later, we see a similar offer of deliverance through rap in the song “My Mic” (2014)\(^{287}\) by SAZ:

\[
\text{My microphone is the weapon—}
\text{for life and death}
\]
\[
\text{...}
\]
\[
\text{And rhymes are bullets.}
\text{Rhymes are bullets.}
\]

Overall, ‘48 Palestinian rappers treat rap as a space for the expression of political and social struggle. “All the artists I interviewed,” Maira observes, “spoke of the freedom they felt in rap to express their views and to reject hierarchies of cultural authenticity.”\(^{288}\) The rappers use this space to challenge the state by calling attention to the dominant ideology they believe inherently marginalizes them, as well as creating counter ideologies that are based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians. Even from a rap transcript in the private domain, the rappers thus contribute to a War of Position, and perhaps even inspire future Wars of Maneuver.

**Conclusion**

I have shown in this chapter that although ‘48 Palestinian rap was largely ignored by Jewish audiences in the early 2000s, ‘48 Palestinian rappers retain their Israeli identities

---


\(^{288}\) Maira (2013), 99.
even when they are critical of the state. As Tamer Nafar points out, just as ‘48 Palestinians are an inextricable part of Israeli society, Israel is an inextricable part of the ‘48 Palestinian identity as well:

You cannot cancel your geography, and my geography is here I’m a Palestinian living in Israel– yeah?– carrying the Israeli ID, so I cannot cancel the Jewish culture around me. I’m influenced by it in a way, for good or for bad– I have my accent, I have the slangs that my neighborhood created, even the way we shake hands, even the way we kiss, even the way we hug, even the way we laugh, and when we fight, this is here.289

Nafar explains that the reality he shares with other ‘48 Palestinians is de-facto part of Israeli society, and vice versa, Israeli society is part of the ‘48 Palestinian lived reality. His words also exhibit the entanglement of ‘48 Palestinians with Israel. This entanglement is further reflected in the regionally specific variant of ‘48 Palestinian Arabic that appears throughout “Ashanak Arabi.”

In conclusion, I have shown that these ‘48 Palestinian rappers express resistance in a public rap transcript.290 The rappers of MWR challenge Israel’s dominant ideology by descriptively calling attention to perceived discrimination in Israeli society, prescriptively entreating ‘48 Palestinians to stand up for their rights, and nonverbally blending eastern and western musical styles. They call attention to Israel’s dominant ideology when they descriptively point out instances of perceived discrimination, and they also create a counter ideology that is based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians when they prescriptively urge ‘48 Palestinians to stand up for themselves. The rappers help define

the ‘48 Palestinian narrative, producing, as Sunaina Maira notes, a “collective memory for later generations.”

In the following chapter, I consider the criticism, expressed in Hebrew, in a rap song by DAM and a semi-autobiographical novel by Sayed Kashua. How, I ask, can we make sense of the short-lived popularity of MWR’s Arabic rap song with the acclaim for Kashua’s Hebrew novel, the rejection of DAM’s Hebrew rap song, as well as the acclaim for Habibi’s Arabic/Hebrew novel? Are these works restricted by the prescribed genres of literature and rap, or are there other factors, such as language and candor, at play?

In the previous two chapters, I looked at examples of criticism against the state of Israel in Habibi’s Arabic novel *The Pessoptimist* (1974), which was translated into Hebrew in 1984, and MWR’s Arabic rap song “Ashanak Arabi” (2001), which was never translated into Hebrew. Both works criticize the state in what James C. Scott calls hidden transcripts, but whereas *The Pessoptimist* entered the public domain, “Ashanak Arabi” only briefly entered the public domain before returning to the private domain. Moreover, I explored the ways in which *The Pessoptimist* and “Ashanak Arabi” express resistance. The novel challenges the state by clarifying perceived discrimination in the state’s dominant ideology, and the rap song not only challenges the state by calling attention to the dominant ideology, but also provides a counter ideology that is based on the implicit inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians. Language (Hebrew or Arabic), genre (literature or rap), and candor (explicit or implicit criticism) all seem to be critical factors: I suggested that *The Pessoptimist* entered into mainstream Israeli cultural discourse because it was a (translated) Hebrew novel whose implicit critique was obscured, whereas “Ashanak Arabi” did not circulate in mainstream discursive spheres because it was an Arabic rap song that explicitly called out perceived discrimination by name.

292. Scott (1990), xii.
I turn in the fourth chapter to two Hebrew works of critical art created near the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005): fictionalized novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002) by '48 Palestinian writer Sayed Kashua (b.1975), and rap song “Innocent Criminals” (2000) by ‘48 Palestinian rap trio DAM (est. 1998), featuring Jewish rock star Aviv Geffen. Both works speak truth to power, directly addressing Hebrew-speaking Israeli readers.\(^\text{293}\) Yet Kashua’s novel has entered into the public domain,\(^\text{294}\) whereas the rap song is censored and banned on mainstream Israeli radio stations.\(^\text{295}\) Why do the works interact so differently with Israeli society, even though they both resist the state in Hebrew?

*Dancing Arabs* (2002)\(^\text{296}\) tells the coming-of-age story of a ‘48 Palestinian youth from Tira, Israel. The story provides non-chronological snapshots of the narrator’s life. Throughout the novel, the unnamed narrator (the “disassociated narrator-observer” to use Lital Levy’s words\(^\text{297}\)) navigates how to fit into Jewish society. In “Innocent Criminals,” the rappers of DAM urge Israeli Jews and ‘48 Palestinians to take respective action to resist perceived discrimination in Israeli society. They also illustrate disparities in Israeli society with spoken and visual examples. The rappers depict societal oppression visually in the music video by acting out a story of police brutality. The dramatic re-enactment,

\(^{293}\) Political philosopher Michel Foucault (b. 1926) used the phrase “speaking truth to power” for one of the first times in a series of six lectures given at Berkeley in 1983 and printed as *Fearless Speech* in 2001 in order to characterize the fortitude of a truth-teller as someone who criticizes the dominant group directly to its face, even in the face of danger. See Michel Foucault (2001), *Fearless Speech*, ed. J. Pearson, 16; 169.


\(^{295}\) Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am)” (2003); McDonald (2013); Salloum (2008).


along with the images of fire, blood, and bruised and beaten faces and bodies, reinforce
the words and messages of resistance in the song. I begin by analyzing an example of
descriptive criticism in each work. I consider, in the upcoming discussion, factors aside
from genre that may determine the novel’s acclaim and the rap song’s eventual rejection
in Israeli society.

*Dancing Arabs*

The following passage from *Dancing Arabs* conveys the narrator’s desires to “pass”\(^{299}\) as Jewish:

I look more Israeli than the average Israeli. I’m always pleased
when Jews tell me this. “You don’t look like an Arab at all,” they
say. Some people claim it’s a racist thing to say, but I’ve always
taken it as a compliment, a sign of success. That’s what I’ve
wanted\(^{299}\) to be, after all: a Jew. I’ve worked hard at it, and I’ve
finally pulled it off.”\(^{300}\)

The narrator is a young adult in this passage. He has graduated from high school at a
Jewish boarding school and from college at Hebrew University. Post-graduation, he has

---

\(^{298}\) The term “passing” refers to people who are accepted into a racial group other than their own. The term has historically been used to describe People of Color in the U.S. who assimilate into White communities by pretending to be White. See Allyson Hobbs (2014), *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Harvard).

\(^{299}\) Shlesinger translates this sentence as: “That’s what I’ve always wanted to be, after all: a Jew.” “Always” isn’t in the Hebrew, so I have not included it. “Always” adds a perspective on time (i.e. by indicating how long the narrator has wanted to pass as Jewish) that is not necessarily intended by the author. Rather than always having been with him, the narrator’s desire to become Jewish seems to have developed over time.

\(^{300}\) *Dancing Arabs*, 67 (Hebrew); 91 (English, Trans. Miriam Shlesinger).
successfully integrated into both Israeli Jewish and ‘48 Palestinian societies: he works with Israeli Jews, and lives in Arab East Jerusalem with his ‘48 Palestinian wife.

On the surface, the narrator’s tone is lighthearted and humorous. He congratulates himself for having mastered the art of passing (“I look more Israeli than the average Israeli”). He also basks in the confirmation he sometimes receives from Israeli Jews about how Jewish he looks (“I’m always pleased when Jews tell me this”). Because he looks Jewish, the narrator even believes he is Jewish (“That’s what I’ve wanted to be, after all: a Jew. I’ve worked hard at it, and I’ve finally pulled it off”). The narrator’s identity, as portrayed here, is as superficial as looking the part.

But underneath the casual humor, the narrator’s words reveal a feeling of self-hate. This is because in order to successfully pass as Jewish, the narrator has to hide his true identity, speak Hebrew, and dress like an Israeli Jew (i.e., without an Arabic accent and in western-style clothing). Moreover, the narrator has to hang out with Jews often enough, and have enough Jewish friends, that they feel comfortable telling him he doesn’t look Arab. Although the narrator embraces these sometimes-discriminatory stereotypes in a lighthearted way, the underlying implications are in no way lighthearted. The narrator demeans himself when he passes as Jewish. As Mahmoud Kayyal convincingly notes, the narrator’s words point to the “arrogant and intolerant Jewish society” that compels him to hide his true self and Arab identity in order to be treated as a first-class member of society.301 He “feels inherently inferior as an Arab,” observe Adia Mendelson-Maoz and

Liat Steir-Livny.\textsuperscript{302}

The underlying self-debasement that is depicted in the narrator’s desire to pass is expressed implicitly in the text. The narrator does not call out perceived discrimination by name, nor does he even seem aware of the criticism he expresses. For instance, although the narrator uses the word “racism” (גיצ’anūt) to describe views held by some Israeli Jews (“some people claim it’s a racist thing to say”), he quickly dismisses the racist undertones (I’ve always taken it as a compliment, a sign of success”). He also takes the observation “you don’t look Arab at all” as a compliment.

This notion that one can “look Arab” is developed further in a later passage in the novel.\textsuperscript{303} The passage follows the narrator, his wife, and their baby girl as they are leaving their East Jerusalem apartment by car late one night. There has been a shooting in Jerusalem, and angry mobs are seeking to retaliate against Palestinians. The narrator’s thoughts are frenzied, almost hysterical with fear. Even though he and his family are not involved in the shooting, the narrator knows that if they are stopped by police, they will have trouble leaving the city. The narrator’s fear of being discovered as Palestinian turns into self-hate as he prepares to fully disavow his Palestinian ethnicity (“I’m not really Palestinian”). He runs through a mental list of precautions he has taken to conceal his non-Jewish identity: he drives a Jewish car (“a Subaru, not the typical Peugeot or Opel Ascona”) and doesn’t have revealing accessories (“Lucky I’m not one of those who hang


\textsuperscript{303} Dancing Arabs, 112-113 (Hebrew); 154-55 (English, Trans. Miriam Shlesinger).
prayer beads on the mirror. Lucky I don’t have a *hamsa* or letters in Arabic”). But he worries that his wife will give them away, and for a minute wishes she was light-skinned, so that she too could pass (“Let’s just hope they don’t see my wife. Couldn’t I have picked someone with a lighter complexion?”).

The narrator does not seem aware of the implied insult in these words, even though they attach a certain value to looking Jewish over Arab. In fact, the very assumption that there exists an inherent difference in the physical features of Jews and Palestinians is based on notions that Palestinians have “dark” Arab features while Jews have “light” western features. These notions are of course untrue: Just as there are dark-skinned Arab and non-Arab Jews, there are light-skinned Arabs. That the narrator buys into these derogatory stereotypes indicates the far reach of the value systems imposed by Israel’s dominant class. This is precisely the cultural hegemony evoked by Gramsci.304

In these passages, Kashua’s illustration of the discrimination in Israeli society derives from the narrator’s self-debasement. As the narrator tries to hide any Arab traits that could give him away, his desire to pass becomes manifested into self-hate. But ironically, this self-hate ends up drawing the reader’s attention to these very same Arab stereotypes.

“Innocent Criminals”

I now turn to an example of descriptive criticism in the third verse of “Innocent

Criminals,” rapped by Suhel Nafar. As Suhel Nafar’s verse begins, Tamer Nafar’s body lies prostrate on the ground, a fire burning around him. Suhel Nafar starts right in:

זאיא דפק לן בְּדָלָה (SUPRISE, SUPRISE)
אמט בְּדָלָה לא צוים
You claim that we are equal
When I knock on your door
SURPRISE SURPRISE! You don’t even answer

Speaking at times explicitly and at times figuratively, Nafar exposes in these lines the hypocrisies he notices in Israeli society. The first line is explicit. Nafar calls attention to perceived discrepancies between fiction and fact (“you claim that we are equal”). As non-Jews, ‘48 Palestinians are not able to take full advantage of the Jewish state. The next two lines are implicit. Nafar likens equality to neighborly kindliness. According to his analogy, when people are truly equal, they open their doors to each other. Nafar metaphorically seeks equal treatment from his Jewish neighbors by trying to enter their homes (“When I knock on your door...”). Notice DAM’s use of Hebrew slang in the shortening of “קשי” (ksheh, when) to “שי” (sheh).

But (“SURPRISE SURPRISE”) Nafar is denied equal treatment (“you don’t even answer”). When people are not equal, they close their doors on each other. The metaphorical denial of equality to ‘48 Palestinians is not really a surprise, though. Tamer Nafar and Mahmoud Jrere join in for the English word “surprise.” The emphasis of three voices belting out English in the middle of a Hebrew verse, along with the repetition of

---


306. Translation modified from the music video.
the word, cheekily draws attention to the lack of surprise.

Nafar continues to criticize the state in the next lines. “Where is the equality” he asks pointedly, “when they don’t mention me in the anthem?”\(^307\) In explicit language, Nafar’s question points to what he sees as an inherent flaw in Israeli society. For in designating Israel as the land of the Jewish people, Israel’s national anthem *Ha-tikvah*\(^308\) doesn’t even mention its Palestinian citizens.

Nafar, now joined by his two fellow rappers, continues pointing out perceived structural flaws in Israeli society:

ארץ لنפש יהודיה,
והאזרחים צאולים לא זה ולא נבריא, ארמה和尚מה?

Land for the Jewish soul,
Where the Arab seems to have never existed, where is “peace”?\(^309\)

Nafar expresses criticism explicitly in these lines by drawing attention to the exclusivity of the Jewish state outright. His words “Jewish soul” (נפש יהודיה - *nefesh yehudiyah*) are another reference to Israel’s national anthem *Ha-tikvah*. They recall the well-known line “the Jewish soul yearns.”\(^310\) The anthem’s exclusive focus on the Jewish people reflects

---

307. English translation is my own.
309. English translation is my own.
310. As long as in the heart within,
*The Jewish soul yearns*,
And toward the eastern edges, onward,
An eye gazes toward Zion

(As long as in the heart within,
*The Jewish soul yearns*,
And toward the eastern edges, onward,
An eye gazes toward Zion)

the exclusion of ‘48 Palestinians from the national collective.

Even if listeners do not pick up on Nafar’s reference to *Ha-tikvah*, his critique in this line is clear: Nafar claims in no uncertain terms that Israel is fundamentally and exclusively a “land for the Jewish soul” (i.e. a Jewish state). The state’s exclusivity, Nafar says, erases the physical presence of ‘48 Palestinians (“the Arab seems to have never existed”). Nafar says that peace is impossible while Israel is still a Jewish state (“where is ‘peace’?”).

I now turn to an example in “Innocent Criminals” where a counter ideology is proposed. I consider DAM’s critique of the state in the opening of the song, including Tamer Nafar’s opening prelude, and the chorus. I also draw attention to some of the imagery from the 2003 music video, which was produced by Aviv Geffen and directed by Israeli-American filmmaker Udi Aloni.311

The music video opens as lead rapper Tamer Nafar intones: “The minority opens its mouth, yo!” (! ha-miy’ūt pote’ah peh, yo!). Nafar, head covered and sitting with his arms around his knees, is alone in a dark warehouse as the music begins. “Innocent Criminals” is rapped over a “boom bap” style drum beat, with a bass drum signaling the downbeats and a snare drum signaling the upbeats. This style is a common feature of drum tracks in Golden Age American hip-hop (mid-late 1980s to early 1990s) in the New York Metropolitan Area.312

---

311. The **Hebrew lyrics** are from Genius.com (https://genius.com/Dam-poshim-hapim-mipesha-lyrics). The **English lyrics** are modified (by me) from the music video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA_Lu_NkojE).

Tamar Nafar still sits in the darkened warehouse. A stiletto-booted female Israeli soldier walks into the room and ignites a fire on the floor. The room around Nafar is lit up by a ring of flame. A hooded figure hangs from the ceiling, and she walks up to it. The surrounding room goes up in flames, and Nafar raps rhythmically above it all:

אומרים שאמרונים פ兕ים פרימיטיבים
אומרים שאמרונים אגרסיבים
אומרים שאמרונים פושימים ואגרסיבים

You say that Arabs are primitives
You say that Arabs are aggressive
You say that we are criminals and barbarians

Nafar’s words are accusatory. Notice the rhythmic, rhyming cadences of the lines. The rhyme (im) is repeated several times in each line (emphasized in bold): ‘omrim, ‘aravim, primitivim in the first line; ‘omrim, ‘aravim, ‘agresivim in the second; and ‘omrim, posh’im, barbarim in the third. The subject “you” (אני-atem) is stated in the first line, and implied in the second and third lines.

Nafar calls out the perceived discrimination in Israeli society in the primary language of Israeli Jews. With the recurring accusation— “you say” “you say” “you say”– Nafar explicitly confronts speakers of Hebrew with some of the discriminatory things said about Arabs. The insults he lists are degrading, and his language is explicit: Arabs are said to be “primitive” and “aggressive,” as well as “criminals” and “barbarians.” This rhetoric maligns the very characters of Arabs. It implies that Arabs exhibit an inherent coarseness. These assumptions of base crudity are unshakeable: an Arab can have all the money, education, fame, and prestige in the world, and some people will still consider him or her to have primitive, angry urges, and to be a barbaric criminal.
at heart. This discriminatory rhetoric and mentality also explains the Dancing Arabs protagonist’s desire to pass. He feels that the only way he can be treated equally in Israeli society is if people think he’s Jewish. Notice how Nafar replaces the direct object “Arabs” (ערבים - ‘aravim) with “we” in the third line. By doing this, he makes it clear that he and the rappers of DAM are Arabs, and that any insult to Arabs is also an insult to Hebrew speaking, non-Jewish, Arab citizens of the state, DAM included.

Nafar’s exhortation concludes with an accusation. The cadence and rhyme of the previous lines is sharply broken by the interjection “we are not” (אנהן לא - ‘anaḥnu lo’). Nafar says discriminatory attitudes are to blame whenever ‘48 Palestinians are angry, or do engage in criminal activity (“But if we really are/ this is what the government has made from us, yo!– aval bemiqreh she’anaḥnu ken / zeh mah she-hamemshalah ‘asta me’iytanu, yo). If Arabs are primitive criminals and aggressive barbarians, it is because of what Israel’s government (“you”) has made them (“us”) do. Discrimination in Israeli society, in other words, has actually created these discriminatory stereotypes: it has turned Arabs into criminals. At this point, even if discriminatory attitudes are weeded out, their effects cannot be eradicated so easily.

Flanked by his fellow rappers, Tamer Nafar, joined by Suhel and Mahmoud, now raps to the camera:

לפי שאתה קולת אוחרי
לפי שאתה שופט אחות
לפי שאתה מרחב אות

313. Also see McDonald (2013), 254 for an analysis of this line.
“Before you get me
Before you judge me
Before you feel me
Before you punish me
Walk in my shoes and you’ll hurt your feet
Because we’re criminals-- We’re innocent criminals.

The rappers exhort Israelis to consider, and ultimately alter, the way they think about, and interact with, ‘48 Palestinians.

Repetition and rhyme punctuate the chorus. The first four lines all begin with “before you” (לפני אתה, lifne she’atah), and end with “to me” (אתי, ‘oti). Additionally, the first two verbs– kolet (טלוק, “get” or “notice”) and shofet (שופט, “judge”)– rhyme with the second two verbs, ‘margish’ (מרגיש, feel) and ‘ma’nish’ (מניח, punish). The repetition of “before you… to me” “before you… to me” emphasizes the power dynamic of “you” vs “me.” “You” are Israeli Jews, the dominant group in Israeli society. ‘48 Palestinians, the subordinate group, are “me.”

The lines call attention to some of the specific ways Israeli Jews may insult ‘48 Palestinians. The verbs– get, judge, feel, punish– describe a sequential process: one first gets or notices someone, then judges them, then feels a certain way about them, and finally punishes them based on these understandings, judgements and feelings.

Notice Nafar’s reference to another insult– the bestowal of ‘48 Palestinian land to Israeli Jews– by his use of the verb kolet (טלק), which can also mean “to absorb.” Kolet recalls Israel’s state objective of “absorbing the exiles” (קוליתות של הערלים, kelitah shel...
This objective was established in 1948 in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and refers to diaspora Jews who live in perceived exile outside Israel. In 1950, the objective was codified into official state policy as The Law of Return. It guarantees Jews the “unconditional right to Israeli citizenship from the day of their arrival in the country.” The Law of Return does not extend to Palestinian exiles. In fact, the Law ofAbsentee Property, passed in the same year, denies ‘48 Palestinians the right to reclaim their ancestral land. By using the word *kolet*, Nafar thus recalls the irony that in offering citizenship and land to Jews, the state takes land away from Palestinian citizens and hands it over to Jewish immigrants.

The rappers end the chorus with an exhortation to Israeli Jews: “walk in my shoes and you’ll hurt your feet.” The stilettoed-soldier in the burning room looks on. Arab bodies thud to the floor around her. With these words, the rappers beseech their oppressors to *get* their hardship and suffering before casting *judgment*, to *feel* their pain before *punishing* them. Once Jews *get* the suffering of ‘48 Palestinians (“walk in my shoes”), they will *feel* ‘48 Palestinians’ actual pain (“you’ll hurt your feet”). And maybe Jews won’t feel the need to *punish* ‘48 Palestinians after seeing they are not felons, but rather the victims of circumstance (“because we’re criminals – we’re innocent criminals”).

316. See Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 170-180.
318. Also see McDonald (2013), 254 for an analysis of this line.
In these verses, the rappers propose a counter ideology that is based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians. Their prescriptive advice is directed at Israeli society, not ‘48 Palestinians. Change needs to start within the dominant group, the rappers seem to be saying. Taken together, “Innocent Criminals” not only challenges the state by indicating the dominant ideology of the state, but also suggests a new set of life values to guide ‘48 Palestinians.

Uncertainty

In both “Innocent Criminals” and Dancing Arabs, we see rhetoric indicating the precarious and uncertain position of ‘48 Palestinians as perceived second-class citizens at the margins of Israeli society. Both works criticize living conditions for ‘48 Palestinians within the state of Israel, but neither work criticizes the fundamental existence of the Jewish state. We see examples of complete artistic rejection of the Jewish state, for instance, in works by Palestinian writers Ghassan Kanafānī (b. 1936) and Sahar Khalifah (b. 1941). Rather, Dancing Arabs and “Innocent Criminals” in fact both display the artists’ attempts to integrate into Israeli society. Neither work expresses intentions or desires to rise up against the state, or even simply to leave it.

DAM’s resistance against Israeli society in “Innocent Criminals” discords with the rappers’ paramount desire for equality and acceptance in Israeli society at this historical moment. They use explicit language to resist Israel’s subjugation of its Palestinian citizens, but do not forsake the state. They do not indicate, for instance, that

320. DAM’s views towards Israel change later.
they’re giving up on Israel, nor do they encourage listeners to turn their backs on the state. By rapping in Hebrew, the rappers moreover indicate their willingness to meet Israeli Jews half-way. They reach out to Hebrew-speaking listeners to work together to fix the structural flaws they perceive in Israeli society. “We reach for peace” Tamer Nafar explains to filmmaker Jacqueline Reem Salloum (in Salloum’s documentary about Palestinian rap inside and outside Israel), “I’m for coexistence, 50/50.”³²¹ Yet the song, as noted, also harshly criticizes the state.

Kashua’s critique of Israeli society in Dancing Arabs is also uncertain. The very title of the work recalls the Yiddish Proverb that one cannot dance at two weddings, which evokes the difficulty of living in two worlds, or being in two places at once. The theme of dancing is used in the book to elicit the narrator’s estrangement from and discomfort with his own heritage. The narrator complains that he has to dance the debka, a traditional Arab folk-dance, with his wife in at his own wedding: “I had to dance with her, even though I haven’t a clue about dancing the debka.”³²² His unfamiliarity with this common dance displays how disconnected the narrator is to Arab culture. Dancing is also used a little later (both in the novel and the story line) to depict the disconnect between Arab and Western/Israeli culture (notice yet again the implied synonymity between Israel and the West). The narrator now bartends at a Jerusalem bar. On Purim Night, he and his friend Shadia (another ‘48 Palestinian bartender), make viciously disparaging observations about the Arabs dancing in the bar that night (the dancing Arabs). “They

shouldn’t let Arabs dance here,” the narrator remarks out loud, “It’s disgusting.” He then says in an aside:

They really are ugly, especially the short one with the mustache. He swivels his ass, crammed into those cloth pants of his, making a mockery not only of himself but of anyone dancing next to him– of the whole bar, especially Shadia and me. If he wasn’t so clueless, he wouldn’t dare to dance. Why should Arabs like him be dancing disco anyway? Don’t they realize how different they are, how out of place, how ugly?³²³

By cruelly mocking these dancing Arabs, the narrator legitimizes stereotypes about the way Arabs look and the way Arabs dance. Moreover, his remarks imply that there is an inherent incompatibility between Arabs and western styles of dance (disco). The narrator questions Arab’s very right to even dance disco, as if only people from the west have that privilege. He goes so far as to claim that Arabs do not belong in the bar at all: they are different, out of place. If all the patrons in the bar this night are Arab, what or who are the dancing Arabs different from? Is the Israeli “normal” the new standard, even in a bar full of Arabs? There is no underlying humor or veiled critique to soften the narrator’s blow in these lines. He fully appears to be disparaging the dancing Arabs and nobody else. In these examples, Kashua evokes the idea that just as one cannot dance at two weddings, one also cannot live comfortably in the margins of two cultures.

Yet although the narrator is critical of both the world of Israeli Jews and the world of ‘48 Palestinians, he is unable to bring himself to reject either one. Kashua uses the narrator’s experiences as a critique of the state’s status quo, but the character of the narrator himself affirms the perceived discrimination in Israeli society. As noted in the

first example of the narrator passing as Jewish, the narrator’s critique occurs in those moments that he upholds the perceived discriminatory attitudes of the state. In the end, it is unclear whether Kashua is criticizing Israeli society for excluding ‘48 Palestinians, or whether he is criticizing ‘48 Palestinians for exhibiting certain Arab stereotypes (or perhaps both).

The rhetoric of Dancing Arabs and “Innocent Criminals” also reflects each work’s engagements with Israeli society. The novel was a bestseller in Israel. Kashua won the Prime Minister’s prize in the year of the novel’s publication (2002), and the novel was turned into a play, which was performed by the Haifa Theatre. Dancing Arabs was translated into seven languages (Italian, German, French, Dutch, Polish, Spanish, and English). Observe the notable absence of Arabic from this list. The rap song, on the other hand, was rejected. Rather than heed DAM’s message and work together to find a solution, Israeli Jewish DJs banned the song from radio and TV. “Our single was simply censored in Israel,” Aviv Geffen told David McDonald years later, “it wasn’t played on any radio station.” “No radio station would risk it” adds Tamer Nafar. Yet despite attempts at censorship, Nafar estimates that the song was downloaded over twenty thousand times. Perhaps one reason for the popularity of Dancing Arabs is that due to its

326. McDonald (2013), 255.
327. McDonald (2013), 255.
ambiguously fraught critique of Israeli society, the work can be read differently by multiple audiences. While some Israeli readers (both Jewish and Arab) read *Dancing Arabs* as a critique of Israeli society, others, as scholars Gil Hochberg and Mahmoud Kayyal separately note in their assessments of reader reactions,\(^{329}\) take the humor in Kashua’s critique at face value as a critique of ‘48 Palestinians. Israeli Jewish critic Sarah Ostsaki-Lezer, for instance, likes the novel because she reads it as a critique of ‘48 Palestinians. The book, she says, “delivers an open criticism of the backwardness of the Arab society,” specifically, “its treatment of women… its low standards of education, the violence in Arab villages, the drugs, the rise of criminality and the belief in Islam as a solution for everything.”\(^{330}\) Israeli-Jewish poet and scholar Yohai Openheimer likewise praises the novel, calling it “brave” and claiming that it “undoubtedly will appear as treachery to many Arab readers.”\(^{331}\)

Openheimer is correct, as the work does indeed appear as treachery to some ‘48 Palestinian readers. These readers, notes Hochberg, criticize the novel for “reproducing negative stereotypes of Palestinians and Arabs by internalizing Israeli perspectives.”\(^{332}\) They also complain, notes Kayyal, about the novel’s “derogatory view of Arab society, and its contribution to the perpetuation of a stereotypic view of the Arab in the eyes of

---


\(^{332}\) Gil Hochberg (2010), ‘To Be or Not to Be an Israeli Arab: Sayed Kashua and the Prospect of Minority Speech-Acts’, 69.
Jewish society.”

48 Palestinian writer and translator Muhammad Hamza Ghanayim (1953-2004), who himself expressed artistic criticism of Israel by translating subversive works from Arabic into Hebrew, writes: “Kashua jeers at us Arabs in Hebrew.” Kashua is a “tragically schizophrenic cultural hero,” Ghanayim continues, who “in a spiritual examination of himself and the ‘other’ in completely Israeli terms [...] completely distorts the fragrance of the Arab in this, his first literary production.”

Kashua was particularly dismayed by the Arab response to Dancing Arabs. “How can it be” he asked, “that all the reviews in Hebrew and abroad say that I cast light on the sufferings of the Arabs, and in the eyes of the Arabs I’m an enemy?”

One cannot help but wonder if an Arabic translation would have earned Kashua more favor or stronger rejection from Arab readers.

The critique in “Innocent Criminals,” on the other hand, is so explicit that Hebrew-speaking listeners could not hear it as anything other than an expression of resistance against dominant Israeli society. When, due to popular demand, the “Innocent Criminals” music video finally aired on Israeli primetime TV, it was met with outrage by some Jewish viewers.

“Way to go,” grumbles Jewish rapper Subliminal to documentary filmmaker Anat Halachmi, “doing a song with Tamer in which Aviv Geffen pisses me off.”

---

337. McDonald (2013); Salloum (2008).
10 times more than Nafar.”338 The song was not played again, either on Israeli TV or radio.339

The rhetoric of both *Dancing Arabs* and “Innocent Criminals” reflects Kashua and DAM’s conflict-ridden relationships to the state of Israel. As seen, Kashua depicts the narrator of *Dancing Arabs* as ingratiating himself to Israeli Jew, humorously displaying his self-debasement. Although he outwardly portrays the narrator’s self-debasement in *Dancing Arabs* as humorous, Kashua, too, has spent much of his life figuring out how to pass unnoticed between Israeli and ‘48 Palestinian communities. Like Kashua, the rappers of DAM also have ambiguous ties to Israel, which is likewise reflected in their lyrics. On the one hand, as we have seen, they blatantly express resistance, in Hebrew, against the unequal treatment of ‘48 Palestinians in Israeli society in “Innocent Criminals.” But on the other hand, in the years surrounding the release of “Innocent Criminals,” DAM worked closely with Israeli Jewish artists, and participated in Israel’s mainstream rap scene.

“We are known as the ‘48 Palestinians”340

How can we account for the critiques of Israeli society in *Dancing Arabs* and “Innocent Criminals,” on the one hand, and Kashua and DAM’s personal engagements with Israeli society and relationships with Israeli Jews, on the other? Additionally, why do these artists criticize the state in Hebrew instead of Arabic? In an attempt to address these

338. Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am).”
339. McDonald (2013), 255.
questions, I turn now to a consideration of the lives of Sayed Kashua and the rappers of DAM. We will examine the historical and personal circumstances that caused these artists to feel such ambiguous stances within Israeli society in the first place.

Kashua’s childhood was relatively discord-free. Unlike the previous generation of ‘48 Palestinians, including his father and Emile Habibi, Kashua was born an Israeli citizen, after the restrictions of military rule had been lifted. He spent his childhood in Israel’s Central District, in the ‘48 Palestinian village of Tira. Inside Tira, he had little direct contact with Israeli Jewish society for the first fifteen years of his life. Kashua’s father (like the narrator’s) strongly opposed the existence of the state of Israel. A Sunni Muslim who grew up in Arab Haifa under the British Mandate, Kashua’s father became an Israeli citizen in 1948. But he remained loyal to Palestine. Kashua’s father was a member of the far left group Matzpen. He was arrested in 1969 for a bomb explosion in the Hebrew University cafeteria.

Tamer Nafar was born in 1979 in Lyd, Israel. Nafar’s brother Suhel Nafar, and their bandmate and friend Mahmoud Jrere (Joker), were born in Lyd as well. Like Kashua’s hometown of Tira, Lyd (Lod in Hebrew) is in Israel’s Central District. The rappers’ families were among only 1,056 Arabs who remained in Lyd after 1948. Arab

342. Tira is part of the Triangle in Wadi ‘Ara south of Haifa. The Central District of Israel was one of several areas with sizable Arab populations. Most Arabs in the Central Districts lived along, or nearby, the Green Line (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2017), ‘Population Of Israel On The Eve Of 2018– 8.8 Million [Press Release’]).
343. @dampalestine, Facebook.
neighborhoods in Lyd were poverty-stricken, and many ‘48 Palestinian residents took to crime and drugs.  

When Kashua was twelve, and Tamer Nafar, Suhel Nafar, and Mahmoud Jrere were under ten, the First Intifada awakened feelings of guilt amongst many ‘48 Palestinians over their conflicting loyalties to Israel and Palestine. Tensions between Israel and the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip escalated when a series of Palestinian uprisings against Israel’s occupation of these territories broke out in 1987. The riots, which lasted four years, are known as the First Intifada (1987-1991).  

Although some ‘48 Palestinians provided aid (in the form of food, etc.) to their brethren in the territories, most opted not to participate, and tried to remain neutral. In a series of interviews conducted in the 1980s by liberal Jewish Israeli author David Grossman, many ‘48 Palestinians admitted to experiencing guilt over their contradictory feelings of loyalty to the state of Israel and solidarity with Palestinian Arabs in the Territories. Palestinians in the Territories, on the other hand, told Grossman about their growing resentment toward ‘48 Palestinians for the same reasons.

---

345. David McDonald offers a vivid description of the poverty in Lyd’s Arab neighborhoods: “In its Arab quarters Lyd suffers from extreme neglect. In the Arab neighborhoods Samekh Het, Warda, Shannir, Neve Yarek, and al-Mahatta, many of the houses and streets are unnamed or unnumbered, paved roads can be rare, and basic utility services are inconsistent and unreliable. The ultimate signs of neglect are seen in many open sewers, overflowing dumpsters, and derelict buildings that line the city streets. [---] More pressing, however, are rampant drug abuse and violent crime. Children play soccer in streets overshadowed by massive tenement buildings covered in graffiti and suffering from disregard and ill-repair. Nearby, drugs are freely bought and sold through slots carved into the neighborhood’s concrete walls. Lights strewn over the slots, called ATMs, mark whether or not a certain drop-off point is open for business. From these points passersby stop for a moment to push their money through the opening and retrieve an envelope or plastic bag of illicit drugs: pills, cocaine, crystal meth, or something else” (McDonald, 2013, 231).


In 1990, at the age of fifteen, Kashua won a scholarship to attend the Israel Arts and Science Academy, a Jewish boarding school in Jerusalem. He had to leave Tira and his family to attend. Classes were taught in Hebrew at Kashua’s new school, and he was one of the few Arabs there. In October of the following year, the First Intifada ended when Palestinian and Israeli delegations sat down at a negotiating table together for the first time in Madrid. Although the achievements of this particular meeting were mostly symbolic, they paved the way for future meetings in which the rights of Palestinian Arabs would be further established and recognized.

Shortly after Kashua entered the Jewish world at the age of fifteen, the Oslo Accords (discussed in the first chapter) made it more difficult for ‘48 Palestinians to side exclusively with either Israel or Palestine. The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 in Washington, D.C. by Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman of the PLO Yasser Arafat, laid the foundations for Israeli-Palestinian peace, which would be implemented transitionally over the next few years. However ‘48 Palestinians were not considered or mentioned at all in the Oslo Accords.

This perceived abandonment by Palestine deeply impacted the ‘48 Palestinian psyche. Many, including the young rappers of DAM, opted to put their efforts elsewhere. What they wanted was official recognition for ‘48 Palestinians as a national minority in

349. Some claim that the Intifada didn’t end until the signing of the Oslo Accords in ‘93.
Israel with collective rights. Kashua’s already-uncertain identity as the only Arab at his Hebrew-speaking, mostly-Jewish boarding school, on the other hand, became even more ambiguous.

Despite their equivocal relationships with Israel, Kashua and DAM both began their artistic careers by participating in Israel’s mainstream artistic scenes. Kashua graduated from Hebrew University in 1996 and entered Israel’s workforce that same year. He began writing as a correspondent for the Jewish-run Hebrew-language newspaper *Kol Ha-’ir* in Jerusalem.\(^{352}\) DAM also started out their rap career by participating in Israel’s mainstream Hebrew-speaking rap scene.\(^{353}\) They began by performing in Arabic at Tel Aviv discos alongside right-wing Jewish rapper Subliminal (Ya’akov “Kobi” Shimoni) and his bandmate The Shadow (Yoav Eliasi).

Filmmaker Anat Halachmi even captured footage of the members of DAM hanging out on Subliminal’s tour-bus with Subliminal and his crew in early 2000, spitting verses. Halachmi was filming a documentary (*Channels of Rage*) about the collaboration, disagreement, and eventual fallout, between DAM and Subliminal in the early years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada.\(^{354}\) Subliminal’s bandmate The Shadow asks jokingly: “Why can’t we all just get along? Only in Israel, guys. Russian, Ethiopian, Arab and Persian rappers can stand on one stage, [with] a fine looking black man like me!”\(^{355}\) Nafar flings his arm around Subliminal: “Film the coexistence! Film it!” Subliminal echoes “Film the

\(^{352}\) Kayyal (2008), 45.

\(^{353}\) Dorchin (2015). 4-5; Halachmi (2003), *Arutzim Shel Za’am (Channels of Rage)* [documentary].

\(^{354}\) Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am).”

\(^{355}\) Halachmi (2003) [documentary].
coexistence!” Turning to Nafar, Subliminal asks jokingly “Are you a second class citizen?” Everyone, including Nafar, laughs. “Get off our backs!” Subliminal chides jokingly.

This scene on the tour-bus reflects Nafar’s uncertainty: As a ‘48 Palestinian, he is aware of the discrimination he feels in Israeli society. But as a rapper hoping to gain success, Nafar chooses to ignore the perceived discrimination, at least for now. The underground ‘48 Palestinian rap scene does not yet exist, and Nafar has only begun to experiment with Arabic rap at this point. Remember that to succeed in Israel’s hip-hop scene, rappers either had to collaborate with hip-hop mogul Chulu or get their music played on Esek Shachor, Israel’s military-controlled rap station (discussed in chapter three). Nafar had already appeared on a compilation of Hebrew rap tracks, called Israelim Atzbanim (ישראלים עצבנים - Nervous Israelis), that Chulu released in 1996. But DAM had yet to be played on the radio. Thus DAM’s professional relationship with Subliminal, who was already the most commercially successful rapper in Israel at this time, likely seemed one of the only ways to guarantee their musical success. Perhaps because DAM needed Subliminal for their career, Nafar told Subliminal what the Zionist rapper wanted to hear: namely, that ‘48 Palestinians are not second-class citizens in Israeli society.

At the turn of the new century, DAM’s relationship with Israel changed drastically. Unlike Kashua, who continued to write for the Hebrew paper Kol Ha’ir, and later for the even more prominent Hebrew paper Haaretz, the rappers of DAM, along
with many ‘48 Palestinians in these years, began to distance themselves from Israel during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the events of Black October, and the Investigation and Report of the Orr Commission. ‘48 Palestinian rapper Saz (Samekh Zakhut) from Ramle, Israel even went so far as to completely renounce his affiliation to the Jewish state:

I don’t consider myself Israeli, I don’t have a relationship with Israel. What’s Israeli citizenship to me? My blue ID? […] As time goes by, I realize I have nothing to do with this country. I have nothing here, but the land is mine. The police, the school, nothing is mine, nothing belongs to me.358

Fueled by outrage over the killing of thirteen ‘48 Palestinian civilians, DAM wrote and recorded “Innocent Criminals” (“Posh’im Ḥafim Mi’Pesha”) shortly after the Black October riots of 2000.359 When he heard about the ‘48 Palestinian deaths at the hands of Israeli police, Tamer Nafar felt driven to respond (“That’s when I decided to write the first political song to ask, ‘What is happening?’”).360

Israeli-Jewish rock star and bad-boy rebel Aviv Geffen found “Innocent Criminals” online two years later, in 2002. Geffen was already notorious for his outspoken critique of Israel. He had even refused to serve his mandatory term in the IDF,

---

359. McDonald (2013), 252.
360. Barnes, “Dam Has Been Using Hip-Hop to Fight for Palestinian Independence for Over 15 Years.”
361. McDonald (2013), 254.
abstaining as a conscientious objector. Geffen saw “Innocent Criminals” as a “unique opportunity for Israelis to engage a dissenting viewpoint, one that criticizes Israeli discriminatory practices against its Palestinian population.”

Geffen contacted DAM to make a remix of “Innocent Criminals” and even offered to “sponsor the production personally, financing the recording and editing as well as a large-scale music video.”

DAM readily accepted Geffen’s proposal to remix the song, seeing it as an opportunity to “get their song out there.”

The music video features an extra verse by Aviv Geffen, which is especially inflammatory to Israeli Jewish viewers. As the song nears its end, a car pulls into the dark warehouse where the music video is set, and a bright headlight momentarily blocks the figure who alights from it. Aviv Geffen, dressed in the uniform of an Israeli soldier, approaches Nafar’s body. Geffen’s costume alone was enough to anger many Israeli Jewish viewers. “You asshole, you weren’t even in the army!” Subliminal yells angrily, in a comment to Anat Halachmi. “You only put on a uniform in the video clip! Helping that poor wounded Arab, putting him in the car. Take your uniform and get the hell out of here!”

In the video, Geffen helps Nafar to his feet and escorts him to the car. The two drive away. Geffen, in the role of a sympathetic liberal Israeli Jew, adds his voice to DAM’s, and confronts Israeli society’s treatment of its ‘48 Palestinian citizens.

362. Aviv Geffen (@avivgeffenofficial), Facebook, “About” (https://www.facebook.com/pg/avivgeffenofficial/about/).
365. Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am)”.
366. Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am).”
Aviv Geffen knew “Innocent Criminals” would be controversial to a mainstream Jewish audience, but he did not foresee that the song would be banned.  

Quite the opposite, Geffen in fact took precautions to ensure the song would be played on the radio. This is apparent in footage captured by Anat Halachmi. In Halachmi’s footage, Aviv Geffen and Tamer Nafar are in the studio recording “Innocent Criminals,” when Nafar raps: “hours at a checkpoint with a bored soldier passing your time away.”

Geffen asks Nafar to change the word “soldier (לייח- hayyal)” to “person (םדא- ’adam).” As Geffen explains, criticism involving a ‘man’ might be more acceptable to Israel’s army-controlled radio than criticism involving a ‘soldier.’

The fact that “Innocent Criminals” was banned, despite Geffen’s precautions and despite his already notorious fame for being a controversial and critical voice in Israeli society, indicates the deeply-rooted perceived discrimination against ‘48 Palestinians in Israel’s dominant ideology. The song gave Geffen the slightest taste of the discrimination ‘48 Palestinians faced daily. Getting the song recognized “highlighted unexpected difficulties that even Gefen had yet to encounter,” notes McDonald. As Aviv Geffen discovered, the shoes of ‘48 Palestinians are not easy to wear. A journalist asked Geffen in 2003 whether, while recording and producing the song, he did in fact try to step into Nafar’s shoes. The pop star answered: “I’m trying.”

368. The line doesn’t make it into the final version of the song, anyways.
370. McDonald (2013), 254-255.
371. McDonald (2013), 255.
being ‘48 Palestinian was more difficult than he had ever conceived: “after I saw that our single was simply censored in Israel—it wasn't played on any radio station—I realized how heavy and quite dirty these shoes are. . . . I realized how difficult it is to be an Arab Israeli.” Luckily for Geffen, he was afterward able to discard these heavy, dirty shoes. Tamer and Suhel Nafar and Mahmoud Jrere, on the other hand, have no choice but to keep wearing them. As switching shoes isn’t an option for the rappers, they try for the next best thing: to keep their shoes clean.

“No Place for Humor”

After examining the lives of Kashua and and the rappers of DAM, their uncertain relationships with Israel are no longer surprising. Growing up as marginalized citizens in Israel, these artists have worked hard to overcome the inherent drawbacks of being non-Jews in a Jewish state, and to gain success in Israeli society. But even though Kashua and DAM both expressed desires to work towards equality in these works from the early 2000s, they both eventually came to terms with the unlikeliness of this ever happening. They had different reactions to this realization. I end the chapter with a consideration of Kashua and DAM’s more recent expressions about the state. Do they both still criticize the state? If so, are they more or less candid?

Shortly after “Innocent Criminals,” DAM began to write and rap almost exclusively in Arabic. Tamer Nafar had grown frustrated with DAM’s Hebrew message...

372. McDonald, 255.
of resistance falling on non-responsive ears. DAM’s switch to Arabic indicates that the rappers are no longer trying to reach Israeli Jews. When they rap in Arabic, the rappers automatically exclude non-Arabic-speakers, which account for 90% of Israeli Jews. This is reflected in the fact that on DAM’s official website, English translations are offered for many of their rap lyrics, while Hebrew translations are not offered at all. Instead of reaching out to meet Jewish listeners halfway by rapping in Hebrew, DAM now insists that Israeli Jews who wish to engage in a dialogue with ‘48 Palestinians and work towards equality, put in the effort to learn Arabic and engage on the latter’s terms.

The rappers of DAM have grown even more critical of Israel in 2017, 2018 and 2019. They now express explicit messages of resistance against Israel both in their music and on social media. For instance, in response to the Trump Administration’s decision in 2017 to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, they wrote in a Facebook post: “Trump’s decision to establish Israeli colonialism in the Middle East and ban the Palestinian right of existence clarified beyond words that we cannot put on our seat belt and sit in silence.” In January 2018, DAM released a new single “Jerusalem Al-

374. Tamer Nafar, in Halachmi, “Channels of Rage (Arutzim Shel Za’am).”
375. Nirit Ben-Ari makes this observation as well (Ben-Ari, Nirit (2010), ‘From the South Bronx to Israel,’ 108-124).
376. In a 2015-16 report, Prof. Yehouda Shenhav reported that only around 10 percent of Israeli Jews claim to have a “good knowledge” of Arabic, 6 percent can recognize Arabic letters, and a slim 1.5 percent is able to read and write in Arabic (Yehouda Shenhav. In Yuval Evri (2016), ‘Why Israel’s Jews Do Not Know Arabic’).
377. DAM ‘Lyrics’ (damofficialband.com).
378. @DAMOfficialBand, Facebook; @TamerNafar, Instagram; @SuhelNafar, Instagram; @MahmoudJere, Instagram.
379. @dampalestine, 2018.
Quds.” In the song, the rappers criticize Israel and the U.S. for moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. They threaten— in both Arabic and English— to take up arms in violent resistance (“bring me my arrows bring me my spears”). This recalls Mahmoud Shalabi’s promise of salvation in MWR and DAM’s collaborative song “Identify Yourself” (2001). As seen in the previous chapter, Shalabi offers deliverance through words instead of weapons, threatening to launch rhetorical rockets at the enemy. “Rhymes are bullets,” as rapper Saz echoes. Additionally, rather than try to negotiate better treatment in Israeli society in the song “Jerusalem Al-Quds”, the rappers of DAM explicitly push for a Palestinian homeland (“We decided we want to build a homeland”). No longer referring to themselves as ‘48 Palestinians, they now identify entirely as Palestinian.

Notably, however, the rappers of DAM still live in Israel and still participate in the Jewish state. Moreover, Tamer Nafar continues to express resistance against Israel by urging ‘48 Palestinians to participate in the political workings of the state. For instance, in response to popular support for a ‘48 Palestinian boycott of Israel’s 2019 elections, Nafar and Udi Aloni (the director of most of DAM’s music videos) released a music video on April 3, just six days before election day (April 9). In the video “Tamer Must


381. Arabic lyrics from DAM’s website (damofficialband.com/lyrics); English translation by Mohammad El-Haj Ahmad and myself.


383. Except for Suhel Nafar, who now lives in New York. Nafar works for music streaming company Spotify, as head of their Arab Music & Culture division (@suhelnafar ‘Suhel Nafar DAM’, Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/suhelnafar/)). Nafar’s spot in DAM has been filled (whether temporarily or permanently is unclear) by ‘48 Palesinian singer song-writer Maysa Daw from Haifa (@damofficialband ‘DAM Palestine’, Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/damofficialband/).
Vote,” Nafar urges ‘48 Palestinians to cast their ballots on election day. The music video depicts two Tamers debating each other in a boxing ring. The first Tamer appears to have given up on his voice ever being recognized, or having a political say in the state: “It’s our land, their state, so the Knesset’s not for me.” “Maybe they’re using us to look liberal,” he remarks cynically, “let them look for someone else.” The second Tamer has not given up, and does plan on voting. “It doesn’t mean we’ll liberate Palestine,” he concedes, “but if our vote will erase Lieberman, imprison Bibi, then we’re ready.” Both Nafars join in for a refrain “Either we vote, or end up outside of the homeland.” With this message of prescriptive resistance, Nafar continues to resist Israel’s dominant ideology by contributing to a counter ideology based on the inclusion of ‘48 Palestinians.

Sayed Kashua, for his part, no longer relies on humor and implicit language to express resistance in his writing, although he does still write in Hebrew. In the past decade, Kashua has begun to feel more anger towards Israel, claiming to Juliana Portenoy Schlesinger that it is becoming harder to laugh at the racial injustices and inequalities.

As the situation in Israel has gotten progressively worse for Palestinian citizens of the state, Kashua has begun to use less humor in his Haaretz columns as well. He now addresses the issues of discrimination head-on. “There’s no place for humor this week,

384. Tamer Nafar (2019), ‘Tamer Must Vote’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtMFjKYtZ6bA&fbclid=IwAR2v31SVkCADmGKcZhkoCMrDgiXpkoWDKs222z1CUeLi2PSoxKS9V1fQ&app=desktop).
this month, this year,” Kashua explains. “Humor,” Kashua reflected at a public lecture at OSU almost twenty years after writing *Dancing Arabs*, “is a weapon of the weak.” Yet Kashua’s gut reaction, he explained during a group conversation over lunch the following day, is still to use humor when he feels under attack.

We can sense Kashua’s restraint from using humor in his movie adaptation of *Dancing Arabs (A Borrowed Identity)*. The movie, like the novel, tells the story of a young ‘48 Palestinian. The protagonist of the movie, Eyad Barhum, undergoes a similar quest as the unnamed narrator of *Dancing Arabs* to integrate himself into mainstream Israeli society. But instead of the self-deprecating humor depicted in the book, Eyad’s attempts to pass in the movie are dramatic and sobering. At the end of the movie, Eyad symbolically buries his ‘48 Palestinian self with the body of his friend Yonatan Avrahami, a Jewish student who had muscular dystrophy. When Yonatan dies, he is buried under Eyad’s name, wrapped in the shrouds Eyad’s grandmother bought in Mecca. The vestiges of Eyad’s Arab identity are buried with Yonatan. In assuming Yonatan’s name and ID card, Eyad also takes on the accompanying privileges of being a first-class Jewish citizen of Israel. As in *Dancing Arabs*, Kashua expresses criticism in the movie by pointing to perceived discrepancies in Israel’s treatment of its Jewish and ‘48 Palestinian citizens.

390. Kashua wrote the screenplay for the 2014 movie *A Borrowed Identity* (directed by Eran Riklis and starring Tawfeek Barhom, Razi Gabareen and Yaël Abecassis).
391. This ending is borrowed from Kashua’s novel *Second Person Singular* (Keter, 2010).
The critique in *A Borrowed Identity* is more explicit, however. In a reversal from his stance in *Dancing Arabs*, Kashua’s message now seems to be that one cannot coexist in both Israeli Jewish and ‘48 Palestinian societies.

Fed up with the racism, inequality, and everyday violence against ‘48 Palestinians in Israeli society, Sayed Kashua left Israel with his family in 2014. He taught Hebrew language at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for several years, and as of Spring 2019, is currently enrolled in a PhD program in Saint Louis. Although he misses Israel, Kashua is relieved to be away from the discrimination and violence he perceives in Israeli society (“I also feel sad, though we’re glad not to be [back in Israel]. It’s easier on my kids; they don’t feel pressure in their schools. They have less complicated questions about Jewish and Arab identity now. So it’s a mixed feeling”).

**Conclusion**

The decisions of the rappers of DAM and Sayed Kashua to abandon the rhetorical styles used in *Dancing Arabs* and “Innocent Criminals” are in fact already foreshadowed by the rhetoric in both works. As shown in this chapter, the narrator of *Dancing Arabs* implicitly criticizes the state when attempting to pass as Jewish. Kashua’s ambiguous critique of perceived discrimination in Israeli society reflects his own unclear relationship with Israeli society. Likewise, DAM’s resistance against Israeli society in “Innocent Criminals” clashes with the rappers’ paramount desire for equality and acceptance in the

393. Misty Urban (2016), ‘[Q & A]: Talks With Sayed Kashua: Sadly Happy.’
Jewish state. This discord reflects the unclear relationship the rappers have with Israel as well.

In conclusion, the rappers of DAM use Hebrew to criticize the Jewish state, yet do not renounce Israel in “Innocent Criminals.” However the song remains in private discourse. I have described the outrage of many listeners, and noted that the song was banned from Israeli TV and radio. Based on the popularity of MWR’s rap song “Ashanak Arabi,” as discussed in the previous chapter, it seems likely that responses to “Innocent Criminals” are predicated on the rappers’ candor in the song. In other words, DAM’s expressions of resistance in the song are overt enough to be offensive to listeners. Meanwhile, although Kashua also criticizes the state in Hebrew, and likewise does not renounce Israel in Dancing Arabs, his message of critique is in the public domain. As seen, the novel appealed to most Israeli readers, who were able to read what they wanted to in the text. Comparing the novel with the rap song allows us to see that the reason for Kashua’s popularity in Israeli society might be the narrator’s very lack of candor in the novel. In other words, Kashua’s critique is ambiguous enough to be malleable, and hence acceptable to a largely Jewish-Israeli audience.

Both of these works, written one year apart, criticize the state in Hebrew, and yet their engagements with Israeli society are so different. What accounts for these differences within Israeli society? As seen in the previous chapter, most scholars are happy to discuss rap and literature separately. It would be easy to assume that genre is responsible for the different engagements of these works with Israeli society. But looking
at DAM’s rap song and Kashua’s novel side by side pushes us to consider aspects beyond
genre. When we do this, we see that candor has the greatest impact on these artists’
participation in public or private discourse. In other words, irrespective of genre, the
explicitness of the critiques most affects how the works interact in and with Israeli
society. The rappers of DAM explicitly confront listeners with the truth about perceived
disparities in Israeli society, while Kashua implicitly indicates these same perceived
inequalities without calling them out by name.
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to do a number of things. I have demonstrated that there exists a serious body of Palestinian resistance literature that encompasses both fiction and rap. I have argued that engaging with the rap music of MWR and DAM on the one hand, and the novels of Habibi and Kashua on the other, enhances our understanding of the meaning and role of each. The articulations of resistance in both the rap and literary works are impactful and insightful; moreover, they are necessary if we are seeking to understand the lives, stories, and current situations of ‘48 Palestinians in Israel. Further, I have demonstrated that if an oppressed group can only fully reclaim its identity by establishing a counter set of values to the dominant ideology (as Gramsci and Harlow have argued), then the selected literary works and rap songs play an important role in a ‘48 Palestinian War of Position, as they both contribute to evolving artistic attempts to define the attenuated position of ’48 Palestinians living on the margins of Israeli society.

I have additionally considered factors that might have influenced the selected ‘48 Palestinian writers and rappers. I concluded that regardless of factors such as genre (written text or rap); language (Arabic or Hebrew); candor (explicit or implicit expressions of criticism); rhetoric (criticizing the state prescriptively or descriptively); and degree of engagement with Israeli society, the works of written text and rap are all
key to understanding, as well as defining, the experiences of Israel’s ‘48 Palestinian citizens. With a horizontal form of analysis that, pace Bakhtin, replaces more traditional hierarchical genre analysis with an emphasis upon the similar rhetorical force of both oral and written communications, I have also maintained that the “low” art of rap contains as much depth, substance, and nuance as the “high” art of written fiction.

My framework has been based on Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and Wars of Maneuver and Position; James C. Scott’s observations on hidden and public transcripts; Ghassan Kanafānī and Barbara Harlow’s arguments regarding resistance literature; and Tricia Rose’s theory of resistance rap. We saw that artistic resistance by what Gramsci terms subordinate artists participates in what he calls a War of Position against dominant ideology (i.e., cultural hegemony).394 A War of Position, as described by Gramsci, expresses resistance to domination with culture, rather than with physical might.395 Resistance art, as depicted by Kanafānī, Gramsci, and Harlow, challenges the state by calling attention to its dominant ideology, and occasionally even creating a counter ideology.

In the works I selected to analyze in the dissertation, Habibi, Kashua, and the rappers of MWR and DAM call attention to perceived discrimination in Israel’s dominant ideology, which, they claim, renders ‘48 Palestinians as second-class citizens. Writing thirty years apart in different languages, the literary writers challenge the Jewish state using self-deprecative humor, both managing to express criticism without writing

unequivocal, or explicit, words of resistance. The rappers of MWR and DAM, in contrast, openly call out perceived discrimination in Israeli society by name.

By choosing to participate in a War of Position that challenges the state through their art, the artists Emile Habibi, Sayed Kashua, Tamer Nafar, Suhel Nafar, Mahmoud Jrere, Mahmoud Shalabi, Waseem Akar, Richi Savo, and DJ Chuck all put their lives at risk, either professionally or socially. In extreme cases, artists have been placed under house arrest or even exiled for expressing outspoken resistance. In less extreme cases, their homes have been looted or they have been attacked by civilian aggressors. Of the four artists (or collectives of artists) discussed in the dissertation, most experienced some sort of tangible backlash. Habibi met with resentment from exiled Palestinians and Arab readers; DAM’s professional career suffered after their dramatic fallout with Subliminal; and Kashua was criticized (sometimes quite harshly) by ‘48 Palestinian and Jewish Israeli readers alike. Only MWR seems to have emerged unscathed.

The rhetoric in these works of written text and rap reflects the artists’ uncertain identities as Palestinians living as perceived second-class citizens of the Jewish state of Israel. Although they all critique the state in one form or another, each artist also demonstrates a desire to improve their status in Israeli society, thereby showcasing their

---

396. E.g. As discussed in chapter two, in the 1960s, ‘48 Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish visited ‘48 Palestinian communities in Israel and recited poetry of resistance (among other things). Darwish was was placed under house arrest for violating Military Rule. Military rule (which was in place from 1948-1966) restricted ‘48 Palestinians from traveling in the state, and from incendiary public gatherings. Military rule is discussed in chapter one. See Kimmerling & Migdal (2003), 169-180; Morris (2008), 272-301; and Shapira (2012), 197.’Mahmoud Darwish: 1942-2008’ (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mahmoud-darwish).

397. E.g. The house of leftist Israeli-Jewish writer Yehonatan Geffen (who is the father of DAM’s collaborator Aviv Geffen) was broken into, and Geffen himself was attacked and almost beaten, by a civilian aggressor who disagreed with Geffen’s criticisms of the reelection of Netanyahu (Yaniv Kubovich, 2015, ‘Israeli Author and Journalist Yehonatan Geffen Attacked at His Home, Called ‘Leftist Traitor’, Haaretz’).
willingness to participate in the state. Although their political and social relationships to Israel are ever-evolving, and have in fact already changed in recent years, in the four works discussed in the dissertation, neither the writers nor the rappers display an intention to leave Israel, nor do they advocate causing harm to the state with anything other than words.

At the time of writing the selected novels, Habibi and Kashua both participated in Israel’s mainstream art scene. Both novels were readily available to Israeli Jewish readers in Hebrew. *The Pessoptimist* was originally written in Arabic, but was eventually translated into Hebrew, and *Dancing Arabs* was written in Hebrew originally. Moreover, both texts were published as well as distributed by Jewish presses, and consumed by Jewish audiences.

In contradistinction, at the time of their release, the two rap songs by MWR and DAM were only briefly accepted into Israel’s mainstream rap scene in the early 2000s. Aside from a few exceptions, rap created by ‘48 Palestinian rappers in these years was not mainstream: it was not played on Israeli radio stations, produced by Israeli record labels, or distributed to Jewish audiences. The exception is MWR’s “Ashanak Arabi,” which topped the charts of a Haifa radio station for two weeks during the summer of its release in 2001. Even though “Innocent Criminals” is in Hebrew, it was only played one time on Israeli TV. Upon its release in 2000, the song was initially banned from Israeli TV and radio stations. After it was played one time, it was banned again.

How, in the end, do we account for the discrepancies between the acceptance of
the written texts and the rejection of the rap songs in mainstream public discourse? One
might be tempted to argue that language is one of the determining factors responsible for
the respective acceptance and rejection of these works into Israel’s mainstream art scenes.
Arabic works are mostly ignored by Israeli Jews, as only around ten percent can read or
speak Arabic. Hebrew works, on the other hand, are mostly ignored by Arab readers, as
“critics in the Arab world considered that the Hebrew writing of Arab authors was
valueless: a marginal phenomenon, characteristic of a tiny group of writers with no
influence on local Palestinian culture.” Both literary works examined were either
written in, or translated directly into, Hebrew. But while Hebrew is the original language
of some ‘48 Palestinian rap, most of it is in un-translated Arabic. So while patterns briefly
emerge in the ways language affects these artists’ engagements with Israeli society, none
are definitive.

It might also be tempting to argue on the basis of genre hierarchies that rap is
simply a “lower” form of art, as opposed to the “higher” form of literary fiction. However
in this dissertation, I have advocated for a more “horizontal” approach to rap, in an
attempt to demonstrate that this distinction between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ art is
unwarranted; ‘48 Palestinian rap can and should be regarded as on a par with the literary
works of Habibi and Kashua. Besides, the works themselves disprove any claims that
written art is intrinsically more complex, nuanced, or deep than spoken art. Consider for

398. In a 2015-16 report, Prof. Yehouda Shenhav reported that only around 10 percent of Israeli Jews claim
to have a “good knowledge” of Arabic, 6 percent can recognize Arabic letters, and a slim 1.5 percent is able
to read and write in Arabic (Yehouda Shenhav. In Yuval Evri (2016), ‘Why Israel’s Jews Do Not Know
Arabic’).
instance the complexity of Emile Habibi’s written prose in *The Pessoptimist*, which can be seen in his playful manipulation of language. Habibi’s mastery of Arabic can be seen in his use of the made-up word *Pessoptimist* to portray the character Saeed as a naïve simpleton. Now consider Tamer Nafar’s complex and multi-layered spoken poetry in “Innocent Criminals”. Recall how with the verb *kolet* (to get or ‘absorb’) Nafar at once recalls the practice of passing judgement on someone; Israel’s objective of ‘absorbing (Jewish) exiles’ and, by extension, the state’s policy of confiscating and repurposing Palestinian land for use by Jewish immigrants. Lastly, compare these with the nuances of MWR’s metaphorical use of the imagery of waking from sleep to signify awareness of injustice and racial inequalities in “Ashanak Arabi.” The literary devices in DAM and MWR’s oral rap songs are equally as complex and substantive as the language in Habibi’s written prose.

Moreover, the hiddenness of certain transcripts plays a very pivotal role in a work’s reception as well. Recall, for instance, the deep shame felt by the narrator in Kashua’s *Dancing Arabs* when he could not conceal his Palestinian identity. The narrator’s deep sadness and self-loathing are concealed behind his outwardly humorous and self-deprecative banter. While the ‘48 Palestinian reader, privy to a hidden transcript or code, might immediately understand the implications and root of the narrator’s sadness, readers who do not have access to the hidden transcript might simply be amused by Kashua’s outward stereotyping of ‘48 Palestinians.

---

400. *Pessoptimist* (mutashāʾīl) is a combination of the Arabic words for optimist (mutafāʾīl) and pessimist (mutashāʾīm).
A more likely explanation for the incorporation of only the literary texts into public discourse reflects the level of perceived threat presented by the artistic works in question. All four artists critique the state, either implicitly or explicitly, and yet their status and levels of acceptance differ markedly. Despite– or perhaps because of– their oblique and partially hidden written critiques, Habibi and Kashua enjoy esteemed status in Israeli society. The critiques spoken aloud by the rappers of MWR and DAM, on the other hand, are perceived as threatening. This would have been especially true during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, when Israelis were experiencing frequent threats from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Compare the reception of MWR and DAM to that of the leftist Jewish hip-hop collective Hadag Nachash (mentioned in chapter one), which released some of the only music critical of the Jewish state that was played on Israeli radio. The uncritical acceptance of Hadag Nachash’s music in stark contrast with the guarded rejection of MWR and DAM’s music highlights the threat that was perceived in Arabic rap. Hadag Nachash’s first big hit was “Shirat ha-sticker” (The sticker song-ştirוח תנשאָה) in 2003. As noted earlier, the lyrics, written in Hebrew by leftist Jewish novelist David Grossman, criticized Israel by pointing out hypocrisies through slogans from popular bumper stickers. Some listeners simply liked the song without recognizing its sharply worded yet implicit accusations.

The experiences of DAM and MWR belie Tricia Rose’s hypothesis that when members of subordinate groups express criticism openly, this criticism tends to become
co-opted as part of the cultural hegemony. Unlike media outlets in the U.S. that are all too eager to commodify and profit from African American rap music, in the 2000s, Israeli mainstream radio and media outlets were not ready to absorb the messages contained in the newly emerging ‘48 Palestinian rap. Perhaps ‘48 Palestinian rap was simply too explicit in the context of Israel’s highly politicized society, and so unlike the case of rap by African American artists in the U.S, its public transcript turned in on itself and became a hidden transcript.

My study of these four artistic endeavors has raised many questions and issues for future work. More specifically, while I have touched briefly upon the reception of these individual works, future studies will expand upon the whole issue of reception; this will include the levels of engagement such works enjoy in Israeli society, as well as consideration of their reception by audiences inside Israel (‘48 Palestinians and Israeli Jews) and outside Israel (Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and the larger Arab world). Such a study entails careful probing of periodicals, journals, and if possible, radio broadcasts, from the years surrounding the release of the literary texts and rap songs discussed in the dissertation.

An ancillary project will consider artistic resistance from another underrepresented segment of Israel’s population: Mizrahi Jews. A fascinating and growing scene of artistic resistance among Mizrahi Jews is located in the *Ars Poetica* movement.\(^{401}\) Founded by Yemeni poet Adi Keissar, *Ars Poetica* blends traditional Arab

\(^{401}\) Michal Raizen (Forthcoming), *Exile Got Your Tongue: The All-Stars of Arabic Song and the Literary-Acoustic*. 

138
musical traditions with poetry and performance, resulting in a unique utterance of resistance and cultural expression. Hip-hop poet Roy Hasan, who has been described as the Israeli Eminem, particularly stands out within this art scene for his blending of written and spoken art forms, as well as for his outspoken and harsh critique against Israeli society in Hebrew in public discourse. Examining and comparing Mizrahi and ‘48 Palestinian artistic expressions side by side will further illuminate the important intersection of hip hop and literary art forms discussed in the dissertation, as well as provide a more complete picture of the cultural and artistic resistance expressed by two oppressed groups in Israeli society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

@damofficialband ‘DAM Palestine’, Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/damofficialband/).

@damofficialpage ‘DAM ماد‘, Instagram [https://www.instagram.com/damofficialpage/].

@dampalestine (2018), ‘DAM Palestine’, Facebook [https://www.facebook.com/dampalestine/posts/10155168429461935?pnref=story].

@dampalestine(2014), ‘DAM Palestine’, Facebook [https://www.facebook.com/dampalestine/posts/10151976391841935],


@Mwr.Palestine ‘MWR-Palestinian Hip Hop’, Facebook.

@suhelnafar ‘Suhel Nafar DAM’, Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/suhelnafar/),

@tamerdam ‘Tamer Nafar’, Instagram.


‘Atallah Mansour, Journalist and Author’, (atallahmansour.com).

Awad, Mira (2010), ‘Interview with Yuval Orr’, (Tel Aviv, Israel).

Bakhtin, Mikhail (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin.


Ben-Zeev, Noam (December 8, 2008), ‘The Microphone is the Weapon’, *Haaretz Gallery*.


Castel-Bloom, Orly, (1992), Doli siṭṭi [Dolly City], (Tel-Aviv: Ha-Ḳibuts Ha-Me’uḥad).


DAM (Ana Mesh Xaīn) (I’m Not a Traitor), YouTube.com [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pavk7H-O3W0].

DAM (Ana Mesh Xaīn) (I’m not a Traitor), Revolutionary Arab Rap [http://revolutionaryarabraptheindex.blogspot.com/2014/07/dam-im-not-traitor.html].

DAM (Ana Mesh Xaīn) (I’m not a Traitor), Dam Rap [http://www.damofficialband.com/lyrics].


Dorchin, Uri (2009), ‘Real Time: The Production of Hip Hop in Israel and the Production of Israeliness in Hip Hop (Dissertation Thesis) [Hebrew]’, (University of Ben-Gurion in the Negev).


Eyal Friedman, aka Kwame (2010), *Interview with Yuval Orr*, (Tel Aviv, Israel:).


Foucault, Michel *Interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Fontana, Alessandro and Pasquino, Pasquale, (https://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/ fouchaulttruthpower.pdf).


Foucault, Michel (2001), *Fearless Speech*, ed. Pearson, J., (Semiotext(e)).


Geffen, Aviv, ‘@avivgeffenofficial’, Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/pg/ avivgeffenofficial/about/).


Habibi, Emile [Trans. Anton Shammas] (1985), ha-Opesimist: ha-kronikah ha-mufla ‘ah shel he’almut Sa‘id Abu al-Nahs Mutasha’il [Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me’uḥad).


Halachmi, Anat (Wrote and Directed) (2003), ‘Arutzim Shel Za’am (Channels of Rage)’.


Jarrar, Mustafa Curras: Corpus for Palestinian Arabic, (http://portal.sina.birzeit.edu/curras/curras.html).


Kanafānī, Ghassan (1963), Ard al-Burtuqal al-Hazin [The Land of Sad Oranges], (Lubnān: al-Ittihād al-‘Āmm li-Ṭalabat Filastīn).


Karni, Gil [Writer and Director], Samekh Zakhut (Saz) (2004), Saz: The Palestinian Rapper for Change (Produced by Gil Karni & Meni Elias, Israel).

Kashua, Sayed (14 Feb, 2008), ‘My French Boycott [Hebrew]’, Haaretz (http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/951817),


Kashua, Sayed (2010), Guf Sheni Yachid [Second Person Singular], (Keter).


Lovatt, Hugh (2009), Palestinian Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music: Cultural Resistance as an Alternative to Armed Struggle, (Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, BA; Exeter University).


‘Mad Man’ (Tel Aviv, Israel), Facebook (@MadManWear), (https://www.facebook.com/pg/MADMANWEAR; https://www.madmanstudioslabel.com).


Marley, Bob (1975), Get Up, Stand Up.


Matalon, Ronit (1995), Zeh ‘im ha-panim elenu [The One Facing Us], (Tel Aviv: Am ‘oved).


Micha’el, Sami (1977), Hasut, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved).


Muallem, David (2010), The Maqam Book: A Doorway to Arab Scales and Modes, (Kfar Sava, Israel: Or Tav Publisher).


Nassar, Maha (2017), Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World, (Sanford, California: Stanford University Press).


Oz, Amos (1983), Mikhael Sheli, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved).


Raizen, Michal (2014), ‘Ecstatic Feedback: Toward an Ethics of Audition in the Contemporary Literary Arts of the Mediterranean’, (The University of Texas at Austin).

Raizen, Michal (Forthcoming), *Exile Got Your Tongue: The All-Stars of Arabic Song and the Literary-Acoustic*.


Rose, Tricia (2008), *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—And Why It Matters*, (New York: Basic Civita Books [A Member of the Perseus Books Group]).


Salloum, Jacqueline Reem (Director) (2008), ‘Slingshot Hip Hop’,


Saz ‘My Story’, alsaz.net [www.alsaz.net/about.php].


Segev, Harel (DJ, 90 FM) (2010), Interview with Yuval Orr, (Ramat Aviv, Israel).


Shumsky, Dmitry (2018), Beyond the Nation-State: The Zionist Political Imagination from Pinsker to Ben-Gurion, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).


Nafar, Tamer (2019), ‘Tamer Must Vote تامر مجبور يصوت’, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtMFjKYZ6bA&fbclid=IwAR2v31SVkCAdmGKcZhkouCMrDgiXpkoWDKs2C2Zi1CUeLi2kJPSOskS9VlFQ&app=desktop),


‘The Or Inquiry— Summary of Events’ (19 November, 2001), Haaretz.


The State of Israel (2016), ‘Emil Habibi: Knesset Activities’, knesset.gov.il,


Tregger, Or (DJ Alarm) (2010), Interview with Yuval Orr, (Tel Aviv, Israel).


Voltaire (1759), Candide, ou L’optimisme: (original 1759)Paris 1913: Hachette et cie).


Williams, Raymond (1973), ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxian Cultural Theory’, New Left Review, 82 3-16.

Williams, Raymond (1977), Marxism and literature, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).