

Citizen Writer

If the mother of the fighter and the hero/martyr were the models of nation/agent meant to constitute a nation-state, the citizen writer emerges in the works of Nasrallah's linked series as the character trope that can ideally constitute the intertextual nation. The citizen writer is a figure that draws on but recrafts the role of the writer as Palestinian and wider Arab literary society had cast them. Nasrallah's citizen writer as a social figure that takes on and absorbs many of the roles that the Arab writer has had since the early eras of literary production, from the scribe and official record keepers of empires to the preserver of local tradition in the form of the storyteller. At the same time, the citizen writer as the figure emerges across the works of the Palestine Project is the ideal and pedagogue that emerged during the *nahda*, providing instruction and material so that others could engage in the "correct" sort of roles and behaviors. The citizen writer is not, however, the "modernizing educator" teaching the new generation how to properly "become" in the world as it was imagined by colonial forces. This citizen writer avoids the traps of colonial entanglements that the nineteenth-century writer so often fell into. As it emerges in Nasrallah's linked works, the citizen writer is a carefully honed combination of the elements of the figure of the writer past but forged as the reader, writer, and editor of an intertextual Palestine. What this ideal character does is actively write, read, and organize the texts of Palestine into their ever-shifting network. In so doing, they also recast the role of writing and its relationship with the projects of decolonization and liberation.

While the writer in Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian folk tradition had long been cast in a position of imaginative authority,¹ debates about the authenticity of their representations reached a fever pitch as the novel gained prominence in Arabic.² Pheng Cheah, drawing together the consensus of myriad postcolonial writers and scholars, identified the genre as one of "decolonizing nationalism."³ In writing the nation—as a nation—into the genre of the "modern" (colonial) world, authors created a narrative solution, an easy way of explaining how to end "suffering from

the chronic malaise of colonialism.”⁴ Of course, this was also figuring the world in the literal format of the colonizer; as Said put it, it was cultural engagement on the “battleground” of the colonizer. In going to the battleground of the colonizer, he explained, we have already lost something to the “culture of empire,”⁵ because the terms of debate, the possibilities of worldview, are already restricted. For Pheng Cheah, this sort of engagement means that the ideas of resistance are constantly “haunted” by the ideology of its “other.”⁶ The figuration of the citizen writer picks up on these debates—as indeed an ideal of the intertextual must—but ultimately recasts the role to answer the needs of the nation’s novel form.

Reading across the works of the Palestine Project and embedding the analysis in longer trends of Palestinian and Arabic literature, this final chapter examines the writerly citizen, its attributes, the way it recasts existing models of the relationship between writer and people, and, ultimately, the new imaginative possibilities for citizenship and belonging that this ideal opens up. The analysis draws from examples across Nasrallah’s linked series, embedding the types and characters in their longer and reorganized traditions. The sections below explore in turn the meaning of “writer,” here using Roland Barthes’s term “writerly,” to understand the interactive role presumed to exist between reader and writer in the intertextual nation. The writerly citizen, the first section shows, need not in fact write but simply hold open the space of imagination for continued dialogue and relationship. Once established, the citizen writer (as writerly) is compared to the closed and often teleological figurations of writer that Palestinian fiction has generated. Finally, through the figure of the citizen writer, we read the “endings” of the works of Nasrallah’s linked series, which the world of intertextuality in fact maintains as open possibilities. The Palestinian citizen, just as the nation, in the words of one Palestinian to another in a classic Emile Habibi story, “will stay ‘without a tail’ [ending] till you and I can write one for it together.”⁷

WRITERLY CITIZENS

The job of the citizen is to witness Palestine and be critical of it, to move in and be shaped by its texts but to refuse to allow those texts to set the limitations of either self or imagination. Carrying out this work as an individual—rather than as part of a community imaginary—is not an easy task. In their active identification of texts, and creation of meaning “on the fly,” citizens figured in the Palestine Project are writerly. The term, coined by Barthes, is useful in that it denotes a particular position of relationship between reader, text, and world, a position that values continuing creativity as its core principle. As the French critic himself explained, “Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”⁸ The ideal citizen of Palestine is precisely thus: “no longer a consumer” of other textual systems or ways of ordering knowledge but a producer.

This way of being in the world is perhaps best represented in Nasrallah's series in the character of Yasin. One of two protagonists in *Under the Midmorning Sun*, Yasin was a fighter with the resistance who has been invited by the newly formed Palestinian Authority to "return" to Palestine as the new government is set up in Ramallah in the wake of the Oslo Accords of 1993–94. Yasin is, in many ways, the only "ideal" male hero of any of the novels discussed here. The problem is that Yasin abhors the title. The hero/fighter is a national figuration he finds stifling and works tirelessly to throw off in favor of a writerly existence. This writerly approach dictates all of Yasin's actions and decisions, and it is this constant process that marks him as writerly—because he is in perpetual dialogue with systems that would prefer to read him as the biographical citizen and a citizen who would guarantee a state. But Yasin can identify power and its problems and can see the violence that the frames of the state have imposed. This is why he refuses them and insists on something different.

Yasin knows that his "return" to Palestine was a political move meant to bolster the newly created PA.⁹ He is aware that his arrival, and the arrival of former fighters from Tunis, Lebanon, and Jordan, is meant to mark a shift in the battlefield from resistance to governance, law, and order, to signal a triumphant "return" to the homeland.¹⁰ But Yasin did not believe the teleological narrative of Oslo; he knew much had changed, from the available space of Palestine to the laws governing it and even the returnees themselves. In this new Ramallah, he saw fighters "out of their time, their place" (44), and he did not want to be like the "people who just returned to their country to die, as through their nation couldn't live if their corpses were not underneath their soil" (43). So when Yasin decides to return, he resolves to do so on his own terms, vowing, "I will return only if it is possible for me to establish new memories" (43). He does not want to live in the shadow of an old and problematic story but rather write his own. Yasin wants to be writerly, to respond to the new world that he arrives in and absorb its differences—not as a return, but as a new phase of life.

It is not so easy, however, to insist on dialogue and openness when there are systems intent on imposing ways of living and becoming on the individual. Yasin is constantly at battle with forces that would see him reduced to the "hero" (and, indeed, to "villain" for the Israeli forces that arrest him), a move that he sees as similarly erasing the national lives and experiences of his friends and family. The man's battle with these limiting structures is manifest in his encounter with Salim, a Ramallah native who is a generation younger than Yasin, who has grown up under Israeli occupation, and who has idolized the fighter figure from afar. An aspiring playwright, Salim is intent on capturing the power of the fighter, so that he might feel "as if we are on top of the occupation and not underneath it" (87). He proposes to write a monologue. So where Yasin wants to make new memories in Ramallah, Salim's draft play begins when Yasin took up arms, follows him on mis-

sions and gun smuggling through the Palestinian bases of Ajloun, and ends with his return. The choice of ending re-creates the Oslo teleology, so that the fighter's goal is fulfilled with return: it is a choice that figuratively, and then literally, cuts Yasin's life short. Despite Yasin's constant insistence that he is *not* a hero and his resistance to retelling the same old stories, he finds himself trapped in the narrative—an actual narrative, performed on stage by Salim.

Trying to explain to Salim that heroism is not a useful paradigm either for capturing his life or for understanding a nation, Yasin articulates the difference in perception between being “written” and being writerly. He tells Salim:

You transformed me until I became a hero that has no meaning; I'm just the hero because I have a story, written or performed or published in a newspaper or in a book. (158)

If this is the reductive sort of writing, then Yasin has the antidote, and he tells Salim that according to his worldview:

everyone could be a hero, any of those who fill the streets: children, women or sheikhs each of them could be heroes if they had a story. I was like them until I had a story told about me. (158)

In the Palestine that Yasin sees, “in truth, all heroes are like each other.” By observing, reflecting, critiquing, and being open to the world as he discovers it, Yasin finds all Palestinians capable of making the national story. He again insists to Salim:

Try for example to tell the story of Nimr on its own, or of Umm Walid on her own, or of Numan, and what would happen? They would all become the main character and I would be secondary. Do you understand now the meaning of a story? And how can you manufacture one with the flip of a hand? (158)

For Yasin, a “story” (the teleological and reductive kind) is wholly insufficient for reflecting the Palestine he understands to have lived and to continue to live as part of. A “story” is repressive, and it is only in actively absorbing other parts of the nation and seeing them in relationship that an accurate shape of the nation, and the self within it, emerges.

Yasin as a model writerly citizen likewise engages his own public to think more critically about how they act within and interpret the world. While he has little luck with Salim, the former fighter does seem to make inroads with his extended family, in particular, his aunt Umm Walid, who adopts him into her family when he “returns” from abroad. Yasin coaxes his aunt into thinking critically about the logic of occupation—which continues in the West Bank despite PA claims to liberation. Umm Walid has become accustomed to the rules of the occupation, so much that they become the invisible parameters of her life. She has, in effect, given the occupation narrative and even imaginative authority. To demonstrate this to

her, Yasin plays a game of logic and imagination, trying to have his aunt let go of the logic of occupation and enter delirium. He asks:

Have you ever in your life seen an airplane drop flowers on a city?
Of course not.
But you've seen an airplane drop bombs on a city.
Any number of times.
You see! The world is crazy! (136)

His aunt agrees. Yasin presses his advantage, trying to show how pervasive the logic of the occupation has become. He makes a final connection between life—as it is sensed, felt, and known—and the systems of logic that they operate within. So he asks Umm Walid, in the same conversation, “How many times have you told Abu Walid that you love him in front of other people?” (136). The answer, at least the first time he asks it, is, “None.” The reason for the question, and its connection to a writerly citizen position, is explained through several of Yasin’s other experiences of “return.”

Perhaps he is determined to continue life when he moves to Ramallah, but encountering the grim realities of an occupied Ramallah gives him pause. The former fighter experiences several clashes in orientation whereby what he sees as normal behavior is clocked as absurd—so that bringing a bouquet through a checkpoint becomes as crazy as a plane dropping flowers over Palestine. On his first time going “home” to Umm Walid, for example, he insists on buying her flowers. The gesture gets him pulled over and detained for four hours. His cousin, who picks Yasin up from the border to take him to the house, already thought the gesture of buying flowers a strange one, so he could only roll his eyes when Yasin got angry at the soldiers for their treatment. Everyone—both soldiers and his cousin—acted as if Yasin’s simple bouquet was extravagant and his expectation that such extravagance would be tolerated by soldiers absurd. Other scenes—also at checkpoints—see soldiers ridicule Yasin’s friends. One is forced to kiss a veiled woman when he tries to help her cross the military zone. Detained, the youth is told he can cross if he kisses the young woman. The kiss was the safest way to bypass the checkpoint and avoid further harassment (173), but it was also a serious breach of social norms. Not only did the expression of love wilt under the logic of occupation, but social decency did as well—and so too did the public expression of love between Umm Walid and her husband.

For Yasin, expression of love and respect for those he cares about is the logic of life. His insistence on following this logic means running against the logic of occupation, which he does not know or care to know. However, for Umm Walid and the other members of his family, living by the rules of occupation and maintaining the hope of the Oslo narrative that this was the road to “return” was what kept them alive. Yasin learns to read this context, creates a dialogue with it, and so becomes a “writerly” citizen. It is his insistence on learning, recognizing, and placing the different systems—in his case, the narrative of return, the logic of occupation, and the confining parameters of Salim’s play—within his worldview rather

than allowing them to dictate his imaginative possibilities, which make Yasin an ideal writerly citizen. Without the innocence of the child that *al-ṣaghīr* and Randa have, Yasin doggedly retains his clear vision of being and uses this to find his way through the many oppressive systems encountered. Yasin becomes the producer of his own logic: he insists on flowers, he refuses to be taken over by the plot of a heroic monologue, he refuses to speak with Israeli soldiers when he is imprisoned, and he continues seeking love when he is once again released. Yasin also keeps and maintains dialogues with other characters—like Umm Walid—urging them to take on his position so that they too can produce Palestine.

... BUT NOT THAT KIND OF WRITER

The writerly citizen often comes up against the more generic figure of the writer as a limiting force. The interaction between Yasin and Salim—the writer who wants “mythic stories” and their subjects who struggle for different representations—is one that the Palestine Project stages over and over again. We see the problematic writer constantly: as Abd al-Rahman tries to write Salwa, in the “men of the newspaper” who reject Randa’s stories, in Mr. Ali who writes Bahjat, in Bahjat as he writes “the condemned man,” and so on ad infinitum. In their representation of the imposing, “readerly” writer (Barthes’s term for the writer who produces closed texts), the works grapple with the legacy of writing a problematic force. These interactions tackle head-on the colonial legacy of the novel, its implication in the *nahda* project of modernization, and the involvement of nationalist movements in replicating problems of the state in their search for liberation. These, the encounters insist, are not part of the remit of the writerly citizen but are rather pitfalls to identify and avoid. The writerly citizen thus draws on, reroutes, and reframes existing figurations of the writer prominent in the Arab and particularly Palestinian context. Life as a writerly citizen becomes a process of overcoming the problems of writing, which became too connected to the modern project. As if to drive this connection home, the earliest writer in the Palestine Project is a British Mandate officer who writes beautiful poetry at night and by day works to eradicate Palestinian resistance to the growing Zionist movement. He is the opposite of the ideal, for many reasons.

Edward Peterson is a thinly veiled critique of writings of the “East” that have more to do with the visions of Europe than the realities of Palestine.¹¹ In *Time of White Horses*, the officer’s lyric poetry is included in footnotes that are jarringly juxtaposed to his horrendous treatment of Palestinians. For example, on the same page that Peterson orders the execution of livestock from an entire village (where he suspected villagers had not turned in all of their weapons), a footnote reads:

That night, Peterson wrote:

No one will ever love you as I do, neither the bullet nor the rose / No one will ever love you as I do, neither the tiger nor the gazelle . . . (324)

With no reference or attention to the destruction he has caused, Peterson writes only of a bizarre anguish over his love for Arabian horses. In a very Zionist/Orientalist mode, Peterson sees the horses of Palestine as uncared for (though the men of *White Horses* treat horses as distinguished members of the household) and dreams of taking home some of the animals. He writes beautifully about horses (who none “will ever love . . . as I do”) but cannot see what happens in front of him.

What Peterson lacks is what Hannah Arendt calls “plurality”;¹² he executes his orders by day, keeping the Palestinian population in check. The poetry Peterson produces does not initiate a conversation between parts and utterly fails to integrate his end-of-day insights with his actions during waking hours. For Arendt, the simple presence of multiplicity—that there is a day and a night, that there are many texts to Palestine—is insufficient to guarantee the correct worldview. Rather, the parts must be integrated, understood as related and complex, otherwise they render individuals and experiences, in the words of Arendt, “whats” rather than “whos.”¹³ The person as a “what,” to quote Randa from *Amina’s Weddings* (an ultimate writerly citizen), is to render an individual as a “character in a novel”—or for Arendt, “a type or a ‘character’ in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.”¹⁴ Writing, then, must make connections, must identify multiplicity and grapple with its tensions; it cannot simply bypass or overlook—erase, even—the context of its subject.

Peterson was not the only corrupt official to be associated with literature. Many of the corrupt hero figures encountered in the Palestine Project also pose as writers, like al-Duktūr, the theater director who claimed his work would help create a state but who in fact was only interested in the flood of aid money sent in to bolster the Oslo project. Al-Duktūr and the other problematic writers represent the dangers of writing when its goal is associated with the state. As Stephan Guth put it, describing *nahda*-era bards, “the idea of literary commitment and, ultimately, the whole project of modernity” were understood to be in “the service of the nation.”¹⁵ Writing was meant to indicate “steady progress, a bright future lying ahead,”¹⁶ whether this was the outing of PLO corruption in Lebanon, the fortification of the hero figure in Oslo-era Ramallah, or the exposition of a vain and mediocre newspaperman in an unnamed Arab state. This is certainly what al-Duktūr relied on for his status. Writers were hailed because they were able to imagine the nation as teleological and bounded, ordering citizens within that frame so the people could learn to behave and imagine in such a way as to conjure that nation into being—and this was meant to bring liberation.

The limited representations of “bad” writers in the Palestine Project are rejected at every turn. Salwa in *Olives of the Streets* throws the pages of Abd al-Rahman’s manuscript out the window, saying if she hadn’t, she “would have died under them.” In *Balcony of the Snow Man*, a second section finds Bahjat, the protagonist of part 1, talk back to the first author to tell him: “If I had read what he wrote about me in the first version without my name being there, I wouldn’t have recognized

myself in the words" (178). Bahjat decides to tell his own story, which instead of addressing the claims of the first, follows the memory and moments important to Bahjat. In the process of creating this intertext, Bahjat realizes that he too had been a "bad" writer in his pursuit of a news story. Told an article would make his career, Bahjat has a condemned man executed because the story of his execution—already at press—might have been "wrong" had the man lived another day. These sorts of imposing writers appear everywhere and fall neatly into the categories Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili point out as "elite Palestinian voices belonging to politicians, military leaders, and those with Western education," who, they add, "are usually masculine."¹⁷ The continued presence of these sorts of characters in Palestinian fiction warns of the persistence of this model of writing and way of seeing that writerly characters must identify and avoid.

Of course, the forms and techniques of the modern were not adopted wholesale or without some critique. As Muhsin al-Musawi writes, even though the modernist intellectual was meant to forge a path for the nation—which was nearly always imagined as a state—when it came to fiction there was a "distrust of established forms,"¹⁸ and a sense that Western formulas might not adequately represent Arab experience. It is this dissenting writer that a citizen of Palestine is encouraged to emulate. Randa of *Amina's Weddings* certainly represents this position as she seeks to rewrite a Gaza under siege, railing against the newspaper editors who refuse to publish her articles on children killed during the Intifada. Salwa of *Olives of the Streets* is also constantly active trying to record her experiences. Though she is not a writer herself, she works tirelessly with Abd al-Rahman so that he might finally get her story correct, though he does not. Even Manar, the protagonist of *Balcony of Disgrace* who is raped, struggles to shift the looming narrative that she is a disgrace to the family, a "stain" on their honor, and must be killed to remedy the situation. The young woman fights myriad systems that would label her a failure, and even at the end of the novel, in a handwritten note, she declares to her parents that she was a "good girl," and she wants them to continue to think of her as their pride and joy. She, like so many other writerly characters, refuses delimitation by problematic writers—whether writers of books or reproducers of systems.

OPEN ENDINGS

The foremost role for the writerly citizen—even those who might not yet have achieved their delirium—is to refuse teleology. This most basic principle means that the possibility for delirium remains open and indeed that the intertextual fabric of Palestine can continue to be produced. Even if, one day, there is a Palestinian solution that takes the model of the state, there will remain a great deal that is Palestinian that will never fit within its parameters. To keep what has been lived, traveled, experienced, and remembered within Palestine—or to maintain Palestine as receptive to new rememberings—it must remain open. Creating this

open-endedness is at once what makes an intertextual Palestine possible and what ensures its continuation, so that any individual citizen is producing and being produced by the nation even after death. This keeps the story of the individual open, told and retold by Palestine—forgotten one day, perhaps, but always with the ability to reabsorb and reinterpret the whole configuration based on the accumulation of new texts. In the works of the Palestine Project, this message is driven home by the life and actions of five protagonists who, while they die at the close of their respective novels, can leave their perspectives, their orientations, and their life projects open and available to others beyond the final page of their stories.

Randa in *Amina's Weddings* kept her twin, Lamis, alive by living as both women and refusing to tell anyone which child had died. Manar's brother in *Balcony of Disgrace* presumes he can eradicate the "shame" brought on his family when her uncle declares, "This banner [of shame] is not coming down from its place until someone takes down the spirit of that fallen woman, who contaminated the honor of the family" (182). Manar's death, however, is transformed into a near-global warning and a condemnation of the systems that killed her. The novel is dedicated "to women everywhere . . . in defense of the right of the victims for love, life, freedom and hope" (5). The work positions Manar's story—a promising young woman who is raped by an acquaintance, denounced by her extended family, abandoned by the middle class, taken into police custody where she is raped by an inmate, and ultimately shot in the street by her brother—as an ongoing tragedy, as one of an ongoing series of events that constitute a phenomenon. Not only this, but the novel gives Manar the last word, even after her death, so that she might forestall such conclusions imposed on the lives of these other women. In her handwritten letter, which appears after the formal "close" of the novel, Manar insists that she should not be remembered as the shame (‘ār) of the family. There is shame, she intimates, but it should be left for the systems that killed her.

The same life-after-death appears in *Olives of the Streets*, when Salwa is thrown thrice from the roof of a building by the men of the official who had abused her. Every time her body hits the pavement one of the guards asks, "Is she dead yet?" (203). After the final impact, a haunting voice, instead of asking a question, makes a strange statement: "One of us has to get up now, Salwa" (203), which is repeated twice. The speaker could be her murderers, knowing her story will never really die, because it has been recorded on a set of audiotapes and in the memories of all the camp residents who—though they were not courageous enough to speak up—knew what was happening. It could also be her friend and teacher Sitt Zaynab, who insists that her experience be heard and who spends time with the journalist writing her narrative so that he might not reduce it to a "story." The voice leaves, also, the faintest possibility that the young woman is still alive—and in a way she would be, so long as the structures that seek to silence her do not prevail. Salwa, Randa, and the boy of *Birds of Caution* are all in fact calls from beyond the close of their novels to keep their memories, their orientations, alive and active.

Yasin of *Under the Midmorning Sun* has no audiotapes like Salwa, no ascent into the heavens like *al-ṣaghīr*, and no twin like Lamis; in fact, his double is a murderous one who aims to kill the writerly hero in both fact and fiction. Salim, who wrote a monologue about Yasin's heroism in Lebanon, felt threatened by the former fighter's insistence that the play should not be performed. So attached had Salim become to the idea of representing the hero that he treacherously wondered when his muse was arrested by the Israeli military, "What if Yasin was killed in prison, what if they killed him under torture?" (15). If the "hero" was killed, it would leave Salim to take over the role, despite Yasin's objections. In the end, horrifically, the actor takes the "hero's" life himself, under the cover of Israeli gunfire at the outbreak of the Second Intifada. But Yasin's life's work continues, as the reader discovers in a final chapter that takes place at once before and after the returnee's death. The chapter repeats, almost verbatim, a scene in the village where his aunt Umm Walid lives but tracks a change in his family's behavior that shows they have managed to break out of the logic of occupation and have embraced the possibility of an open and changing interpretation of their lives. In the end, Yasin did not write an open ending on paper or with texts but has inscribed the value on life itself.

Under the Midmorning Sun's final chapter is symbolically titled "After the End" (176) and repeats in its setting and much of its dialogue the first scene of the first chapter of the novel, titled "Before the Beginning" (5). Both relate the village where Yasin's aunt Umm Walid lives with her husband and family. Where often the repetition of a scene indicates the fulfillment of telos, in this case it tracks change, in particular, the change that Yasin has had on the Ramallah to which he returned, determined to continue living. The twin chapters are set some seven years apart, and while everything in the village has changed, it has also stayed the same. Umm Walid is in the house, the birds are chirping, and the men of the neighborhood are sitting on plastic chairs around a small earthen square. The square, site of Salim's first performance of the monologue, is also where the men gather and where the children play football and which, in the intervening years, has become skirted with new homes for the new children. The description of the scene is at times repeated word for word from the first chapter, but phrases are inserted to mark the change that has taken place over time. In the passage below, the text appearing at both the opening and the close of the novel appears as regular script, and the phrases that only appear in the closing chapter are underlined.

Under the midmorning sun, and in front of the two walnut trees that shaded the lower field, and in the view of sparrows and nightingales . . . (5)

Under the midmorning sun, which was peeking out through the clouds, and in front of the two walnut trees that shaded the ruined lower field, and in the view of sparrows that opened their wings to cross the field with caution and nightingales . . . (176)

The words, like the scene, are the same and yet different. There is a continuity in the village but one that makes room for the new texts that have subtly changed its rhythms, for the birth of the children described playing soccer in the field, and for the death of Yasin. The scene is set for the appearance, in both cases, of Umm Walid.

Under the gray clouds, in front of two walnut trees, Umm Walid sees an Israeli military patrol approaching the village. She yells out to her husband, "Abu Walid!," and in both passages the men sitting in the square turn their heads. Abu Walid, repeating the lines from the first passage, replies, "What is it?" Umm Walid yells out, "I love you Abu Walid, I love you!" Where in the first passage, the man had rolled his eyes and cursed Yasin for driving his wife mad, this time there is a change:

Abu Walid nodded his head, squinted his eyes a little more sparkling than usual, and he looked at the faces of the men who were with him. He raised his head tall and the children stopped their football game in the square, and the sparrows didn't know which way to look. He let out a sigh . . . and yelled: I love you Umm Walid!

What did you say? She yelled back, even though she had heard clearly. She replied because she wanted to hear it over and over again. (178)

Where once Abu Walid had blushed, this time he holds his head high, and the children pay attention. They at once know this is the legacy of Yasin and their own weapon as an alternative way of reading dominant narratives. The logic that Yasin followed persists; he has taught a whole village to see past the rules of occupation and to subsume that structure of power under a larger and wider Palestinian experience. The occupation no longer dictates the possibilities of Palestine. The final chapter is only another beginning, as Yasin had earlier insisted to Salim, when the playwright first asked him to "tell his story."

The story doesn't end when it ends, it starts and when it does the beginning must continue until a new beginning. . . . I don't see an ending at all, I see only a chain of beginnings. The ending is many beginnings: so where to start? (145)

The mirrored chapters, the acceptance of change, and the conceptualization of both the self and the nation as an assembly of beginnings create a narrative structure in the novel that is able to accommodate the realities of an open text.

While the life of Yasin ends and the pages of *Under the Midmorning Sun* run out, his story continues through the imagined life of his family members and all those he touched in Ramallah. The vision of the writerly citizen creates its own open text, eschewing the very idea of beginnings or endings and their closing telos, and embracing delirium, if only for a moment. Yasin presents a personal agency toward his own life that mirrors the work of other characters who had endeavored to keep others' lives open and undetermined by the forces that would quash them. The writerly citizen, criticizing established forms, ever alert to the problems of writing, is a personal embodiment of the rules of the Palestine Project. It was, perhaps, what Darwish himself imagined when he wrote one of the last poems in his

final collection, “*Lā urīdu li-hādhi al-qaṣīda an tantahī*” (I do not want this Qasida to end), one verse of which reads thus:

I do not want this Qasida to end
 I do not want it to have a clear goal
 I do not want it to be a map of exile
 And not of a country
 I do not want this Qasida to end¹⁹

In giving up “a clear goal,” the telos of the state is erased, and the “map of exile” becomes a chart of a nation-constellation, where each element is recognized as wholly and fully national. In this way an image of Palestine is not a map “of a country” but the story of an ongoing series, and of a *qaṣīda* without end. So long as the citizen—as open-ended and delirious—is the active agent who produces the nation, then neither citizen nor nation can be limited.