

Power as Geography (Power as Text)

A first reading of the texts of the Balconies teaches the reader to identify structures of power as architexts and demonstrates that there are often multiple structures operating simultaneously within any one narrative. Looking again at the Balconies, this time in conversation with the Palestine Comedies, this chapter considers how knowledge of these architexts changes how the story of Palestine can be told. For indeed, around, across, and beside the chronotopes and linkages of Palestine that the Comedies forged, a network of power structures compete, repeat, and overtake each other. These structures of power and their interactions provide as much of a geography of Palestinian life as the literal terrain on which Palestinian stories take place. It is this terrain that the present chapter explores. It asks: What does this operation of power look like, how do structures interact with each other, with the texts of Palestine?

As chapter 4 laid out, there are multiple structures of power in operation at any given time. The first section of this chapter shows how understanding the terrain of power first requires the balconic vantage in order to identify and parse the many different structures. Analysis shows that structures of power in Nasrallah's Palestine act as texts within the national intertextual network that the Comedies set out. The second section looks at one of the ways that these structures (texts) overlap—as echoes of each other repeating the same patterns of control, so that what can look like one system is in fact many. This sort of relationship is very much distinct from the connective power of devices like *al-muthannā* or the series. The third section looks at what happens at the intersections of these echoes, how structures of power clash and intermingle and create the terrain for the nation. The fourth and final section returns to the balcony, not just as a position from which to identify power, but as a place where Palestine and Palestinians can be excavated from these interlinked structures of power that would otherwise erase them.

The three initial points of analysis are read through two novels, *Eraser Child* (*Tīfl al-mimhāt*, 2000) from the Comedies series, set between 1930 and 1948, and *Balcony of Disgrace* (*Shurfat al-‘ār*, 2010) from the Balconies, set in 2008–9. The works—which could not be more different—are read in tandem, with the lessons of one complementing and extending the other. *Eraser Child* is the story of the Nakba but as it has never been told before.¹ It is the story of the depopulation of Palestine rewritten as a narrative of the failure of the Arab Liberation Army to save Palestine. No longer telling the story of exile or depopulation, the novel flips the trajectory of telling from “what happened” and “why” to “how”—how the structures of power that claimed they were aiming to save Palestine instead replicated the structures that they claimed to resist. *Balcony of Disgrace* is the story of a very different kind of catastrophe. It follows Manar, a young woman in a nameless Arab city, as she goes to university and finds her way in life. At the cusp of independence, she is gunned down by her brother. This is a story about the concept of honor, who defines it, and who has control over it. Where *Eraser Child* tells of structures like British colonialism, neocolonialism, and the ALA and *Balcony of Disgrace* looks at class, religion, and the state, both begin with a critical look at family structure and show how no system of power—even familiar ones—is immune to the drive for totalizing control.

Where the texts of Palestine’s places, times, and people formed networks of association (the series, *al-muthannā*, etc.), bringing parts together across time and space, structures of power create a hostile geography. Mapping the multiplicity of these structures, and understanding how they operate alongside and against each other, makes it easier to read these texts as they operate ultimately within the network of Palestine as a sort of constellation of elements. This reading beyond (and reading into power) is what the final section of this chapter turns to. It puts these lessons to use and returns to the story of Salwa in *Olives of the Streets* (*Zaytūn al-shawāri*, 2002). It reads the work as a story not only of architexts (in this case, those at work on the life of a young Palestinian refugee in Lebanon during a period of PLO sovereignty in the camps) but also of the young woman that they “read” or represent. While the story of the woman, Salwa, is never formally told, the reader is taught to excavate her perspective and her experiences through the architexts that present her. Readings of the first two novels—how they identify architexts, how these architexts overlap and intersect—prepare the analytic tools for the third. Here we learn how to excavate a hitherto invisible text, to peel back the structures of power and the narratives they impose on people (places, events) and pull out from beneath the “text” as it might be without the limitations. Once excavated, we see that the texts are no longer invisible and can take up their place within Palestine.

MULTIPLE ARCHITEXTS

Manar and Fouad, the protagonists of *Balcony of Disgrace* and *Eraser Child*, are not—for different reasons—agents of their own life stories. Rather, they are acted upon and narrated by others. This is devastatingly typical of Palestinian stories (and so many others)—where it is forces of power that determine what is important or narratable about a person or a place. Worse, forces of power also often dictate what it is possible for an individual (and therefore an individual's story) to be. The stories of Fouad and Manar look directly at these architexts and how their multiplicity makes the lives of each protagonist invisible. While the two come at the structures from very different perspectives, it is this difference in fact, that demonstrates a certain uniformity of structures of power, which operate on individuals indiscriminately.

Fouad is the simple, slightly lazy, passive, youngest boy in a household of girls. He is raised on the edge of the Jordanian desert in the 1940s to believe the world is at his service. When he becomes a young man, however, the reader comes to understand that it is in fact Fouad who is at the service of the world—where the world is a consecutive set of overlapping structures of power (here British colonial power, neocolonial power in the Transjordanian government, the structure of the family, and the structure of the ALA). The young man simply does not have the critical faculties to realize it until too late. Manar, for her part, is the celebrated only daughter of an aspiring middle-class family in a contemporary Arab city in the late 2000s. Her father's hard work and dreams for her success make it seem as though all roads are open to her. In the early chapters Manar thrives—attending university, falling in love with a fellow student, and finding her calling in the field of social work, which she chooses as her career. When Manar hits a crisis point, however, it becomes clear that she had been seamlessly navigating what are separate structures of power (here family, class, religion, state). While each novel goes about creating and identifying architexts differently—and indeed the characters traverse different sets of structures—the result, as we will see, is the same. Each system—operating as though the others don't exist—attempt, bodily, to impose their logics.

Though Manar and Fouad are protagonists who see the world as operating under one system, narrative clues in each work tell the reader that this is not the case. Both novels are organized into distinct parts or phases, and each phase explores the conventions of a different social/political force that operates as a distinct structure of power. As the characters pass from one “phase” into another (phase of life, or politics, or of geography), they enter a new structure of power. In *Eraser Child*, Fouad passes through zones that correspond to chapter divisions, governed by (respectively) family, imperialism, proto-imperialism, Pan-Arabism, and nationalism. In each case Fouad is at the service of the system in question. For each new power he serves, he initially moves to a different location. Because he moves from place to place, Fouad does not immediately perceive that there are many structures operating at the same time (just with different zones of

administration). Complicating the matter, is that the normative structure—that of the family—is also a structure of power.

Growing up in a remote northern Arabian Desert village, Fouad does not see power because life is built to serve him. What is shown of this adolescence is “typical,” scenes with his mother hanging the wash, his sisters cooking dinner and being told to “give you anything you wished” (46) while his father is in the fields. The first chapter of the novel diligently creates a discrete world ordered by the family with the father at its head. This world neatly corresponds to Hisham Sharabi’s definition of (neo)patriarchy, wherein the family structure is (imagined) as a discrete system characterized by the “dominance of the Father (patriarch), the center around which . . . the natural family are organized.”² Under this system, Sharabi adds, “the paternal will is the absolute will, mediated in both society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion.”³ While Fouad sees very little of this coercion in his early years (he is the celebrated son after all), the same description of a single will organizing the relations of a particularly located community also comes to characterize the systems whose control he comes under later. Indeed, for all the structures “between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations.”⁴ While appearing benign as the work begins, this idea of the discrete operation of power comes up again and again—in ways that seem less and less “typical.”

When Fouad grows up and joins the British Legion—the desert forces founded by Glubb Pasha as part of early British attempts to exercise sovereign control over Transjordan—the order of relations that characterize the system are the same. This, like the family structure, doesn’t read as problematic (especially for Fouad), since the system is understood as a continuation of the system at home; but instead of the father as the head of the house, it is the British monarch. In the barracks and life in the army, it is the British who are in control, with a vertical line of command extending all the way—at that time—to the king. And Fouad wants to impress his way up the chain. He was the star attraction at home and desires desperately to be recognized in this new setting. He sets his sights on one blue-eyed Colonel Gregory, who he bends over backward for—even apologizing when he can’t offer a match to the official who is preparing to torch the colonial archive ahead of a British evacuation. While both of these systems seem fine to Fouad (who does not blink at the torching of colonial records), an unnamed, apparently omniscient narrator steps in repeatedly to cue the reader into the systems as they are encountered. This narrator creates the balconic vantage from which it becomes possible to see the operation of power in even the most “typical” settings.

While *Eraser Child* is centrally told through the life experience of the hapless, gullible, and naive Fouad, who unquestioningly accepts the rules as they are given to him and plays along to get along, his insufferable naïveté is countered by the presence of the omniscient but only sometimes present narrator who offers occasional critique of the protagonist. This critical voice prompts the reader to take

a critical view as well. The narrator interjects periodically with funny, sometimes scathing comments on the life of Fouad. The protagonist continues through life assuming that it will bend to his wishes, at which the narrator interjects, “but the truth is that you didn’t know” (55), the implication being that Fouad really has no idea about the world he exists within. Or later, the narrator interjects to cast doubt on a decision, adding, “in my opinion” (70), and ultimately belittling Fouad’s ideas. The narrator even reflects on the young man’s actions with the remark, “The thing that doesn’t stop confusing me . . .” (53), presenting Fouad as an untrustworthy narrator who cannot perceive all that is around him.

The limitations of Fouad as a reliable narrative source are underlined from the very opening of the novel. At one point, the narrator addresses Fouad directly and urges him to “look closely” (*inẓar jayyidan*) at a scene.

Corporal Fouad tried as much as he could to focus in the direction that his friend [the omniscient narrator] was pointing him, but he saw nothing.

[Narrator] “Do you see what I see?”

Corporal Fouad gestured with his head, for he did not want to let on that he could not see what his friend saw. But he said: “Yes.”

[Narrator] “Do you see it clearly?”

He gestured again. He was less certain about himself and about his friend!

[Narrator] “I see your dear mother busy with the washing. . . . [D]o you see her?”

Corporal Fouad gestured with his head a third time, but he wasn’t even sure that he was looking in the right direction. (9)

What Fouad sees and what the narrator wishes him to see are not the same thing, but the protagonist so badly wants to fit in that he doesn’t say a thing. That Fouad is hapless, that he takes things for granted and that the narrator knows it, implicates the reader. Indeed, the narrator addresses much of the work to “you” (*anta*), which we read at once as Fouad and also as us, the readers. We too are asked to “look closely.” And while the reader begins to see the repetition of power—principally in Fouad’s desperate desire to fit into it—by the time we encounter the last structure, the presence of multiple systems becomes unmissable.

As the war for Palestine heats up, Fouad decides to join. He leaves the barracks of the Jordanian government (where he had been transferred, a system we return to shortly) to join the Arab Liberation Army. Here there is no smooth operation of power. As Fouad prepares to enter Palestine and cross the Jordan River, an old sheikh tells the recruits to be careful as they prepare for a difficult journey, expressing concern and caution for the men about to fight for Palestine. The old man, however, is shuffled off and replaced with an enthusiastic youngster who assures the waiting soldiers of their victory. The Arab nation was sure to succeed, he said. This is the narrative Fouad wants to believe. The father was supreme, the king was supreme, and now, Fouad is told, the Arab nation is supreme. But the sheikh had spoken his piece: the mission was not an assured success, and there was sure to

be danger on the way. This warning is papered over (for Fouad), but the warning remains. Without paying attention, Fouad crosses the Jordan and enters the final phase of his story under the command of the ALA.

Though Fouad notices the slips in operation of control in the ALA (more on this shortly), as he moves through each system he does not question or challenge its aims, values, or customs. Each, in effect, has total administrative control within its geographic sphere of operation (until we learn that they do not, which we turn to in the next section). What is important, at this point, is only that there exist distinct spheres of control, each of which have the appearance of total control so long as the others are not present within the same operational zone. The same becomes true of the spheres that Manar, some seventy years later, navigates: her family, the middle class, and the state. Where the different structures that Fouad moves through correspond to his geographic shifts (and to some extent, life phases), the structures Manar traverses all operate within her native city. To help distinguish the structures, Nasrallah uses structure. Each of the four parts of *Balcony of Disgrace* comes to represent one of the structures that frame and play a key role in the abuse and ultimate killing of Manar.

Reinforcing the idea of a structure of power as a closed administrative zone, the four parts of *Balcony of Disgrace* (each of which contain several chapters) are written as almost discrete teleologies, so that the scenes that begin a section also end them. The formula is not entirely straightforward. For example, in part 1, the first chapter closes with a scene of Manar's father dancing and being dangerously tired afterward, declaring, "Did you see how I returned to my poor legs like new again. Do you know, it was impossible for me to stop dancing!" (11/76). The final chapter begins with the same scene of dancing, repeating the lines verbatim, but continues for several pages, showing that what had appeared at first as a celebration turns out to be an ominous foreshadowing of Manar's father's deterioration, the loss of the use of his legs, the loss of livelihood, and the inability to protect his family any longer. He had been injured in a car accident and pushed his body beyond its capacity to celebrate Manar's graduation from university. Though the proud father had worked hard to make sure his only daughter received an education and had fended off criticism from his brothers as well as refused marriage proposals from her cousins (angering his relatives), as the novel's part 1 and Manar's education come to a close, her benevolent parent no longer deploys his own version of the family system as her architext. The narrative loop, or the circle of control of the family, is not in fact a closed one.

Each of the four parts of the novel (except for the final part, which follows the structure with a very short addition, discussed in chapter 8) repeats the same formula, so that the lines that end the first chapter begin the last (Table 4). Each part, similar to the structure of Fouad's story in *Eraser Child*, narrates a different system within which Manar operates.

TABLE 4 Chapter structure of *Balcony of Disgrace*

Part	
First chapter	Last chapter
Scene	Scene
J	F
K	G
L	H
M	I
N	J+

NOTE: Each letter indicates a new “vignette” or scene. Each chapter has the same structure and repeats the first vignette at the start of its final narrative salvo. The same information (often verbatim) is given, but the story continues and gives more information, more context for the opening scene, changing its meaning and how we understand what is happening. The same vignette (marked as J above) begins and ends the part. So the part and its chapters narrate in a sort of circular fashion. Where the J of the first chapter ends, however, the J+ of the beginning of the last chapter begins.

After looking at Manar’s family, the novel turns to the class structure. Manar enters this system through the university. It is here that she meets her upper-middle-class nouveau riche boyfriend, who is intimidated by the family structure he must eventually come up against. It is also through the university that Manar decides on a career, takes an interest in art and cinema, and crafts for herself a future that is different to the one available only through her family network. This, what analysis calls a “class” system, is defined in the text by its difference from the family system and the places it takes her to: the cinema, the mall, the gallery—generally places of commerce or global cultural production. This is entrance to a sort of global middle class. Manar’s father, his insistence that she study, and his refusal of marriage proposals that would have taken her out of school, had made her entry into this other system possible. However, with the failure of Manar’s father’s health and the inability (or unwillingness) of Manar’s brothers to insist that his will continue, the extended family structure eventually tries to reclaim its power over Manar.

The systems compete and eventually collapse. Competition has nothing to do with Manar but rather her father’s taxi business and her brother’s failure to pass the taxi license test. To make an income, Manar’s father goes outside of the family system and rents the cab to a neighbor. When the brother finally passes the test, Manar’s father gives him the cab. The neighbor is furious and rapes Manar as revenge. Crucially, he gains access to her while driving (another cab) downtown when she is out with her boyfriend on the way to the cinema. He tells her it is too late to be out on this other side of town and offers to take her home. The rape happens literally between the two neighborhood geographies. One system has challenged the other, and both are injured in the process. When Manar’s extended family learns of the ordeal, her uncle declares that she—who refused her cousin’s proposal—is a stain on the family and must be killed. Her boyfriend, who meekly

tries to propose and absorb the “dishonor,” quickly disappears when he realizes the extent of the situation. Family and class thus clash, and while family seems at first to prevail, it is eventually challenged again by the state. As the final section of the last chapter outlined, police were summoned to Manar’s house as her elder brother attempted to close the circle of power from the family structure. She is taken, in the next “part” of the novel, into protective custody and a judicial system intervenes, not releasing her until it is assured that she will be safe (the family agrees to send Manar to another brother in the Gulf). Each system has its own vision of the appropriate direction for Manar’s life or provision for her safety. What this is in real terms, however, is simply the exercise of complete control by any one system. Family thinks she is best off marrying her cousin, class would send her to the new part of the city with her bourgeois boyfriend, and the state would remove her from her family’s care and send her abroad.

The four parts of the novel represent discrete “bounded texts,” in Kristeva’s sense of the term; each text sets out the limits of its own epistemology, explores the possibilities available within its structure, but ultimately confirms the assumptions about the possibilities laid out in their opening pages.⁵ Family can only see family as a solution; class, as class; and state, as state. The constant repetition of closure is relentless. So relentless that the reader cannot help but notice the patterns. The haunting echo of verbatim text repeated at the beginning and end of each part underscores where attention should be paid: not to what the structures portrayed promise, but to their operating logics. This structural device cues the reader to the same sense of awareness in reading as the critical and omniscient narrator does in *Eraser Child*: the interjections, the looped narratives, the foreshadowing, and the repetition. Literary devices draw inescapable attention to the rules and limits of structures, each of which imagine themselves as sovereign. Both protagonists are caught in a world made up of overlapping and competing structures of power, each of which claims narrative and at times bodily control. At the same time, however, the inevitable overlap in the operation of these structures gives space for transgression. The inevitable movement between structures that perceive themselves as sovereign and distinct reveals the nature of the operation of their power, and the way that these operations affect both Manar and Fouad.

MANY TEXTS, SAME STRUCTURE

For Nasrallah’s Palestine, the operation of power is not singular; it does not operate uniformly over and across space. While Fouad was able to imagine that discrete systems operated over independent geographies, Manar saw these systems compete and overlap. This, in the Palestine Project, is how power ends up being experienced as a single system; each architext, using the intertextual language of Genette, “amplifies” the others,⁶ so that power structures seem larger and more universal than they are. A second reading of *Eraser Child* shows that here, too, the

systems are not discrete as they claim—though they repeatedly claim to be so. In returning to Fouad, analysis gains tools with which to better understand the chaos of systems that seem to focus on and destroy Manar. In both works, we find that power acts as multiple distinct and discrete elements (architexts) that unevenly impose orders of possibility on the other elements within their sphere. This section looks at the overlaps between systems, and how each echo within the others but also echo each other in terms of function.

Each of the systems of power that Fouad and Manar move through (and are read by), for example, operate as though they have autonomous and distinct authority. Like an episteme, architexts of power have their own logics and boundaries of possibility, which they presume are unbreachable. The way these elements interact with others is as a lens of interpretation, claiming imaginative control over other elements through what can most easily be described as an exercise of what Anthony Giddens has called an “administrative monopoly.”⁷ Architexts of power each presume total control over a particular zone and an authority that issues from a single source, whether custom, religion, inheritance, or economy. What first becomes clear as the different structures of power are identified is that each exercises the same type of imaginative and administrative power. Each also presumes a monopoly. One structure of power echoes its others.

The British Legion, for example, is well known to have operated, as one scholar put it, as an “instrument for the pacification and integration of a predominantly tribal society into a state to whose central authority the tribes became responsive and to whose administrative control they became subjected.”⁸ It was a unit that precisely replicated the priorities of the imperial project. It, like the family, operated under the direction of a single imagined will. In both the family and the British imperial setting, Fouad is recognized as someone who will “play your role in the game” (57)—with the game being the subjection of a space and its people to patriarchal and then later colonial control. The Transjordanian government where Fouad went to work next is depicted as a reproduction of the same. Since Fouad had done such a good job in the British Legion, the administration sends him to the *Sayyid al-balad* (the local governor) as “the favorite present from the chief of the army to the chief of the city” (102). This is the government of King Abdallah, which was installed as a proxy by the British, so that the chief of the city supported the colonial position exactly: one was a precise replication of the other.⁹ While the ALA, as an apparent revolutionary force pushing off the specter of colonial control, seems like it would provide a different model, the hapless Fouad outs the model as yet another echo of the top-down model. The desire for power for its own sake in the ranks, and indeed the command, of the ALA is demonstrated in the novel by the organization’s reaction to Fouad’s British-made gun; a parting gift from the Transjordanian governor.

The ALA was meant to be a revolutionary and anti-imperial force working against the imposition of an outside will; it was meant to represent in a way the will

of an Arab people. In theory, the ALA was an expression of a growing movement of Pan-Arabism, a “nationalist notion of cultural and political unity.”¹⁰ In practice, however, the ALA replicated the power structures—the top-down authority, the work to maintain administrative control over a vast geography. The fight for Palestine was simply one aiming to expand that scope. We see this plainly through the way the ALA and its officials look at—and fight for control of—a British made gun. In their envious glances, their attempt to control it, the ALA officials signal no critical position when it comes to the type of power they seek to impose and the way their ranks are organized: they want the British gun not for its facility in taking down an enemy but for its symbolism. For officers in Fouad’s ALA unit, control over the British gun means status, which they clamor for above all else. As the narrator explains, “News of the rifle reached [Fouad’s ALA unit commander] Assad Bik” quickly (184), and while the commander “couldn’t have determined the difference between two rifles or the difference between two [of his own] men” (184), he is determined to have the machine for himself, or at least confiscate it from Fouad in order to preserve his own sense of authority.

This is not an army working for a common purpose but rather one “marked by disunity, mutual suspicion, and cross-purposes”¹¹—and an attempt to wrest power from competing structures simply to exercise control itself. Fouad’s experience with the ALA reveals its stated aim of liberating Palestine as false. He sees firsthand what historians detail as a unit whose “antagonisms and suspicions undermined any hope of firm, realistic decision-making.”¹² And so the commander, instead of focusing on how to save Palestine, goes “to war with one of his men” (184) over control of a weapon neither can use properly. It is not Palestine, after all, that the ALA is after—it is the expansion of power.

Like the British Legion and the ALA for Fouad, the state reproduces mechanisms of control over Manar that her extended family and class structures had earlier tried to exercise. The systems do not act in distinct geographies but rather overlap, each operating as if it is the only structure of power. After her brother tries to kill her and her middle-class beloved meekly gives her up to pursue his own interests, the police enter Manar’s home and take her into protective custody. Here protection means control, and control is total. Manar is taken to a prison facility where she is treated as a criminal. Manar’s imprisonment reinforces the symbol of the closed and indeed confining realities of each power system portrayed in the novel. Couched in the language of familial protection, the state steps in as proposed guardian, offering to defend the young woman from her male relatives and offer her shelter. Parroting the same value set as the family, state control guarantees her about as much “protection” as her father had: none. Once in custody, Manar is badly abused. Disgusted at the conditions, she insists, “I will not agree to go in there” (184), but even as she is stripped and hosed down, the guard scoffs, “Why? Are you more honorable than them?” (184). The guard uses the idea of honor—one that, as we will see, had been mobilized by a number of actors within

the family system—to force Manar to abide by its logic. The paradox, of course, is that while the systems are claiming to protect her honor, they are in fact perpetuating her violation.

Representing the state—but truly detailing the operation of power across the structures detailed here—the prison curtails all aspects of Manar’s life. Rising when the lights go on, eating when fed, exercising when permitted: the prison reads onto Manar its own vision of life, of normalcy, of the pattern of a day. Life according to the rules of the structure is, as Foucault described, a “power of normalization.”¹³ The women’s prison is the most powerful embodiment of what Foucault described as a “place for individual transformation that would restore to the state the subject it had lost.”¹⁴ Where the family and the middle class had sought to imprison Manar ideologically, the state does so literally. Each mirrors the other in some way, replicating modes of dominance. This reinforces the idea of the simultaneous and bounded loops of narrative. Protection becomes confinement, and the state insists that it is the ultimate authority over not only Manar, but the class and family systems.

The structure of the novel creates a narrative framework representing, and reinforcing, the world that Manar moves within. The story is told in repeated closed loops that, while operating from different starting points, enact in form and function the same limitations as the systems she encounters and manifest the same prison. These narrative loops symbolize the closed nature of the power structures that “narrate” Manar and represent a structural impossibility of escape. These structures quite literally compose the story of Manar, and to read her story is to read how each of these systems (almost like the genre structures in *Balcony of the Snow Man*) shape the possibilities of her life. The same is true for Fouad, except in this case it is not the story of his own development that is limited; it is the story of the territorial loss of Palestine. What made the life of Manar unbearable is precisely what created the impossibility of a Palestinian territorial sovereignty: both were “protected” by an interlinked and repeating system of power structures that exercised a problematic authority over their claimed zone. This repetition, this exercise of control by multiple parties with different interests (but parallel mechanisms), made national life impossible.

INTERSECTIONS

While each structure echoes the operation of the others and each imagines its own administrative monopoly, the structures eventually overlap. These overlaps become sites of intersection, and often competition, which is played out on the bodies of the protagonists. Reading the violence that the structures carry out on Manar and Fouad, the edges of power are put in the spotlight. It becomes clear that architexts in Nasrallah’s Palestine operate as separate and distinct, but they are not, and in fact they are multiple and overlapping. The structures are also—though

they don't admit it in terms of their operating logics—interdependent and formed in relationship with one another. In other words, architexts are in intertextual relationship with one another, and reading the story of Palestine requires an understanding of how and why these interactions proceed.

While Fouad's family structure is understood as a discrete force with rules and conventions, the family also invisibly recognizes its limitations. When something goes wrong at home and the safety of the family is threatened by bad blood between households in the village (Fouad had put someone's eye out with a stone, and the family feared retribution), Fouad is sent into the service of the British Legion. The family sees this as a separate place, so that sending Fouad to the military base near the city is as though sending him to another state with its own laws and boundaries. Not only will his service earn the family income, but it will put Fouad out of harm's way. When he returns home for his uncle's funeral, however, Fouad's mother worries about the inevitable clash between family and British affiliation, as he sports the military uniform. She only relaxes when he takes off "the rank of Private Fouad" (122), but she still worries and decides that until he returns to the capital, "she will have to treat [him] with great caution" (122). This is in part because of the trouble the family was in before he left but more immediately relates to the funeral: his uncle had been killed fighting in Palestine. So, on the one hand, Fouad needs to skirt the notice of the family he injured by throwing a rock at a suspected thief, and on the other, he needs to maintain deference and respect to his martyred uncle whose priorities and politics were different from those of the British Legion that Fouad is controlled by. While each system imagines its control as absolute, it is with qualifications and the inevitable tension of overlap.

Structures of power are in relationship—but one of competition that reinforces boundaries rather than dialogue. While on the surface the village seemed far away from the colonial administrative center, years earlier it was in fact British forces that had shot at a gazelle and missed, with the stray bullet killing his older brother. While unrecognized and unaccounted for within each structure (the event is mentioned almost in passing), family and imperial power had been clashing and competing in the village for years. Fouad's movement between the systems is also a product of their relationship. With another son in the house, they might have been safer, but with seven daughters who all needed to get married, Fouad was better off elsewhere. This clash between forces served to structure the life of the family even as things continued on the assumption that it operated under a patriarchal monopoly system. Just as the dominance of the village patriarchal system is undercut by the British, so too is British authority challenged by patriarchy, as well as emerging nationalist sentiments in the then (quasi-)independent Jordan.¹⁵

For example, when the women of the city start writing Fouad love letters and insist on accompanying their high-ranking husbands or fathers on their official visits so they can flirt with the young man, the soldier's appeal as a subject of female desire endangers his ability to represent the British, who in fact rely on the

compliance of notable families to sustain rule. As he is a low-ranking soldier and a villager, pursuing any of the women would end his career. When “a number of people learned about [his] situation” (107), it becomes only a matter of time before gender politics embedded in the system of patriarchy drive Fouad out of the service of the British. Confused, he turns to a new organization, whose structures of power he hopes will finally give him meaning and help him make better sense of the world around him. He asks permission from the “chief of the city” to fight for Palestine with the ALA. Fouad once again packs up his few belongings and joins the Pan-Arab force of fighters who are organizing on the borders of Mandate Palestine to confront the Zionist militias. The overlaps, lacunae, and glaring contradictions he is faced with when he crosses the Jordan River and battles in the hills of Jerusalem are, finally, what push him to see the different structures of power at work, their service to their own interests, and how this service and self-sustaining functioning ultimately loses Palestine. The realization leaves Fouad lost and looking for his own personal compass. But we return to that part of the story in the next chapter.

Manar is similarly caught in the competing and overlapping structures of power that create her life's geography. The narrative loop of *Balcony of Disgrace's* part 2 opens and closes with the young woman's return home, with her dress ripped and face tear-stained (83), in the middle of her eldest brother's scandalous wedding to a second wife. Neither the reader nor Manar's brother understands why she is crying when the passage first appears, but the intervening pages once again explain how the scene came to pass: the tears are the result of a clash between the family and class systems. As a taxi driver, Manar's father had been able to buy himself out of the family structure by aspiring to the middle class. He takes charge and tells his brothers that he is protecting his family through cash, not “honor.” He drives Manar to and from university every day and tells the whole neighborhood that he will “raise his head” and his status through her work. Meanwhile, Manar studies and goes to art galleries and the cinema with her new boyfriend, Issam.

All of a sudden Manar's father loses his ability to work and buy his way into the structure of the middle class. He is injured in an accident, his back and legs rendered unfit for driving. His eldest son, Amin, fails his taxi license test, and the family is forced to hire out the car to a stranger, Yunis. The one condition of his lease is to drive Manar to the university campus. While it was fine when it was Manar's father driving her to school, with Yunis at the wheel things change: Manar is no longer protected by either her father or his work. The business relationship between Yunis and Manar's father sours, and the driver takes it out on Manar. While Manar is out with her boyfriend, Yunis stops her downtown and admonishes her for being “in this area so far from the house without telling [anyone], and the sun will set shortly!” (103). Using the family logic of protection to challenge the bourgeois logic of culture and independence, he insists that Manar come home with him. Issam makes no objection and waves goodbye as Manar gets into the car.

Manar is afraid; she sees the entanglement of two separate systems as a threat to her person. She is afraid because Yunis had been ousted from the family circle when Amin finally got his license, and her father had broken the lease contract in favor of his son. Bourgeois and family logics here become at odds. Because it was the family logic that saw the car taken away, Yunis takes his revenge according to the same ordering code. Where he feels his honor has been sullied by Manar's father, he taints the family honor by raping Manar on their way home, dropping her off at Amin's wedding with a ripped dress and tear-stained face. Where Manar was working to rise into the middle class, the family system has now exercised its logic on her body. While Issam tries to find a way to bring her back into his world, she is too firmly gripped by the family structure, and he gives up. The systems may operate simultaneously, but their notions of monopoly are distinct, and Manar's movement between the two ends in violence. The same is true when Manar moves between the state and the family.

Manar's uncle Salim hangs a black banner on the home of the family and declares, "I hope to god there is a man in this house to rise up and protect their honor" (105), asking a male relative to kill her and clean the stain on their honor, but the state steps in, in the form of police officers who declare, "We are here for her protection [*himāyatiḥā*]" (179). She is only released when the state is satisfied that the family will not impinge on its monopoly on violence. Each system is sure it has the solution. But when Manar is released, it is her own brother who takes control and implements the family logic—gunning her down in the street. None of the systems that Manar interacts with is interested in anything more than protecting their own logics, and danger is certain when the logics overlap, displaying the weaknesses of one or the determination of another to assert control. While each suggests that it will ensure her care and indeed fulfilment, when threatened by another system—when the sovereignty of that system, its internal logics and organization—the structure closes in on its subjects and imposes its monopoly on violence instead of merging interests.

Once power is visible, it is thus fractured. Narrative and the imposition of logics are not only the purview of a single system. Rather, the lens of the modern and the attempt to order everything within a particular area into a certain logic is a task that is repeated by multiple systems, with ultimately different ends. So where in Genette's terminology the architext is the ultimate meaning maker, that which sets out the parameters of possibility, in reading Palestine the architext is pulled out of this hierarchy and into an intertextual relationship alongside multiple simultaneous and overlapping structures of power and grammars of control. While architexts are prevented from imposing a single frame of reading on Palestinian lives through the balconic vantage, they do create a substantial and often violent geography of power. Structures of power, then, are as important to understanding the realities of Palestine as the people, places, and things that they work to order. Sometimes, as we shall see below, all we have of the story of Palestine is what

comes through these structures of power, and it is through the vantage of the balcony that we can learn to find Palestine despite them.

EXCAVATIONS

In the Palestine that Nasrallah writes, the realities of individuals and even the nation often need to be excavated from imposed narrative frames. Stories of Palestine and Palestinians often reach the reader through so many narrative layers that the people and places that should be at the heart of the narrative end up representing the structures of telling rather than themselves. Whether Palestinians are serving as an example of oppression, deprivation, “terrorism,” resistance, or the plight of the refugee, realities are buried beneath structures of telling. What the vantage of the balcony tells us is that what is represented through these systems must be understood to be only part of the story, separating out that which is represented and the tool of representation. As we saw in the earlier sections, Palestine is the sum total of these structures and that which they have claimed to represent. Sometimes, however, these structures occlude that which is represented, and we must find a way to excavate the object.

In *Olives of the Streets*, the text that needs finding is that of Salwa, a young woman whose life is made invisible by a number of architexts that displace her from a Palestinian narrative. The novel is set in an unnamed refugee camp near Beirut in the 1970s. The peak years of the internationalization of the Palestinian struggle, it was the era of the freedom fighter, symbolized by the men of the PLO—an entity that epitomized the dream of Palestinian self-determination. At this place and time, the PLO had a tense relationship with Lebanon, the country that played host to most of its fighters following the 1971 exodus from Jordan during Black September. Salwa, the novel’s protagonist, is raised by her paternal uncle in the camp after her father had been killed in the violence of 1948 and he had taken on her mother as a wife. The uncle is a PLO supporter and works to aid the cause for liberation. He is seen in the community as someone who supports his family and his country.

These factors make it very difficult for anyone to hear Salwa’s accusation of the grossest corruption by her paternal uncle. As Salwa narrates, her uncle killed her father in 1948 so he could take her mother, he supports the PLO only because it gives him power, and the bulk of his “support” for the organization is in the form of pimping out Salwa to a local functionary. In a context where Palestinians are fighting for freedom, are the unwelcome “guests” of the Lebanese with no state apparatus of their own, and finally have the support of the international community that is cheering on their political ethos, no one wants to hear Salwa. To hear her would be, it seems, to discredit and destabilize all the good that the PLO was doing. It is the unlikely figure of Abd al-Rahman, a Lebanese journalist, who seeks out Salwa to tell her story, who grapples with what it means to hear and to find frames of telling that can express her truth.

His first attempt is a failure. Abd al-Rahman has his own reasons for finding Salwa and telling her story: she is the chance at a scoop on the Palestinian leadership's depravity. He had read a short reference to her in a Lebanese newspaper article accusing a local PLO leader of corruption. The official's abuse was only one of a litany of sins gathered to discredit him. Abd al-Rahman decides to track down the woman and find out if the allegations are true. The journalist collects his story. After reading the manuscript, Salwa marches into his office and throws the pages out the window, declaring, "If I hadn't cast out these papers I would have died under them" (7). On reading the manuscript, she finds that what she was told would be pages that told her experience instead tell the story of a victim of the PLO. She says, "I cried the whole night. When I read your pages I cried more than I had in my whole life" (5). She finds this more destructive and humiliating than the abuse that brought her to the writer's attention. The journalistic-style story that Abd al-Rahman renders thus repeats the damage of the camp official. Both make it impossible for her to be heard.

In *Olives of the Streets*, the story of Salwa is buried beneath other narratives, other architexts. In terms of both plot and formal structure, the novel is one of multiple texts in relationship and Salwa's experience in her own words is at the bottom of the pile. While the novel opens with Salwa throwing out the pages of Abd al-Rahman's manuscript, it is not until the end of the work that a reader understands how to find and pay attention to Salwa's own words. In fact, Salwa's version of her life is only captured on "six cassette tapes, on which were the whole story, from its beginning, but not to its end" (8), but we never hear them. Her words are not only shaped by Abd al-Rahman's writing, but supplemented, put into conversation with, and cast into question by the voices we do hear. As journalistic practice requires, Abd al-Rahman asks Salwa's uncle, the school principal, the local sheikh, and the PLO official who sexually abuses her to corroborate her story. Even while Abd al-Rahman knows that asking Salwa's abuser to verify her story is somehow wrong, he has no other way to think about writing. The journalist tries to mollify his guilt: "But why did you go to see her uncle? Abd al-Rahman asked himself. To make sure her story was true this time" (36). What the reporter learns from her school principal and the uncle, however, does not corroborate the young woman's story. They call her crazy. The principal tells him he had "never seen a girl who loved boys and chasing them more than her" (55), and her uncle tells him, "We tied her up because she was crazy!" (55).

It is these voices that are recorded in the novel, where Salwa's cassettes go unplayed. The reader must learn to deprioritize not only structures of telling but also other voices that these structures bring in. What the writer wants is for the facts to "line up." This is why Salwa calls the manuscript "a shelter for lies, not a refuge for me," and what is hinted at when she calls the manuscript "a story from different perspectives" (5). She tells the journalist, "You want it to be *accurate*," and reminds him, "This is life, not a story; have you forgotten?" (5). The journalist's

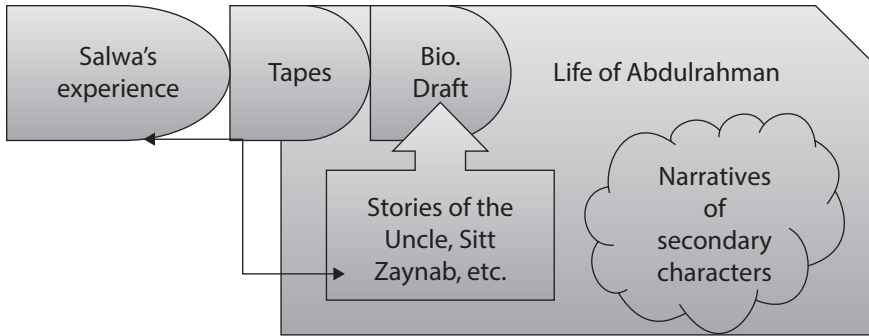


FIGURE 5. A visual rendering of the different “texts” in *Olives of the Streets*, which appear within the frame of the novel and which are narrated as existing beyond the telling of the work.

quest to write her story inscribes into the novel not only Salwa’s experience but also the structures that created it. This, in essence, is a deployment of the balconic vantage to see and identify the intertextual structure of the novel. This, the reader learns, is the only way to gain access to Salwa.

The visual rendering of the intertextual structure of *Olives* in Figure 5 shows that while all these different narratives are put to work to find Salwa’s story, her own voice and her own logic of events are never heard directly. In the figure, inside the large rectangle are the “texts” related within the time frame of the novel, and the texts outside the rectangle are referenced in the novel but do not occur as it is read. While imperfect, each shape in the figure can be thought of as a “text” (an imaginatively limited space with its own logic and self-developed parameters, along the lines of Barthes’s definition),¹⁶ with no correlation between size and importance, and the arrows indicate the degree of conversation between them (or how much the reader’s knowledge of one text might influence an understanding of the others). The overlapping sections suggest how one text frames or gives context (adding another layer of conversation) to the text that it underlies. So it is the rectangle of Abd al-Rahman’s life that frames the novel. That rectangle shapes and shades the entire narrative as it is presented to the reader. However, within that rectangle, and informing it, are other texts that influence not only each other but also Abd al-Rahman’s life. So while the narratives of secondary characters do not make it into the manuscript that Salwa reads, they do inform the life of Abd al-Rahman and are recorded in *Olives of the Streets*.

As what Genette would call a palimpsest,¹⁷ each narrative writes over and occludes the young woman’s “original” story. Salwa’s “actual” personal experience is outside of the frame, but the tapes she records are not—at least not entirely. While her words are never directly relayed from the tapes to the novel, we at least know they existed. While Salwa struggles to have her story heard within the many texts that overwhelm it, her “text” nonetheless shapes the many others that surround it. By parsing the many different elements, Salwa’s story can be seen—if

not heard—as can its influence on other texts. Though the shape of Salwa's story can only be measured in the negative, in the void created by the outlines of its silencers, it can in some measure be identified. That story is there, at the bottom, in fact secretly dictating the parameters of that which seeks to overwrite her.

In trying to see through the other texts to find Salwa, we are taking the advice of her schoolteacher, who advises the journalist:

If you want to write well about Salwa, you must listen to the tapes once, twice, three times, until you feel that Salwa is no longer in the tapes, that she has escaped and become part of you; when you forget about the tapes, you must write Salwa as you feel her, and this is all you must do. (79)

It is only by releasing himself from the expectation of a narrative that the journalist can find a space for Salwa's nonlinear, "incomplete," and "unverified" telling of her own experience. The narrative is no longer a linear biography, journalistic interview, or fact-checked article. Through Salwa's insistence on rewriting, on relistening, and on hearing her tell her own story, her story can be found. The texts, read as structures of power, no longer bury her but tell their own stories of oppression, leaving the way clear to see Salwa behind them. So where Salwa's uncle abrasively asks Abd al-Rahman, "A novel!! And will you bring back Palestine with your novel?" (43), the answer, in a way, is yes.